Primary reading • “Learning the Art of Critical thinking” By Richard Paul

Genres □ fiction □ poetry ■ drama □ prose
□ song □ news □ art □ speech
■ movie ■ on-line information □ others

Learning focus ■ listening ■ speaking ■ reading □ writing

Handouts by J Yeu-Ting Liu / Brian Li

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Unit 4

Critical thinking and thinking outside the box

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Section 1: Getting Started - Guess What!!?

Instruction: Teacher brings a volunteer to the front of the class; the volunteer then sits down facing other students. Next, teacher shows a sheet of paper with a word written on it without showing the word to the volunteer. The class’s mission is to turn ‘describing’ the word (in English) without using the word; each description should be consisted of 1-6 English words. The group that helps the volunteer guess the right word first is the winner. (Note: Only one guessing or hinting attempt is allowed in each trial and no body gestures is allowed)

Teacher only material provided

Section 1.1: Discussion

Instruction: Please discuss the question below, finish the task with your group and share your answer with the class.

◆ Q1: What are your strategies for helping the guesser get the answer faster? Think of at least two strategies and share them with the whole class.

■ T1: Please think of a new (challenging) word that is difficult to guess even after applying the two strategies you used in the warm-up activity. (Note: At the end of this task, all the groups have to nominate the most challenging word of the day.)

Section 2: Video Viewing

Instruction: Please read the synopsis of the show and then watch the video till the first round ends. Think about how the show relates to critical thinking.

Source: http://bit.ly/1TVhzQ4 Cutthroat Kitchen video

Cutthroat Kitchen is a reality cooking television show on Food Network. It features four chefs competing in a three-round elimination cooking competition. However, the contestants face auctions in which they can purchase opportunities to sabotage each other or benefit themselves. Each chef is given $25,000 at the start of the show; the winner keeps whatever money s/he has not spent in the auctions.
IN THE MIDST OF OUR CHAOTIC WORLD, no matter what your circumstances or goals, we can assure you of one thing: you will be better off if you are a skilled thinker. As a manager, leader, employee, citizen, friend, parent—in every realm and situation of your life—good thinking pays off. Poor thinking, in turn, inevitably causes problems, wastes time and energy and engenders frustration and pain.

Critical thinking is the disciplined art of ensuring that you use the best thinking you are capable of in any set of circumstances, which entails asking yourself questions such as what is really going on in this situation? Am I deceiving myself when I believe that...? What are the likely consequences of failing to...? If I want to do X, what is the best way to prepare for it? How can I be more successful in doing Y? Is this really my biggest problem, or do I need to focus my attention somewhere else?

Successfully responding to such questions is the daily work of thinking. However, to maximize the quality of your thinking, you must first learn to become an effective ‘critic’ of it; and to become an effective critic of your thinking, you have to make learning about thinking a priority. In this article, we will help you get started on this path.

Learning about Thinking

Ask yourself these rather unusual questions: What do you know about how the mind processes information? What do you really know about how to analyze, evaluate or reconstruct your thinking? Where does your thinking come from? How much of it is of good quality, and how much of it is vague, muddled, inconsistent, inaccurate, illogical or superficial? Are you, in any real sense, in control of your thinking?

If you are like most people, the only honest answers to these questions will run along the lines of, ‘Well, I suppose I really don’t know much about my thinking or about thinking in general. I suppose in my life I have more or less taken my thinking for granted. I don’t really know how it works. I have never really studied it. I don’t know how I test it, or even if I do test it. It just happens in my mind.
It is important to realize that the serious study of thinking—serious thinking about thinking—is rare. It is not a subject in most universities, and it is seldom found in our culture. But if you focus your attention for a moment on the role that your thinking plays in your life, you will come to recognize that, in fact, everything you do, want or feel is influenced by your thinking.

And if you become persuaded of that, you will be surprised that humans show so little interest in thinking. To make significant gains in the quality of your thinking, you will have to engage in a kind of work that most of us find unpleasant, if not painful: intellectual work. Once this heavy lifting is done and we move our thinking to a higher level of quality, it is not hard to keep it at that level. Still, there is the price you have to pay to step up to the next level: one doesn't become a skillful critic of thinking overnight, any more than one becomes a skillful basketball player or musician overnight. To become better at thinking, you must be willing to put the work into thinking that skilled improvement always requires.

