

## Developing Learner's Critical Thinking and Motivation

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**Abstract:** *Critical thinking is all about asking why isn't it? According to Edward Glaser, critical thinking involves three things: an attitude of being disposed to consider in a thoughtful way the problems and subjects that come within the range of one's experience; knowledge of the methods of logical enquiry and reasoning; and the skill to be able to apply these methods. In fact critical thinking is the practice of challenging 'knowledge claims'. Critical thinking is something that we employ as part of our daily lives. However by making critical thinking skills more explicit we can help our students to tackle essay type questions more effectively.*

*Learner's motivation plays an important role in learning and using a second language like English in Indian classrooms. It is possible to orient a learner's motivation in positive direction by using certain pedagogical methods. L2 motivation is always influenced by socio cultural aspect and is never static, it passes through generation, maintenance and retrospection phase. Effective and personalized strategies can increase the learners' linguistic self confidence and generate sustainable motivation.*

*My paper shall discuss the pedagogical perspective on developing critical thinking and motivation level of our learners.*

**Keywords:** *Critical Thinking, Learner Strategies, L2 Motivation, Pedagogy, Skills.*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Critical thinking is the art of analyzing and evaluating thinking. It helps in effective communication by taking one away from egocentrism and sociocentrism. A critical thinker raises vital questions and problems, gathers and assesses relevant information, formulates well-reasoned conclusions and solutions, thinks open mindedly within alternative system of thought, and communicates effectively with others in figuring out solutions to complex problems.

### 2. LEVELS OF THOUGHT

There are three levels of thought: a. lower order thinking- which is unreflective, low skill level, relies on gut intuition and largely self-serving; b. higher order thinking- which is selectively reflective, lacks critical thinking vocabulary, inconsistently fair and skilled in sophistry; c. highest order thinking- which is explicitly reflective, highest skill level, routine use of critical thinking tools in analyzing and assessing thinking and consistently fair. Thinking is governed by intellectual standards like clarity, accuracy, relevance, depth, breadth, logic, fairness etc. These intellectual standards shall be inculcated in the students' thought process, making them persons with reason and logic.

### 3. INTELLECTUAL TRAITS

A critical thinker has the following intellectual traits or virtues.

- a. Intellectual Humility: it means that one should not claim more than one actually knows. One should not suffer from intellectual pretentiousness, boastfulness, or conceit.
- b. Intellectual Courage: it is the recognition of the fact that ideas considered dangerous or absurd are sometimes rationally justified.

- c. Intellectual Empathy: it means putting oneself in the place of others in order to genuinely understand them.
- d. Intellectual Autonomy: it means to gain command over one's thought process by analyzing and evaluating beliefs on the basis of reason and evidence.
- e. Intellectual Integrity: it means to be true to one's own thinking by admitting discrepancies and inconsistencies in one's own thought and action.
- f. Intellectual Perseverance: it means to use intellectual insight in spite of difficulties, obstacles, and frustrations; a sense of the need to struggle with confusion and unsettled questions over an extended period of time.
- g. Fair-mindedness: it means adherence to intellectual standards without reference to one's own advantage or the advantage of one's group.

Critical thinkers apply intellectual standards to the elements of reasoning in order to develop intellectual traits.

#### **4. EGOCENTRIC THINKING**

Egocentric thinking results from the fact that we do not appreciate the point of view of others or the limitations in our own point of view. We live with the unrealistic but confident sense that we have fundamentally figured out the way things actually are, and that we have done this objectively. An egocentric person believes in intuitive perceptions – however inaccurate. Instead of using intellectual standards in thinking, we often use self-centered standards to determine what to believe and what to reject. The commonly used psychological standards in human thinking are as following:

- a. Innate egocentrism: assumption that what one believes is true even though one has never questioned the basis for many of one's beliefs (it's true because I believe it).
- b. Innate sociocentrism: believing in whatever puts one or the groups to which one belong in a positive light (it's true because we believe it).
- c. Innate self-validation: having a strong desire to maintain beliefs that one has long held, even though those beliefs are rarely justified by the evidence (it's true because I have always believed it).
- d. Innate selfishness: believing whatever justifies one's getting more power, money, or personal advantage even though these beliefs are not grounded in sound reasoning or evidence (it's true because it is in my selfish interest to believe it).

