

Integrating Critical Thinking Skills in Teaching at Nepalese Schools
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Introduction

This paper provides arguments why Nepalese Teachers need to integrate Critical Thinking (CT) skills in their classroom. It begins by considering the emergence of critical thinking in teaching. The paper then briefly discusses multiple ways of integrating Critical Thinking skills using different CT strategies in the current teaching approaches. It covers the various methods or strategies that teachers can apply help the students to improve their thinking and interpreting skills.

Emergence of Critical Thinking in Teaching

Now in all levels of education, critical thinking has become a basic ingredient. Educationalists and educational policy makers have agreed that one of the fundamental goals of education is that students are able to think critically. The west acknowledged the importance of Critical Thinking five decades ago and since included it in their curriculums. More recently, the value of critical thinking has also arrived in Asian countries, for example, Thais have gone so far as to include a clause in the newly promulgated Constitution that a bill on education be passed by Parliament. However, the educators from the West have faced some specific Easter cultural problems while integrating critical thinking in their teaching. Atkinson (1997) argues that critical thinking is culturally specific, and is a part of the social practices of the West having no place within Asian cultures, which do not adopt such practices. Teachers in the East are believed to be superior and always right, that knowledge is not to be made here and now, but exists eternally, so to speak, to be handed down by teachers, that social harmony is to be preferred rather than asking probing questions. Then, is critical thinking culture specific? Can't we integrate CT strategies in our classrooms? These are very significant question not just for us, but for understanding how cultures of the world respond to globalization.

Purpose and Rationale of Teaching Critical thinking

The basic purpose of teaching critical thinking in schools is to help learners improve the thinking skill and better prepare them to succeed in life. It is said that schools should be teaching students how to think not what to think. Now we can see that all education consists of transmitting to students at least two different things: (1) the subject matter or content of the course ("what to think"), and (2) an appropriate strategy to help learners comprehend and evaluate the content ("how to think"). So far our teachers have done excellent job of transmitting the content, but they have not been so effective to assist students how to think effectively about this subject matter. This second ability is termed critical thinking. Why have our teachers not been able to help our learners to develop their critical thinking? They have not been able for the way we have defined the goal of

education, "what to think," is so traditionally obvious that both teachers and students focus all their energies and efforts on the task of transmitting and acquiring basic knowledge.

Thus, teaching critical thinking means teaching students correct thinking in the pursuit of relevant and reliable knowledge about the world they live in. The students learn to be reasonable, reflective, responsible, and skillful thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do. A person who thinks critically can ask appropriate questions, gather relevant information, efficiently and creatively sort through this information, reason logically from this information, and come to reliable and trustworthy conclusions about the world that enable one to live and act successfully in it.

Critical Thinking Teaching Strategies and Classroom Techniques

Are children are born with the power to think critically? Do they develop this ability naturally? The answer to the both questions is no. Critical thinking cannot be taught reliably to students by peers or my parents. Therefore, trained and knowledgeable teachers are necessary to impart the proper information and skills.

Critical Thinking cannot be taught by lecturing, it is quite an active process. The skills of Critical thinking--analysis, synthesis, reflection, etc.--must be learned by actually performing them. In an educational institution, we have a responsibility to use classroom teaching methodologies which enable learners to create a climate of equality, understanding and mutual respect. Gnawali et al. (2006) mentions "today, all children are expected to be in school, and schools, regardless of their race, gender, or physical or mental abilities, are expected to make sure all students reach their learning potential. These children bring with them a wide range of background, talent, and needs." Classroom activities, therefore, should emphasize active intellectual participation by the student. Actually students learn by making sense- that is, by exploring and inquiring- teachers should encourage students to inquire. And since inquiry is an activity that one can get good at, teachers should show how to inquire, question, seek and examine information (Crawford, Makinster, Mathews, Saul: 2005). In this section I suggest some such classroom strategies that evoke critical thinking among students.

