



The Palgrave handbook of critical thinking in higher education

Deepa Idnani

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BOOK REVIEW

The Palgrave handbook of critical thinking in higher education, edited by Martin Davies and Ronald Barnett, USA, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, 628 pp., RRP £55.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-349-47812-5, RRP £131.50 (hardback) ISBN 978-1-137-37803-3, RRP £105.00 (eBook) ISBN 978-1-137-37805-7

Davies and Barnett in this handbook addresses Critical Thinking (CT) in a holistic manner across disciplines of philosophy, sociology, psychology, education, pedagogy, management studies etc. The Palgrave handbook provides an overview of the field, and forms a unified field for study and practice. It examines ‘the nature of critical thinking within, its application and relevance to higher education’ (p. 2). The underlying perspective – philosophical, educational and social construction have been reconciled to give the readers an analytical tool. The book has a well sequenced and organised theme as each chapter unfolds into the other. The book has seven parts and thirty-four chapters. Each part apart from a preface gives details about the theme, a discourse, an ingress about the literature and the work of the contributors.

Further, the operational framework of CT-Knowledge, Skills, Dispositions is a useful guide to improve the teaching- learning process across disciplines. The book appeals beyond academics as it is quite diverse. Do cultural differences impact student thinking? The empirical evidence from Kyoto, Okinawa, Auckland provide useful insights. The book designed for a worldwide audience evokes interest among millions.

The first part of the book ‘What is Critical Thinking in Higher Education?’, consists of four chapters, the first by Robert Enis considered as one of the founder of CT puts forth the power of Critical Thinking in different situations at the individual and collective level. The next chapter by Richard, accentuates on argumentation in a generic or discipline specific courses and graduate it to another level. Andrew’s chapter provides a direction to become not only critical thinkers but self critical thinkers. Enis and Andrew come from diverse paths, yet they converge and aim to develop and realise our potential. The chapter by Benjamin Hamby emphasises the need for ‘inquiry’ and the debate towards criticality. Barnett compels the student to make connections between her knowledge, self understanding and actions (p. 76). This part provides the overall framework for the book from the historical antecedents to its practical application in the curriculum and beyond, to look inwards to face any situation.

The second part ‘Teaching Critical Thinking’, comprises seven chapters which have educative value and showcase CT across disciplines. Green advocates to develop CT as a means of lifelong learning. Thomas and Lok suggest the practical side of CT, not merely a ‘doing component’ but a ‘being component’ as well (p. 90). Stephen Lano sees ‘Critical thinking as culture’ rather than a skill set, beyond the technical aspect and as part of one’s life, finding connections between practice and the mundane aspects of living (p. 140). Wendland et al., sees CT as ‘thick critical thinking’ with parallel from Clifford Geertz work, which gives it a unique flavour, a new enriching alternative model. Anna Jones empirical work shows the depth and multi layered nature of CT and its forms across disciplines. Gelder provides mapping tools to improve performance as well as learning of CT skills.

The third part ‘Incorporating Critical Thinking in the Curriculum’, has seven chapters. In the first chapter Harrell and Wetzal focus on the need and role of argument analysis among students

to become active citizens in the society. Bowell and Kingsbury aim to bridge the gap and transform students into lifelong learners. The subsequent chapter demonstrates different ways to practise essay writing through CT using step by step activities and techniques. Brodin proposes to be creative while using CT for pursuing a doctorate and not to toe the line. The last chapter by Hitchcock reflects on the effectiveness of instruction in CT, gives it a practical side and deals with everyday situations which gives a unique touch.

The fourth part 'Critical Thinking and Culture', has four chapters, an interesting section as it looks at the cultural context of CT from empirical studies. Manalo et al., explores 'similarities in views about what 'good thinkers' possess, including many qualities associated with critical thinking like consideration of different or alternative perspectives' (p. 299). The study suggests that CT is influenced by students' educational and social environment rather than the cultural' as it moves beyond the definitions of CT to include 'creativity, positivity and intuition' (p. 313, 314) and makes it broader. Bali looks at CT from a multicultural lens and reconceives it to incorporate elements of empathy and social justice. Sharon's exciting chapter centred around Indigenous context keeps in mind 'both ways' framework to address CT. The last chapter by Dong traces the development of CT in China, the 'Chinese characteristics' of resistance, how to overcome them and promote CT education.

The fifth part of the book 'Critical Thinking and the Cognitive Sciences', consists of three chapters – Lau regals the importance of metacognition, or 'thinking about thinking' as Critical Thinking requires one to be self disciplined in one's thinking and approach. Lodge et al., address that at the core, 'critical thinking involves addressing our assumptions about how the world works' and offers mental shortcuts across disciplinary domains, moving beyond the general-specialist debate (p. 370). In the last chapter Ellington provides a model of metacognition to develop CT which is seen as a higher order skill by providing various pedagogical principles to make it relevant across disciplines.

The sixth part 'Critical Thinking and the Professions', consists of five chapters. Sin et al., investigate CT as it applies to accountancy by using qualitative data. They view it 'less as a cognitive ability than purposeful yet highly problematic doing' (p. 449). Trede and McEwen want to foster the genuine spirit of CT in universities, and contend that the 'emancipatory form' of criticality provides space for liberal education. Grace and Orrock look at CT in the field of Osteopathic Medicine. They distinguish the medical context and put forth the relative neglect of the socially transformative character of criticality. Wilson et al., investigate CT in the context of scientific research through a science blog. They demonstrate the advances students make while using CT, how students mature, reason, gain expertise and reach advanced level. In the last chapter, November analyses how critical thinking can be promoted by the use of social media in diverse fields like music, population health and creative writing.

In the final part of the book 'Social Perspectives on Critical Thinking', consisting of five chapters. Brookfield contends the way we look at CT depends on how we conceptualise it or the discourse we are using. Also relevant is what is considered as 'legitimate knowledge' in the discipline (p. 529). Costandius et al., aims at promoting CT in the post apartheid South Africa with shared values and achieving social justice. Cowden and Singh trace the historical legacy of critical pedagogy by Paulo Freire. The background of this chapter is to understand what does CT aim to achieve, as the author regals the importance of the 'end' and the relevance to higher education in contemporary context. Szenes et al., look at knowledge practices drawing on sociological framework of Legitimation Code Theory and analyse the core of critical thinking in higher education. The last chapter by Volman and Dam aims to promote citizens who are able to evaluate different perspectives and develop 'social practices' and 'communities of learning' so that the participation is experienced as personally meaningful.

The book broadens the horizons and showcases the diverse ways to look at Critical Thinking and move beyond the individual to social and vice-versa. It has a core ethical value, which has

to be nurtured and harnessed among students of higher education to reach the potential to transform into lifelong learners. The empirical evidence from different cultural context and the relevance of critical thinking across disciplines gives it an edge to acquire and develop. In the last section, the emphasis to acquire critical thinking to contribute to society as empowered citizens is a significant contribution to the field.

Deepa Idnani

Research Scholar, Institute of Education, University College London

 deepa.idnani.15@ucl.ac.uk

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