



HEALTHY CAMPUS INITIATIVE

Session on Core 6 Activities with Focus on Critical Thinking

09 December 2017

Healthy Campus is an initiative of the Narcotics Control Bureau, supported by Suraksha Setu Society. The Healthy Campus initiative is for the education institutions of the state of Gujarat in India, to help the campus community get the most out of their years spent at the educational institutions.

The initiative aims to be led by the students who undertake activities to promote healthy living on campus.

The initiative has identified seven key areas. For these information is disseminated and activities undertaken. The seven key areas are:

1. Healthy living
2. Social consciousness
3. Stress management
4. Building self esteem
5. Developing critical thinking

6. Developing soft skills

7. Living a drug free life

We invite the campus communities the world over to engage with us by offering feedback on the content on this website and giving suggestions for what more can be done.

Introduction to today's session

Critical thinking ability ensures that we are able to use our ability to think as well as we can when we need to think about an issue or a situation. For critical thinking we need to be able to get the best available information and then use the best ability for reasoning we have to arrive at the best decisions or judgments that we can make.

The six core areas of focus for the Healthy Campus initiative are interconnected and one affects the other. This applies to our critical thinking ability as well.

Let us see how this happens.

To be motivated to think we need to be conscious about issues affecting us and our society so social consciousness is important.

To have the confidence to start thinking one must have self belief so self esteem is important.

To be able to think well one should have a free relaxed mind so stress management is important.

To be able to think well we should be healthy so eating a healthy diet and leading a healthy lifestyle is important.

To be able to think well it is important to have good soft skills so that you are able to understand what others have to say and communicate what you want to say.

Let us first learn more about critical thinking. Later we will revisit the other core areas and see how to strengthen those as well.

Critical thinking is deeply rooted in Indian culture

Chetna, Buddhi, Vivek and Vinay is a four stage positive cycle that will take your understanding and reasoning to ever greater heights.

Chetna - become aware of your circumstance.

Buddhi - apply your mind to those aspects of your circumstance that you feel are important and about which you feel you have not thought enough.

Vivek - once you apply your mind several points and choices will occur to you. Use your 'vivek' (discretion) to know which are the good ones and which are the actionable ones.

Vinay (humility) – once you have got from 'chetna' to 'vivek', do not be proud that you have thought it through and now you need not worry about it. Instead be humble and show 'vinay' (humility). Keep your mind open even if you have committed views. In time you will get more experience and so you will have a new 'chetna'. This way if you have humility you will start the cycle again and your thinking will be able to evolve.

Need for us to think today

The ability to think critically is very important for leading a happy fulfilling life. You need the ability to make good life decisions, for your academics and later in your career.

You have to set a positive cycle going because once your ability to think starts getting better it will start to build its own momentum and you will find you are able to understand issues better and make better judgments. And this experience will improve your ability to think further.

For example you need it to appreciate good art and once you can appreciate it that nourishes your mind and helps your thinking to develop further.

Here is some poetry to give you an example of great thinking and how that nourishes our mind.

This is a very famous Gujarati poem:

કસુંબીનો રંગ

લાગ્યો કસુંબીનો રંગ -

રાજ, મને લાગ્યો કસુંબીનો રંગ !

જનનીના હૈયામાં પોઢંતા પોઢંતા પીધો કસુંબીનો રંગ;

ધોળાં ધાવણ કેરી ધારાએ ધારાએ પામ્યો કસુંબીનો રંગ. - રાજ..

બહેનીને કંઠે નીતરતાં હાલરડાંમાં ઘોળ્યો કસુંબીનો રંગ;

ભીષણ રાત્રિ કેરા પહાડોની ત્રાડોએ ચોળ્યો કસુંબીનો રંગ. - રાજ..

દુનિયાના વીરોનાં લીલાં બલિદાનોમાં ભભક્યો કસુંબીનો રંગ;

સાગરને પાળે સ્વાધીનતાની કબરોમાં મહેક્યો કસુંબીનો રંગ. - રાજ..

ભક્તોના તંબૂરથી ટપકેલો મસ્તીભર ચાખ્યો કસુંબીનો રંગ;

વહાલી દિલદારાના પગની મેંદી પરથી ચૂમ્યો કસુંબીનો રંગ રાજ..

નવલી દુનિયા કેરાં સ્વપ્નોમાં કવિઓએ ગાયો કસુંબીનો રંગ;

મુક્તિને ક્યારે નિજ રક્તો રેડણહારે પાયો કસુંબીનો રંગ. - રાજ...

पिडितनी आंसुदाधारे ढाडाकारे रेल्यो कसुंभीनो रंग;
शडीदोना धगधगता निःश्वासे निःश्वासे सणग्यो कसुंभीनो रंग. – राज

धरतीनां भूभ्यां कंगालोने गावे छलकायो कसुंभीनो रंग;
बिस्मिल बेटाओनी माताने भावे मलकायो कसुंभीनो रंग. – राज...

