

Introduction

To be a critical thinker a person needs to learn and develop a range of skills and qualities to use within their work.

According to Erstad of Rasmussen University (2018) ‘6 Skills you need to master now are’ - Identification, research, identifying biases, inference, determining relevance and curiosity”

<https://www.rasmussen.edu/student-experience/college-life/critical-thinking-skills-to-master-now/>

A critical thinker will seek to engage these skills as well as others during their learning whether it be through assignments, lectures, reading or research.

Through the areas that will be explored we will be identifying skills and characteristics that contribute to a learner becoming a critical thinker.

Some qualities associated with a critical thinking learner may be time management, reflectiveness and active engagement.

Time Management

For students to be productive and successful in their studies they need to demonstrate good time management skills.

Cottrell (2018) spoke of what is expected from the student – “the ability to organise your time, know deadlines.”

Cottrell provides suggestions to use planners and diaries to manage time and effectiveness when studying. These resources can be used to ensure deadlines are met and attendance and punctuality is consistent to support the learners academic studies.

Students may find writing a number of details in these diaries or planners useful, making notes or plans by prioritising work, setting deadlines, setting aside time for reading, goals for the end of the day or week, a reflection on what might have worked or did not.

Students must be aware of their learning journey and the time it may take them to complete tasks, reading or lectures. Organising their study and life using meaningful tools and techniques can have a positive impact.

Stress can have a negative impact on a student’s rate of work and mental health. Being aware and knowing your stress levels are increasing means you can effectively put into place productive and timed techniques or even planned breaks.

Chase,J *et al* (2012) ‘Time Management Strategies for Research Productivity’ suggest ways such as goal setting and prioritising amongst others to help improve productivity.

Critical Thinking

Active Learner

“Instructional strategies that involve students in doing things and thinking about what they are doing’ is a description by Bonwell,C and Eison,J (1991) on the concept of active learning.

Active learning is the encouragement of students to engage and participate. Questioning theories and independently researching information to inform themselves on relevant studies and theories. It can involve and nurture skills such as collaborative learning, problem solving and risk taking. <https://www.nureva.com/blog/education/9-benefits-of-active-learning-and-why-your-college-should-try-it> (2018)

To be curious in learning is a vital and key factor . To be curious in learning can propel us forward to explore and develop learning possibilities. Through being curious and not passive in learning your mind will remain active, continually remembering to question and independently locate answers without the guidance and lead of lecturers and teachers.

According to NYU <https://www.nyu.edu/faculty/teaching-and-learning-resources/strategies-for-teaching-with-tech/best-practices-active-learning/active-learning-demystified.html>

Active learning has many benefits including

- can help keep students more engaged than simply watching or listening
- allows students to reach a deeper understanding of the content
- develops cooperation among students
- enables students to receive timely feedback, which can resolve any misconceptions
- increases problem solving skills
- provides an opportunity to discuss more difficult topics in a peer setting

Active learning strategies can range from simple activities that require little planning such as simple Kagan strategies as round robin to more in depth activities such as group projects or case studies. By using Kagan strategies with children from a young age it is embedding and enhancing that curious nature to explore and listen to opinions we may not have considered ourselves.

https://www.kaganonline.com/free_articles/research_and_rationale/330/The-Essential-5-A-Starting-Point-for-Kagan-Cooperative-Learning

The above Kagan site provides a list of simple activities and collaborative learning strategies that are used for children.

The theorist John Dewey (1859-1952) believed that learning together was a key part of the process in developing and growing. To be curious in learning would lead to the development of skills that increase ones thinking. This was explored in the book ‘Theories of Early Childhood Education’ Cohen,L and Stupiansky,S (2017)

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Reflective

Reflection is a key skill needed to improve and build on the learning that has already taken place within your academic work.

To reflect gives the learner the opportunity to assess the strategies used and their effectiveness within the piece of learning. It is important to reflect from many different angles and perspectives to fully become aware of positives and potential negatives from the piece of work being assessed and where there is room to develop further avenues of learning and study.

“Its power lies in being able to help you develop your understanding of the way you learn, the subjects you are studying.” Gillett, Hammond and Martala, (2009)
http://www.docs.hss.ed.ac.uk/iad/Learning_teaching/Academic_pastoral/Reflect/Reflection_explanation_HO.pdf

Reflection is a learning tool that will not only enhance your learning but also your daily and work life. It will provide you with the skills to assess your day, what went well, what could be improved upon, are there areas you excel in and enjoy more than others? Whilst reflecting on work it is important to remember that as this is a life skill, it is something we will do throughout life as we learn and grow and is not limited to our time taking part in academic study.

Learning reflections provide the opportunity to engage in growth mindset activities and develop this belief in themselves and their learning. Once a student has reflected and identified areas to improve or explore further they can set attainable goals and targets that can continually be assessed and reflected on until a satisfactory outcome for the learner has been achieved.

‘A person with a growth mindset is more likely to embrace challenges and learn from setbacks to reach greater levels of achievement’ Pisa (2018)

Through using growth mindset we can review areas to develop through a positive light. To actively engage in this process, growth mindset requires commitment from the learner to continually evolve and better themselves, becoming more resilient in their practice.

Conclusion

To summarise, critical thinking consists of many components that are all key in aiding learning and giving students the best chance of success through acknowledging and learning from their strengths and weaknesses.

“They recognize the complexities in developing as thinkers, and commit themselves to life-long practice toward self-improvement.” Linda Elder, September, 2007

<https://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/defining-critical-thinking/766#:~:text=Critical%20thinking%20is%20self%2Dguided,live%20rationally%2C%20reasonably%2C%20empathically.>

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