Does Communicative Language Teaching help develop students’ competence in thinking critically?

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Please raise your hand if you think that:

Question 1. you think critically?

Question 2. all students equip critical thinking equally as they get older?

Question 3. development of thinking capability is a by-product of the subject-matter teaching and all we have to do is to follow the prescribed curriculum and thinking would flourish spontaneously?
What is critical thinking in a higher educational context?

Definitions

1) Originality/creativity (Moore, 2013)

2) Careful and sensitive reading of text and think beyond the text (Moore, 2013)

3) Problem solving

4) Skills which you can train to obtain
Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Background history

Chomsky (1957)
‘grammatical competence’

Hymes (1972)
‘communicative competence’

Characteristics

• ‘CLT is firmly opposed to teacher dominance in the classroom’ (Hu, 2002, 95)
• ‘CLT avoids linguistic correction entirely’ (Brumfit & Johnson, 1979, 173)
• Use of speaking activities such as role play, information gap, games with pair, which allows students to learn at their own pace
Theoretical framework to compare CLT and critical thinking:
Hofstede et al. (2010) five dimensions of culture:

- Power Distance (High vs. Low)
- Individualism (vs. Collectivism)
- Masculinity (vs. Femininity)
- Uncertainty Avoidance (High vs. Low)
- Long-Term Orientation (vs. Short-Term)
Individualism vs. Collectivism

**Individualism**
- ‘The interest of the individual prevail over the interest of the group’ (Hofstede et al, 2010, 91)
- Anglophone countries (Dimmock, 2000)

**Collectivism**
- ‘The interest of the group prevail over the interest of individual’ (Hofstede et al, 2010, 91)
- Asian countries (Dimmock, 2000)
Underlying pedagogy of Individualism vs. Collectivism

**Individualism**
- One-to-one interaction: 
  - pair work
- One-to-one instruction: 
  - dialogue/tutoring
- Independence

**Collectivism**
- Whole class instructions
- Interdependence or dependence
Power Distance

• ‘the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally’ (Hofstede et al, 2010, 61)
Underlying pedagogy of Power Distance

**Large Power Distance**
- Teachers are guru who transfer personal wisdom
- Students treat teachers with respect
- Teachers are expected to take all initiatives in class

= teacher-centred class

**Small Power Distance**
- Teachers are experts who transfer impersonal truth
- Students treat teachers as equal
- Teachers expect initiatives from students in class

= student-centred class
Confucius vs. Socrates

**Confucius** (6 century BC)

‘Confucius is asked questions by his students and responds with wisdom’

‘He is a messenger who transmit the wisdom of the ancient’

(Hinkel, 1991, 19)

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**Socrates** (5 century BC)

• ‘to lead him(youth) to the truth by means of questioning’

• ‘helps give birth to a truth that lies within’

(Hinkel, 1991, 19)

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role of a transmitter
(Hinkel, 1991, 19)

role of a midwife
(Hinkel, 1991, 19)
Uncertainty avoidance

• ‘the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situation’ (Hofstede et al, 2010, 191)
Underlying pedagogy of Uncertainty Avoidance

**Strong Uncertainty Avoidance**

- Students are comfortable in structured learning and concerned with right answers
- Teachers are supposed to have all the answers

**Weak Uncertainty Avoidance**

- Students are comfortable with open-ended learning and concerned with good discussion
- Teachers may say ‘I don’t know’
Control vs. Freedom

**Control**
- Right answer/One correct answer
- Routinisation
- Rehearsed activities
- Rote learning
- Recitation
- Strong discipline

**Freedom**
- Open-ended learning/questions
- Creativity
- Essay writing
Those who prefer **Strong Uncertainty Avoidance** in university context:

1. Generally, Asian countries are labelled as Strong Uncertainty Avoidance nations
2. Those who study and teach STEM subjects
3. The lower track students who study language in a mixed ability class

