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Infusing Critical Thinking into Communication Courses

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ABSTRACT

The importance of critical thinking is generally recognized by educators and during the past 20 years numerous initiatives have been taken to improve critical thinking. Although research demonstrates courses in communication study can have a positive impact on critical thinking skills, we argue that instruction in critical thinking can be more explicitly covered in basic communication courses. This article details our efforts to infuse critical thinking into an entry-level communication course and outlines a guide to help communication teachers integrate critical thinking into their courses.

Introduction

The importance of critical thinking is categorically accepted and its value universally recognized. Willingham (2007) noted, however, that while “everyone would agree” (p. 8) that critical thinking is “a primary goal of education” (p. 12) nearly 20 years of “initiatives designed to encourage educators to teach critical thinking...today we still lament students’ lack of critical thinking” (p. 8). Courses in communication have been one of the few bright spots in those initiatives. According to Allen, Berkowitz, Hunt, and Loudon (1999), meta-analysis of studies of critical thinking, found that explicit education in communication may enhance critical thinking by up to 44 percent. Given the importance of critical thinking and the significance of Allen et al.’s findings, our goal is to demonstrate how critical thinking concepts and strategies may be incorporated throughout a communication studies curriculum in order to further enhance the value of communication courses. We believe the infusion of critical thinking can have a significant impact on excellence in undergraduate education.

Definition

We utilize a definition of critical thinking offered by Scriven and Paul (2004): “Critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action” (n.p.; emphasis added). The definition is appropriate and useful as it directly addresses the intrinsic link between communication and critical thinking.

Program Development

As noted above by Allen et al. (1999), communication is critical for advancing critical thinking. Therefore, all aspects of speech communication have the potential for incorporating and applying critical thinking. Instead of developing a stand-alone unit on critical thinking, our agenda was to incorporate critical thinking pedagogy throughout the entire semester coursework. We specifically focused our efforts on critical thinking implementation in an entry-level hybrid speech communication courses, SPEE 100: Fundamentals of Speech Communication. At our institution, Minnesota State University, Mankato, the introductory course is taught using a large-lecture with recitation sections. The large lecture addresses interpersonal communication theory, emphasizing how we perceive, understand, and make use of various communicative strategies. Public speaking, small group dynamics and other applications of communication skills are developed in the recitation sections. This course was selected because of the large number of students the course reaches (up to 750 students per semester) and because this course is, for many students, the only communication course they will take in their college careers. We believed this course was the ideal format to reach the greatest number of students.

While one of the sessions in the large lecture addresses the principles of critical thinking, most of the lectures ask students to move beyond memorizing definitions to applying the theory in more critical ways. For example, the lecture covering the perception process also addresses the various cultural factors which impact and influence their interpretation of certain situations.

The large lecture is taught by a faculty member in the department and graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) handle the recitation sections. Our department offers 25 sections of SPEE 100 each semester and we knew we wanted continuity across all sections. Therefore, in order to ensure that critical thinking concepts were infused throughout the course, we developed a training program and an assessment rubric for our GTAs to employ in their recitation sections. We believe that in order to fully exploit the intrinsic link between communication and critical thinking we must teach the teachers to not only think critically themselves but to put critical thinking at the forefront of their teaching.

The primary component of the training program is a matrix—*The Guide to Assessing Critical Thinking*—which we developed to help GTAs assess the level of critical thinking on

speeches and written assignments.¹ Adapted from the “Universal Intellectual Standards” articulated by Richard Paul and Linda Elders (2006) in *The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking: Concepts and Tools* and the matrix format developed by Washington State University’s *Guide to Rating Critical & Integrative Thinking*, our guide can be used to assess both oral and written communication. The GTAs use the guide to train students in composing speeches and to grade assignments in SPEE 100. See *Appendix A to view the Guide to Assessing Critical Thinking*.

