

Chapter 75

Planning for Critical Thinking in Language Arts Instruction

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ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on the importance of planning for critical thinking in language arts instruction based on the Caribbean classroom. It seeks to identify traits of critical thinking, outline suggestions for planning for the inclusion of critical thinking, and highlight methods for incorporating critical thinking into language arts and provide solutions and recommendations. The chapter ends with suggestions for future research directions and summarizes the importance and many benefits associated with critical thinking in language arts.

INTRODUCTION

The overarching goal of most educators is to ensure learning is taking place under his or her watch. The need to foster learning therefore makes planning an essential tool in the educator's toolbox. Unfortunately, planning a lesson can sometimes appear to be a herculean undertaking. On occasion, he or she is tasked with teaching a class that may have many impediments such as overpopulated classrooms with students who have multiple and varying strengths and interests. Regardless of the circumstance, it remains the educator's responsibility to ensure every student under his or her care receives equal access to quality education.

The mandate perpetuated by the concept of facilitating lifelong learners, a key component for the 21st century, posits the need for heavy focus to be placed on fostering critical thinking skills. To this end, it is contingent on teachers who are tasked with the day to day socialization and education of students, to ensure that their charges have a firm grasp of these skills. This mandate is codified in some educational policies. For example, in Barbados, the Ministry of Education recognized the need for students to be

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-3022-1.ch075

able to utilize higher order thinking skills and assigned teachers the job of ensuring that “As lifelong learners, persons should be able to engage in critical thinking, generate solutions to complex problems, and gather and synthesize data. In order to facilitate this purpose, Barbadian students must be prepared to read strategically” (Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports, n.d.). Scott (2015) agreed with this stance when she posited that in order to teach higher order skills, teachers must tailor their lesson to suit “all the characteristics of today’s students” (p.2) and should begin as soon as the child commences formal schooling as opposed to further in its educational life. This would allow critical thinking to become second nature to the student, eliminating any awkwardness that may occur from them being unsure of their ability to be rational producers, rather than mindless consumers of knowledge.

This chapter draws upon the experience of teaching and knowledge of the Barbadian education system. To address these concerns, this chapter presents definitions of key concepts: planning and critical thinking, explains the characteristics and identifiable traits of critical thinking, offers suggestions for planning for the inclusion of critical thinking in Language Arts and methods that can be used to incorporate critical thinking into Language Arts. Finally the chapter concludes with solutions and recommendations for these concerns, future research directions and a summary regarding the importance of planning and critical thinking and how they may coincide with Language Arts.

DEFINING KEY CONCEPTS: PLANNING AND CRITICAL THINKING

Thinking is a basic human function in all individuals, manifesting itself in the form of “problem solving, decision making and creative thinking” (Tosuncuoglu, 2018, p. 20). Due to the fact that thinking is natural and automatic to the individual, it occurs without consideration of any intervening factors, and so tends to be selfish, myopic and uninformed. In order to validate one’s thoughts, some level of effort must be applied to this automatic thought process to give it some direction (Tosuncuoglu, 2018). One of the most fundamental aspects of critical thinking is its ability to actively encourage educational growth within a technologically changing world. As technology evolves, human thinking should also develop to foster future advancements. Although critical thinking in the classroom may be perceived as a simple task by some, it requires planning to adequately manage and achieve goals within learning environments. Planning and critical thinking coincide as planning requires thorough internal debates about the goal optimistically to be achieved and appropriate methods for achieving it. It “involves deciding on a future desired state and the course of action to get there” (Spoelder, Lockwood, Cowell, Gregersonand, & Henchman, 2015, p. 383). The planning process is a natural occurrence which we often take part in without a conscious awareness. For instance, people often make plans to attend events, for daily and weekly routines or in some cases to achieve academic or business objectives.

Teachers plan before the lesson to give themselves adequate time to instruct, for students to have enough learning experiences and for facilitating assessments within each lesson. Planning before the lesson also allows teachers to choose and prepare teaching aids or materials and strategies which would benefit the students they are working with. During the lesson, there may be interruptions such as meetings, lengthy morning assemblies and other unplanned events. Planning for the lesson, allows things to run smoothly regardless of these interruptions as the teacher already has a clear idea of learning objectives during the class and therefore is better prepared to adapt the strategies and activities to facilitate unexpected interruptions. Similarly, after the lesson, the teacher can gain new insight based on the evaluations. Subsequently, knowledge of what worked and the adjustments which would be needed to

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