What Influences Critical Thinking in Education?

What is Critical thinking and why is it important? At its very core, critical thinking is carefully analysing information and evidence that has been read, seen and heard, while seeking the truth (Aveyard, Sharp and Wooliams, 2015). It is crucial to be prepared to question personal views, opinions and ideas of others with honesty and flexibility, while making a personal judgment. It is also important to observe research to determine whether a source carries authority and authenticity and, engaging in theories without fear to explore the evidence, allowing oneself to be open-minded to a change of perspective. It is implied that personal understanding of a particular read depends on an individual's experience and current knowledge, therefore, it is critical that we seek strong, correct evidence. Adopting a range of skills and qualities that influence the development of critical thinking in education is important because it creates space for understanding. Discovering such skills produces constant growth in a particular subject area (Eales-Reynolds *et al*, 2013). Some examples of these qualities and skills might include, time management, critical questioning, and perseverance. As a university student, it is essential that the development of these personal skills and qualities are embedded and embraced fearlessly and in all aspects of academic study. Indeed, during lectures, independent learning, and placement (Cottrell, 2017).

Time management is having a thorough and detailed plan in place confirming the amount of time one spends on each required task. Reflecting on current responsibilities and agendas could determine what is needed and what is not, therefore creating a healthy level of space to engage in study time, while concentrating on the most important aspects of university life – completing assignments. Burns and Sinfield (2012) suggests that thorough organization and planning influences a greater academic achievement for students. It is creating the space for organizational strategies to unfold and therefore developing critical thinking in education by delving deeper into study. In their book, *'Essential Study Skills': The Complete Guide to Success at University*, the first aspect to note is reviewing priorities:

- When and where is the best time to study to achieve the best outcome?
- How will studies fit around the important relationships of friends and family?
- When will healthy, balanced mealtimes and exercise be scheduled?
- How to plan assignments around work, chores, and hobbies.
- When to unwind, rest and relax.

According to LearnHigher (2012), managing time well should include varied aspects of study and could look like a daily, weekly, and termly timetable with goals set to achieve by several deadlines. It may involve different phases of study such as research; reading; note taking; reflective learning; and critical questioning and targeting the most important area first. It might include time in lectures, placement, or independent learning. Time management could also involve additional approaches including diary's, journals and lists prioritizing the most important aspects of each goal ensuring deadlines are met. Cottrell (2010) suggests some realistic approaches to managing time well and therefore improving personal performance, reducing stress and highlighting strengths and weaknesses. This encourages the development of critical thinking in education because the time is intentionally created to study well.

(Source: Microsoft PowerPoint icon).

Critical questioning is skillful judgement to find truth, characterized by intellectual curiosity (dictionary.com, 2021). According to Eales-Reynolds *et al*. (2013), it is suggested that although there is a main viewpoint, there is also alternative views that can be explored and analyzed. It is essential to question your own views and the views of others and be confident to recognize that not everything is truth because it is in print.

From very young, children discover the world of questions. In their book, *Critical thinking skills for education students*, the delivery implies that questioning is crucial to supporting the creation of meaning about their world. It encourages the development of critical thinking as they grow, because they are already beginning the process of analyzing other people's reasoning, challenging their own assumptions and finding the truth (Eales Reynolds *et al*. 2013).

According to Cottrell (2017), asking critical questions is something everyone should be doing. More specifically, as a university student it can change entirely how one perceives, understands, engages, and develops. It unfolds the world of study and builds more awareness of how to be a critical thinker. It differentiates fact from opinion; identifies strategies, engages in ideas and creates insight (Moore, 2010). In her book, Moore encourages the importance of students 'digging deeper' and suggests that exploring topics independently is how to grow into an effective, successful student. Critical questioning is about enhancing the learning journey by exploring, investigating, dissecting every piece of knowledge that is presented and, empowering oneself to become a self-engaged learner who has not only been given insight of knowledge but understanding. In agreement with Cottrell, Moore urges students to apply questioning to everything.

(Source: BIZDIAGRAM, 2021).

Perseverance is continuing steadily along, especially in spite of challenges (dictionary.com, 2021). To develop critical thinking in education such qualities are key. It demands loyalty and commitment to obtaining the right answers. This means hard work and dedication, not merely sitting in a lecture and expecting numerous handouts delivering all the answers to the assignments. It needs thought, consideration, and the ability to engage deeper and more thorough. It seeks accuracy and care. It is grafting. University students are largely responsible for their own success. Support is indeed certain; however, it is the student's duty to take initiative (Cottrell, 2013). Students can take charge of their learning abilities, resulting in the strengthening of one's capacity to persevere if there is a desire to give up. Cottrell suggests creating time to put the hours in; being wise and realistic with choices; taking advantage of existing opportunities and exploring current mind-sets with a willingness to change and grow.

Life is hard sometimes. There could be many reasons as to why; many obstacles; challenges; disappointments. However, amid countless obstacles also comes countless opportunities. Perseverance is the key. Vujicic (2021) was a useful source of information. Nick Vujicic is a man who was born with no arms or legs, suffered bullying at school, fearful of the future. Feeling desperate, powerless, and alone, Vujicic attempted suicide. Despite the difficulties of life, Vujicic claims a positive attitude changed everything. Perseverance created discoveries of the wonderful opportunities of life. Now Vujicic stands as the most sought-after motivational speakers in the world!

Cottrell (2013) also suggests that at various points throughout education there will still be times that studying is too much effort, even if it is a subject of great interest. However, success will be defined by the level of motivation. It is vital that even in those challenging times, asking the critical question, 'what is the motivator here?' influences one's perseverance to succeed. Cottrell suggests the influences on motivation:

- be clear about the purpose of the assignment
- consider personal choices and find the right direction
- build confidence and believe in personal success
- time-management and strategies to support development and progression
- intentionally choose not to give up!

To conclude, university students must learn a range of skills and qualities that influence critical thinking in education. If time management, critical questioning and perseverance along with many other qualities are combined within the learning journey, they will succeed in personal performance and continue to develop the fundamental skill of critical thinking. They will learn to analyze information and evidence while discovering the truth surrounding their topic of study and they will grow. This is not only a skill they will use during education, but something students can carry with them long after university studies are complete, into family life, work life and beyond (Cottrell, 2010).

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