The SPEE 100 course in which we implemented our program is a hybrid course wherein students are instructed in many facets of communication theory including public speaking, interpersonal, nonverbal, listening, intercultural, conflict, and group communication processes. Because the guide for critical thinking was developed in this context, we believe that the guide has broad applicability and that it would be suitable not just in this communication course but in virtually any introductory communication course, including written composition courses, at both the high school and collegiate level.

The Eight Criteria of the Critical Thinking Matrix

We have specified eight criteria for evaluating critical thinking in either speeches or written texts: purpose, thesis, information, concepts, assumptions, inference, point of view, and implications. These eight criteria can be used by students and teachers in a number of ways including evaluating sources such as magazine or newspaper articles, assessing one’s own composition prior to submission and grading of submitted work.

Criterion One: Purpose

Deliberate communication, such as a composed speech or essay, does not take place without motives. What does the speaker want to accomplish? What does the speaker hope to achieve?

Unless we, the audience, determine a speaker’s motives in producing a speech, we cannot properly assess it. We suggest students consider the difference between editorials and advertising campaigns. While the purpose of the author of an editorial might intend to persuade readers relative to a particular position, an advertiser’s purpose is to sell a product. Students are encouraged to consider how these differences impact their interpretation of a text. Our ability to interpret and evaluate a text is severely limited if we don’t consider purpose. As they write speeches, we urge students to reflect on steps they have taken to ensure that their purpose is clear and intelligible to their audience.

Criterion Two: Thesis

A thesis is the primary claim a speaker is attempting to demonstrate to the audience. A thesis is the heart of any composition and consists of a single, clear, declarative sentence. Speakers will often clearly articulate their thesis statements. Other times the thesis is implied which can make the process of identifying the thesis more difficult but no less important. In order to identify a thesis, a critical thinker should consider each of the parts of the composition. The entire composition should support a single claim. The thesis should clearly relate to the speaker's purpose. For example, if a speaker is interested in the environment and wants to give an audience ways to conserve energy, she might write a presentation with the thesis "you should turn off all electronic devices when not in use." Students should be able to identify the thesis of texts they read. In composing speeches, students should be able to clearly articulate their thesis statements.

Criterion Three: Information

Information, along with concepts and assumptions (the fourth and fifth criteria) is one of the building blocks critical thinkers use to reach conclusions, make decisions, and solve problems. Information is the starting point for critical thinking and critical thinking depends on good information. If your facts are wrong, your reasoning cannot produce true conclusions, good decision or viable solutions. The ability to evaluate information and assess its quality depends on the nature of the information, which may come in many forms.

The basic types of information are examples, witness testimony, and expert opinion. *Examples* are best used to clarify or demonstrate. The key word to identify an example is "like." When we are using examples we are saying, "This phenomenon that is unknown to you is like another phenomenon that is known to you" or "This complex phenomenon which is difficult to understand is like this less complex phenomenon which is easier to understand." *Testimony* is the offering of details, facts, and descriptions that the audience has not experienced firsthand. Even for those who have had similar experiences, testimony provides an alternate perspective on those experiences. Testimony allows the audience to have the experience through a witness (i.e., one who testifies). *Expert opinion* (sometimes called "authority"), while it is often confused with testimony, differs in some very important ways. A person becomes a witness by virtue of experience. A person becomes an expert by virtue of training or education. For example, if a person were to speak on the effects of smoking, the person might be a witness by virtue of being near someone who smoked and thus having had firsthand experience of the effects of smoking. A medical doctor who speaks on the effects of smoking, on the other hand, is an expert with a different kind of knowledge, one learned by study and training in the health of the human body.

Ethical speakers make it possible for audiences to think critically about the information they used. Good information is verifiable in the sense that (the audience may check on the accuracy of the information independent of the speaker) and credible (the source of the

information can be trusted). In evaluating sources like magazine articles and websites, students are encouraged to consider the information writers use and whether or not the writer has made it possible for readers to evaluate the source of that information. Similarly, when composing speeches, students are reminded to take steps to permit audience members to critically reflect upon and evaluate the information used.

