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CRITICAL THINKING AND ITS IMPORTANCE IN EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This study explained critical thinking skills in education processes and the importance of thinking critically for a student who attends any education programme. Developing the ability to think critically is an important element for modern education approaches and models. This study intends to give a framework on the concept of thinking critically while teaching or learning. The world is getting both more technical and more complex day by day life environment, that's why the necessity for education increases for each growing generation. The skill of thinking critically is generally accepted as a very vital stage in every field of learning, particularly in the last decades. As a study draws a general suggestion on the importance of critical thinking skills.

KEY-WORDS: *Critical Thinking, Thinking, Learning.*

INTRODUCTION

Thinking critically will boost creativity and enhance the way you use and manage your time (Hader, 2005) and critical thinking not only describes the ability to think in accordance with the rules of logic and probability, but also the ability to apply these skills to real-life problems, which are not content-independent. . Critical thinking can provide you with a more insightful understanding of yourself. It will offer you an opportunity to be objective, less emotional, and more open-minded as you appreciate others' views and opinions. By thinking ahead, you will gain the confidence to present fresh perspectives and new insights into burden some concerns.

THINKING

Thinking is the base of all cognitive activities or processes and is unique to human beings. It involves influence and analysis of information received from the environment. Such manipulation and analysis occur by means of abstracting, reasoning, imagining, problem solving, judging, and decision-making. The mind is the idea while thinking processes of the brain involved in processing information such as when we form concepts, engage in problem solving, to reason and make decisions. The history of researches on thinking depends upon the time that human beings recognized that they think. Thinking is one of the features that extricate humans from other living beings. Thinking is the manipulation or transformation of some internal representation (Halpern. 2003, p.84). She says that when we start thinking, we use our knowledge to achieve some objective. In this sense thinking ability is the basic case of our life because all of us need to achieve an objective; on the other hand humans have relations in society and whereas nobody is alone. Descartes argued that thinking is reasoning, and that reason is a chain of simple ideas linked by applying strict rules of logic (McGregor, 2007). Both learning and thinking are the concepts which support and complete one another. When considered from this point of view, whereas learning style and critical thinking concepts have different qualifications, it can be stated that they can be used jointly. Likewise, when literature is examined, it is seen that there are researches handling learning styles and critical thinking concepts jointly (Guyen & Kurum, 2004).¹

CONCEPT OF CRITICAL THINKING

Critical thinking features conspicuously in all the skills or abilities learners are expected to acquire through the type of education being provided. One, who cannot think, may not be able to solve even the minutest problem. We now live in a world of problems – social problem, economic problem, political problem, ethnic problem, religious problem, educational problem, Science and technologically related problems to mention a few. It only takes a sound mind, a mind instilled with reflective thinking, which can engage in deep analysis, to come up with causes of the problem at hand and generate possible solutions or options to reach at a decision; to solve a or get out of the problem.

Critical thinking like the concept of education has been defined in so many ways by writers and researchers. According to Encarta (2009), critical thinking is regarded as a type of critical analysis has been described as “disciplined intellectual criticism that combines research, knowledge of historical context and balanced judgment. It is the ability to think logically and analytically. In other words, critical thinking is the purposeful and reflective judgement about what to believe or what to do in response to observation, experience, verbal or written expressions or arguments. Thus, critical thinking involves determining the meaning and significance of what is observed or expressed, or concerning a given implication or quarrel, decisive whether there is adequate defence to accept the conclusion as true. This definition agrees with the one given by Fisher and Scriven (1997) as: “skilled and active interpretation and assessment of observations, communications, information and argumentation”. Critical thinking therefore gives due consideration to the indication, the context

¹ www.researchgate.net › ... › Philosophy › Critical Thinking

of judgement, the relevant criteria for making the judgment well, the appropriate methods or techniques for forming the judgement and the applicable theoretical construct for understanding the problem and the question at hand. Critical thinking employs not only logic but broad intellectual criteria such as clarity, credibility, accuracy, precision, relevance, depth, breadth, fairness and significance. In contemporary usage, the word “critical” may connote stating disapproval, which is not always true of critical thinking. A critical valuation of an argument, for instance, might conclude that it is valid.

Similarly, foundation for critical thinking (2009) has defined it as: “the intellectually disciplined process of actively and capably abstracting, applying, analysing, manufacturing, and/or assessing information gathered from, or generated by observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. In its model form, the foundation claimed that it is based on universal intellectual values of clarity, accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reasons, depth, breadth and fairness. In its simplest form, critical thinking may be considered of as that mode of thinking about any subject, content or problem, in which the thinker improves the quality of his thinking by skilfully taking charge of the structures characteristic in thinking, and imposing intellectual standards upon them.

