

# Critical Thinking

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## **Educational Practice that Discourage Critical Thinking**

According to Gerald M. Nosich, author of *Learning to Think Things Through: A Guide to Critical Thinking across the Curriculum*, "Some prevalent educational practices discourage critical thinking, and internalizing them as a model of what education should be can seriously affect [students'] critical thinking." When teachers project the following assumptions through their methods, students can believe that these assumptions define education and help them develop the skills necessary for adulthood. Neither is/should be true. These assumptions can exacerbate or create fears that become obstacles to thinking critically, and they can develop rigid thinking that inhibits thinking critically.

### **Inhibitive Assumptions**

- The student's role is to be a passive recipient of knowledge.
- The student's role is to memorize and regurgitate information.
- The teacher's role is to dispense knowledge.
- Questions on exams should be taken only from what has been covered in class.
- Problems assigned to students should always be clearly formulated.
- There is an adequate answer to every question.
- Everything is just a matter of opinion.

### **Fears that Become Obstacles**

- Fear of making mistakes
- Fear of trying something new, of sticking one's neck out
- Fear of looking foolish

Teachers must help students understand that as they develop critical thinking skills, they will make many mistakes. Even once they have

developed these skills, they will continue to make mistakes, but they will do so less frequently. When students risk looking foolish (such a hard fear to overcome with teens!), they may discover new solutions to old problems, may open their minds to new possibilities, and will prepare themselves to handle life's many challenges. When we laugh at our mistakes, we demonstrate how students should handle themselves in similar situations. When we put our egos aside, we can demonstrate that a little embarrassment or temporary discomfort can be worth the red-faced moment.

## **Rigid Thinking Practices**

- Basing our picture of the world's ways, peoples, cultures, and events on media's portrayals, advertisements, or news coverage.
- Black-and-White / All-or-Nothing Thinking
- Stereotyping
- Egocentric Focusing (seeing everything solely through one's own feelings, pains, and pleasures, the things one wants, the things one fears, the experiences that have shaped one's life and attitudes — whether the person knows it or not)
- Developmental Patterns of Thinking (gained through psychological and physical development — need fulfillment; adhering to the strategies developed as children, reverting to a child's way of thinking especially when faced with problems)
- Clutching Previous Commitments or Previous Personal Experience (not permitting new information, evidence, examples, or experience supersede older beliefs or experiences)

Teachers can help students by showing them several ways to learn about the world *including* media coverage, especially motivating them to explore meeting people from various cultures whether in person or via social media. By incorporating numerous and repeated critical thinking strategies and assessments into our teaching, we help students relinquish these rigid thinking practices. Of course, before we can expect to emulate critical thinking for our students, we must first eliminate these behaviors ourselves. By demonstrating critical thinking during class, we show students what it looks and sounds like and describe what it feels like, even when it doesn't feel so great (see putting ego aside above)!