धोणी धोणी ध्यावा भरिया : रंगीवा लो ! पीजो कसुंभीनो रंग;
दोरंगां देभीने उरियां : टेकीवा तमे! लोशिवा तमे ! रंगीवा तमे वेजो कसुंभीनो रंग!

राज, मन्ने वाग्यो कसुंभीनो रंग
वाग्यो कसुंभीनो रंग !

– अवेरयंद मेघाणी

And here is an excerpt from a famous Hindi song written for the youth of a newly independent India.

स्वप्न झडे फूल से, मीत चुभे शूल से
लुट गये श्रृंगार सभी, बाग के बबूल से
और हम खडे खडे, बहार देखते रहे
कारवाँ गुज़र गया, गुबार देखते रहे

...

- excerpt from स्वप्न झडे फूल से, मीत चुभे शूल से a song from the movie 'Nai umr ki nai fasal' written by Neeraj.

The second excerpt also tells about how time can pass one by easily if one does not start to make things happen on one's own. The ability of critical thinking is key to making things happen as per our wishes.

Do you think critically already?

We all already think. But can we call that critical thinking? Ask yourself a few questions to know how much you have thought about thinking.

1. What do you know about how you think?
2. Have you thought about how the mind processes information?
3. Have you thought about planning your thinking with an aim to analyze and evaluate?
4. Are you able to know when you are thinking well and when you are thinking poorly?

5. Are you able to know if your thinking is muddled, illogical or superficial?

6. Have you ever realized your thinking was not good and put in a better effort to think and changed your views?

Chances are you do think about things. But a lot of it will be sub-conscious and you may not be able to spot the problems with it. Thinking about your thinking will make you aware.

Do you think of all the important things in your life? Do you think as often as you feel you should? In today's life of multiple interests and multi tasking we tend to leave little time for quality thinking. It is good to plan to do more of critical thinking so that we fill our lives with consciously made choices.

Qualities of good thinking

Critical thinking leads to reliable insights only when the quality of thinking is good. Here are the key qualities of good thinking.

Rigour - If you are thinking on an issue you should take care to cover all relevant aspects. If you do not cover all relevant aspects you run the risk of adopting mistaken beliefs. Ensuring rigour may require you to read up existing material on the issue to make sure you have covered all the aspects.

Integrity – You should choose initial premises that are sound and do not have inherent flaws. Thereafter you should apply sound logic and the deductions you make should hold up to scrutiny. If you are making assumptions (for various possible reasons) you should be aware of that and you should state the assumptions explicitly. It is best to do a self-check of ones deduction if the path from your premises to your conclusions is a complicated path.

Empathy – Thinking is done best when you do it with empathy. What does that mean? One way to understand that is if you want to understand someone else's point of view put yourself in the shoes of that person and try to understand the point of view. Rather than trying to understand it from your perspective. For this you have to reflect what the other person's premises are and what the other person's reasoning maybe. Thinking with empathy will help you explore a wider set of possibilities and keep you from getting caught in a rigid mind set.

'Sub-types' of thinking

It is difficult to think about thinking as it can quickly go into complicated loops and thinking about thinking will get out of control. But with experience you will notice there are some ways to give structure to thinking. And by doing that we develop our ability to think in an organized coherent manner even as we make sure we do not restrain our creativity.

The thinking one does can be of one of these three 'sub-types'. You will need to do all three 'sub-types' of thinking to think about an issue.

- a. Logical and deductive thinking.
- b. Thinking to dig out facts and thoughts from our memory as we try to leverage our experience.
- c. Creative thinking where we allow ideas to strike us, using things that inspire us or from completely out of the blue.

Once can build one's ability to think by building our strength for each of the above types of thinking.

A method for thinking about an issue

How to think about an issue? There are many ways to take up thinking about an issue. Sometimes an issue may be at the back of our mind for a long time and we may think about it subconsciously and then one day we may gain a new insight on the issue thanks to our thinking about it over a long time. There is not much conscious planning of such thinking. But we do not have the luxury of an unplanned simmering style of thinking for all issues we need to think about. Therefore it helps to have a method.

Here is one method you can try. This method is general and quite exhaustive. It may therefore seem like a lot of effort if you just want to lightly think about an issue. But with practice you will find it is easy to do and the rewards more than justify the effort.

1. First write down the important points of the issue that occur to you immediately, which you will have to think about.

It is important to write them down otherwise a lot of your mind space will get used up in remembering them and your ability to be creative or to remember relevant information from your experience will get reduced.

2. Within each point remember everything that is relevant to the context and also be creative and try to come up with new thoughts on what else might be relevant. Keep writing things down as you remember them to keep your mind free for new thoughts to enter. Don't worry about organizing things now and write things down in random order.

