

In My OPINION

Critical thinking

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It has taken a period of 10 years since the 1999 Education Act before the executives of the ministry's education agencies agreed to the proposal to reduce the role of rote learning and to adopt analytical thinking as a fundamental teaching protocol. This has been a long time coming.



Teachers need to be trained very quickly in order to give students who are in basic education the best chance of understanding the necessity of critical thinking. STEVE GRAHAM

More pie in the sky?

However, I am worried over how this is going to be initiated. A recent article in the Bangkok Post informed us that basic analytical skills would be taught in Grades 1 to 3, and advanced analytical thinking in Grades 4 to 6 and secondary school.

As with most of the educational initiatives in Thailand, it is the implementation that lets us down. Just how are we supposed to do this? I don't see how it can be started across the board at all levels of education as this is something that takes time for students to understand, especially when they have never been exposed to something as profound before.

Once again, it looks as if critical thinking may well be just another subject taught at schools as an academic subject, much like English. What needs to happen is that it has to be applied to real-life situations so that students can understand why it is so important, and so that they can use it properly.

Some universities such as KMUTT (King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi) integrated thinking-skills tasks into their task-based curriculum a few years after the 1999 Education Act was introduced. I am sure there are individual teachers who have designed critical-thinking and problem-solving tasks as part of their daily lesson plans, but these classes are not at the primary-school level where they are supposed to begin.

Teacher training

This new method of instruction is to start in May 2010. From now until then, there is a slight problem in training all the existing teachers in analytical-thinking skills before the deadline. Even though we are told that materials are ready, this task seems difficult, to say the least.

Garnet Education has university foundation study coursebooks in its Transferable Academic Skills Kit (Task) series, which could help in student- and teacher-training at the university level.

I have used the Presentation Skills course with my students at Udon Thani Rajabhat University with great success, and the new Udon Education Foundation is planning to adopt each of the 12 courses in the Garnet Education Task series to satisfy the local public's craving for transferable academic skills.

My concerns are with the primary- and secondary-school sectors. There are only four months until we are in May. I am not optimistic that 400,000 teachers can be trained to prepare our students to think critically, to analyse situations and to solve the problems in that short timeframe.

In my opinion, while we still have the situation of students not failing and automatically moving up to the next class every year, we will never be able to have an education system to be proud of. Being able to think critically/analytically and solve problems on a piece of paper is only half the battle.

For Thailand to compete with its Asean neighbours effectively, it is imperative that our students apply what they learn in the classroom to real-life situations in order for them to remain in the race.

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