

CRITICAL THINKING AS A CRUCIAL SKILL FOR STUDIES AND FOR REAL LIFE

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Abstract: *the article is focused on definition of critical thinking as one of the most important study and life skills, improvement of it and self-assessment. Critical thinking is improved during all life, and the university provides a knowledge and practice for this improvement: students are taught critical thinking within discussions, assignments, and researches. A stage theory of improving critical thinking, which designed by Linda Elder and Richard Paul, is defined in the article.*

Keywords: *critical thinking, study skills, improving critical thinking.*

КРИТИЧЕСКОЕ МЫШЛЕНИЕ КАК КЛЮЧЕВОЙ НАВЫК, НЕОБХОДИМЫЙ В ПРОЦЕССЕ ОБУЧЕНИЯ И В РЕАЛЬНОЙ ЖИЗНИ Басова В.М. (Федеративная Республика Германия)

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Аннотация: *статья дает определение понятия «критическое мышление» как одного из самых важных навыков, необходимых в процессе обучения и в жизни, его развития, а также представляет систему оценки степени развития критического мышления. Критическое мышление развивается в процессе всей жизни; университет, в свою очередь, предоставляет знание и практику для его развития: студенты учатся критическому мышлению с помощью дискуссий, письменных работ и исследований. В статье также представлена теория стадий развития критического мышления, разработанная Линдой Элдер и Ричардом Паулом.*

Ключевые слова: *критическое мышление, навыки обучения, развитие критического мышления.*

Introduction

Studying at school or at the university requires to have and to develop special study skills. It means that students who pay attention to improving their study skills are smarter and more successful during studies. Moreover, students need to be prepared to real life and career which starts after their graduation. Every day people meet challenges, make a choice, and should make decisions. Success and quality of life very often depend on the ability to evaluate the situation and to make right choice or decision.

All countries have different systems of education with different requirements for students. For instance, European education is based on students' independence and proactivity. So, the most important study skills are time-management, which helps to plan time effectively; reading skills, which include predicting the text, sampling, scanning, skimming, and critical reading; note-taking, which forms the basis of students' work, helping them to prepare essays and dissertations and revise for exams; and research, library and IT skills, which help to save a great deal of time during searching for relevant materials [Plagiarism, University of Cambridge, 2018].

Critical thinking skills

The first step in improving each kind of skills is definition of the skill and choosing the system of self-assessment regarding to this particular skill. In 1990, a group of 47 experts from the USA and Canada, headed by Peter Facione, agreed on a common understanding of the concept of critical thinking – a purposeful, self-regulating system of judgments, used for interpretation, analysis, evaluation and formulation of conclusions, and to explain the evidential, conceptual, methodological, or contextual reasoning on which the system of judgment is based [Peter A. Facione, 1990].

Linda Elder with Richard Paul designed a stage theory based on the nearly twenty years of research of the Center for Critical Thinking [Linda Elder, Richard Paul, 1996]. According to this theory, six stages of development of critical thinking can be defined.

Stage One: The Unreflective Thinker. At this stage, thinkers do not understand the role that thinking plays in their lives. They also do not realize that many of the problems in their lives are the result of errors in their thinking. Unreflective thinkers fail to recognize thinking as involving concepts, assumptions, inferences, implications, points of view, etc. They do not use the appropriate standards for the assessment of thinking: clarity, accuracy, precision, relevance, logicalness, etc.

Stage Two: The Challenged Thinker. Thinkers move to the next stage when they realize the role that thinking is playing in their lives, and that problems in their thinking are causing serious and significant problems. Challenged thinkers are becoming aware of thinking as such. They recognize that their thinking is often flawed, although they are not able to identify many of these flaws.

Stage Three: The Beginning Thinker. Thinkers at this stage recognize that they have basic problems in their thinking and make initial attempts to better understand how they can improve it, but they have limited insight into deeper levels of the trouble inherent in their thinking. Most importantly, they lack a systematic plan for improving their thinking. Beginning thinkers are becoming aware not only of thinking as such, but also of the role in thinking of concepts, assumptions, inferences, implications, points of view, etc. They have a beginning understanding of the role of egocentric thinking in human life.

Stage Four: The Practicing Thinker. Now thinkers not only recognize that problems exist in their thinking, but they also recognize the need to attack these problems globally and systematically. However, since practicing thinkers are only beginning to approach the improvement of their thinking in a systematic way, they still have limited insight into deeper levels of thought.

