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LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

**DEEPER LEARNING, DIALOGIC LEARNING AND CRITICAL THINKING**

**ATLANTIC INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY**

**HONOLULU, HAWAII**

**SUMMER 2022**

**DATE JUNE 16, 2022**

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***INTRODUCTION-***

Emmanuel Manalo, a professor at the Graduate School of Education of Kyoto University in Japan, is a gifted in the field of Educational Psychology and Academic communication skills of which he transmits such skills to undergraduate and graduate students. As a researcher, his interests include the promotion of effective learning and instructional strategies; diagram use for communication, problem solving, diagram use for communication, problem solving, critical thinking and other things. Contributing much to scholarship, he must be commended this wonderful book which helps students and all readers to be equipped with right reasoning.

For the current generation, twenty-first century, Deeper learning, dialogic learning and critical thinking are very indispensable competences. Apart from being imperative in themselves, they are also decisive in aiding the acquisition of many other skills such as problem solving, concerted learning, novelty, information and so on. Unfortunately, majority of instructors and teachers in schools are inadequately prepared for the task of promoting deeper learning, dialogic learning and critical thinking in their students. This is so despite the fact that there are educational researchers who are developing and evaluating strategies for such promotion. It is one thing for one to learn and teach and the other thing to learn and learning for self-edification. The problem is bridging the gap between the educational researchers’ work and what gets conveyed to teachers and instructors as evidence-based, usable strategies. It would be nice and not out of place to define and say something about: Deeper learning, Dialogic learning and Critical thinking.

***Deeper learning*** depicts a profound understanding of knowledge in such a way that the person who is learning is able to grasp not only what that knowledge is but also how, why and when that knowledge can be applied. Marton (1976, p.9) sees deep-learning as deep-level processing, during which the person manages to apprehend what is significant. It is the reverse of superficial learning or abstract learning where a student can only recite, recall, or reproduce knowledge, but is not able to understand much about what is learnt. To cite a practical example, in most of our elementary schools in Ghana, most pupils are made to learn the multiplication table off-head without ruminating and understanding much about the process of multiplication itself. In this case, one has learn the multiplication superficially. To go deep into learning such multiplication table, the person needs to understand how multiplication in arithmetic is similar to addition, and how it is the inverse of division. For a broader mind, a searcher of deep knowledge would not limit himself or herself to knowing only the meaning of things but would go extra mile to know how related it is to other domains.

***Dialogic Learning*** simply means learning through dialogue; preferably where the discussion between participants is open or egalitarian. To Emmanuel Manalo, dialogic learning, in his book, represent communication, with the aim that dialogue comprises much of the communication in teaching and learning contexts. Dialogue can take the form of interactions with teachers and other students. In our day-to-day activities are full of dialoguing and in the field of learning, one could learn best with this approach. In dialogic learning, the meaning of something such as, one saying ‘well done’ could be understood in a context. The context include what the person has said previously, what you have previously talked about with that person as well as other things you know may be only what is said.

***Critical Thinking*** is consistently included in lists of skills and capabilities our current education wish to promote. It connotes the essence of being careful and reflective; thinking that is deliberate and goal-directed.[[1]](#footnote-1) Fisheer and Scriven are of the view that critical thinking is a skilled and active interpretation and evaluation of observation and communications, information and argumentation. In a broader and not narrow sense, its definition must incorporate other thinking skills, such as problem solving and decision and even creative thinking.[[2]](#footnote-2)

***A Tour Through The Book***

Heavily dense, the book has nineteen chapters which has been organized into six sections according to the kinds of strategies that are described in each chapter for promoting deeper learning, dialogic learning and critical thinking.

The strategies described in the first three chapters included and promoted the target capabilities basically by providing a means for structuring the language used in classroom interactions and learning. In chapter 1, the “playground of ideas” approach is described by Laura Kerslake. It provides a structure of framework, based on play equipment commonly found in children’s playgrounds, to support the development of children’s critical thinking skills through collaborative dialogue. Beautiful contribution is seen in chapter two by Neil Phillipson and Rupert Wegerif toward explaining the value of dialogue teaching approaches in promoting deeper learning; this, they demonstrate through the description of one particular approach called “thinking together” approach. It includes the use of ground rules, focus on reflection, structuring and grouping of lessons, and techniques for dialogue facilitation which ensure quality of talk in the classroom. Math learning and the use of “Compare and Discuss” method which provides a structure for developing deeper learning of communicative competence in students and math strategies is treated in chapter three.

