
**DEVELOPING SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS'
CRITICAL THINKING THROUGH DEVIL'S ADVOCATE
APPROACH IN THE CLASSROOM**

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Abstract

This paper seeks information on developing secondary school students critical thinking by playing the act of devils' advocate in the classroom. In every given society, the primary goal of teaching and learning is to influence learners' behavior, promote analysis. This is because the needed improvement in learning behavior should be learners centred and not teacher-centred learning. Devil's advocate is the process in which a person acquires a position that he/she does not necessarily believe in, for the sake of arguing, or during which a person presents a counter argument for the position he/she does not believe in, to another debater. This process engages all the students' sensory organs, and can help them think more critically, there by employing not only logic but broad intellectual criteria such as clarity, credibility, accuracy, precision, relevance depth, breadth, fairness and significance. This approach is an ideal pedagogical strategy for secondary school students in classroom, as it helps challenge the nerves and assumptions that retain the hegemonic stratification that directly affects

students. To achieve these, the paper ex-rayed the concept of critical thinking, concept of devil's advocate, strategies in adopting devil's advocate, benefit of using devil's advocate, obstacles in using devil's advocate, conclusion is drawn and recommendations made.

Keywords: Developing, Critical thinking, Devils' advocate, Classroom.

Introduction

The main purpose of teaching and learning in any given society is to effect change in behaviour of the learners, develop critical thinking, logical reasoning, and synthetic analysis. The success or otherwise of teaching and learning activities depends to a large extent, on how well the teacher employed a new strategy and to what extent the teacher is able to involve the learners in activities during and after instruction (Offorma, 2014). This is because the desired changes in learning behaviour can only come not merely through teachers' instructional activities but also, students' interests. Students' critical thinking can be enhanced through the use of devil's advocate that will engage all the students' sensory organs.

In the 21st century, the conventional teaching method is an old-fashioned routine approach of teaching. It is teacher-centred and is without students' active participation. In a classroom where the conventional teaching method is used, students are viewed as passive receivers of information. Obiwelouzo (2017) remarks that the conventional teaching method which is teacher-centred does not actively involve the students in the learning, critical thinking, inquiring and problem-solving processes as they are predominantly passive. This has dwarfed students' creative thinking which is necessary for today's workplace. In the same vein, traditional style of teaching fails in teaching learners to think creatively. Given this scenario, there is need to engage students in creative thinking so as to develop problem-solving skills by act of devil's advocate methods. This can only be achieved by making learners the centre of learning activities in order to take charge of their learning and to

become critical thinkers.

A devil's advocate role is typically played by an individual who provides alternative perspectives and solutions to problems, frequently challenging group assumptions (Human, 2008). Applied to the classroom, playing devil's advocate means a teacher or student takes the opposing side of the predominant argument. It may not change the students' minds, but using the devil's advocate approach challenges them to expand their analysis, perspective, and understanding of an issue. As Gose (2009) asserts that the utility of such teaching strategies is measured by their contribution to the overall goals of helping students learn to analyze logic and assumptions, to critique the validity and soundness of arguments, and to come to true understanding.

When employing devil's advocate approach in the classroom, students learned how to think critically by analyzing, evaluating, and creating (Overbaugh & Schultz, 2010), not just by rote memorization. To employ this pedagogical approach, teachers must be comfortable voicing and defending arguments with which they personally disagreed. For instance, it may be challenging for a teacher to discuss the family life situation from the perspective of the students. When students, disagreed with the teacher's view. Such arguments, however, helped students question setup issues instead of just accepting them. It is against this backdrop that this paper ascertained whether the use of devils' advocate positively contributes to students' critical thinking and determined the use of devils' advocates in the classroom, thereby advocating critical thinking capacity analysis.

Conceptualizing Critical Thinking

Critical thinking features prominently in all the skills or abilities learners are expected to acquire through the type of education being provided. One, who cannot think, may not be able to solve even the minutest problem. We now live in a world of problems – social problem, economic problem, political problem, ethnic problem, religious problem, educational problem, Science and technologically related problems to mention a few. It only takes a sound mind, a

mind imbued with reflective thinking, which can engage in deep analysis, to come up with causes of the problem at hand and generate possible solutions or options to arrive at a decision; to solve a or get out of the problem.

