

Critical Thinking Teaching Guide

This teaching tip in the format of an “activity guide” that we use here in our work with faculty. The source is Brookfield & Preskill (2016). *The Discussion Book*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Title: Using a "chalk talk" activity to engage students in deep thinking about course content

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Modality: Face-to-Face Type: Active or experiential learning Scope: Partial to whole class

Purpose of Strategy or Activity:

The purpose of this activity is to: 1) prompt students to think deeply about questions and issues related to the day's course objectives, 2) create an opportunity for students to make connections between ideas contributed by their peers, and 3) give students ownership and control over a significant portion of the class discussion.

This Activity/Strategy Supports the Following Critical Thinking Skills or Outcomes:

Ability to describe patterns or relationships in written and/or visual information; ability to compare or contrast ideas, concepts, or statements.

Brief Description of Strategy or Activity Instructions: The professor writes a prompt or question on the white board that is related to the content that is being covered in class that day. This prompt should be one for which there is no right or wrong answer (or one that can elicit a number of valid responses). Students are given up to five minutes to free write about the prompt as a way of organizing their thoughts. At the end of that time they are invited to come to the white board and write a brief response to the prompt. As many students who want to participate can write their response until the board is full or no one else volunteers. Then, the teacher offers students who have not yet participated in the activity the opportunity to come to the board and draw a connecting line between related ideas and write one or two words along the line that describe the connection between their classmates' responses. Finally, the professor takes a photo of the white board for posting to the course LMS, and then uses the student-generated ideas to lead a whole-class discussion on the topic of the day. For a slight variation, instead of leading a full group discussion, the teacher can organize the students into groups of 4 or 5 and assign each group a concept from the board and ask them to elaborate on the relationship between what a student wrote and the original prompt. After 5 - 7 minutes of discussion, a representative of each group is asked to report out to the class on the ideas that emerged during their conversation.

How Do You Know This Activity/Strategy Enhances Critical Thinking? The empirical literature suggests that activities in which students reflect on a topic that has no straightforward right/wrong answer, identify and explain connections between ideas, and elaborate on ideas proposed by others provide opportunities for students to think deeply and critically about the topic at hand. Repeated practice of these skills should enhance one's overall critical thinking ability.

Other Comments: The source for this activity is Brookfield & Preskill (2016). The Discussion Book. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

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