**MODULE ONE: CRITICAL THINKING**

**Learning Objectives:**

1. To understand that critical thinking is facilitated through curiosity, reflection, and judgment
2. To realize the potential of critical thinking to (a) foster deeper learning and (b) build confidence in students
3. To learn practical ways teachers can incorporate critical thinking in their own classrooms

**Part One: Understanding the importance of critical thinking**

1. Activity: Statement - “Children have the right to question all aspects of Islam.”
   1. Pick a side - Completely Agree or Completely Disagree
      1. Ask why they picked the side that they did
      2. Stimulate debate
         1. Key learning: for children growing up in North America it is necessary to understand why they believe. And BTW, this is supported within the Holy Qur’an as well, within reason.
2. Critical thinking is how children learn:
   1. Metaphor: Let’s think about how a lightbulb works. First, there needs to be electricity, an energy that flows into it. We’ll call that curiosity, which is a spark or interest. Next, we need a complete circuit, made up of connections that link one thing to the other. We’ll call that reflection because it depends on connecting existing knowledge to new information. And finally, there is the bulb that filters the light that emanates - sometimes it has a yellow glow, other times it has a blue tint, or it could shine bright white. We’ll call this judgment because it is ultimately the way we interpret and see the world.
      1. Moral of the story -- three parts: curiosity (spark), reflection (connections), and judgement (light). These three parts will influence how we see the world.

**Part Two: Understanding the nuances**

* Curiosity: “a strong desire to learn or know something…It’s also about leaving your mind open to possibilities and being honest about what you do and don’t know.”
  1. Why does it matter? It fuels a thirst for lifelong learning, In a 2014 study, researchers from UC Davis, discovered that:
     + 1. Curiosity prepares the brain for learning: like a vortex that sucks in what you are motivated to learn, and also everything around it [metaphor: whirlwind]
       2. Curiosity makes subsequent learning more rewarding: not only increased activity in the hippocampus (memories), but also in the brain circuit that is related to reward and pleasure [metaphor: when you’re hungry, the food tastes better]

1. Reflection: thinking about our experiences, building on existing knowledge
   1. Why does it matter?
      1. Allah (SWT) tells us so many times in the Holy Qur’an to reflect
         1. “And He has subjected to you, as from Him, all that is in the heavens and on earth: behold in that are Signs indeed for those who reflect” (45:13)
      2. Students don’t have empty minds that need to be filled up, but rather learning happens when connections are made
         1. Reflecting on mistakes leads to change and development
         2. Reflection that links current experience to previous learnings (scaffolding, learning edge, zone of proximal development) leads to growth
         3. Reflection allows transfer of learning
      3. Teachers assist in discovery; they are facilitators of meaning making
2. Judgment: ability to weigh pros and cons to solve a problem or make a decision
   1. Think back to the corners activity we did earlier. How did you decide how to respond to the question?
   2. Why does judgment matter?
      1. Judgment allows for the evaluation of options so good decision-making is the outcome of good judgment
      2. Leads to independence in thought
      3. It clears pathways for original ideas through fostering creativity

Why does critical thinking matter?

* Critical thinking is important for any learning environment
* It’s especially important for Muslim children growing up in this social and political climate >> they must be able to know, with confidence, why they believe in what they believe

**Part Three: Strategies to bring critical thinking into the classroom**

1. Ask a thought-provoking question that inspires debate/dialogue; use sticky notes, 4 corners to structure the conversation
   * 1. We did this earlier when I asked, “Do you feel like critical thinking is appropriate in Islam?”
     2. Another example, “Is social media materialistic?”
2. Use a metaphor to correlate something known to something unknown
   * 1. We used the metaphor of a lightbulb to explain the parts of critical thinking and how they work together
     2. Another metaphor is talking about the importance of building a relationship with the Holy Qur’an by talking about reading your grandparent’s journal
3. Pair share
   * 1. Encourage students to turn to a partner and discuss a question/share their thinking
4. Chalk-talk/brainstorm
   * 1. We did this activity at the beginning of the workshop as a way to begin reflecting on ourselves as teachers
     2. Also note that if there are difficult topics to discuss or students are very shy, this provides an anonymous way for students to participate
5. 5 whys/playing devil’s advocate
   * 1. Get a volunteer and ask them “why do I have to read Qur’an?”
6. Each one, teach one
   * 1. Find a way to divide the content of the lesson so that students can choose an aspect of it that they find most interesting to then teach the rest of their classmates
7. How you can do it [culture]
   1. Applaud students who show independent thinking (e.g. Nadia)
   2. Model when and how to ask questions (e.g. Yousef)
   3. When students ask questions, deflect them to others to see if they can explain their thinking (students learn from one another, not only from the teacher)
   4. Help them find information rather than just giving it to them
   5. Pose open-ended/short answer questions to students