

香港資優教育學院
The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education

Factsheet

CRITICAL THINKING

By Dr Irene Ho

'Which school is better for my child?' 'Should I use Chinese or Western medicine?' 'How can I prepare myself to survive the financial tsunami?'

You have to make choices every day. But how do you know if you are making a good decision? Critical thinking is crucial when you have to analyse a situation in which there are different contributing factors. We need critical thinking skills to establish our views and stands on issues such as same-sex marriage, euthanasia or the implementation of universal suffrage for the Chief Executive and the Legislative Council.

Three essential factors for critical thinking

The quality of critical thinking is affected by one's thinking skills, attitude and knowledge in the area which one is reasoning about. The set of thinking skills represent the ability to analyse an issue based on facts, logic and different perspectives. Highly intelligent people usually have strong thinking ability; however, without sound values, positive attitude and common sense, their analytical reasoning would be affected.

A thinker with sound values and a good attitude will tend to be more selfless, open, just and careful. Also, a competent critical thinker can only analyse and reason having solid knowledge related to the issue being analysed. For example, if a person is ignorant about the local political scene or does not have adequate knowledge of the Hong Kong legal system and history, his views on the universal suffrage for the Chief Executive will be questionable.

Nurturing critical thinking in children

A child's habit of information use and interpretation as well as his / her problem solving approach reflects his / her critical thinking ability. To nurture a critical thinker, parents have to provide children the opportunities to practice critical thinking. Parents should discuss with their children issues with no definite answers, encourage them to ask 'why' questions and develop their ideas with reason and evidence. Allowing children to make decisions and teaching them how to evaluate different positions can also develop the children's critical thinking skills.

In addition, activities that can broaden a child's horizon are beneficial to widening the child's perspectives and deepening his / her understanding of certain issues or topics. Children should be encouraged to read widely, participate in community services and go on outings to gain more general knowledge. Finally, it is important that parents are role models for their children in critical thinking. As a parent, you can share with your child the process you have taken in making a stand or arriving at a certain decision, instilling in them the importance of making good decisions, with careful deliberation and supported by good reasons.

Becoming a reasonable gifted child

Gifted children possess a strong ability to analyse and reason. Their critical thinking abilities are usually better than their peers'. They are inquisitive and some can also demonstrate perfectionism. However, due to their lack of life experiences and knowledge, they might not have developed a set of sound values to guide them in reasoning. Hence they could seem to be unreasonable or overly

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critical in presenting an argument. Sometimes, they might bluntly point out others' mistakes without considering the possible negative effects.

Parents have to remind their children that even if they may reason well and have logical viewpoints they still have to learn how to express their views in an appropriate manner. Should your child disagree with you, it is important that you show understanding and make allowances for them, bearing in mind that children need time and space to grow. Always remain calm even if there are disagreements. Effective parenting is always based on good parent-child relationship.

