

Fostering critical thinking via assessment

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Critical thinking skills have been identified as learning outcomes expected of students. Teaching towards developing thinking skills is quite recent, attempts are observed to find ways to infuse critical thinking into the tertiary curriculum. Assessment as learning promotes active thinking via self assessment and exchange of feedback among peers.

Currently, the trend to filter job applications by [academic achievement](#) is being replaced by the candidates' critical views and ability to handle and solve problems – something that universities often overlook. The lack of opportunities to employ critical thinking in class is believed to be a possible factor to the production of [graduates](#) who perform well academically but are not highly critical.

Critical thinking skills have been identified as [learning](#) outcomes expected of [students](#) for most courses of tertiary education in many countries including Malaysia. Since the shift of attention away from teaching information and content towards developing thinking skills is quite recent, continuing attempts are observed to find ways to infuse critical thinking into the tertiary curriculum. One possible approach is via assessment. Assessment as learning in particular promotes active thinking via [self assessment](#) and exchange of feedback among [peers](#).

Researcher Noor Shidrah from the Academy of Language Studies, UiTM, Malaysia, describes the three main groups of purposes of assessment, explains how assessment fosters critical thinking among students, and compares and contrasts three forms of assessment as

learning (i.e. [self evaluation](#), peer evaluation and [peer review](#)) to see their potential to develop students' critical thinking skills.

The learning and teaching approach appears not to encourage deep thinking among the students. Realising this, the urge is for policy makers and education stakeholders to gradually reform [educational goals](#) and objectives to include [critical thinking](#). The aim of instruction is no longer just about assessing students' learning but to teach students to assess their own thinking (Stone, 2001). To achieve this, a thinking-centred learning environment should be initiated to encourage students to constantly evaluate their thinking. The active judgement by students is possible when assessment becomes a routine to students. In doing so, students reshape their thinking on their way to becoming a critical thinker. To understand this idea, it is helpful to first know the assessment purposes in education.

Assessment serves either to supply evidence that learning has taken place or to help improve students' learning. To achieve the latter in particular, assessment needs to be used as part of the learning process. Learning via assessment entails students taking active role in the learning process. Teacher assessment only indicates to students the areas that need improvement but self- and peer assessment potentially engage students in the thinking process itself as they try to understand, analyse, clarify, comment and defend each others' work in order to improve it. Thus, students can experience the assessment procedure as well as, more importantly, they can realise "the recursive linkage between learning processes and outcomes" (Green et al. 1997, p. 263). Besides, they see for themselves what makes quality work as they evaluate it on the basis of the assessment criteria and internalise them (Johnson, 2001) and develop their judging skills (Brown et al., 1994).

When assessing, students judge the extent to which their own or their peers' work has met the criteria. They need to find evidence from the

text to justify the grading made. In fact, they learn to give constructive comments to their peers. The more opportunity they get to practise these activities the better their evaluation and judgment skills are enhanced.

More information: *Conference Proceedings*. Presented at the MyCaselt 2012 Language conference UiTM, Malaysia.

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