Criterion Four: Concepts

Concepts help form the basis for reasoning. For example, before we can claim, “Scott Peterson murdered his wife, Lacy” we must know what it means to murder someone. How is murder distinct from other forms of homicide such as manslaughter? This is particularly important when our concepts are hard to define, and when speakers call upon audiences to make value judgments. If a speaker argues, for example, that the death penalty is wrong and should be abolished, he or she will need to be sure to define what is meant by “wrong.”

Teachers of critical thinking and logic have long recognized equivocation (using a word in two or more different ways) and ambiguity (using words in ways that permit multiple meanings) as fallacies. Critical speakers should clearly define important terms and concepts. Weaver (1967) pointed out that the word “define” comes from the Latin *finire* with means “to limit or set bounds” and we can think of defining as building “a fence around whatever is being defined, which separates it from everything else” (p. 25). This fence gives a speech clarity and avoids confusion (unintentional) or misleading (intentional) arguments.

Criterion Five: Assumptions

There is an old adage about assumptions: that when you use them you make an “ass out of you and me.” A humorous play on words to be sure but the implications expressed are misleading. Assumptions are dangerous because they influence our perception and because they are all too often unspoken and unexamined. They are also inevitable. No speech can begin with a history of the world and a philosophy of everything. Speakers have to start somewhere and that means they will, inevitably, leave something out. Behind every assumption, there lies another assumption. Our goal, then is not, as the saying suggests, to eliminate assumptions but rather to understand their impact to prevent unwarranted assumptions whenever possible.

The examination of our assumptions is a hard practice to implement and a difficult habit to develop. Our approach to developing this aspect of critical thinking begins with the position taken by Therborn (1980), that each of us has a set of assumptions about the world in which we live and that these assumptions are essential because without them we would be unable to function. Our assumptions tell us what we can expect; they orient us and help us to fill in the blanks in a world where all of our knowledge is partial. Therborn identified three foundational assumptions:

- *What's real (and not real; and more real)*
- *What's good (and bad; better or worse)*
- *What's possible (and impossible)*

Critical speakers consider their assumptions before they begin composing a speech. These three questions serve as a starting point from which students can begin to examine their assumptions about the world in order to determine whether or not the assumptions they are making are reasonable and whether or not it is reasonable to expect the audience to make the same assumptions. Moreover, as part of their critical evaluation of information, students are encouraged to ask the same questions with regard to the sources of information they read. Finally, as part of becoming critical speakers students are challenged to develop strategies to make their assumptions known to their audience. Where something is assumed—rather than known or demonstrated to be true—the critical speakers give the audience the same opportunity they had to examine those assumptions and chose whether or not to accept them.

Criterion Six: Inference

Inference is perhaps the most difficult and complex aspect of critical thinking. Philosophers and logicians have discussed this issue for centuries and there is still disagreement about what constitutes valid inference (sometimes called “derivation”), and how best to instruct students in the principles of its proper function. Critical thinking begins with credible information and clearly defined concepts, and reasonable assumptions. Inference is how we move from the information, concepts, and assumptions to valid conclusions. There are two ways in which this is done: deduction and induction. We find the distinction between the two is especially relevant for students as they develop their critical thinking skills.

Deduction is also sometimes called formal logic and it is the form of inference wherein if the premises are true the conclusion must be true. Deduction takes the form of a three-part structure called a *syllogism*:

Premise: If A is the same as B, and
Premise: If B is the same as C, then
Conclusion: Then A is the same as C

The strength of such reasoning is that, if we start with premises that are true, our conclusions will also be true. We encourage students to think of deductive reasoning like mathematics and, in fact, much of the advanced work in deductive reasoning involves the use of symbols rather than language because symbols permit invariance in meaning and a definitiveness of quality that is not possible in language. Although language is symbolic, “there are numberless gradations of meaning, of relationship, and of tone which must be taken into account” (Weaver, 1967, p. x).