Section two is basically on two chapters (4 &5). The two chapters describe strategies that promote the target capabilities by guiding learners to find meaning. Example, in chapter 4, Hillary Swanson elucidates how engaging students in scientific theory, that is, mirroring what scientists do in real life aid student to develop deeper scientific understanding by refining everyday concepts and idea they possess. Chapter 5 is about classroom practice. This was developed by Beth V. Yeager, Maria Lucia Castanheira and Judith Green. Here, students and teachers become co-ethnographers[[3]](#footnote-3) in the process of developing a culture of inquiry to support deeper learning, critical thinking and communicative capabilities in students. Section 2 closes with the description of Douglas W. Baker, going further with another explanation of ethnographic approach in which two university instructors and their graduate students examined; selections of their classroom discourse to cultivate deeper learning and understanding about how to interpret and teach literature.

Section 3 comprises three chapters: 7, 8 and 9. The major things discussed there, gear towards the act of helping students to cultivate the ability of effective questioning to promote the target capabilities. These are some of the processes we meet in these chapters: “Question Based Instruction,[[4]](#footnote-4)” “Augmented World,[[5]](#footnote-5)” and this section ends with the explanations from Keita Shinogaya on how deeper learning in the subject of history can be achieved by assigning students preparatory learning tasks for upcoming classroom lessons; at the core to this preparation is the generation and answering of pertinent questions.

Part four also has three chapters; chapters 10 to 12 and they all focus on promoting engagement and reflection. That is, using various techniques that promote student engagement and reflection, which lead to deeper learning, better communication, and critical thinking.

Part five contains four chapters (13-16). This chapters are spiced with the methods for training specific competencies that in turn lead to the promotion of the target capabilities. Diagrams are used for the purposes of problem solving, communication and thinking. Research based design, implementation and evaluation of a workshop for developing graduate research students’ presentation skills; details for an online tool are designed to help students’ development of argumentation skills are considered important for reasoning, perspective talking and critical thinking are deployed in this section. Chapter 16 gives us the richness of designed training programs developed to assist pre-service and in-service teacher’s competencies in promoting their students’ understanding and use of effective learning strategies.

In the final stage (part 6), the last three chapters (17-19) present us with details of whole courses that directly address the promotion of deeper learning, dialogic learning and critical learning.

**Thinking Together Approach To Dialogic Teaching**

As explained dialogic before, dialogic teaching involve teaching through communication or dialogue and for quality dialogue. The society cannot do without dialogue. Engaging in dialogue can stimulate profound, theoretical and thoughtful ideas as participants discover ideas from different viewpoints in a gentle, collective, critical, and inventive manner. Reflective practice, supported by ground rules, helps to define and develop good quality dialogue which enhances efficiency and promotes personal growth.

One may be excited to ask the meaning of DIALOGUE. It is an amalgamation of two Greek words ***“dia”*** means ***through*** or ***across*** and ***“logos”*** means ***discourse***, ***speech*** or ***reason***. We may ask, what is it that people are reasoning across? To satisfy that curiosity, this paper suggests that one answer to the numerous ones is that they are reasoning across difference between perspectives, often the difference between their personal and most immediate perspective and another perspective experienced as being other to them or outside them. The merit pointed out here is that to engage in dialogue is to acknowledge and respond to other viewpoints; to seek to understand them, to be sensitive to their opinions and deploy various means to sieve and utilize better information gathered from the dialogue. Dialogue is one of a number dialogic teaching strategies that have proven to have positive impact on learning and acquisition of knowledge. There would always be a dialogue between a student and a teacher, a student and his or her book, among peers and others. In short, this paper agrees with Robin Alexander (2017a), whose work on dialogic teaching comes out with a set of useful principles to guide us in teaching: collective,[[6]](#footnote-6) Reciprocal,[[7]](#footnote-7) supportive,[[8]](#footnote-8) cumulative,[[9]](#footnote-9) and Purposeful.[[10]](#footnote-10)

This paper considers dialogue educationally very valuable because much of schooling is concerned with helping students see the world in new ways by introducing them to disciplines such as mathematics, science, and history. All these are ideas that are removed from everyday experience. Dialogue between teacher and student or between students provides the social plane on which conceptual understanding can be developed. It offer students the opportunity to construct and reconstruct knowledge through a shared process of questioning, answering, explaining, exemplifying, comparing, connecting, applying, evaluating, competing and so on. It enables students become sensitive to the differences between their understanding and those of their teachers, coaches, peers, parents and others which stimulate further meaning making.

