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Creative Teaching in Practice: A Framework for Enhancing Critical and Independent Thinking

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Abstract

This study investigates how creative teaching practices can enhance critical and independent thinking among learners in rural schools within the Western Cape Province. The main problem addressed is the continued dependence on rigid, teacher-centred instructional methods commonly found in under-resourced rural settings, which restrict learners' ability to think critically, solve problems, and take ownership of their learning. The research was conducted in three rural schools located on the outskirts of Cape Town, involving a sample of 105 learners and 9 teachers.

A mixed-methods research design was employed, incorporating classroom observations, learner questionnaires, and semi-structured teacher interviews. Data were analysed to determine how creative pedagogies such as inquiry-based learning, group problem-solving tasks, artistic expression activities, and real-life community projects impacted learners' thinking skills and classroom participation.

Findings showed that learners exposed to creative teaching methods demonstrated noticeable improvements in reasoning, self-expression, and confidence when engaging with academic tasks. Teachers reported that these methods fostered higher levels of participation, curiosity, and independence, even among learners who previously struggled with traditional approaches. The use of local, community-based examples also helped learners connect abstract concepts to their everyday rural experiences, strengthening understanding and retention.

The study recommends that rural schools in the Western Cape adopt structured creative-teaching frameworks and invest in continuous professional development focusing on innovation in instruction. Teachers should be encouraged to integrate flexible, learner-centred strategies that draw from community resources, real-world challenges, and collaborative learning formats. Additionally, education stakeholders should prioritise support for rural schools so that creativity-based approaches can be sustained despite resource limitations. Strengthening these practices can significantly enhance learners' critical and independent thinking capacities in rural Cape Town.

Keywords: Learner Engagement, Mixed-Methods; Problem-Solving Skills; Rural Education; Teaching Innovation