



Development of Critical Thinking Skills in English Language Classroom through Dialogue Method

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ABSTRACT

Thinking is one of the important characteristics of human beings. It is an act which separates human beings from other species on the planet. Thinking skills are one of the most important areas to be worked upon which is the current need of the society. But classroom teaching learning is still unable to inculcate higher order thinking skills among our students. Higher-order thinking involves the learning of complex judgmental skills such as critical thinking and problem solving. Higher-order thinking is more difficult to learn or teach but also more valuable because such skills are more likely to be usable in novel situations (i.e., situations other than those in which the skill was learned). In the present paper focus is on development of critical thinking skills. The paper summarizes the theoretical underpinnings for dialogue and points out the benefits that genuine dialogue can bring in teaching learning process. On the basis of above theoretical background and findings, Dialogue as pedagogy can be considered fruitful in English Language Classroom for the inculcation of Higher Order Thinking Skills i.e. Critical thinking skills in the students. We need to invest in our English language classrooms the dialogue method so that we can have a foundational relationship of understanding, a common ground, and a capital of collective acumen and vision that enables us to address the questions which we are facing in the present era. Dialogue is a necessary and a powerful tool in the hands of teacher for cultivating critical thinking skills among our students. An important feature of Dialogue is that it crafts a community-based culture of teamwork and shared leadership.

Keywords: Thinking, higher order thinking skills, critical thinking skills, dialogue method

Thinking is one of the important characteristics of human beings. It is an act which separates human beings from other species on the planet. But today's Education system is more oriented towards gathering information, data and knowledge which provides less space to work on thinking skills of child. Thinking skills are one of the most important areas to be worked upon which is the current need of the society. But classroom teaching learning is still unable to inculcate higher order thinking skills among our students. If our pupils are not thinking means they are just listening to the content prescribed in the curriculum which does not appear to be an effective form of communication in the teaching learning process.

Traditional teacher pupil interaction is autocratic by nature where teacher decides about the content to be taught in classroom with his/her fixed -agenda,

questions and answers related to topic taught in the class. This type of traditional teaching acts as a barrier in the development of students' thinking skills. This paper broadly speaks about higher order thinking skills, Critical Thinking (CT) Skills, how CT can be integrated with a school subject i.e. English Language, Dialogic teaching and learning in English Language Classroom, followed by an activity based on dialogue for English language classroom. Before discussing the main theme, the meaning of thinking and higher order thinking skills are discussed below.

Thinking and Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS)

Thinking is a series of symbolic processes. It uses symbols, percepts, images and concepts. Images can be sensory or verbal. Therefore thinking involves

representative process. Mohsin (1967) defines "Thinking is an implication of problem solving behavior." Gilmer (1970) "Thinking is a problem solving process in which we use ideas or symbols in place of overt activity." Mohsin and Gilmer both talk about Thinking in the problem solving context. On the other side, Garrett (1968) defines "Thinking is a behavior which is often implicit and hidden in which symbols (images, ideas and concepts) are ordinarily employed." According to Eyesenck (1972) "Thinking is defined operationally as the establishing of orders in the apprehended world. This ordering is related to objects as well as to representatives of the world of objects. Thinking is also ordering the relation between representations of objects." Thinking skills are mental processes which we use when we are engaged in planning, decision making, problem solving, asking questions, analyzing alternatives, organizing information and evaluating ideas etc. Thinking may be of many kinds such as reveries, controlled, association, reasoning, conceptual thinking, imagination, divergent, convergent, problem solving, day dreams, night dreams, creative thoughts and so on. A lot of research work has been done in the area of Thinking and Higher order thinking skills by Bloom, De Bono and Lipman.

Higher-order thinking, known as higher order thinking skills (HOTS), is based on learning taxonomies (such as Bloom's taxonomy). The idea is that some types of learning require more cognitive processing than others, but also have more generalized benefits. In Bloom's taxonomy, for example, skills involving analysis, evaluation and synthesis (creation of new knowledge) are thought to be of a higher order, requiring different learning and teaching methods than the learning of facts and concepts. Higher-order thinking involves the learning of complex judgmental skills such as critical thinking and problem solving. Higher-order thinking is more difficult to learn or teach but also more valuable because such skills are more likely to be usable in novel situations (i.e., situations other than those in which the skill was learned). In the present paper focus is on Development of Critical Thinking Skills.

