

Teaching For Critical Thinking

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TODAYSMEET.COM

- Go to www.todaysmeet.com/
- Create a nickname for yourself & log in – ***don't use your real name***
- Greet us by posting a welcome!
- Anytime you have a question or comment post it on Today's Meet
- I'll check the feed & respond throughout the session

Incorporating *Todaysmeet*

- *Todaysmeet* is a useful way to get students to ask questions, provide examples, respond to questions & offer reactions to the class
- It by-passes the dynamics of verbal participation – giving everyone an equal chance to speak
- It provides anonymity – meaning nobody runs the risk of looking stupid
- It allows students to ask questions as they occur to them – not only when the professor invites questions in class

CRITICAL THINKING: A Survival Skill of Adulthood

- Adult life is a series of micro & macro decisions, choices & judgments
- We want these choices & actions to be good ones that work for us
- We can help ensure this will happen by checking the assumptions that lie behind those decisions
- Adulthood begins when you stop universalizing your own experience (Jurgen Habermas)

What is Critical Thinking?

Hunting & Checking Assumptions

- All actions / decisions / judgments in life are based on ASSUMPTIONS
- Assumptions need to be unearthed & appraised – to what extent do they fit the situation?
- Assumptions are rarely completely true or completely false – rather they are more or less valid & accurate depending on context & circumstances

What is Critical Thinking?

Exploring Alternative Viewpoints

- We try to see our decisions, actions & practices from multiple viewpoints & in multiple contexts
- We engage in perspective taking: seeing things as others see them
- We open ourselves to new experience & information

Someone Who Thinks Critically Can ...

- Identify Assumptions Behind Thinking & Actions
- Check Assumptions for Accuracy & Validity
- View Ideas & Actions from Multiple Perspectives
- Take Informed Action

An Informed Action...

- One Based on Assessed Evidence or Experience
- One That Has Its Assumptions Known & Checked
- One That Stands a Chance of Achieving Its Intended Consequence
- One That Has a Rationale that Can Be Clearly Explained to a 3rd Party

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- What's an example of critical thinking in action that you've witnessed or enacted?

A Personal Example

Assumptions:

- Clinical Depression is Caused by External Circumstances
- The Way to Deal With It Is To Reason Through It & Tell Yourself To Snap Out of It
- Medications Are For Those Too Weak To Deal With The World

Rooted in Ideology: PATRIARCHY

(Men are to be entrusted with making decisions by virtue of their superior rationality & logic)

Re-Framed Assumptions

- Depression is a chemical imbalance in the brain – not a flaw in character
- Talk & cognitive behavior therapy is helpful against a background of medication
- Patriarchy damages men
- My responsibility is to make appropriate public disclosure of my own response to my own depression

A Pedagogic Example: The Circle



The Circle - Assumptions

If I get to class early & arrange the chairs in a circle...

- Students will feel their experience is respected & acknowledged when they walk in.
- This will create a relaxed and congenial environment for learning
- The distance between me as the teacher & them as the students will be reduced
- Students will be more likely to participate, contribute, ask questions etc.

Students' Perceptions

- The circle is an arena of surveillance – everything I do will be seen, my mistakes will be noticed by everyone (peers & instructor)
- The circle is alienating – if anything about me marks me out as different (how I look or sound) my discomfort is increased
- The circle is coercion – you are coercing me into speech before you have earned the right to do that
- The circle increases mistrust – I can't sit back & judge your competence or authenticity

Now....

I still use the circle but explain...

- It's to keep sight lines clear – so students who wish to contribute or ask a question can do that easily
- It's so students don't have to talk to the back of other people's heads
- I won't assume that those who are quiet are less diligent or intelligent
- I must self-disclose before expecting students to do the same

The Good White Person



A Personal/Professional Example

I am a **GOOD WHITE PERSON** who is free of racism

Assumptions...

I have self-knowledge

I can monitor my own racism

I know how my actions are perceived & experienced

I am free of racial micro-aggressions

Racism is something committed by less-enlightened White friends & colleagues

In Reality

- I regularly commit racial micro-aggressions – eye contact, examples I use, how I run meetings & classes, jokes with other Whites

Recognizing Micro-Aggressions ...