Your mind may run wide and far and you may end up thinking about more important points. Write them down as well. And in time take them up for your creative and memory based thinking as well.

Once you have completed one round of thinking about all the points and about the new points that may have occurred to you later, you can get back to organizing your thoughts.

You can read through your thoughts and you will find you can put them into groups based on some criteria. You can put thoughts of the same group together. Some thoughts may belong to more than one group you can put them in both.

Finally you can assign importance to the groups and to the thoughts in the groups and present your thinking on the issue in the order of diminishing importance.

If you are thinking on a very important issue it is best to run through the entire process above several times till you are not able to add any more significant value with additional effort.

Building our ability to think

Like many other skills the ability to think builds with practice. Think about things often. Don't copy views and decisions about important things, think about them yourself. Having friends with whom you like to discuss things in detail is a good way to practice your thinking.

Also our ability to think depends not so much on any innate brain power but on abilities of using our mind that we develop. We do not need to have great mental prowess, but we do need to have good mental stamina. And that we all can have.

Here are some key abilities we need to develop to be able to think well.

1. Making our mind empty of other thoughts.

The more we are able to focus our mind on a topic the better we will be able to think about it. Our minds are powerful and for simple issues we can think about things even with half a mind but that does not lead to quality thinking and we will end up doing superficial thinking. For complicated issues being able to empty our minds of other thoughts is a must.

2. Having long attention spans. For being able to construct reasoning in our minds we need to have attention spans which are long enough. If our attention span does not last, the thought breaks and we are unable to complete the reasoning. This again is a must for complicated issues.

3. Being able to hold more than one thought which is relevant to the issue at the same time. Very often thinking about an issue requires one to deduce the impact of one aspect of the issue on another aspect of the issue. We need to be able to have both aspects of the issue in our minds at the same time to be able to do that. In fact you may be required to consider not just two but many aspects together that too each in great detail.

There are simple games available to build each of the three abilities. You should have a culture of playing such games on your campus to build such abilities and have fun at the same time.

Good art also requires a lot of critical thinking. Those who are good dancers will know how much thinking goes into perfecting their performance.

Similarly playing sports well also requires a lot of thinking. And both with sports and dancing there is a lot of additional mental work that is done subconsciously which is also a great mental exercise and builds mental stamina.

And remember as mentioned above a good ability to think does not require great mental prowess of being able to solve complex problems quickly. It requires more of mental stamina which helps us to diligently stay on the course and ensure each step is done well. As Edison said 'Genius is one percent inspiration, ninety-nine percent perspiration'.

When we have a challenging topic to think about, it may seem like a mountain to climb. But our mind is very good at understanding things. Also we have the benefit of those who have thought about the topic earlier to help us. They have in a way carved small steps that we can climb. We can start climbing using these steps. And later we will be able to start making steps of our own as we think with verifiable rigour and integrity.

Strengthening other areas that impact our ability and motivation for critical thinking

Healthy Living

Have a good diet. Eat fresh produce rather than processed foods whenever possible. Drink plenty of water, fresh juices and instead of caffeinated beverages or energy drinks. When you have a good diet you will naturally feel better and have more energy.

Do something physical. Some of it often, some regularly. Like cleaning your house or room. Going for a walk or a run. Or playing some sport.

Self esteem

Everyone has self esteem related issues to varying degrees. Here are some things you can do to help build your self esteem.

1. Be true to yourself. Live your life doing what feels right to you. It is good to listen to advice from people whose views you value, but in the end, make the decisions that you feel are best for you.
2. Choose what you absorb well. For example read good books and listen to good music.
3. Stop comparing yourself to others. Compare how you were yesterday to how you are today, and plan how to bring about the change you want in yourself.
4. Be grateful for what you have. That will help you focus on positive things.
5. If you have time to spare, learn something new. Try to be very good at it. Be curious and learn all there is to learn about it.

6. Challenge yourself. Do things that stretch your comfort zone.

7. Do something nice for someone else. Making someone else feel good is sure to make you feel good about yourself.

Stress management

Yoga
Breathing exercises
Discuss issues causing stress with friends

Spend some time just being. Don't fill up your day with work from start to finish. Reflecting and day dreaming will relax you. This is also important for your mind to subconsciously process all the knowledge you take in. It will refresh your mind and will help it work better when you do focused thinking again later.

Soft skills

This is a vast area and we need to do a session dedicated to this.

Activities to build thinking skills

Reading good books, poetry and listening to good music are great ways to expose your mind to great thoughts and nourish it. Initially though you may need to have a knowledgeable person help you to appreciate them.

Maths and logic puzzles are a great way to build reasoning abilities. They are also great to build mental stamina.

You can also solve crosswords, cryptic ones are more challenging.

Interactive question answer session

As per audience questions.

THANK YOU!



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