**Refining Student Thinking Through Scientific Theory Building**

According to Albert Einstein (1936, p. 349), “the whole of science is nothing more than a refinement of everyday thinking.” This observation conveys the constructivist philosophy of learning, where a learner builds formal knowledge by reorganizing and refining their information knowledge. (diSessa, 1993). How do we help students as teachers, to refine their thinking through theory invention, test and revision? With the help of this book, measures are put in place to ensure that. In sum, the theory-building approach fosters deeper learning, communicative competence, and thinking skills. By engaging students in articulating, making sense of and refining their ideas, theory building facilitates a knowledge-construction process that yields deep understanding of scientific patterns. By guiding students to refine their theories along dimensions that are germane to expression of scientific knowledge, it develops their competence with scientific communication practices. It develops thinking skills that reflect a theoretical turn-of-mind. The development of deeper learning, communicative competence, and thinking skills is interconnected. As students make sense of and refine their thinking, they get a clearer picture of a pattern’s deeper structure and its possible cause. They begin to understand what aspects of the pattern are general to multiple phenomena. Their improved clarity in thinking allows them to articulate their theories more precisely along these dimensions, thereby enhancing their communicative competence.

Deeper learning and communicative competence are mutually supportive. Focusing on the development of both deeper learning and communicative competence by engaging in knowledge refinement, in turn fosters the development of thinking skills that reflect a theoretical turn-of-mind.

**Promoting Deep Learning Through Comparing and Discussing**

This paper would be inadequate on this topic if we leave *comparing and discussion* as a medium of promoting deep learning. There is a general assumption that learning is best done through comparison. For instance, we compare different brands and models of products. Students do compare marks they got during their exams. Moreover, we compare new words, objects and ideas to one we already know. These comparisons helps us recognize what features are important and merit more attention, which and lead to deeper understanding. (Gentner, 1983). Science or research have proven that comparison promotes learning across a range of topics.[[11]](#footnote-11) Comparison and Discussion as a mechanism is an effective instructional method to promote deeper learning and communicative competence. Comparisons put students on their toes to press hard and compete with peers whereas discussions help students make their ideas more explicit and better integrated with their prior knowledge, especially when teachers and peers support this process.

**Conclusion**

The aspiration of this book and vision of the author was to address the lapses: in it, directing scholars from around the world, define stratagems or strategies that have developed for fruitfully nurturing students’ competences for deeper learning and transfer of what they learn, dialogic learning and effective communication, and critical thought. They reconnoiter links in the elevation of these capabilities, and they offer, in reachable form, enquiry or research proof validating the efficacy of the strategies. They also discuss answers to the questions on how and why the strategies work. This course, proposed by AIU, has indeed impacted knowledge and not only knowledge but it has become an eye-opener to the students as to utilize these strategies and various methods suggested in this book to assist students while aiming at improving the standard of quality education in Ghana. Whatever ground rules are established, deliberate and reflective practice is essential if they are to have the desired impact on the quality of talk. There is a need for the Standard Board of Teachers Association in Ghana relook into the curricula and insert some of these beautiful ideas for the betterment of the people.

This paper recommend this book to all teachers, would-be teachers and students who wants to climb the education lather.

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1. Ennis (1985, p. 45) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Bailin, 1987 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ethnography has to do with the study and systematic recording of human cultures. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Is a method in which classroom instruction revolves around student-generated questions, with the aim of promoting deeper understanding and better engagement in students. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Is a web-based platform that teachers and students can generate location-based, multimedia-rich questions, all, for the purpose of promoting contextualization, creativity, critical thinking, and ICT literacy. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. He states that classroom is a site of joint learning and enquiry. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Participants listen to each other, share ideas and consider alternative opinions. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Participants feel able to express ideas freely without intimidation of being wrong; which they help each other to reach common understanding. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Participants build on their own and each other’s contributions and chain them into coherent lines of thinking and understanding. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Classroom talk, though open and dialogic, is structured with specific learning aspirations in view. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Alfieri, Nokes-Malach, & Schunn, 2013 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)