It is believed that students learn by using the knowledge they already have therefore teachers should begin a lesson by drawing out students' prior concepts, and getting them ready to learn by asking questions and setting the purpose for learning. This is the first phase of the lesson and is called "the anticipation phase". The second phase is called 'the building knowledge phase' in which the teaching leads students to inquire, find out, make sense of the classroom material, answer their prior questions, and find new questions and answer those, too. In the final phase- the consolidation phase- teachers involve students to reflect on what they learned, ask what it means to them, reflect on how it changes what they thought, and ponder how they can use it.

One of the strategies that we can integrate in our classroom is brainstorming- a method for generating many ideas about a topic. This can help "open students' mind" so that they

can think of ideas that might not normally have occurred to them. First, the teacher introduces the topic or problem to the class. Then he gives a time limit to solve the problem. The teacher encourages students to share any idea, no matter how odd, that is related to the problem. The teacher reminds students if they criticize each other's ideas. This free sharing of ideas creates an environment for the students to think critically on the given topic.

Another strategy, DRA (Directed Reading Activity) is a reading comprehension/critical thinking activity for the building knowledge part of a reading text. This method is designed to support students' reading comprehension by guiding them to key points in the text and providing opportunities to discuss its meaning with their classmates.

Likewise, the teacher can use "jigsaw" method in the classroom. Jigsaw ((Crawford, Makinster, Mathews, Saul quotes Slavin: 2005) requires students to help each other learn. It can be used when students are reading a text, listening to a presentation, or carrying out a group investigation. This requires both 'home groups and expert groups'. The teacher divides the class into groups and numbers each group members. The teacher forms 'expert groups' from same number member from home group. Then the teacher provides different reading texts and assigns study questions to the expert groups. The expert groups prepare to teach their portion to the home group. The teacher also allows time the expert groups to discuss their questions and decide on ways to teach them. Finally, expert groups return to their home groups and take turns leading the discussion. This method helps all of the students to study and learn all of the material. They become 'expert' as they teach each other parts of the material. Each student plays a active role in teaching and learning and experience deep understanding higher order thinking ((Crawford, Makinster, Mathews, Saul: 2005).

Similarly, there are many other strategies or methods that teachers can use in their classroom such as 'discussion web', 'quick write', 'mix/freeze/pair', 'value line', 'one stay three stray', 'know-want to know-learn' ect. Actually, teaching through using CT strategies enables students to be innovative and it is often perceived as an influential exercise of the mind. Of course these issues are not new in education. CT has been around for about five decades. There may be several reasons offered why we should use CT strategies. According to Girous (1992) education has a potential to transform learners into political subjects to whom ethics and questions of good and bad, as well as of truth and knowledge, are central. Thus, knowledge is not just a 'bank' of facts to be transmitted from the teacher to the students, but instead becomes a cognitive process undertaken by teachers and learners alike who discover how different types of information are given precedence within educational institutions. Thus, new forms of culture and knowledge become possible. This may involve a reformulation of so called objectivity and reason in recognition that knowledge can only be partial and particular, reflecting its participants' social position. This teaching approach therefore can be a used to create a new world in which learners develop and identity and 'voice', while teachers act as 'transformative intellectuals' working towards social transformation.

Moreover, this approach seeks to develop an awareness of 'self' and to re-humanize the classroom. The classrooms are not only arenas of 'pure understanding', but are also places of committed social encounter between participants who struggle for empowerment and emancipation.

Conclusion

Therefore, Critical Thinking allows students to face and comprehend objective reality by gaining reliable knowledge about the world. This, in turn, allows them to better earn a living, achieve success in life, better solve life's problems, and be reconciled to existence, mortality, and the universe. If a person is happier possessing reliable knowledge and living in objective reality, rather than living in ignorance and possessing false or unreliable beliefs, this is as good a reason as any for teaching and learning Critical Thinking.

Reference

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