#### **5. SOCIOCENTRIC THINKING**

Most people do not understand the degree to which they have internalized the dominant prejudices of their society or culture. Sociologists and anthropologists identify this as the state of being 'culture bound' caused by sociocentric thinking, which includes:

- The tendency to place one's culture, nation, religion above all others.
- The tendency to select self-serving positive descriptions of ourselves and negative descriptions of those who think differently from us.
- The tendency to internalize group norms and beliefs, take on group identities, and act as we are expected to act – without the least sense that what we are doing might reasonably be questioned.
- The tendency to blindly conform to group restrictions (many of which are arbitrary or coercive).
- The failure to think beyond the traditional prejudices of one's culture.
- The failure to distinguish universal ethics from relativistic cultural requirements and taboos.
- The failure to think historically and anthropologically (and hence to be trapped in current ways of thinking).

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- The failure to see sociocentric thinking as a significant impediment to intellectual development.

Both egocentric and sociocentric thinking can be diminished only when replaced by critical thinking which develops through the following stages.

- a. Unreflective thinker: being unaware of significant problems in our thinking.
- b. Challenged thinker: facing significant problems in our thinking.
- c. Beginning thinker: trying to improve but without regular practice.
- d. Practicing thinker: regularly practicing and advancing accordingly.
- e. Advanced thinker: committed to lifelong practice and beginning to internalize intellectual virtues.
- f. Accomplished thinker: intellectual skills and virtues have become a part of our life.

## 6. MOTIVATION

In order to acquire and enhance the skills of a second language, motivation of the learner is very important. Motivation can be promoted consciously; by employing certain methods it is possible to change learners' motivation in a positive direction. Motivation to learn a second language is very different from the motivation to learn any other subject. This is because an L2 is not only a communication code, but also a representative of the L2 culture. Learning a second language therefore always entails learning a second culture to some degree. As Williams (1994) argues:

learning of a foreign language involves far more than simply learning skills, or a system of rules, or a grammar; it involves an alteration in self-image, the adoption of new social and cultural behaviors and ways of being, and therefore has a significant impact on the social nature of the learner.

As a consequence, L2 motivation will always have a strong sociocultural component. L2 motivation is not stable and static but is rather in a continuous process of change. Dornyei (2005) argues that motivation undergoes a cycle that has at least three distinct phases.

- a. Choice motivation: it means the need for motivation has to be generated which then leads to the selection of goal or task to be pursued.
- b. Executive motivation (volition): the generated motivation needs to be actively maintained and protected. It is particularly relevant to learning in classroom settings, where students are exposed to a great number of distracting influences, such as off-task thoughts etc.
- c. Motivational retrospection: it concerns learners' retrospective evaluation of their learning. The way students process their past experiences in this retrospective phase will determine the kind of activities they will be motivated to pursue in future.

These three phases are associated with different motives to learn a second language. Gardner's (1985) motivation theory emphasizes three key motives:

- a. Integrative: it reflects a positive disposition towards the L2 group and the desire to interact with members of that community. It includes attitude towards the learning situation (the teacher and the course), desire and attitude towards learning the language.
- b. Instrumental: it refers to where language learning is primarily associated with the potential pragmatic gains of L2 proficiency, such as getting a better job or a higher salary.
- c. Linguistic self-confidence: it refers to learners' confidence in being able to carry out the tasks associated with L2.

What matters in learning a second language is not the level of one's language abilities but rather the perception of assurance and trust in oneself (Clement, 1980; Clement, Dornyei and Noels, 1994). That is why some people will be able to communicate with 100 words while others will not be able to communicate even with 1000 words. The learners' initial belief about L2 learning affects motivation. Similarly, whether the learner receives positive or negative messages from the

larger environment (media, friends) motivation plays an important role in reinforcing or blocking one's initial commitment.

## **7. LEARNERS' BEHAVIOR**

Schumann (1997) argued that learners react to the stimuli they receive from their environment in five ways – a. novelty (degree of unexpectedness/familiarity), b. pleasantness (attractiveness), c. goal or need significance (whether the stimulus is instrumental in satisfying needs or achieving goals), d. coping potential (whether the individual expects to be able to cope with the event), e. self and social image (whether the event is compatible with social norms and the individual's self-concept).