This means you must be willing to practice special 'acts' of thinking that are, initially at least, uncomfortable, and some-times challenging. You have to learn to do with your mind 'moves' analogous to what accomplished athletes learn to do (through practice and feedback) with their bodies. Improvement in thinking, in other words, is similar to improvement in other domains of performance, where progress is a product of sound theory, commitment, hard work and practice.

In this article we will present four recommendations which, when applied, result in a mind practicing skilled thinking. Although we have selected these particular four, many others could have instead been chosen. There is no magic in these specific ideas: it is important to understand them as a sampling of all the possible ways in which the mind can work to discipline itself, to think at a higher level of quality and to function better in the world.

**Clarify Your Thinking**

Our own thinking usually seems clear to us, even when it is not. Vague, ambiguous, muddled, deceptive or misleading thinking is a significant problem in life. If we are to develop as thinkers, we must learn the art of clarifying our thinking, of pinning it down, spelling it out, and giving it a specific meaning. To figure out the real meaning of what people are saying you have to look not only on the surface, but also beneath the surface. There are various ways to do this: try to figure out the real meaning of important news stories, or explain your understanding of an issue to someone to help clarify if in your own mind. Here's what you can do to begin: when people explain things to you, summarize, in your own words, what you think they just said. When you cannot do this to their satisfaction, you haven't really understood what they said. Likewise, when they cannot summarize what you have said to your satisfaction, they don't really understand what you said. Try it, and see what happens. The fact is, you should neither agree nor disagree with anyone until you clearly understand them.

**Stick to the Point**

Disciplined thinking intervenes when thoughts wander from what is pertinent and germane: concentrating the mind on only those things that help it figure out what it needs to figure out. Undisciplined thinking is often guided by associations ('this reminds me of that, and that reminds me of this other thing') rather than what is logically connected ('if A and B are true, then C must also be true').

When thinking is relevant, it is focused on the main task at hand. It selects what is salient, pertinent and related. It is on the alert for everything that connects to the issue, and sets aside what is immaterial, extraneous and beside the point. What is relevant directly bears upon (and helps solve) the
Always be on the lookout for fragmented thinking—thinking that leaps about with no logical connections, and start noticing when you or others fail to stay focused on what is relevant. Focus on finding what will aid you in truly solving a problem. When someone brings up a point (however true) that doesn't seem pertinent to the issue at hand, ask, 'How is that relevant to the issue?'

When you are working through a problem, make sure you stay focused on what sheds light on the problem. Don't allow your mind to wander to unrelated matters, and don't allow others to stray from the main issue. Frequently ask. What is the central question here? Is this or that relevant to it? How so?

**Question Questions**

Most of us accept the world as it is presented to us and are not skilled questioners. Even when we do question something, our questions are often superficial or 'loaded', which doesn't help one solve problems or make better decisions.

Good thinkers routinely ask questions in order to understand and effectively deal with the world around them. They question the status quo on a regular basis, because they know that things are often different from the way they are presented. Their questions penetrate images, masks, fronts and propaganda, make real problems explicit and discipline their thinking through those problems.

If you become a student of questions, you can learn to ask powerful questions that lead to a deeper and more fulfilling life. Our advice is to be on the lookout for questions — the ones you ask, and the ones you fail to ask. Listen to other people, and begin to notice when they question and when they fail to question. Look closely at the questions being asked. Which questions do you ask, and which ones should you ask? Examine the extent to which you are a questioner, or simply one who accepts the definitions of situations given by others.

**Be Reasonable**

One of the hallmarks of a critical thinker is the disposition to change one's mind when given a good reason to. Skilled thinkers actually want to change their thinking when they discover even better thinking; they can always be moved by reason. Yet, comparatively few people are reasonable by this definition: few are willing to change their minds once they are set, and few are willing to suspend their beliefs to fully hear the views of those with which they disagree.