This, unfortunately, results in a dilemma for if given premises which are true deduction can guarantee true conclusions but only if there is certainty with respect to the premises and only if there is an absolute precision in the use of language. The practical application of deductive inference is thus limited. Students are instructed to use deduction only when the concepts

involved are clear and precise and when they are certain of the accuracy of the information they are using. For example, students might argue deductively:

Premise: No form of punishment is justified if it cannot be applied fairly

Premise: It is impossible to apply the death penalty fairly

Conclusion: The death penalty is not justified.

Although the deductive inference is sound, students must be able to identify the weak points in their argument that deduction cannot remedy: whether or not the first premise is a reasonable assumption and whether or not the second premise is supported by good information.

The other form of inference, *induction*, is the form of logical reasoning wherein if the premises are true the conclusion is probably, but never certainly, true. Although incapable of producing certainty, induction is much more broadly applicable than deduction and if deduction is like mathematics, induction is the form of inference more closely related to science. Induction permits us to move from limited data to general claims or propositions.

For example, to continue the line of argument initiated above, let us suppose that a student claims that the death penalty is inherently unfair in its application. The student might consider the statistics relative to the application of the death penalty and argue that because the people of color and the poor are much more likely to receive the death penalty than whites and the wealthy, that the death penalty is discriminatory. That claim would require a consideration of death penalty cases. The student would not need to examine each and every case but only to consider a representative sample of cases. Enough cases would need to be looked at to draw a reasonable, but not absolutely certain, conclusion.

As noted previously, inference is the most difficult of the eight criteria for critical thinking. In developing our program we spend considerable time training Graduate Teaching Assistants in the principles of valid inference and the detection of fallacies. These lessons, then, were passed on to students in the recitation. Even then, developing a sense of sound inference is a time consuming process and one that places considerable demands upon students (see our reflection on issues and challenges later in this article).

Criterion Seven: Point of View

Whenever we speak, we become advocates for a particular belief, action, attitude, etc. Critical speakers understand that no matter how firmly they believe in the rightness of their position; there are others who believe just as firmly in the rightness of the opposite position. Critical speakers are attentive to this fact. They will identify alternatives (e.g., beliefs, ideas, proposal) and then try to understand why others advocate for those positions. Why do those who believe differently believe what they believe? Critical speakers acknowledge alternative beliefs and address them. This does not mean that critical thinkers actively attempt to refute everyone who thinks differently. On the contrary, critical thinkers demonstrate their willingness to consider alternative points of view and treat those with whom they disagree with respect. In our training of students, we attempt to instill what Scriven (1976) called the principle of charity or

the requirement that we start with the assumption that those with whom we disagree are as rational and reasonable as we believe ourselves to be and that they are persons of good will, open to consideration of our position and willing to give us a fair consideration of our information and reasoning. In evaluating sources of information, students are asked to identify writers' efforts to demonstrate their understanding of alternative points of view while in their composition of speeches, students are asked to take affirmative steps to show they understand and appreciate those with whom they disagree.

Criteria Number Eight: Implications

Richard Weaver (1953) noted that the power to speak "is a liberty to handle the world, to remake it, if only a little, and to hand it to others in a shape which may influence their actions.... The changes wrought by sentences are changes in the world..." (p. 119). When we advocate for a particular position, we take on certain obligations and responsibilities. When we convince a person to take a particular course of action we have some responsibility for the consequences of taking that action. Beliefs and ideas—like actions—have consequences. Critical speakers consider the consequences of the beliefs and ideas they advocate. They ask themselves what would happen if the speech is successful and what the likely outcome is.

When evaluating sources of information, students are asked to draw out the implications of the position they are reading. If you accept this person's claims, then what? How will this impact your other beliefs? Your attitudes? Your actions? Most importantly, however, students are charged with becoming responsible advocates who take their speaking seriously and always speak as though their words would, in fact, bring about changes in the world.

