

Promoting Critical Thinking as a Social Practice: Shaping Students' Voice, Agency and Inter-Subjectivity in a Cohesive Framework

Khalid Almashikhi

Department of Education, College of Arts and Applied Sciences
Dhofar University, Salalah, Sultanate of Oman

Vijay Singh Thakur

Department of Languages and Translation, College of Arts and Applied Sciences
Dhofar University, Salalah, Sultanate of Oman

Abstract:

Strict outcome-bound approaches and text-books-based instructional practices, prevalent in the pedagogy of most of the colleges and universities in English as an International Language (EIL) contexts, involve language activities, tasks, and tests that predominantly require one right answer or response. Pedagogical practices and related quality assurance mechanisms regulated by such approaches limit students' ability to be original and skeptical in reflecting upon various issues of importance and concern based on their own thinking and experiences. Such a focus, in Sivasubramaniam's (2015) and Nunn and Sivasubramaniam's (2011) view, has entirely centered on bureaucratic efficiency aimed at having a uniform curriculum for the majority of the students and a scheme of research and evaluation based on recalls, think-alouds, cloze tests and multiple-choice questions in standardized texts. In line with the socially-aligned view of competence much needed spontaneity, flexibility, and diversity accrues only through a process-centered pedagogy of voice, agency and response. In the backdrop of this as a premise, this paper aims to demonstrate how Critical Thinking (CT) can be promoted in EIL classrooms as a discursive practice that could shape students' voice, agency and inter-subjectivity in a cohesive framework. The paper shares both theoretical and practical ideas about CT and its importance in facilitating a meaningful education and aims to demonstrate some innovative tasks and activities that could be exploited to shape student's voice and agency and develop their higher order CT skills. The paper culminates in evolving a practically viable prototype pedagogical framework for promoting CT as a social practice in EIL classrooms that is capable of making Wilga Rivers's (1983) notions of 'skill-getting' and 'skill-using' a reality. Such a model will be useful for EIL practitioners in designing similar lessons with innovative tasks and activities and make the EIL class atmosphere stimulating and pedagogically more fruitful.

Key Words: agency, voice, critical thinking, discursive practice, inter-subjectivity, pseudo-bilingual situation, skill-getting and skill-using

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