Critical Thinking Skills

The relationship between critical thinking and education is obvious: learning and thinking

are interwoven, one cannot learn well without thinking well. A research conducted for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, University of Oregon by Conley (2007) finds that "habits of mind" such as "analysis, interpretation, precision and accuracy, problem solving, and reasoning" can be as or more important than content knowledge in determining success in college courses. Teaching critical thinking effectively in the classroom is vital for students. Learning critical thinking leads students to develop other skills, such as a higher level of concentration, deeper analytical abilities, and improved thought processing. Today's citizens must be active critical thinkers if they are to compare evidence, evaluate competing claims, and make sensible decisions. The solutions to international problems, such as global warming, require highly developed critical thinking skills and dispositions. In everyday work, citizens must employ critical thinking to better serve the society, develop better products, and continuously improve themselves within an ever-changing global economy. Economists, Levy and Murnane (2004) have described the new world of work in which the most desirable jobs—the ones least likely to be automated or outsourced—are those that require *expert thinking* and *complex communication*. Problem solving has always involved teamwork and cooperation.

In any institute or organization, be it a sports team, business, school, or class the "intelligence of the team exceeds the intelligence of the individuals on the team" (Senge, 2006, p. 9). This discipline begins with dialogue and a suspension of assumptions to permit the discovery of insights through the free flow of ideas. A class is far more than just a group of students who work together for the purpose of learning. To be a learning team, students must have a shared vision, comparable purpose, and complement other's efforts. Team learning "is a process of aligning and developing the capacity of a team to create the results its members truly desire" (Senge, 2006, p.218) and building on personal mastery and vision, Team learning requires proficiency in dialogue. The engagement in dialogue involves becoming aware of one's own assumptions, sharing one's assumptions with others, and inviting others to inquire about one's thoughts and beliefs. Dialogic teaching and learning helps to develop students' critical thinking skills. Next paragraph

explores how traditional teaching-learning and dialogic teaching- learning are different.

Dialogic Teaching and Learning

Dialogue helps to develop thinking among students. Students’ thinking needs stimulus from the environment – like a story, an issue, a problem, a question etc. Dialogue is the primary means for developing wisdom in human species. Nowadays there has been a growing emphasis on the central role of dialogue in teaching and learning. The value of talk for learning in the classroom can be fully understood if teachers:

- ❑ View dialogue as an aim of learning not just a means for learning
- ❑ Use talk and questioning to challenge children’s thinking
- ❑ Plan for sustained and effective dialogue
- ❑ Teach the ground rules for effective dialogue
- ❑ Inspire students to ask questions
- ❑ Allow students enough time for thinking, reasoning and enquiry

Traditional teacher/ pupil interaction is a necessary feature of learning, but it is not sufficient in 21st Century World, for it places limits on students’ thinking, whereas dialogic teaching expands students’ thinking and continually challenge their capacity to frame ideas in words. Given below are differences which clarify the origin and nature of the two interactions – Traditional teacher/ pupil interaction and Dialogic teaching.

Table 1: Traditional versus dialogic teaching

Traditional Teacher/ Pupil Interaction	Dialogic Teaching
Teacher’s questions	Student’s Questions
Teacher’s agenda	Shared Agenda
Informative	Imaginative
Limited focus	Exploratory
One directing view	Variation of viewpoints
Calculative	Reflective
‘I/it’ relationship	‘I/you’ relationships
Authoritative	Persuasive
Right Answers	Possible answers
Competitive answer- giving	Co- operative enquiry
Content- focused learning	Personalized Learning
Related to functional outcomes	Related to inner purposes

Effective Dialogue is collaborative (learning together), reciprocal (listening to each other), supportive (each is able to express ideas freely), cumulative (each builds on ideas), challenging (beliefs can be challenged and changed) and purposeful (the goals of the discussion are kept in sight). Effective dialogue is about challenge, wrestling with ideas, but also about dancing with them. Dialogue is a type of communication which allows people with different views to talk with each other in safe environment, different from discussion and debate. This type of communication offers chance for in-depth learning, transforming ideas and developing self -awareness among the participants.

Many studies were conducted related to Dialogue Method in India like: Shah (2007), Bhatu (2008), Jagani (2008) and Narayan (2014). In most of the studies dialogue as pedagogy was found to be effective in terms of Achievement, Study habits, Scientific attitude, and Social adjustment. Dubey and Ratnaparkhi (2014) conducted a study at School of Education, DAVV, Indore. It was found that participation of the students in dialogue method was remarkable. Students enthusiastically contributed in the activity and realized their abilities to listen and think critically and to express one-self clearly and effectively. Sleeter and Grant (2003) found that diversity in education aims to promote feelings of unity, tolerance, and acceptance *within the existing societal structure* Inter Group Dialogue research shows strong evidence for students’ increased critical consciousness.

