Some questions on teaching critical thinking, social studies and global studies in Japan

日本における社会科教科とグローバルスタディズ, クリティカル シンキングに関する授業の進め方についての問題点

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要　　約

日本での英語による一般教育の社会科学の指導に関して、クリティカルシンキング、グローバル スタディズは現在キャッチフレーズとなっている。最近、このクリティカルシンキング教育法への 批判もあるのもまた事実である。本研究はクリティカルシンキング教育法に関する問題点を論議し、 そこで生じているいくつかの疑問点を想起することである。

ABSTRACT

Critical thinking and global studies have become catch phrases related to teaching EFL content-based social studies in Japan. There has also been criticism of critical thinking teaching methods. This paper discusses some of the problems and raises some questions related to teaching critical thinking.

Key words: critical thinking; critical pedagogy; global issues; EFL; content-based

Worldwide trends in social studies and EFL content-based education have led to more of an emphasis being put on global issues and critical thinking in Japan. Recent social trends − such as the changes made by the Japanese Ministry of Education in the secondary curriculum − with its focus on "internationalization", the development of "self-expression" (Yoshida, 1996) − or the move towards an "information society" − seem to indicate that there is a practical base for this emphasis in EFL teaching in Japan. All three social trends require the analysis, synthesis and evaluation of ideas that is at the heart of critical thinking.

Much of the literature on teaching critical thinking in L2 comes from the United States and is heavily influenced by ESL approaches which assume the student has a need to adjust or assimilate to an American host culture in which English is the primary language of communication. Moreover, this literature often has an EAP perspective and critical thinking is often equated with the rituals of American college classroom culture and especially the rhe-

torical formats of traditional academic analytical essay. In an ESL situation in the United States students bring schemata from a variety of cultural locations to the classroom, yet the "dominant" culture of the classroom is often the academic culture of the American university. In ESL programs, students are seen to have a need to adapt their learning strategies to the native English-speaking culture because they have chosen to live or study in that dominant culture. In contrast, in an EFL situation students often share the same basic schemata about the culture of the classroom and have no practical need to adopt the classroom culture of an English-speaking country. In EFL, teaching takes place under rules and rituals of classroom culture which may be quite different from the American university and foreign critical thinking teaching strategies (Cogan, 1996).

The traditional pedagogy of the American university and the critical thinking training associated with traditional academic discourse or the analytic essay have come under attack from its own members. For example, hooks (1994) asserts that it functions to marginalize minorities and women. Feminists have critiqued its exclusive and reductive nature.

Various uses of language and rhetorical formats come into play in strategies for critical thinking and its expression in every culture. Critical thinking skills are often perceived as "commonsense" or culturally transparent to teachers who have experienced critical thinking training in their own cultures (Atkinson, 1997). Those who do not display the commonsense cultural behaviors associated with good thinking in the teachers own culture are sometimes sub-consciously judged as lacking critical thinking ability. Yet it would be ridiculous to assume that because a culture's way of deep understanding and its communication of this understanding fails to mimic the American or European university, that no deep, meaningful, or critical thinking exists in that culture.

Rather than teaching good or bad thinking, it would be more accurate to say that critical thinking training teaches questioning or behavioral strategies that can be applied to understanding and responding appropriately to a complex situation or problem. As such, learning "critical thinking" does not help one to "think better" but to understand something more deeply or solve problems more successfully. Every culture has a different complex of strategies for doing so, some shared with other cultures, some seeming unique.

With the increase of foreign teachers in Japan, however, many critical thinking teaching methods have been suggested for use in the Japanese EFL curriculum. Ryan (1996) summed up his discussion of some foreign "native" EFL teachers attitudes toward student classroom behavior in Japan: "If the students are there to learn English, they should learn to behave like American (British, etc.) students." The teacher has an image of the ideal student that is constructed from the teacher's cultural schemata. The culture of the students is not taken into consideration in the teacher's expectation of classroom behavior. This parallels the findings on teacher attitudes that have been conducted in minority education contexts in the United States. Teachers and students schemata concerning what is appropriate and not

appropriate in the classroom are based on their culture and can make the development of an effective lesson very difficult when teachers and students have different cultures.