Our advice is to always be on the lookout for reasonable and unreasonable behavior — yours and that of others. Listen to what people say, and look closely at what they do. Notice when you are unwilling to listen to the views of others, and when you simply see yourself as 'right' and others as 'wrong'. At these moments, ask yourself whether their views might have some merit, and see if you can break through your defensiveness to hear what they are saying. Also notice unreasonableness in others: identify times when people use language that makes them appear reasonable, although their behavior indicates otherwise. Try to figure out why you, or others, are being unreasonable. Might you have a vested interest in not being open minded in this particular situation? Might they?

**In closing**

The recommendations presented herein are but a few of the myriad ways in which critical thinkers can bring intellectual discipline to bear upon their thinking. In the end, the best thinkers are those who understand the development of thinking as a process occurring throughout many years of practice. They recognize the importance of learning about the mind, about thoughts, feelings and desires and how these functions of the mind interrelate. They are adept at taking thinking apart, and then

Unit 2 “Learning the Art of Critical thinking” P.4
assessing the parts when analyzed. In short, they study the mind, and they apply what they learn to their own thinking.

**Section 3.1 : Discussion**

**Instruction**: Please finish the task and share your ideas with the class.

- **T1**: The quote “Skilled thinkers actually want to change their thinking when they discover even better thinking” pinpoints a key idea of this article: one needs to be reasonable and open-minded. Please utilize any of the four skills you’ve just learned and think of an unconventional way (think outside the box) to solve the following questions with your group members.

**Question 1**: A bomb goes off and it was a total carnage. One person, only a few feet away, survives! How can this be?

**Question 2**: What mathematical symbol can be put between 5 and 9, to get a number bigger than 5 but smaller than 9?

**Question 3**: How do you use just one sentence to motivate or inspire a person who is trying to lose weight?

**Section 4 : Group Activity – Think differently**

**Instruction**: Have you ever heard of A-MO GU? He is a popular YouTuber who produces hilarious narrated video summaries for movies, TV shows, soap operas … etc. One of his most famous videos is entitled “Understand the gist of Harry pottery 1-3 in 3 minutes.” The reason he went viral is not only because of his ability to precisely sort through the best clips of his (selected) materials but also the ability to make a seemingly boring moment extremely hilarious through his narration. In this activity, you will first view three videos from the “fixed fairy tales”; then, each group has to pick one story they favor the most and, using A-MO GU as an inspirational example, work with their group members to come up with a 1-minute narrated summery for the story.

**Humpty Dumpty**

Humpty Dumpty is a character in an English nursery rhyme, probably originally a riddle and one of the best known in the English-speaking world. Though not explicitly described, he is typically portrayed as an anthropomorphistic egg.

**Little Red Riding Hood**

Red little Riding Hood, is a European fairy tale about a young girl and a Big Bad Wolf. The story has been changed considerably in its history and subject to numerous modern adaptations and readings.

The Princess and the Pea

The Princess and the Pea is a literary fairy tale about a young woman whose royal identity is established by a test of her physical sensitivity.

Section 4.1 : Discussion

Instruction: In this follow up activity, each group has to use the narrated summary created in the previous section to compose a short play and act it out. Please read the following guidelines before starting the activity.

1. Each group has to assign a specific role to each group member (e.g. narrator, actors, director… etc.);
2. Next, all group members collaborate to complete the play within a time limit (say, 5-10 minutes); note that the final production shouldn’t be longer than the length of the narrated summary.
3. Please film the short play with a smart phone and upload the file to the designated online platform (Moodle or Facebook);
4. All the classmates view and critique the files together.

Section 5 : Lesson Plan

Instruction: The big final project is just around the corner. Are you ready for this project? To better help you prepare for the project, a simple lesson plan is provided (P.7) for your reference. Please discuss with your group members and fill out the form together.

Note Section
### Lesson plan

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#### Pre-teaching activity

#### While-Teaching

#### Post-Teaching activity

### Work distribution

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<td>1. Understand the material provided by the resource finders thoroughly. 2. Teach and take control of the class.</td>
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“Learning the Art of Critical thinking” 7