Critical thinking according to Encarta (2009), is regarded as disciplined intellectual criticism that combines research, knowledge of historical context and balanced judgment. It is the ability to think logically and analytically. In other words, critical thinking is the purposeful and reflective judgement about what to believe or what to do in response to observation, experience, verbal or written expressions or arguments. Thus, critical thinking involves determining the meaning and significance of what is observed or expressed, or concerning a given inference or argument, determining whether there is adequate justification to accept the conclusion as true. This definition agrees with the one given by Fisher and Scriven (2018) as: "skilled and active interpretation and evaluation of observations, communications, information and argumentation". Critical thinking therefore, gives due consideration to the evidence, the context of judgement, the relevant criteria for making the judgment well, the applicable methods or techniques for forming the judgement and the applicable theoretical construct for understanding the problem and the question at hand. Critical thinking employs not only logic but broad intellectual criteria such as clarity, credibility, accuracy, precision, relevance, depth, breadth, fairness and significance. In contemporary usage, the word "critical" may connote expressing disapproval, which is not always true of critical thinking. A critical evaluation of an argument, for instance, might conclude that it is valid. Critical thinking may be seen as having two components i) the skills to generate and process information and beliefs, ii) the habit of using those skills to guide behaviour, based on intellectual commitment. These components should be contrasted with: the mere acquisition and retention of information alone, this is because it involves a particular way in which information is sought and treated; the mere possession of a set of skills, because it involves the continual use of them; and the mere use of those skills ("as an exercise") without acceptance of their results.

Consequent upon the foregoing, it may be summarized therefore that, critical thinking is self-guided, self-disciplined, self-directed, self-monitored and self-corrective thinking, which attempts to reason at the highest level of quality in a fair-minded way. Thus, people who think critically consistently, attempt to live rationally, reasonably and empathically. They are keenly aware of the inherent flawed nature of human thinking when left unguided. They strive to diminish the power of their egocentric and socio-centric tendencies. They use the intellectual tools offered by critical thinking such as concepts and principles that enable them to analyze, assess and improve thinking.

Concept of Devil's Advocate

This approach is an ideal pedagogical strategy for students in classrooms, as it helps challenge the norms and assumptions that retain the hegemonic stratification that directly affects students. Therefore, as teachers it is importance to employ critical pedagogy to challenge systems of oppression, playing devil's advocate can enable teachers to help students challenge their assumptions and analyze the world through a more critical lens. Gose (2009) explained in a clear term that a devil's advocate is a person who argues against a point of view to poke holes in it. The devil's advocate does not have to believe the perspectives or ideas that they are supporting. Either the instructor or learners can be the devil's advocate.

Devil's advocate is a process in which a person argues a position that s/he does not necessarily believe in, for the sake of arguing, or during which a person presents a counterargument for the position s/he does not believe in, to another debater. This method can be used to test the quality of the original argument and identify weaknesses in its structure. Another meaning of the term "Devil's Advocate", originally comes from the Catholic church, describes someone who, given a certain point of view, takes a position, that does not necessarily agree with (or simply an alternative position from the accepted norm), for the sake of debate or to explore the thought further (<http://www.theidioms.com/devils-advocate/>).

Devil's advocate is to argue against the decision that someone is contemplating. The concept of devil's advocate has a tendency to emphasise the negative aspect of dialectics. The devil's advocate approach is said to promote adversarial decision processes where one participant deems themselves to win, while another participant is deemed to lose with regard to deciding on the preferred course of action to take.

Devil's Advocate in the Classroom

Despite its many advantages in the classroom, the devil's advocate strategy necessitates a lot of planning and experience on the part of the teacher. When used improperly, a teacher's employment of the devil's advocate can create a confrontational classroom environment in which students become hostile, fight, and disengaged to the point that learning is impossible because they are afraid to speak. The tactics listed below will assist teachers in learning how to properly apply the devil's advocate approach in their classroom and foster dialogue.

Before adopting the devil's advocate strategy in the classroom, a teacher must first create a cooperative learning atmosphere. If teachers use the devil's advocate strategy and it doesn't work, it will end up with a confrontational climate in the classroom. As a result, if a teacher does not build a culture where students feel safe to disagree ahead of time, good debate will devolve into a tense environment that limits learning (Adeyi, 2018).

Students are less likely to participate in a discussion when they feel uncomfortable with their peers, whether it is because they fear being judged by people they like or they are not comfortable speaking with peers they dislike. Fear hinders productive dialogue, and thus, teachers must create an environment where this fear is eliminated. Hess and Posselt (2002) submit that teachers can be undermined by the realities of teenage drama and peer pressure despite having the best intentions of creating a high level of equality and critical thinking in their classroom. While a teacher cannot completely mitigate the emotions of these students, he or she can establish an atmosphere where students learn to respect one another

in spite of differences, allowing for open dialogue about any controversial topic.

For students to feel comfortable speaking openly about an issue that cultivates different perspectives, Chuks (2018) Advocated that it is critical that the teacher act as a facilitator and not take control of the discussion, as may often be his or her inclination. Chuks (2018) further explained in clear term that it is difficult for a teacher to allow his or her classroom to become authentically student-centered. If a teacher does not relinquish the desire to control the discussion, students can feel their thoughts are being stifled, which is contradictory to open dialogue. Teachers may have an end goal for the discussion and desire that students draw certain conclusions, but teachers need to trust that the students will get to their own conclusions (Rossi, 2006).