Also, because of the shortage of EFL critical thinking educational materials, teachers adopt English language materials designed for native speaker or ESL use. There may be problems with these materials that are culturally transparent. Even in the United States the traditional American academic methods of teaching critical thinking have been criticized from gender, class, cultural, and ethnic perspectives as inappropriate. (hooks, 1994; Atkinson, 1997).

Critical thinking is often demonstrated in difficult or complex situations and in problem solving. As a result we can find evidences of critical thinking in areas as diverse as academic discourse, skills training (EAP, nursing, business, engineering), or in complex life situations such as selecting a suitable marriage partner, deciding what repairs to make to a broken down car, or planning the family menu for a week on a severely limited budget.

These evidences of critical thinking are situational, task specific, and often culture specific. Different situations and cultures often require different critical thinking strategies. This is reflected in the literature in that there is no agreed upon definition of critical thinking and the aspects of critical thinking that authors emphasize have varied widely.

Social studies, global issues and critical thinking

EFL content-based teaching activities involve a balance of language and content objectives: the teaching of content background and knowledge, the teaching of language components, and the teaching of elements where the content and language components are intermixed to the point of being indistinguishable (Halvorsen & Gettings, 1996). Critical thinking activities essentially fall into the later category in that they involve communication (teaching of language) and processes that are central to the discipline (teaching of social studies or global content).

Particularly, critical thinking falls into the category of social studies *skills*. One American high school history texts lists the following critical thinking skills:

> . . .identifying central issues, making comparisons, determining relevant information, formulating appropriate questions, expressing problems, distinguishing fact from opinion, checking consistency, identifying assumptions, recognizing bias, recognizing values, distinguishing false from accurate images, analyzing cause and effect, drawing conclusions, identifying alternatives, testing conclusions, predicting consequences, demonstrating reasoned judgment. . . (Barell, et al., 1992, p. ix).

These are the kind of skills that are essential to internationalization, self-expression and life in an information society that are so often mentioned as being desirable in Japan.

Social studies in its broadest definition can include sociology, politics, economics, anthropology, communications, national or international studies, cross-cultural studies or com-

munication, geography, psychology, history or social ethics (in Japan). It would be difficult to teach social studies without touching on some of the topics included in global issues. Likewise, most topics in global issues fall into one of the categories of social studies. Global issues studies usually focus on the identification and solving of global problems, or of understanding complex human, inter-cultural, or global situations more deeply. This aspect of global issues studies provides an ideal opportunity for training in critical thinking strategies.

Global issues and social studies attempt to promote a deeper understanding of our world and society. Critical thinking pedagogy requires students to analyze and evaluate in order to more deeply understand the subject under study or the problem at hand to be solved. Critical pedagogy puts student experience and exploration at the center and encourages students to look critically at their world and society. For the creation of a successful pedagogy, hooks (1994) suggests that student locations of gender, class, ethnicity, and race also need to be taken into account. Freire (1970) suggests that true learning cannot happen when the teacher "deposits" knowledge in the heads of the students without engaging their critical abilities. Teacher and students together create knowledge, examining their world, starting from their own experiences. This focus on the student is especially useful in critical thinking pedagogy because student self-expression and discussion of individual and social values is central.

In Japan, methods of teaching global issues and critical thinking have been criticized as foreign, as challenging the *status quo* or as conflicting with elements of Japanese culture, particularly Japanese classroom culture. To a certain extent, teaching critical thinking does this in any culture. Also, to a certain extent, since the Meiji era, adapting foreign ideas, challenging the status quo, and introducing values that conflict with previous cultural values has become a part of modern Japanese history and culture.

In considering teaching critical thinking, social studies and global issues in Japan, many questions arise: What critical thinking methods are appropriate in a Japanese setting? What aspects of Japanese classroom culture are supportive of critical thinking pedagogy? If some methods do conflict with traditional cultural schemata are we training students in skills inappropriate to Japanese society, training students to be "nails that stick up"? Teachers build on the cultural concepts (schemata) that students bring with them to the classroom. How should students' schemata relating to social studies content, pedagogical process, classroom culture and their role or location in society effect the way we teach social studies related global issues or critical thinking in Japan? While the answers to these questions will be difficult to find, the drive to search for them will come from the rising importance of internationalization, self-expression and the need to live in an information society that is being realized today in Japan.

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