

Critical Thinking

Description: Critical Thinking is the ability to analyze and evaluate information. This can involve questioning, problem solving, forming arguments, debating, comparing, and contrasting.

Youth who struggle with Critical Thinking often:	Youth who have strong Critical Thinking skills often:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have difficulty taking others' perspectives • Struggle with solving problems, especially those with multiple possible solutions • Accept information at face value without questioning or assessing validity • Struggle to communicate their ideas • Struggle with open-ended tasks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider multiple view points or opinions • Use strategies to solve complex problems • Analyze reading material for theme, opinion, character development, etc. • Synthesize information from multiple sources • Ask a lot of questions

Best Practices and Evidence

Perspective Taking: Challenging youth to consider issues from multiple perspectives enables them to practice critical thinking and problem solving skills. Youth are encouraged to engage in a deeper level of thinking when taking on different roles.

Evidence of a program that incorporates Perspective Taking include:

- Role-plays are used to help youth practice taking others' perspectives and analyzing their own.
- Structured debates encourage youth to analyze issues from multiple points of view.
- Staff ask youth to take on differing perspectives during reflection conversations.
- Staff are comfortable with respectful disagreement during class discussions.

Problem Solving Strategies: Youth may need help learning how to tackle open-ended problems. Guiding them through steps of problem-solving teaches important critical thinking skills such as analysis, information gathering, comparing, planning, and assessing progress.

Evidence of a program that incorporates Problem Solving Strategies include:

- Activities involve addressing challenges that are open-ended or have more than one possible solution.
- Project-based learning requires youth to solve relevant and complex problems through research, creativity, action planning, collaboration, and synthesis of information.

- Youth begin activities with a brainstorm or pre-planning activities to activate critical thinking.
- Youth are taught and employ strategies to support their problem solving, such as pro/con lists, acting out possible solutions, and anticipating potential pitfalls.
- Consistent feedback from staff helps students to assess their own work throughout the problem-solving process.

Reflection: Opportunities to reflect support youth in analyzing their learning experiences. Reflection provides space for youth to examine and question their assumptions and make sense of the world around them, raising their level of critical thinking.

Evidence of a program that incorporates Reflection include:

- Staff regularly guide youth reflection during whole-group debrief discussions and individual conversations.
- Youth share what they learned about a topic and how their thinking changed over time.
- Youth write in journals and reflect on their development as learners.
- Youth are asked to identify their own strengths, challenges, and areas of improvement.
- Regular, structured time is set aside for youth to check in with themselves through writing, art, discussion, or movement.

1	2	3	4
<i>There is no evidence of strategies to support youth who struggle with critical thinking.</i>	<i>There is some evidence of strategies to support youth in critical thinking.</i>	<i>There is moderate evidence of strategies to support youth in critical thinking.</i>	<i>There is extensive evidence of strategies to support youth in critical thinking.</i>
Youth have no opportunities for open-ended thinking. When youth are faced with a challenge, they employ no strategies to solve it. Staff solve problems or they go unaddressed.	Youth have minimal opportunities for open-ended thinking. When youth are faced with a challenge, staff wait for students to independently attempt one or two strategies, but quickly step in and take over the process.	Youth have opportunities for open-ended thinking, but they remain superficial or brief. When youth are faced with a challenge, staff assist them in solving it, with staff more involved in the solution than youth.	Youth have extended, authentic opportunities for open-ended thinking. When faced with a challenge, youth are able to independently employ problem solving strategies, or employ them with staff support, but youth are more involved in the solution than staff.

1	2	3	4
<p>There is no evidence of strategies to support youth who struggle with critical thinking.</p>	<p>There is some evidence of strategies to support youth in critical thinking.</p>	<p>There is moderate evidence of strategies to support youth in critical thinking.</p>	<p>There is extensive evidence of strategies to support youth in critical thinking.</p>
<p>There are no opportunities for reflection on learning or selves.</p>	<p>There are minimal opportunities for reflection, and/or reflection remains superficial.</p>	<p>There are some opportunities for reflection, but there is inadequate time or support for youth to “go deep.”</p>	<p>There are many opportunities for reflection, with adequate time and support for students to “go deep.”</p>

DRAFT