These learners' behaviors' constitute the motivational role of teachers and peers in any L2 learning experience. The teachers' motivational influence is crucial because they are the most visible figures in the classroom serving as the point of reference and standard. Their personal characteristics, rapport with the students and the specific ways they model motivational values (for example, how they present tasks or give feedback and praise) are all likely to have an impact on the students' commitment to learning. The motivational influence of the peer group is equally important.

Another important constituent of motivation is autonomy (self determination) because it is said that autonomous language learners are by definition motivated learners. Teachers' orientation towards autonomy plays an important role in shaping their students' motivation level (Noels, Clement and Pelletier, 1999; Noels, 2001).

The retrospection phase of L2 motivation strongly influences learners' overall impression about the past – some learners will gain a positive impetus even from non-positive experiences, whereas others may not be completely satisfied even with outstanding performance. One very important function of the retrospective stage is for learners to consolidate and extend the repertoire of personally useful strategies, which will in turn function as a source of inspiration for future learning.

## **8. ASPECTS OF MOTIVATIONAL TEACHING PRACTICE**

The moot point is how can motivation research help classroom practitioners i.e. teachers? The most obvious way is by providing a list of practical motivational techniques that teachers can apply in their classrooms. Dornyei (2005) identifies four principal aspects of motivational teaching practice:

- Creating the basic motivational conditions: establishing rapport with the students, fostering a pleasant and supportive classroom atmosphere, developing a cohesive learner group with appropriate group norms.
- Generating initial student motivation: enhancing the learners' L2 related value and attitude, increasing the learners' expectancy of success, enhancing the learners' goal-orientedness, making teaching materials relevant to the learners and creating realistic learner beliefs.
- Maintaining and protecting motivation: setting specific learner goals, presenting tasks in a motivating way, protecting the learners' self-esteem and increasing their self-confidence, allowing learners to maintain a positive social image, creating learner autonomy, promoting cooperation among the learners and promoting self-motivating strategies.
- Encouraging positive retrospective self-evaluation: providing motivational feedback, promoting motivational attributions, increasing learner satisfaction, offering rewards and grades in a motivating manner.

## **9. SELF MOTIVATING STRATEGIES**

Such techniques play a role in empowering learners to be more committed and enthusiastic language learners. Even under adverse conditions in certain classrooms and without any teacher assistance, some learners are more successful at staying committed to the goals they have set for themselves. How do they do it? The answer is that they apply certain self-motivation skills as a means for overcoming environmental distractions.

Dornyei (2001b) draws on Kuhl's (1987) and Corno and Kanfer's (1993) research to suggest the following self-motivating strategies

- a. Commitment strategies: for helping to preserve or increase the learners' original goal commitment, keeping in mind positive incentives (for example, a film director fantasizing about receiving an Oscar).
- b. Metacognitive strategies: for monitoring and controlling concentration, and curtailing unnecessary procrastination.
- c. Satiation strategies: for eliminating boredom and adding extra attraction or interest to the task.
- d. Emotion strategies for managing disruptive emotional states or moods, and for generating emotions that will be conducive to implementing one's intentions through self-encouragement and using relaxation and meditation techniques.
- e. Environmental strategies: for eliminating negative environmental influences and exploiting positive environmental influences by making the environment an ally in the pursuit of a difficult goal.

## 10. CONCLUSION

Needless to say that motivation is the most important factor that stimulates creativity and critical thinking. Motivation is of two types: Internal motivation- the passion, interest and will for creativity- the challenge about solving a problem and the sense of satisfaction resulting from the solution. External motivation- all external factors like prize or the positive result gained out of an activity. The creative learners are mostly influenced by the internal motivation. Effective and adequately personalized communication strategies can increase the learners' linguistic self confidence and generate increased satisfaction in their L2 use. A language teacher with learner self motivating strategies in mind can supervise the motivation level of learners and in fact can assist in keeping the level of motivation high. In fact with good planning the teaching of a language programme can be more productive and enjoyable for both the teacher and learner.

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