

**Impact
Factor
2.147**

ISSN 2349-638x

Refereed And Indexed Journal



**AAYUSHI
INTERNATIONAL
INTERDISCIPLINARY
RESEARCH JOURNAL
(AIIRJ)**

Monthly Publish Journal

VOL-III

**ISSUE-
XII**

Dec.

2016

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“Critical Thinking In Teaching”

- **Dr. Vishakha P. Mhaske**

Nanded.

The concept of critical thinking has been developing for the past 2500 years but the term critical thinking emerged in the mid 20th century. According to B. K. Beyer in *Critical thinking* (1995), critical thinking is a mode of thinking about any subject, content or problem in which one uses criteria to judge the quality of the subject and assess its validity. Other definitions put emphasis on the meta-cognition factor, saying that critical thinking is a way to think about one's thinking with the aim to identify its strengths and weaknesses and eventually improves its quality. According to Richard Paul and Linda Elder in *The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking Concepts and Tools* (2008), critical thinking can be shortly described as a self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored and self-corrective mode of thinking.

Critical thinking is based on asking questions, defining a problem, examining evidence and analyzing assumptions. In addition, a critical thinker avoids emotional reasoning and over simplification, while considering other interpretations and tolerating ambiguity. They are not unlike the thousands of educators who work daily with students and teachers helping them give birth to critical, self-authored thinking.

In their diversity of focus, these educators share a common purpose and theme: they all strive to help their students think more critically, to govern and author their own lives and to develop good citizenship practices and interests that are tied to equality and public good. These educators all share a commitment to work and struggle to transform education and educational practices into something that is relevant to the lives of both students and teachers. By offering their stories, they provide theoretical insights as well as practical suggestions as to how we as a community of educators might highlight and build upon the best practices in our fields to achieve our desired educational reforms and visions.

Consider that many of the people who are alive today will be working at jobs that do not currently exist and that the explosion of information means that today's knowledge will quickly become outdated. As a result, two goals for education clearly emerge – learning how to learn and how to think critically about information that changes at a rapid rate. We face a multitude of new challenges to our natural environment, difficult dilemmas concerning the use of weapons of mass destruction, political agendas for the distribution of scarce commodities and wealth, psychological problems of loneliness and depression, escalating violence, and an expanding elderly population. International in scope and in magnitude, these new problems strain resources and threaten the continuance of life on earth. To creatively and effectively attack these imminent problems, a well educated, thinking populace is essential.

The skills discussed are needed in every academic area and setting – both in and out of class. They are:

- Determining causes;
- Assessing likelihood and uncertainty;
- Comprehending complex text;
- Solving novel problems;
- Making good decisions;
- Evaluating claims and evidence; and
- Thinking creatively.

Teaching critical thinking is of great importance in the current age when one has access to an enormous amount of information through technology. Students are often passive receptors of information so they need to be taught how to weed through the information and decide what is important. Critical thinking can be applied both to student's academic studies and to solving complex problems in life. Critical thinking enables people to make sound decisions on personal and civic level, which is of crucial importance for living successfully in a democracy.

A teacher can use ongoing classroom assessment to enhance and monitor students' critical thinking. For example, students can be asked questions such as " what was the most important thing you learned in today's class ?" or " what questions related to this session remains uppermost in your mind ?" Another strategy to foster critical thinking is to put students in group learning situations where they can get continuous support and feedback from both the teacher and other students.

The case study / discussion method is a method in which the teacher presents a case and encourages students to reach conclusion by leading them into a discussion via prepared questions. Critical thinking can also be enhanced through so-called conference style learning. Here the teacher does not give lectures but rather acts as a facilitator of a conference, he or she gives the students the task to thoroughly read certain materials and then discuss the materials in class asking each other questions. Although the teacher does not have an active role of lecturer, he or she helps direct the discussion.

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