In two studies using pretest-posttest surveys, students report thinking more about their social group memberships and interrelated learning activities, such as social identity and affinity groups. Zúñiga and Nagda (1993) explained how differential privilege and power affect individuals in the separate groups and across the groups in dialogue. Collins (1996) found that instead of differences being divisive, explicit acknowledgment and dialogue about the differentials can facilitate more connective relationships. Study done by Yeakley (1988) speaks directly about the purposefulness of dialogic engagement processes. Nagda and Zúñiga (2003) found that students’ value for the dialogic engagement was positively related to their affirmative views about conflict. Positive

influences were also seen for one measure of community—bridging differences (for example, “I want to bridge differences between different social identity groups”). Gurin, Nagda and Lopez (2004) showed that the informational content and intergroup interactions in dialogue help build a learning community that allows for learning about one’s own group and other groups, reflecting more on one’s own group, and bridging differences between groups.

Above studies like Shah (2007), Bhatu (2008), Jagani (2008), Narayan (2014), Dubey and Ratnaparkhi (2014), Sleeter and Grant (2003), Zúñiga and Nagda (1993), Collins (1996), Yeakley (1988), Nagda and Zúñiga (2003), Gurin, Nagda and Lopez (2004) state that dialogue has effects on the learning of students. It also helps diverse group to communicate about their different views and build a healthy environment for learning. It helps to build learning community. Taking the above mentioned studies into consideration researcher thought to develop critical thinking skills in English language classroom by employing dialogue method as pedagogy. Next paragraph will describe the condition of English language in India. It will also talk about the recommendations given by NCERT, NCF (2005) and its implementation by the teacher in English language classroom.

Teaching Critical Thinking in English Language Classroom through Dialogue Method

English in India today is a symbol of people’s aspirations for quality in education and fuller participation in national and international life ... The level of introduction of English has now become a matter of political response to people’s aspirations, rendering almost irrelevant an academic debate on the merits of a very early introduction.

— (NCERT 2006:1)

English – formerly perceived as a library language and the language of higher education – is now in demand by every quarter as a means of progress and the key to a better life. As Graddol (2010) point out, the language which was a ‘key part of the mechanism of exclusion because of its very unequal distribution in society’ is now seen ‘as a means of inclusion’. The demand for English emerges from

many factors, as recognized by the position paper on the teaching of English produced by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT 2006)

Davis (1993) in his book ‘*Tools for Teaching*’ says that regardless of the subject matter, students working in small groups tend to learn more of what is taught and retain it longer than when the same content is presented in other instructional formats. According to sociocultural view of classrooms, language use must be seen as a situated phenomenon. Sociocultural theories might guide us to structure classrooms in ways that adequately support English learners. Sociocultural theories draw on the work of Vygotsky (1978), who posits that learning occurs through social interactions, as learners make meaning through the negotiation of new concepts (and language). His work, focused on children’s learning, argues that learning occurs in a ‘zone of proximal development’ (ZPD), where children, through scaffold interactions with more capable peers and adults, can move to the next stage of development (beyond their current stage). Mercer (2000) suggests that an educator may attempt to foster an environment in which the participants are consciously and actively encouraged to participate with ideas, thoughts, and suggestions and so on.

He labeled this type of discourse ‘exploratory talk’ in which notions of trust, inquiry and constructive engagement with each other’s ideas are promoted. Mercer and Howe (2012), in taking a sociocultural perspective to education, view such exploratory talk as ‘a form of co-reasoning in language, with speakers sharing knowledge, challenging ideas, evaluating evidence and considering options in a reasoned and equitable way’.

On the basis of above theoretical background and findings, Dialogue as pedagogy can be considered fruitful in English Language Classroom for the inculcation of Higher Order Thinking Skills i.e. Critical thinking skills in the students. Below given are some rules to be followed while conducting Dialogue in Classroom which is followed by an activity which could be done in the English language classroom.

In order to have real dialogue in the classroom certain conditions must exist in the group, certain skills must be developed in the participants

(Bohm, 1985 & 1990; Gerard & Teurfs, 1993 & 1994; Hannigan, 1994; Huang Nissen, 1996; Ross, 1994; Senge, 1990). Ten important points to be considered during real dialogue are listed below:

1. Class to be divided in Small groups
2. Act as colleagues
3. Create an empty space
4. Listen without judgment
5. Suspend assumptions
6. Postpone agenda and goals
7. Focus on learning
8. Inquire and reflect
9. Observe self
10. Respect and value differences

These are suggestive points to be considered during dialogue but not yardstick to be always followed as it is. Teachers can make necessary changes according to the requirement of student's age, content to be taught and designed activity. Below given is an activity based on Dialogic teaching which will help to enhance critical thinking skills of students in English Language classroom.

