

Skills That Influence the Development of Critical Thinking in Education

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Introduction

'The essence of independent mind lies not in what it thinks, but how it thinks.'
Christopher Hitchens, Letters to a Young Contrarian.
Critical thinking is an important skill to having when undertaking an academic path. It is a skill that most people will have at some level. It is used for example in not believing everything written in tabloid newspapers and online. Especially with the current trend of 'fake news' As an academic student the ability to be critical about everything one encounters, be it lectures, written text or online articles becomes increasingly important. This poster will show some ways to help develop this skill.

Note Taking

When reading through any new academic work taking notes while doing so can be a great help. This allows one to recall the important points of a text, things that can be quoted and referenced later.
It can help the reader remember if the text was of use at all and who wrote it. Notes can be written in anyway. There is no right way to take notes, provided all the information needed is recorded.
Note taking is not just for reading, but for lectures and speeches and any other forms of information that need to be remembered.
'Note taking is important because it assists you in concentrating on and understanding the information you are reading by helping you to summarise the ideas and arguments in the text.' Note taking importance (Unilearn, 2000)

Time Management

'The first lesson of time management is doing the right things at the right time, rather than wasting a lot of time doing the wrong things.' (Burton, 2000)
Prioritise what needs doing and do the most important tasks first and not what one would prefer to do. Procrastination can be a struggle for academic students, and this will add a lot of pressure as deadlines draw nearer.
Having a quiet place away from distractions can aid with studying. As can having a plan or idea of when studying will take place. However, with this do be realistic, life is busy and setting aside a whole day to study may not ever happen.
Keeping perfectionist pressure off will help, as this can take up the allotted time. Make sure there is time to relax and do tasks of enjoyment, or study can become a chore.

Referencing

To reference is to acknowledge another author's text used in one's own work, which allows the reader to see what research has been done. Referencing is needed to make sure that plagiarism is avoided. 'Using the words or ideas of others without referencing your source would be constituted as plagiarism and is a very serious academic offense.' (Pears and Shields, 2013,p.1)
Plagiarism can be accidental or deliberate. As a skill, referencing needs to be learnt. There are four main styles of referencing used, the Harvard style is arguably the most commonly used, and is the style used on this poster.

Reading

The more text read the broader the amount of knowledge that will be gained. It is important to read frequently. However, it is not just the amount of reading that helps the development of ideas and skills, but what is being read.
Everything being read should be evaluated. Is this work from a credible source? Was it written recently? Who wrote it? Works in print are easier to convey their source as most will have the authors name, date of publication and there is often a piece about the author too. Online it can be more difficult as to whom to trust. Believing everything written on Wikipedia or Mumsnet for example, is far from advisable. This is because the layman can voice subjective opinions on there. It is important to understand everything that one reads and to look up new and unknown words. A word list can be useful in remembering the new terminology.
'Reading improves with practice. Your brain becomes more used to seeing unusual words, and your mind to dealing with complex sentences and ideas.' (Cottrell, 2013).

Objectivity

Staying objective in study is an important skill to learn that will aid the development of critical thinking. Understanding if something written is fact, argument or opinion.
'Opinion is free...but facts are sacred' Scott (1921).
In every text one needs to have good reason to believe what is written. In one's own work it is important that everything stated needs to be backed up with fact through referencing, not just opinion.



The image shows a colorful infographic titled 'The Ultimate Cheatsheet for Critical Thinking' by Global Digital Citizen Foundation. It features a table with 10 rows and 2 columns of questions to guide critical thinking. The rows are color-coded: Who (purple), What (blue), Where (green), When (orange), Why (red), and How (grey), each with two columns of questions. The questions are designed to prompt the reader to evaluate information from various perspectives.

Who	... benefits from this? ... is this harmful to? ... makes decisions about this? ... is most directly affected?	... have you also heard discuss this? ... would be the best person to consult? ... will be the key people in this? ... deserves recognition for this?
What	... are the strengths/weaknesses? ... is another perspective? ... is another alternative? ... would be a counter-argument?	... is the best/worst case scenario? ... is most/least important? ... can we do to make a positive change? ... is getting in the way of our action?
Where	... would we see this in the real world? ... are there similar concepts/situations? ... is there the most need for this? ... in the world would this be a problem?	... can we get more information? ... do we go for help with this? ... will this idea take us? ... are the areas for improvement?
When	... is this acceptable/unacceptable? ... would this benefit our society? ... would this cause a problem? ... is the best time to take action?	... will we know we've succeeded? ... has this played a part in our history? ... can we expect this to change? ... should we ask for help with this?
Why	... is this a problem/challenge? ... is it relevant to me/others? ... is this the best/worst scenario? ... are people influenced by this?	... should people know about this? ... has it been this way for so long? ... have we allowed this to happen? ... is there a need for this today?
How	... is this similar to _____? ... does this disrupt things? ... do we know the truth about this? ... will we approach this safely?	... does this benefit us/others? ... does this harm us/others? ... do we see this in the future? ... can we change this for our good?

Lee Wantanabe-Crockett (2016)

Conclusion

Having good concepts of reading, note taking, referencing, time management and objectivity skills will influence the development of critical thinking in education. Becoming adept in these skills will not happen overnight; each takes work and dedication. However, through these, critical thinking will become easier and one's ability to do so will become second nature.

Reference List:

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