Assessment

Following the initial session in the large lecture where students are introduced to the basics of critical thinking, students are required to take a short quiz beginning with multiple choice questions in order to assess students' understanding and recollection of the key concepts of critical thinking. The multiple choice questions are followed by an essay question that permitted students the opportunity to apply the eight criteria for critical thinking to persuasive and informative messages. *See Appendix B for examples of the quizzes.*

We also provide classroom assignments, deliberative dialogues, which give students the opportunity for in-depth critical thinking, exploration, and assessment. According to the Deliberative Democracy Consortium (2007), deliberation is "an approach to decision-making in which citizens consider relevant facts from multiple points of view, converse with one another to think critically about options before them, and enlarge their perspectives, opinions, and understandings" (para. 1). We incorporated deliberative dialogues to encourage students to think critically about issues they see as important. Deliberative dialogues are a flexible format for discussion of issues in the classroom and can be applied in many different ways. Numerous

examples of deliberative dialogues can be found on line at www.studycircles.org. As we implemented them in our courses, students were required to participate in three in-class deliberative dialogues. Topics were selected based on their relevance and importance to the students in the class. *See Appendix C for an example of the Deliberative Dialogue Assignment.*

Students are required to develop a statement that they will deliver orally in class. These statements must include the student's stake (how the issue affects the student), source (a summary of the research the student has done on the topic), a statement of position (where the student stands on the issue), and if applicable, a solution (what does the student believe should be done). These statements are short, no more than three to five minutes in length, and start off the dialogue and discussion. Students are not allowed to respond, react or comment on other's students' statements until all the participants have finished. The floor is then opened up to discussion of the issues facilitated by the instructor who encourages open discussion and ensures that the dialogue does not degenerate into verbal aggression.

We should note that the number of students participating in each dialogue will vary depending on the constraints of each class. If class periods are short or if the class has a high enrollment, it may not be feasible to have the entire class participate in the dialogue. We believe it is important that each participant has enough time to make his/her statement and that sufficient time to discuss the issues raised be allowed in that class session. This may require breaking students into manageable groups with some students observing while others participate

The final element of the deliberative dialogue assignment is a reflection paper on the deliberative dialogue process. The students answer the following questions:

1. *After attending these dialogue sessions, what does the term deliberation mean to you?*
2. *Did our deliberative dialogue sessions change the way you think about social or political issues? Why or why not?*
3. *Which format for our discussions did you prefer: full circle, two groups, four groups or the on-line posting board? Why?*
4. *If you were to hear of a deliberative dialogue event in your community, would you attend? Why or why not?*

As a final question, we asked students to reflect upon the assignment itself and our goals as teachers. We wanted to know whether they believed that the deliberative dialogues were worthwhile and educationally valuable. Overwhelmingly, students have responded positively to the deliberative dialogue sessions:

I really liked the dialogue sessions. At first, I had a hard time sitting and just listening to the opinion of others, especially when it was a subject that I was really for or really against. I have found the dialogues have made me more aware to try to listen fully and then to comment. (student comment, 2007)

I would absolutely attend any deliberative dialogue. I like the idea that we can all choose a topic, explain why it matters, what others have to say about it then we try to find the

best solution. I would like to be more involved in the community which I think is the best way to learn and support each other. (student comment, 2007)

I really liked them because it gave all of us a chance to speak our opinions on the things that are affecting our lives and the lives of people close to us. It also helped us to open up more freely with our peers. This also made me more comfortable about speaking in class and made me realize that people care about what you are talking about and they also have the patience to listen to what we have to say. (student comment, 2007).