Activity: Dialogue on a Given Topic

1. Orientation about dialogue

Students will be informed about the cycles and rules to be followed in dialogue. Quick presentation about the finer details of this approach will be given.

2. Formation of groups and sitting in closed circles

During this step all the students will be divided into groups. Each group will consist of five – six students. Students will be asked to sit in close circles so that they can listen to each other and have feeling of oneness in their circle. Circles were formed in such a way that every one was able to see and hear peer individuals with ease.

3. Declaration of topic

Now after the formation of group, the topic will be given to them, which can be randomly selected by picking a chit from bowl. The topic for dialogue can be current global or local issue such as Global

warming, Pollution control, Use of Mobiles by students, an incident/person/book that changed my life, traffic rules, etc. The topics can vary depending upon students' background like urban- rural, English medium – Hindi medium, socio economic status, geographical position etc After this, first cycle of introduction where students will introduce themselves and share their hobbies, favourite subject, games etc, will be followed by actual dialogue on the topic.

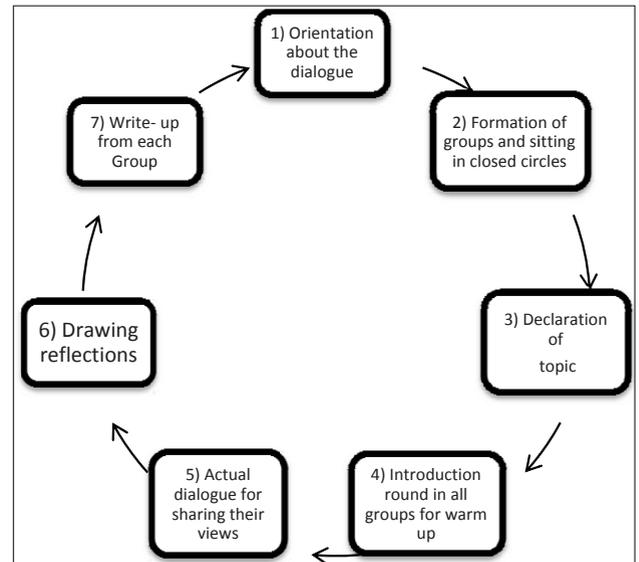


Fig. 1: Steps followed in Dialogue on a given Topic

4. Introduction round in all groups for warm-up

Introduction round is basically framed for breaking students' hesitation and monotony. This round takes about five to seven minutes. The effect of this round is that they come close to each other and a friendly environment is built among the group members. Good rapport is established in this round.

5. Actual dialogue for sharing their views about the topic

Now the actual Dialogue begins on the given topic. As they become free in the first cycle of introduction, they start to share their views on the topic. Teacher acts as a facilitator. This step is actually related to analysis of the topic. Students share their views, beliefs and experiences on the given topic.

6. Drawing reflection

The next step followed is to draw their reflections on the topic. After the actual dialogue, students are asked to reflect on the topic on the basis of their views shared in the group. This step is related to the process of synthesis, which emerged as a result of dialogue among group members. Fourth and fifth step helps students to churn their minds and new ideas are generated.

In this way dialogue helps students to think about their own thinking system, beliefs, views and experiences. At the end they are able to correct their own beliefs, views related to the given topic. Then students are given chance to stimulate their thinking which when continuously practiced will help to enhance critical thinking skills of students.

These types of many other activities can be framed by the language teachers to enhance their students' critical thinking skills.

The paper summarizes the theoretical underpinnings for dialogue and points out the benefits that genuine dialogue can bring in teaching learning process. An important feature of Dialogue is that it crafts a community-based culture of teamwork and shared leadership. It moves groups from the craving, rivalry and marginalization often found in hierarchical cultures to increased collaboration, partnership and inclusion. It helps to remove the culture of competitiveness with each other in group and helps to build a healthy atmosphere for learning. The activity described in the paper helps to develop higher order thinking skills among the students. It is a kind of students cum content based learning. It helps to cultivate among students good listening habits which are must for language learning.

We need to invest in our English language classrooms the dialogue method so that we can have a foundational relationship of understanding, a common ground, and a capital of collective acumen and vision that enables us to address the questions which we are facing in the present era. We must develop a culture of collaboration and communities of learning grounded in respect, openness and trust for the good of humanity. Dialogue is a necessary and a powerful tool in the hands of teacher for cultivating critical thinking skills among our students.

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