It is also important, according to Graseck (2009), when raising controversial issues, don't avoid the controversy. Controversy makes people uncomfortable, but if people are unwilling to discuss it, no authentic thought will occur. If teachers are able to cultivate an environment where controversy is encouraged, in addition to students thinking more critically and becoming more engaged in the classroom, there is a chance they will be motivated to become more politically involved (Meyerson & Secules, 2001). Once students have heightened their civic understanding through authentic debate over controversial issues, some will choose to take action, and most will be aware of different perspectives.

Benefits of Using Devil's Advocate Approach in the Classroom

In every lesson plan, it's important to include some elements of the devil's advocate approach to facilitate students' critical thinking skills and enhance their engagement in the lesson. Some lessons used the approach through discussion while others applied it to textual analysis with guiding questions and texts from multiple and contentious viewpoints. If students are not challenged by their teacher or one another to defend their stance on an issue, the quality of analysis will often be superficial.

Felix Roosevelt, a veteran middle and high school social studies teacher in the New York City school system, is a big proponent of using the devil's advocate approach. He believes: "By taking the opposing view, educators challenge students to defend their positions with deeper evidence. Additionally, forcing students to address a position that they disagree with helps them develop critical thinking skills to examine a position independent of how they personally feel about the issue." Utilizing the devil's advocate role has enabled teachers to demonstrate an elevated expectation for students that is apparent both through their ability to think independently and with the high percentage of students he has helped both pass examination.

To enhance students' ability to generate critical thinking skills students need to experience instability in their thought. It frustrates the teacher (when a teacher plays devil's advocate) because it makes students feel as if no one is right. Once you have the perfect argument for one side, you realize that it is not as simple as it seems. By realizing an initial point of view is more complicated, students are challenged to find a plausible, often more intricate resolution to the issue at hand. This pedagogical approach helps students to see a much larger picture of complex issues. It is assumed that when a teacher plays the devil's advocate...it teaches students to come with bigger and stronger arguments to support the point teachers are trying to make. If it is continuously done, teachers will get better and are able to face any opposing argument." By being able to tackle any opposing argument, students can grapple with all sides of every issue.

Miles (2019) advocated that critical thinking skills developed in the classroom through the devil's advocate approach also help students outside of school. Students found playing the devil's advocate approach is actually a very good method for teaching because it really makes students think. It teaches students to always have evidence before speaking and you get used to doing it even outside of school.

Obstacles to Using Devil's Advocate in the Classroom

Marrio (2019) points out one of the greatest challenges to using the devil's advocate approach with diverse learners: "It can be counterproductive in classes when students who are either low-skilled or under-proficient in English, as they might not take away the right message from the lesson." For instance, two of my former lower-skilled students explain: It irritates students when the teacher knows that they are right but continues to play the other side ...[and] they feel you are always going to be wrong when the teacher plays devil's advocate even though you know you are right." The question becomes, should a teacher withhold from playing the devil's advocate in such classrooms or should the teacher adapt their approach?

Another obstacle to using the devil's advocate approach is that many students like positive reinforcement, to be told that they are right for providing a quality answer. Because it is the nature of the devil's advocate approach to challenge every assumption, for students who continually rely on a nurturing environment, the use of devil's advocate can be counterproductive. As one of my former students says: "It's frustrating to have the teacher disagree with you instead of telling you if you're right or wrong." Therefore, a teacher using this approach needs to be cognizant of his or her students' reactions to being challenged.

Conclusion

To be successful after secondary school, students in the twenty-first century must be able to think critically, assess problems from different perspectives, and challenge their peers. These are some of the "basic academic talents" necessary for success in secondary schools and beyond. Core academic skills, like as writing and critical thinking, are not subject-specific and allow students to work in a variety of fields. The devil's advocate strategy can be incorporated into the teaching toolbox by any teachers. By establishing a classroom based on mutual respect and cooperative learning, teachers can elevate the dialogue in their classroom to facilitate critical thinking. Teachers can achieve this by discussing

controversial issues, providing students with multiple perspectives, and challenging students with tough questions. In such a classroom, students will become more engaged and students' critical thinking and writing skills will be enriched. Conclusively, to be successfully after secondary schools, students in the 21st century must be able to think critically, assess problems from different perspective, and challenge their peers.

Suggestions

Differentiate the reading material for the students on a given topic as well as change the language a teacher uses to explain different perspectives of an issue. Teacher should balance the challenging students claims with supporting their ideas to maintain the establishment too play devil's advocate in the classroom. Teacher with large class size should try as much as possible to split them in groups and attend to them differently so as to avoid rowdiness that may lead to conflict among the students. Teacher using the devil's advocate should study the approach adequately with writing practice to avoid been misunderstood for been bias by the student.

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