The purpose of the dialogue is to create an opportunity for students to become advocates for their beliefs and values in the public sphere. John Rawls (1997) pointed out, the “basic feature of democracy is the fact of reasonable pluralism – the fact that a plurality of conflicting reasonable comprehensive doctrines, religious, political and moral, is the normal result of its culture of free institutions” (para. 1). For Rawls, democracy could only be maintained where “rights, liberties and opportunities” (para. 21) were respected by everyone and such respect was impossible without at least a basic understanding of the perspectives of others. Therefore, we believe that while realizing consensus on issues is possible, it is not the goal of deliberative dialogues. Rather the goal is to develop skills in advocating one’s position while cultivating an understanding and respect for the positions of others.

To this end, the *Guide to Critical Thinking* we developed can be applied in several ways. First, students are required to engage in research before the dialogue begins. We encourage students to research broadly and to seek out a variety of sources including traditional avenues of research such as magazines, newspapers, and websites and less utilized sources of information such as interviews, surveys and personal experience. We suggest students use the *Guide to Critical Thinking* to assess each of the sources of information they consult in developing their statement. This not only encourages students to rely on quality sources of information but develops their critical thinking skills and encourages them to cultivate the habits of critical thinkers.

Second, if not all of the students in the class are able to participate in the dialogue, students in the observer role can use the *Guide to Critical Thinking* to assess the dialogue. We discourage students from using the *Guide* to assess individual students because we believe that the quality of the dialogue is not the product of any one student’s efforts but collectively constructed. Applying the *Guide* in this way further develops students habits of critical thinking and encourages them to understand the dialogue as a process that is greater than the sum of its parts.

Finally, the *Guide to Critical Thinking* is a mechanism whereby instructors can assess student growth and their development of critical thinking skills. The *Guide* is primarily an assessment tool and it is constructed to provide students with feedback that encourages them to build upon their understanding of critical thinking concepts and learn to apply those concepts to public discourse and deliberation. The instructor can use the *Guide* to assess the dialogue and in

the evaluation of reflection papers. The *Guide* thus becomes a tool to identify areas of competency and to develop strategies for improving critical thinking.

Issues and Challenges in the Implementation of the Critical Thinking Initiative

Challenges

The challenges we faced in the project centered around two themes. The first challenge was the number of students we were trying to reach. As previously noted, the SPEE 100 course serves approximately 750 students a semester in the lecture/recitation format. Additionally, the recitation sections were large with 30 students in each section, each meeting for only two hours a week. Our efforts to reach all 750 students included lectures, quizzes with essay format, and assignments to weave critical thinking throughout the course. The number of students unfortunately meant that we prioritized objective short answer assessments such as multiple choice exams rather than extended written responses that we believe are more consistent with critical thinking. Our ability to engage in in-depth dialogues was also hampered by the large number of students in each section.

The second challenge was the number of instructors who serve this course. The students have two teachers—a full-time faculty member who teaches the large lecture and a GTA who teaches in the recitation section. Furthermore, the course is served by a Basic Course Director who is in charge of the training and development of the teaching assistants: creating course assignments, creating a common syllabus/course calendar, and ensuring consistency throughout the 25 sections of the course. Therefore, although we had mandatory lectures and assignments engaging critical thinking exercises, we had to have some “blind faith” in our GTAs regarding how the message is reinforced during the recitations.

The challenges discussed above were addressed by implementing training during the GTA summer orientation program and by requiring a workshop for GTAs during the fall semester. While not all communication departments employ GTAs, we believe our training materials would prove useful as a guide for other speech communication instructors and/or departments.

Training Instructors

The training provided to instructors of SPEE 100 is twofold. First, during the summer orientation program, GTAs are taught how to implement the materials and assignments required in the SPEE 100 course, including critical thinking exercises and deliberative dialogues. GTAs engage in critical discussion groups during the summer orientation. Additionally, the GTAs read several academic articles written by authors who are writing from a critical pedagogical perspective. Through a series of small group discussions, the GTAs begin to grapple with pedagogical issues. During the summer orientation program, GTAs are also given specific

instruction regarding deliberative dialogues; the process is defined, illustrated, and practiced through a series of lectures and activities. The bulk of the training in critical thinking is conducted in a workshop early in the Fall term.