Stage Five: The Advanced Thinker. Advanced thinkers have significant insight into problems at deeper levels of thought. Advanced thinkers have good general command over their egocentric nature. They are actively and successfully engaged in systematically monitoring the role in their thinking of concepts, assumptions, etc., and hence have excellent knowledge of that enterprise. Advanced thinkers value the deep and systematic internalization of critical thinking into their daily habits.

Stage Six: The Accomplished Thinker. Master thinkers not only have systematically taken charge of their thinking, but are also continually monitoring, revising, and re-thinking strategies for continual improvement of their thinking. Critical thinking for them is both conscious and highly intuitive. Master thinkers have not only a high degree of knowledge of thinking, but a high degree of practical insight as well. They intuitively assess their thinking. Master thinkers have deep insights into the systematic internalization of critical thinking into their habits. Moreover, they deeply understand the role that egocentric thinking plays in the lives, as well as the complex relationship between thoughts, emotions, drives and behavior.

Development of critical thinking skills

Today there are a lot of available sources which provide information about improving critical thinking, from old books to the latest videos, but it is not enough to read a book or watch a video. Critical thinking skill is based on developing the attitude or disposition of a critical thinking [Diane F. Halpern, 2014]. As critical thinkers we need to exhibit the following dispositions or attitudes: willingness to plan, flexibility, persistence, willingness to self-correct, and being mindful.

Willingness to Plan. This is a particular skill to create a plan of response before starting to write or answering with the first idea that comes to mind during discussions. One of possible solutions is following “Model to generate Critical Thinking” (Figure 1).

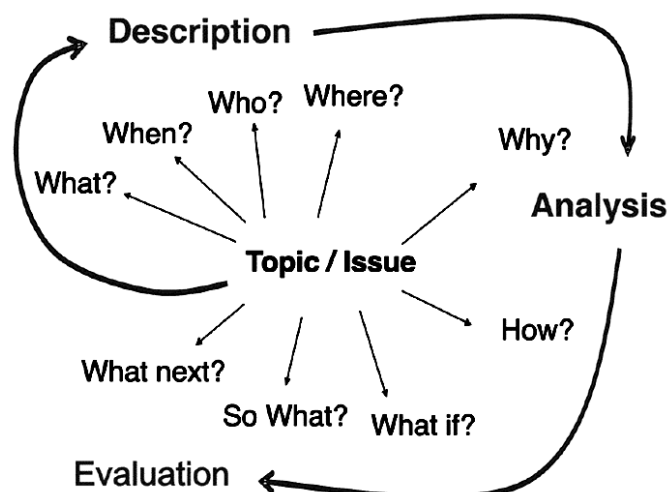


Fig. 1. Model to Generate Critical Thinking [University of Plymouth, 2006]

In the part “Description” it is necessary to define what the topic is about and its context, when it occurs, who is involved, affected, or interested, and where it takes place. The second part “Analysis” is focused on questions: “Why did this occur? Why was that done? How does it work in theory and in practice? What if it was wrong?”. And the final part “Evaluation” suggests to answer questions: “So what does this mean? What can be learnt?”

Flexibility. Flexibility is a willingness to consider new options, try things in a new way, and reconsider old problems. Cognitive flexibility is the ability to change how to think about something—to see things from another

person's point of view, consider multiple options, think of several ways to respond, and seek information that may not be readily available [Diane F. Halpern, 2014].

Persistence. This is the willingness and ability to keep at a task. Some problems and tasks require more time for dealing them than others – they seem to be too difficult. So, it is easier to say that I am not able to solve a problem or ask somebody to solve it, instead of me. But good thinking is hard work that requires diligent persistence.

Willingness to self-correct, admit errors, and change mind when the evidence changes. People make mistakes every day. In fact, creative thoughts and actions would not be possible if people unwilling to make mistakes, at least some of the time. Instead of becoming defensive about errors, good thinkers acknowledge them and learn from them [Diane F. Halpern, 2014].

Unfortunately, there is wide spread tendency to justify mistakes – faulty beliefs, bad decisions. Self-justification is extremely strong because it keeps our image of ourselves intact. For example, is it important to think of yourself as an informed and intelligent citizen? For many of us, this is an important component of our self-image.

Being mindful. In order to develop basic thinking skills, it is necessary to direct attention to the processes and products of my own thoughts. Mindfulness can be defined as the simple act of drawing new distinctions. It is the opposite of the “automatic pilot” that used for routine tasks. Learning requires a mindful engagement with the task and materials.

Conclusion

Every student passes through the stages of critical thinking development. The university has an important role in the development of this ability. At the same time, it depends on the students' activity – how much time they devote to self-education, to improving their skills in practice. And critical thinking develops as a result of deliberate and systematic actions.

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