

CRITICAL THINKING: A FUNDAMENTAL SKILL FOR MODERN LIFE

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ABSTRACT:

Critical thinking is an essential cognitive process for evaluating information and arguments, crucial for informed decision-making in personal and professional contexts. This article explores the definition, importance, and development of critical thinking skills, emphasizing its role in enhancing problem-solving, fostering creativity, and promoting rationality.

Keywords: Critical thinking, cognitive skills, decision-making, problem-solving, rationality, creativity, evidence evaluation, communication, academic success, workplace efficiency.

Introduction

In an era characterized by information overload and rapid technological advancements, critical thinking has emerged as an indispensable skill. Critical thinking involves analyzing and evaluating information to make reasoned judgments and decisions. It encompasses the ability to think clearly and rationally, understanding the logical connection between ideas, and applying these skills in problem-solving and decision-making processes.

Alternative View on Critical Thinking: The Need for a Comprehensive Understanding

Most scholars and authors agree that critical thinking involves intelligent and wise understanding through the application of specific techniques and skills. However, this perspective is limited and overlooks the foundational metaphysical principles that underlie critical thinking. Critical thinking, distinct from general thinking, operates within a specific framework and follows its own paradigm. Therefore, I argue that the current understanding is flawed and misses essential aspects that define genuine "critical" thinking. These include discussions of its framework, paradigm, and principles. To develop an accurate view of critical thinking, we must begin by analyzing these missing elements, ensuring they are true, realistic, authentic, and universal.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

What is Critical Thinking?

Critical thinking can be defined as the capacity to engage in reflective and independent thinking. It requires the ability to identify, analyze, and evaluate arguments, detect inconsistencies, and solve problems systematically. According to various educational and

psychological frameworks, critical thinking is more than just the accumulation of information; it involves active engagement with content, questioning assumptions, and synthesizing information to form a well-reasoned conclusion.

Harvey Siegel noted that adopting a critical approach fosters a critical spirit, which helps students become true critical thinkers. Teachers play a crucial role in cultivating this critical spirit by employing their skills and habits to promote logical thinking, making it an effective teaching style. In everyday life, critical thinking is essential for addressing personal and social challenges.¹

Educational institutions should prioritize fostering rational beliefs. However, students often focus on absorbing what teachers and textbooks present, leading to a prevalence of irrational learning in schools. Social studies are particularly well-suited for developing critical thinking, as they encourage analysis and questioning of ineffective plans and policies of leaders. Rationalizing ruling powers and selecting national leaders require critical thinking, as these are critical decisions. Thus, fostering a critical mindset is vital for making judgments in the national interest. Additionally, critical discussions, debates, and conversations are effective in resolving personal, social, and national disputes, and they help assess different viewpoints through dialectical practice.

Facts often draw the attention and provoke questions and arguments from listeners and readers. For example, presenting facts about the Cold War, such as both countries attempting to place missiles in each other's territories, can stimulate rational thinking both in support of and against the situation.

The technique of questioning is essential for generating critical discussions and inquiries about a situation, contributing to students' learning and making problem-solving techniques memorable. Students should value their reasoning and evidence to ensure clarity and fairness during presentations.²

Considering both theoretical and practical aspects of rational thinking is beneficial for managing irrational behavior and resolving conflicts and misunderstandings in society. In this approach, individuals must first identify and understand the problem and facts, explore potential alternative perspectives, and finally, evaluate and analyze these alternatives and facts to make logical decisions based on rational considerations. Techniques such as problem-solving, decision-making, managerial strategies, and others are extensively employed in the modern business era, all grounded in the concept of critical thinking. It is crucial for individuals to recognize assumptions and facts, assess different arguments, and exercise judgment to foster rational thinking. Moreover, according to another study, critical thinking can also involve oral discussions on personal issues or dilemmas (Hawkins, 2006). Additionally, they aim to propose authentic and innovative designs, generate various hypotheses, and solve problems by discovering and finding new applications (Glass, 2004;

¹ Ulger, K. & Imer, Z. (2013). The effect of problem based learning approach on students' creative thinking ability. Hacettepe University Journal of Education, 28(1), 382-392.

² Watson, G. & Glaser, E. M. (1980). Watson–Glaser critical thinking appraisal manual. New York: The Psychological Corporation.

Young & Balli, 2014). This process allows individuals to recognize their knowledge gaps and work to bridge them while gaining new perspectives. By examining problems from multiple angles, making unconventional connections, and taking risks based on their insights, they can develop alternative solutions with patience and determination.

- **Synthesizing**: This dimension encompasses activities such as using analogous thinking, deriving original results from small components, and presenting novel and authentic solutions to problems.

- **Articulation**: This involves integrating old and new knowledge, expanding current knowledge with new insights, creating unconventional relationships to produce unique solutions, and making thoughts concrete through imagination and the use of materials.

- **Imagination**: This dimension involves establishing relationships between valid and reliable ideas, presenting flexible ways of thinking through imagination, and generating different insights during the idea creation process.

Indeed, it is one of the most innovative instructional methods in the history of education, where students are presented with an authentic or poorly structured problem. This approach immerses them in the learning process by building new knowledge on top of existing knowledge to solve the problem. The aim is to develop students' problem-solving abilities, self-directed learning, collaborative skills, and motivation levels throughout the problem-solving process (Hmelo-Silver, 2004).³

Additionally, Problem-Based Learning (PBL) encourages students to solve real-world problems in information-rich environments. This method allows them to construct their own solutions, contributing to an effective learning experience that encompasses the methods, processes, and epistemology of the discipline. However, some critics argue that problem-based searching places a heavy demand on working memory. A high working memory load may prevent the accumulation of knowledge in long-term memory, as working memory is focused on searching for solutions rather than learning. Furthermore, the goal should be teaching the discipline through inquiry, rather than treating inquiry as the sole method of learning.

CONCLUSION

Critical thinking is a vital skill for navigating the complexities of modern life. It enhances problem-solving, supports informed decision-making, fosters creativity, and improves communication. By actively engaging in critical thinking practices, individuals can make more reasoned decisions, achieve academic and professional success, and contribute positively to their communities. As we continue to face increasingly complex and ambiguous situations, the ability to think critically will remain a crucial asset in personal and professional endeavors.

³ Robson, S. (2013). The analysing children's creative thinking framework: Development of an observation-led approach to identifying and analysing young children's creative thinking. *British Educational Research Journal*. doi: 10.1002/berj.3033

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