The workshop begins with a lecture about critical thinking skills similar to the lecture the students enrolled in SPEE 100 are given. The lecture defines critical thinking, examines the essential components of critical thinking, and explores the application of critical thinking to the basic communication course. Each instructor is given a workbook designed to both introduce them to critical thinking and provide them with exercises to practice critical thinking with their students. The workbook was provided to all instructors during a three hour workshop. The workshop introduces instructors to *The Guide to Assessing Critical Thinking* (“*The Guide*”) and gives them specific instructions to use *The Guide* as a rubric when grading speeches and evaluating essay exam questions and other assignments in the course.

Conclusion

Lipman (1988) pointed out that critical thinking is, in essence, about making judgments and judgments are the key to decision-making. Those who make good judgments about the information at their disposal, about the issues involved, about the possible outcomes, make better decisions than those who do not make good judgments. The key to making good judgments, Lipman went on, is having a set of criteria that defines good judgment and on the basis of which we can distinguish good judgment from bad judgment:

A criterion is an instrument for judging as an ax is an instrument for chopping. It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that there is some sort of logical connection between “critical thinking” and “criteria” and “judgment.” The connection, of course, is to be found in the fact that judgment is a skill, critical thinking is skillful thinking, and skills cannot be defined without criteria by means of which allegedly skillful performances can be evaluated. So critical thinking is thinking that both employs criteria and that can be assessed by appeal to criteria. (p. 40)

Our objective was to produce criteria for critical thinking that could be used both by students as a means of evaluating the information they consume and for reflecting upon their own thinking and that could be used by instructors as a means of assessing students’ critical thinking. We believe that the *Guide to Critical Thinking* we developed can fill both roles. Moreover, we believe that our efforts indicate that the *Guide* is not only easy to use in the classroom but also broadly applicable and can be employed in a variety of speaking and writing courses.

The importance of critical thinking cannot be overestimated. As Sezer (2008) noted, the goal of education is not the accumulation of facts but rather “to have students think for themselves” and “many educators and philosophers” (p. 350) have stressed that critical thinking is a prerequisite for education, not a product of it. As critical pedagogues, we reject what Freire (1996) called the “‘banking’ concept of education” wherein “the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat.” (p. 53). True

education, and a truly democratic system of education, must allow knowledge to emerge through “invention and re-invention, through restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry” (p. 53). We believe that by infusing critical thinking into basic courses in communication—in both the high schools and the colleges and universities—that we better serve the interests of students. We cannot say that we truly seek the goal that education is supposed to serve and not teach in such a way that we encourage students to think for themselves. As Freire also noted, “To affirm that men and women are persons and as persons should be free, and yet do nothing tangible to make this affirmation a reality, is a farce” (p. 32).

We hope that educators throughout the communication discipline will borrow freely from the lessons we have learned and make use of the methods we have developed and to continue the efforts to integrate critical thinking practices throughout their teaching.

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Endnotes

¹ Throughout this work we make reference to speaking and speeches because we have principally been teachers of speech. We believe that the guide we have developed is just as valuable in the composition and evaluation of written texts as it is in speeches.

Authors' Notes

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Appendix A Guide to Assessing Critical Thinking

1. PURPOSE

<i>Emerging</i>		<i>Developing</i>		<i>Mastering</i>	
1	2	3	4	5	6
The reasoner's purpose is unspecified – neither stated clearly nor easily inferred from the composition.		The reasoner's purpose can be determined but needs to be more clearly presented.		The reasoner's purpose is clear and unambiguous.	
No effort is made to justify purposes.		The reasoner's purposes are ambiguous.		The reasoner justifies his/her purpose.	
		The reasoner makes an effort to justify his/her purposes.			
Comments:					