It may be observed from the above that critical thinking entails those structures or elements of thought implied in all reasoning such as purpose, problem or question – at - issue, assumptions, concepts, experiential grounding, reasoning leading to conclusions, implications and consequences, objections from alternative viewpoints and frame of reference. Critical thinking, being responsive to various subject matters, issues and purposes, is incorporated in a family of intertwined modes of thinking which include: scientific thinking, mathematical thinking, historical thinking, anthropological thinking, economic thinking, moral thinking and philosophical thinking (Foundation for critical thinking, 2009).

Critical thinking may be seen as having two components i) the skills to generate and process information and beliefs, ii) the habit of using those skills to guide behaviour, based on intellectual commitment. These components should be contrasted with:

- i. the mere acquisition and holding of information alone, this is because it involves a particular way in which information is sought and treated;
- ii. The mere ownership of a set of skills, because it involves the frequent use of them; and
- iii. The mere use of those skills (“as an exercise”) without acceptance of their results.

Consequent upon the foregoing, it may be summarized therefore that, critical thinking is self-guided, self-disciplined, self-directed, self-monitored and self-corrective thinking, which attempts to reason at the highest level of quality in a fair-minded way. Thus, people who think critically reliably, attempt to live rationally, reasonably and empathically. They are intensely aware of the inherent faulty nature of human thinking when left unguided. They strive to diminish the power of their selfish and socio-centric propensities. They use the intellectual tools offered by critical thinking such as concepts and principles that enable them to analyse, assess and improve thinking. They work diligently to develop the intellectual virtues of intellectual honesty, intellectual humility, intellectual civility, intellectual empathy, intellectual sense of justice and sureness in reason. They realized that no matter how skilled they are as thinkers, they can always improve their reasoning abilities and that

they can at times fall quarry to mistakes in reasoning, human irrationality, prejudices, biases, distortions, uncritical accepted social rules and taboos, self-interest and vested-interest. People who can think critically strive to improve the world in whatever ways they can and contribute to a more rational and civilized society. Even at that, they recognize the complexities that are inherent in doing so. They avoid thinking simplistically about complicated issues and strive to appropriately consider the rights and needs of relevant others. They also are aware of the complexities in developing as thinkers, and as such got committed to life-long practice toward self-improvement. The critical thinkers exemplify the Socratic principle: “*The unexamined life is not worth living*”, because of their belief that many unexamined lives together result in an uncritical, unjust, and dangerous world (Paul & Elder, 2008)²

CRITICAL THINKING IS A PREREQUISITE TO SUCCEED IN REAL LIFE

Critical thinking is a skill that some people are born with. It is a skill that can be developed with proper training from teachers in a classroom setting. Throughout history, education system has focussed upon rote learning and the ability of students to retain information given to them by their teachers. Except math and science, all subjects rely heavily on rote learning and memorization. But critical thinking is not limited to carrying out experiments in a science lab or problem solving in a math course. It is required by men and women in many situations in diverse industries in different sectors of economy. These are the reasons why modern education is today emphasizing on the need to develop critical thinking skill in all students.

WHAT REALLY IS CRITICAL THINKING?

G Randy Kasten, a prominent expert in the field of critical thinking, believes that development of this skill in students will benefit them in many different ways throughout their lives. Benefits of critical thinking are not limited to workplace alone as an individual can use this skill to understand things and solve problems at all places. There is no universally accepted definition of critical thinking but most experts believe it is the ability to understand why things are the way they are. It also enables them to understand the significances of their actions. Therefore, critical thinking is a skill that helps in preparing students to easily cope with situations in real life.³

CRITICAL THINKING IS NECESSARY TO SHAPE LEADERS OF TOMORROW

Today, students are bombarded with information from all kinds of sources, in particular from various online platforms. Development of critical thinking helps them in quickly analyzing this huge information and also in evaluating it to strike down false and misleading information. Here, it needs to be kept in mind that critical thinking is not just looking at things in a clear and rational manner. It is about thinking in an independent manner to formulate opinions about things, issues, and people. If you are able to think critically, you can absorb and

² www.researchgate.net › Home › Logic › Philosophy › Critical Thinking

³ publications.anveshanaindia.com › wp-content › uploads › 2019/07

analyse information and arrive at your own conclusions irrespective of the outside influence. Successful people in all walks of this life are blessed with this essential skill.

Competitive exams and job interviews are intended to identify candidates who possess the ability to think critically. Realizing the importance of this ability, it is not just colleges and universities but also high schools and elementary schools that are making development of critical thinking in students their primary goal.

TEACHING STUDENTS TO THINK CRITICALLY

It is clear that critical thinking is not a part of any subject or stream. However, it is a skill that can be used and applied by students to learn and understand any subject in a much better manner. Teachers need to inspire students in their classrooms to indulge in suggesting by asking them open ended questions. By taking part in such sessions where they are able to take part in free discussions, students gradually develop critical thinking ability.

Critical thinking is a skill that requires both research as well as problem solving. In present times, information gathering is not enough as it is available from multiple sources. Teachers need to equip their students with the ability to filter information so they can discard information that is irrelevant, false and misleading. They can then make use of relevant information for the purpose of problem solving.

