

Increasing Critical Thinking in Early Childhood Settings with Meaning and Sustainability

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Abstract

As time advances, people's approach to innovation and learning are subject to change. This is observable in the way we educate the minds of our future and the ways in which we teach and learn. We alter what we deem as the most important lessons and skills that should be taught to young people. This is in an effort to create the most beneficial and effective adults that are equipped with the tools needed to succeed in everyday life. Now, in the 21st century, four skills are believed to be the most important and relevant: the ability to collaborate, create, communicate, and think critically (Priyanti, & Warmansyah, 2021). Educators of all types must become aware of these essential elements of relevant skill. One way teachers can focus on and continuously refine these proficiencies that yield long-term results is through inquiry-based learning methods.

Thinking Critically

Critical thinking has been defined time and time again and is of considerable focus in the field of education. Many educators can agree that critical thinking is an active process of analyzing choices, combining ideas, taking risks to build connections, and reflecting on the steps it took to reach certain conclusions (Cottrell, 2023). Undoubtedly, this is considered a high-level cognitive ability; however, young minds are ripe for this type of fine tuning. Children are popularly referred to as "sponges." In saying this, everything is new and of interest to a child, making

information easily absorbable. Everything is captivating, everything holds potential for further exploration with genuine interest on behalf of the child. With proper care from the influential adult, these young minds can be sculpted on how to seek questions, research explanations, and reflect on answers.

Observation on Current Modes of Thinking- South Tangerang Kindergarten

The role of a school to a child is to condition proper modes of learning and thinking through pre-planned learning and thinking stimulations. Having suitably

trained instructors holding a student's attention throughout the day, nearly every day, could be the perfect environment for creation of these crucial critical thinking skills. Alas, many schools currently lack outcomes that would prove this to be true (Hidayat & Nur, 2018). Two researchers, working and studying at the State Institute for Islamic Studies Batusangkar in Indonesia, wanted to see just how much of an impact it would have on students to shift from a teacher-centered class mode to a student-centered one. They conducted research in a kindergarten class in South Tangerang, Indonesia that put students' critical thinking skills to the test. These observations concluded that most students do not have the initiative to ask questions, lack interest in activities that require critical thinking, have low analytical skills, consistently wait for teacher direction as opposed to taking initiative to one's own learning, and scarcely create ideas that stem from one's interest (Priyanti & Warmansyah, 2021).

Inquiry- Based Learning – A Solution

One approach to achieve a child-centered education regimen is to utilize inquiry-based learning. Inquiry based learning requires the student to be at the forefront of their own education, research, and reflection. The child can form their own questions based on their experiences and interests, use their own methods of research and investigation, and devise their own findings that they can believe and trust. Within inquiry and child-based learning, the teacher is to act as a facilitator to help the students question, research, and make conclusions. This opposes a more traditional teacher-centered mode of learning where the educator serves as a sole-source of question and answer. Higher-level mental processes and critical thinking skills advance through a

child-based learning approach (Krogh & Morehouse, 2020).

Research

Priyanti and Warmansyah, students and researchers at the State Institute for Islamic Studies Batusangkar in Indonesia, conducted research on a group of 12 kindergarten students (ages 5-6 years old) at the Madinah Pondok Cabe Kindergarten in South Tangerang, Indonesia from October 21, 2019 until November 1, 2019 (10 days/ 2 weeks of school). Data was collected through means of observation, interviews, and documentation. Child-centered lessons were delivered daily for each five days of the week (cycle) 1 and then again for week (cycle) 2. The first week was jarring for most students, as this was a completely new way of thinking and learning. As students became comfortable with the approach, their known way of education was altered. Comparing data from the two cycles, significant improvement was shown on the student's engagement, independence in research, and subject mastery from cycle 1 to cycle 2 (Priyanti & Warmansyah, 2021).

Conclusion

These findings allow us to conclude that a child and inquiry-centered teaching approach yields the greatest potential for a child's success both academically and practically. Allowing autonomy on the part of the learner allows for more sustained interest and mastery of subject(s). When students can dictate their own modes of learning, they will become more engaged in the topic, take a greater role in research, and have better understanding and pride in findings. Implementing this type of thinking early on in a person's life instills lasting critical thinking skills that will serve an individual both in and out of the classroom. The ability to collaborate, create, communicate, and think critically are valued

talents in our modern world that an inquiry-based teaching approach supports.

References

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