**Strategies and Tactics for Teaching Critical Thinking**

The actual teaching of critical thinking is a function of many situation-specific factors: teacher style, teacher interest, teacher knowledge and understanding, class size, cultural and community backgrounds and expectations, student expectations and backgrounds, colleagues’ expectations, recent local events, the amount of time available to teachers after they have done all the other things they have to do, and teacher grasp of critical thinking, to name some major factors. I here suggest some general strategies and tactics gleaned from years of experience, research, and others’ suggestions. They are guidelines and must be adjusted to fit the actual situation.

**Strategies**

1. Use a defensible conception of critical thinking with which you feel comfortable.

2. Continuously emphasize alertness for alternative hypotheses, conclusions, explanations, sources of evidence, points of view, plans, etc.

3. Also emphasize seeking reasons and evidence. Frequently ask, and invite your students to ask, "Why?" in a non-threatening way. Ask this question when you agree with your students as well as when you don't -- and of course when you are unsure yourself -- or are trying to find out what they mean. "Why?" is sometimes threatening, but is the most concise way to draw out the reasons. A less aggressive question is, "Would you say a little more about that?"

4. Emphasize their seeing things from others' points of view and being open minded -- that is, willing to reconsider, should other reasons and evidence be discovered.

5. Assess (test for) what is important in critical thinking – and do it validly; incorporate the results in the course grades, or other report that matters to the students; and discreetly make sure that students are aware of this incorporation. Lastly, make sure that the assessment procedure fits the critical thinking instruction; this often requires thinking about assessment well in advance of its use.

6. Students do not need to become subject matter experts before they can start to learn to think critically in a subject. These things can proceed together, each helping the other. Students will learn best the subject matter they use (e.g., in making decisions). But ultimately, of course, familiarity with the subject and/or the situation calling for critical thinking is essential for critical thinking.

7. In a subject-matter course, the time required for infusion of critical thinking is usually justified, not only for the critical thinking learned, but also for an enhanced understanding of the subject. (Consider how much you have retained of the subject matter to which you were merely exposed as a student.) Note: “Infusion” here refers to the embedding of critical thinking in subject matter instruction that ensures that the principles of critical thinking are explicit, whether stated by students or the teacher. “Immersion” refers to the embedding in which critical thinking principles are not made explicit. Of course some cases lie in between. Infusion is more likely to succeed than immersion.

8. For infusion, arrange it so that either you or the students make explicit the principles of critical thinking involved.
9. Assuming that one of your goals is having your students apply critical thinking principles learned or used in your course or class to everyday life as well as to your and other subjects, teach for this transfer of learning by giving much practice with examples, some of which call for transfer. Call students’ attention to how the critical thinking principles apply in the transfer situation.

**Tactics**

10. Frequently give explicit positive feedback and recognition for efforts and successes in learning or applying critical thinking principles.

11. Sometimes ask students to address questions to which you do not know the answer, or that are controversial. The question should seem significant to them and be interesting.

12. Give students time to think about questions and situations. If you wait long enough, someone will offer an answer. In other words, provide “wait time”.

13. In a discussion, label a student’s statement (or thought, answer, hypothesis, position, point, objection, question, etc.) with the student’s name, so that the student receives attention and assumes some responsibility. Write the statement on the board, or screen. (Don't worry that you might be wasting time doing this. It gives students a chance to think about the statement or thought.) Invite them to help formulate what you write. Encourage them to speak to each other's positions, giving reasons. Budget extra time.

14. Have students write down their positions, giving reasons to support what they think, showing awareness of opposing positions and the weaknesses of their own positions. Limit the length to a few sentences, one page, or two or three pages, etc., depending on their maturity and the time available.

15. Provide a set of criteria for judging papers, reports, letters, proposals, or statements in which they take positions. The criteria should reflect the critical thinking principles that you have been telling them are important.

16. Have students read each other's written statements or position papers, applying these criteria and making suggestions. Then get them to revise -- and revise again, in the light of still other comments or further thought.

17. Be ready to postpone an assignment, if the content of the previous assignment is not understood.

18. Have students work on issues or questions in groups, with each group reporting to the entire class, and each person showing the others what he or she has done. Students are eager to do well in the eyes of their peers (just like us).

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