Another technique teachers can use to develop critical thinking in their students is peer groups. Students develop critical thinking easily when they are asked to cooperate on a given task.⁴

TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING

Every pupil should have an effective skill of critical thinking, and they must not accept anything for granted but how can you teach thinking critically to students? There are several ways of organizing for instruction in critical thinking: We can teach a separate course or unit, we can pervade critical thinking into all that we teach, or we can use a mixed approach. The first approach of a separate course or unit requires materials that teach specifically for critical thinking dispositions, skills, and knowledge. The downside is that there may be little transfer from what the program or materials teach to the rest of the curriculum. Infusion, the second possible approach, requires that critical thinking be taught as an integral part of all subject areas (Wright, 2002). According to Hirose (1992) employers complain about employees' lack of reasoning and critical thinking abilities. Those abilities are essential because compared with the jobs in the past the modern work environment requires more thinking and problem solving abilities. This situation can be adapted to education, too. Teachers had better be equipped with high critical thinking skills. Critical thinking is not equal with intelligence and shouldn't be misunderstood with it. Critical thinking is skill which can be developed (Walsh and Paul, 1988). As well as critical thinking can be developed, it can be searched and analyzed with its different dimensions, so this shows that many scientists or experts imagine about critical thinking, because the vitality of critical thinking has been realized by many people recently. Educators are aware of the fact that critical thinking can be thought.

⁴ <https://www.rockforreading.org/2018/10/educational-process>

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CRITICAL THINKING AS THE PRIMARY GOAL OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

Critical thinking means making reasoned judgments that are logical and well-thought out. It is a way of thinking in which you don't simply accept all influences and conclusions you are exposed to, but rather have an attitude involving questioning such arguments and conclusions. As educators, we need to understand that when children grow-up and enter the real world, their organization does not expect them to remember dates of wars or which crop grows where anymore; what they do expect though is for the employee to be able to think, to know how to make connections between ideas, and evaluate information critically. Each decision they make has a consequence and they are required to weigh each aspect tortuously before taking the final call. So if it is an important aspect, why do educators fail to inculcate this habit? Because the need to get better scores is what we emphasize on in most schools. Also, teaching critical thinking is not an easy task, and a whole lot don't know how it should be introduced. Here are ways in which critical thinking can be presented from the beginning of a child's schooling years:

- **Encourage children to ask questions:** Children are nosy and have a lot of questions. At times, when parents and teachers do not have answers to their questions, they are discouraged from asking any. This makes the child believe the questions they are asking are immaterial and they accept everything at face value. As parents and teachers, we should encourage children to ask why. They should question every-thing they come across. When you allow children to lead their ship independently, you are making them responsible for their actions
- **Answer each question asked in class:** As a teacher, just hopeful children to ask questions are not enough. You need to make sure you answer those questions. In case you do not know the answer at the moment, go back and find-out, but make sure you answer the question. A child needs to feel that each question they ask is important. Otherwise, they will stop asking why?
- **Make children find the answers to their own questions:** It is a good idea to make children go look for their own answers. You can act as a material and guide them on where they will find the answers. But let them do the self-study. Children need to be able to go look for their own answers and feel ecstatic about it.⁵
- **Introduce Situational Role-plays:** Situational role plays put children in other people's shoes. Different people react differently in the same situation, helping them analyse each outcome is just as important. Put them in life-changing situations and give those options they would choose from if they were actually in there and let them justify. Then ask them to reason why they did not pick any other option. Let them independently think; but guide them in the right direction if need be after the exercise. Our job as parents and teachers is that of wheels on a ship We are here only to stir children in the right direction as and when required.
- **Allow children to make decisions:** When you allow children to lead their ship independently, you are making them responsible for their actions. So, before each step they take, they will analyse each decision, weigh the

⁵ <https://education.siliconindia.com/management/viewpoint/last-word/the-development-of-critical-thinking-as-the-primary-goal-of-the-educational-process-nwid-19804.html>

consequence, and then decide the direction in which they want to move. Defining consequences for each action is important. While encouraging children to think critically, parents and teachers need to make sure they keep these five points in mind. The Foundation for Critical Thinking has developed five 'Intellectual Standards' Be Clear, Be Accurate, Be Relevant, Be Logical, and Be Fair which are ways you can inspire your children to learn to think more critically. The most important thing to keep in mind is that dealing with children requires a lot of patience. They might go wrong sometimes; they may ask too many questions, they will take decisions in haste. However, as their guides, we need to be very patient with them and keep land their hand till they learn to take-off and fly.⁶

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion, Critical thinking is no doubt necessary in every field of life, but especially for professions that occupy with people. Finkelman (2001) took the attention and emphasized the importance that the people who work in the field of human health, especially the people who directly interfere to the person's life like psychologists, counsellors and educationalists have to be critical thinkers in both practice and management. In order for teachers and counsellors to be able to implement critical thinking into their classrooms they must first be committed to critical thinking and its philosophy.

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