

Chapter 3

Teaching Critical Thinking Skills to Foster Social–Emotional Learning

ABSTRACT

Critical thinking, once promoted in classrooms only for gifted and talented students, is now found to be in the curriculum for every student. Why is this the case? We are experiencing a fast and complex shift in the global workforce where many routine and rote skills have been replaced with the need for analytical and communication skills. Today's worker not only has to problem solve on the job but must work collaboratively with others to get the job done efficiently. At the same time, this modern-day worker must learn how to adapt to a constant changing workforce. Therefore, it is important to prepare our students by teaching them how to critically think, a learning skill needed to adequately prepare our students for the 21st century, not just for their future workforce, but for their success in school and their personal, social, and emotional lives.

INTRODUCTION

Karl Schwab (2016) describes that we are living in the early stages of a Fourth Revolution, “a revolution that is fundamentally changing the way we live, work and relate to one another. Some define the Fourth Revolution as a period of artificial intelligence, machine learning, and autonomous vehicles. Schwab

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-4102-9.ch003

predicts that approximately 5 million jobs will be lost to technology by the year 2020, and half of the current jobs will be replaced by automation. This Fourth Revolution denotes a real shift in the workforce, a shift that brings educators to the realization that there will be “unknown” jobs or jobs that have not been created at present date for our young future workers. Thus, the best practice that educators can do is to prepare students for a future workplace, which “puts a premium on the ability work in diverse teams, to grapple with difficult problems, and to adjust to rapid change” (Nation at Hope). Future employers will more than likely hire those who can think quickly, analyze, and process information given to them at a given notice. So, where some skills are “desirable,” critical thinking in the 21st Century will no longer just be a desirable skill but rather a necessity for our future employees to function at a competent and competitive level (Wagner, 2008).

Critical thinking is a learning skill for 21st century success and is evidenced throughout educational communities. A student will not be able to succeed academically if he/she cannot critically think; therefore, critical thinking is ranked in the education arena with high importance. In addition to its reference in the Partnership for 21st Century Learning that asks educators to “focus on creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration (the 4 C’s) ... in order to prepare students for the future”, the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts (ELA) place emphasis on the “critical thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills that are required for success in college, career and life” (ELA CCSS, n.d.). Finally, the Every Student Succeeds Act, or ESSA, recommends tests that “measure high-order thinking skills, such as reasoning, analysis, complex problem solving, critical thinking, effective communication, and understanding of challenging content” (ESSA Fact Sheet, 2017). Therefore, teaching critical thinking and problem solving to our youth is crucial. With critical thinking and problem-solving skills, students learn how to develop other skills. Having critical thinking skills will enable them to have higher levels of concentration and deeper abilities to analyze situations. Thus, students’ overall thought processing will improve as a result.

BACKGROUND OF CRITICAL THINKING

The following outlines a brief history of critical thinking:

- One can examine the early roots of critical thinking through such great thinkers as

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