Those who prefer **Weak Uncertainty Avoidance** in university context:

1. Generally, Anglophone countries are labelled as Weak Uncertainty Avoidance nations
2. Those who study and teach arts or music subjects
3. The high track students who study language in a mixed ability class
The studies of mixed/stream classes and higher/lower track students

Teachers who teach lower track students

• emphasised pedagogies such as ‘getting along with others, working quietly, improving study habits, punctuality, cooperation and conforming to rules and expectations’ (Oaks, 1985, 85)

Teachers who teach higher and average track students

• emphasised pedagogies such as ‘critical thinking, active participation, self-direction and creativity’ (Oaks, 1985, 85)
Methodology

Does Communicative Language Teaching help develop students’ competence in thinking critically?

Using literature, examine the educational culture and underlying pedagogy of critical thinking and CLT

Compare the similarities and differences of critical thinking and CLT
Educational culture and underlying pedagogy of CLT

- Use of speaking activities such as role play, information gap, games with pair, which allows students to learn at their own pace
- ‘CLT avoids linguistic correction entirely’ (Brumfit & Johnson, 1979, 173)
- CLT promotes creativity’ (Littlewood, 1981).
- ‘CLT is firmly opposed to teacher dominance in the classroom’ (Hu, 2002, 95)

• Pair work
  Individualism
• tolerance for error & creativity
  Weak uncertainty avoidance
• student-centred class
  Small power distance

Please match left and right side
### Findings: CLT

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(Winch, 2013)
Educational culture and underlying pedagogy of critical thinking 1: Individualist culture

‘critical thinking very often takes place in the context of person’s thinking things through together by means of discussion and dialogue’ (Bailin et al, 1999, 289)

‘Students must learn to teach themselves’ (Pithers & Sodon, 2000, 243)

‘students must ultimately teach themselves, for they must be responsible for finding out what methods of problem finding and problem solving work for them’ (Stemberg, 1987, 459)

• One-to-one instruction (dialogue)
  Individualism

• Independence
  Individualism
Educational culture and underlying pedagogy of critical thinking 2: Uncertainty Avoidance culture

‘critical thinking often requires imagining possible consequences, generating original approaches and identifying alternative perspectives.’ (Bailin et al, 1991, 288)

- Creativity (weak uncertainty avoidance)
- Fallacies of right answers (weak uncertainty avoidance)

Sternberg’s (1987) 8 fallacies in teaching critical thinking, one of which includes ‘right answers’
Educational culture and underlying pedagogy of critical thinking 3: Power distance culture

‘student-centred orientation is more consistent with approaches for developing student thinking’ (Pithers & Soden, 2000, 247)

- Student centred class (small power distance)
## Findings: Critical thinking

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Similarities and differences between CLT and critical thinking

Similarities shared:

- Educational culture:
  1) Individualism
  2) Weak uncertainty avoidance
  3) Small power distance

- Underlying pedagogies:
  1) Student-centred orientation (Small Power Distance)
  2) Creativity (Weak Uncertainty Avoidance)

Differences

- Independence (individualism) is an underlying pedagogy of critical thinking, but it does not share with CLT.

  3) one-to-one instruction (dialogue) and one-to-one interaction (pair work) in Individualism
Conclusion

Does Communicative Language Teaching help develop students’ competence in thinking critically?

CLT appears to help develop students’ critical thinking
Implications: What can language teachers do to supplement independence?

• Role of a ‘transmitter’
  ↓
• Students are not given the opportunity to think for themselves

• Role of a ‘midwife’
  ↓
• Students are given the opportunity to think, overcome uncertainty, may have to use creativity and will eventually be able to think on their own.
Do you agree or disagree and why?

- Teacher sets the problem and shows the students how to pose and solve it and then leaves the students to solve similar problems, often with model answers provided as feedback (Pithers & Soden, 2000, 243)
Reference

• Chomsky, N. 1957. Syntactic Structure, Mounton.