- The receiver is left wondering ‘did that happen or am I seeing something that doesn’t really exist – am I over sensitive?’
- When pointed out Whites immediately deny any overt intent & believe it’s all a mistake

My Learning

- I will never be free of the learned ideology of White Supremacy
- I cannot expect my assurances of anti-racism to be believed
- I will be best positioned to uncover my racism by working in multi-racial teams

Why Is Critical Thinking Difficult?

- Because it's hard for us to see our own assumptions without some kind of peer assistance
- Because we don't want to question assumptions – life becomes more difficult
- Because 18-22 year olds are grappling with their intellectual development – contextual & dialectical thinking is difficult
- Because adults' experience has established firm perceptual filters

Developmentally 18-22 year olds struggle with...

- **Dialectical thinking** – holding 2 ideas in tension; i.e. good leaders should be transparent about the reasons for their actions –v- in some situations the LAST thing you want to do is to be transparent about your actions
- **Contextuality thinking** – behavior & action can only be fully understood in its historical/social/intellectual/workplace context; & context changes understanding & application

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- **What do you think most helps your students to think critically?**

What Students Say is Helpful....

- **MODELING** - Seeing It MODELED by Instructors
- **SEQUENCING** - Beginning With Learning THE GRAMMAR OF THE SUBJECT (Basic Protocols & concepts, building blocks of knowledge) then applying these to ever more complex situations
- **PEER LEARNING** – Using peers as sounding boards, mirrors, co-inquirers

How is it Best Modeled? What Students' say....

- Spatially Separated Voices
- Assumptions Inventories
- Instructor Point – Counterpoint
- Structured Devil's Advocacy -
Clint Eastwood Chair
- What Do YOU Think Professor?
- Ending with Questions

Spatial Separation

- 3-4 signs posted around the auditorium or classroom, each reflecting a distinct theory/analytical framework
- When you stand under a sign you speak **ONLY** in the language & perspective of that theory
- When students ask questions you go to different stations & answer them **ONLY** from that perspective

Assumptions Inventories - Teachers

- Here's the Assumptions I'm Working Under
- Here's Why I Think They're Accurate & Valid
– Experience as Corroboration
- Here's How My Assumptions have been Confirmed / Deepened by My Practice
- Here's How My Assumptions have Been Challenged by My Practice or Peers
- Here's the New Perspectives & Information I've Discovered Over Time

Assumptions Inventories - Students

As I completed this assignment, here's...

- Assumptions I held about the topic that were confirmed / strengthened / deepened
- Assumptions I held about the topic that were challenged / disturbed
- New perspectives, interpretations or information about the topic of the I considered
- A question about the topic that arose

Instructor Point-Counter Point

- Here a duo or trio of faculty model a critical analysis of a concept (through in-class discussion, chat thread, or video stream) in front of the students. They seek to understand each other's viewpoints as best they can and raise questions about each other's positions. They clarify points of dissension and disagreement and make public the evidence or reasoning behind their disagreements

Clint Eastwood Chair

- If you teach solo you state an argument or outline a theoretical interpretation standing or sitting at one position in the room.
- You then move to another position, turn to face where you were sitting, and review the arguments you've made. You point out all the omissions, distortions, and contradictions in your earlier argument.
- Online you can post as another individual. (My 'avatar' / doppelganger identity is Shannon.)

What do YOU think professor?

- You give 2 or 3 Answers – Only 1 Represents Your Actual Opinion
- Students Vote on Whether They Think Answer A), B) or C) is Correct
- Students Assemble in Groups Based on their Responses – all A's, all B's & all C's
- In Answer Groups they Discuss Why They Chose Their Particular Answer
- Class Assembles & Groups Give their Reasons
- You Disclose Which Was Your Actual Opinion

Ending With Questions

- At the end of a lecture, demonstration, preceptorship or discussion you end by asking....
- What's been missing from this analysis?
- What most needs further scrutiny?
- What are the chief critiques of what we've been saying or doing?
- What unresolved questions am I left with?
- What are the most important questions we've raised today?
- What important contexts, ideas have we missed?

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Please post a
question or criticism
you have about
today's presentation



RESOURCES

Teaching for Critical Thinking
(2012)

The Skillful Teacher (2015 3rd. Ed.)

The Discussion Book (2016) with
Stephen Preskill

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