2. THESIS

<i>Emerging</i>		<i>Developing</i>		<i>Mastering</i>	
1	2	3	4	5	6
No clear thesis is presented or implied.		The reasoner's thesis lacks clarity or needs development.		The question is clear and well-formed.	
		The reasoner needs to more clearly define the relationship between the question and the purpose.		There is a clear and exact relationship between the speaker's purpose and the question.	
Comments:					

3. INFORMATION

<i>Emerging</i>		<i>Developing</i>		<i>Mastering</i>	
1	2	3	4	5	6
The reasoner does not cite any information/fails to provide reasoning behind his/her conclusions.		The reasoner cites or references information and experiences.		The reasoner bases conclusions on relevant and accurate information.	
The reasoner relies on inaccurate or unverifiable information.		The reasoner needs to do more to ensure that the information is accurate and verifiable.		The reasoner makes an effort to ensure that the information is verifiable.	
Comments:					

4. CONCEPTS

<i>Emerging</i>		<i>Developing</i>		<i>Mastering</i>	
1	2	3	4	5	6
The reasoner makes little or no effort to define terms/clarify ideas.		The reasoner makes some effort to define key terms or ideas but needs to be more explicit and clearer.		The reasoner makes a concerted effort to define all ambiguous terms and clarify important concepts.	
The reasoner prevaricates/equivocates with respect to key terms or ideas.		The reasoner needs to be more careful about using terms consistently.		The reasoner uses consistent and precise language.	
Comments:					

5. ASSUMPTIONS

<i>Emerging</i>		<i>Developing</i>		<i>Mastering</i>	
1	2	3	4	5	6
The reasoner makes a unsupported or unjustified assumptions. The reasoner seems unaware of the assumptions upon which his/her reasoning is based.		The reasoner needs to show more concern for/pay more attention to his/her assumptions. The reasoner needs to make his/her assumptions clear.		The reasoner does not make unreasonable or unjustified assumptions. The reasoner is open and clear about what he/she is assuming.	
Comments:					

6. INFERENCE

<i>Emerging</i>		<i>Developing</i>		<i>Mastering</i>	
1	2	3	4	5	6
The reasoner does not develop a clear line of reasoning between information and the conclusions he/she draws.		The reasoner needs to pay more attention to principles of valid reasoning/derivation. The reasoner needs to make his/her reasoning clearer.		The reasoner has clearly articulated and valid reasoning.	
Comments:					

7. POINT OF VIEW

<i>Emerging</i>		<i>Developing</i>		<i>Mastering</i>	
1	2	3	4	5	6
The reasoner is unaware of or uncharitable toward alternative points of view (relies on stereotypes, simplistic interpretations, “straw man” arguments.		The reasoner does not demonstrate a complete understanding of or appreciation for alternative points of view. The reasoner needs to do more to respond to relevant objections of those with a different point of view.		The reasoner fully understands and appreciates the points of view of others. The reasoner makes a concerted effort to address the objections of those with a different point of view.	
Comments:					

8. IMPLICATIONS

<i>Emerging</i>		<i>Developing</i>		<i>Mastering</i>	
1	2	3	4	5	6
The reasoner seems unaware of or unconcerned with the implications of his/her position.		The reasoner is aware of but does not demonstrate a concern for the implications of his/her position. The reasoner has a simplistic/undeveloped understanding of the implications of his/her position.		The reasoner understands and appreciates the consequences of or associated with his/her position.	
Comments:					

Appendix B

Example Quiz A

Part One (five points)

1. The form of derivation wherein if the premises are true the conclusions must be true is called
 - a. **Deduction**, b. Induction, c. Logic, d. Inference, e. Implication
2. Which of the following is NOT one of the Criteria for Thinking?
 - a. Accuracy, b. Breadth, c. **Point of View**, d. Clarity, e. Charity
3. The form of derivation which is most like science is called
 - a. Deduction, b. **Induction**, c. Logic, d. Inference, e. Implication
4. Which of the Criteria for Thinking demands that we assume the best possible case with respect to interpreting the positions of others?
 - a. Relevance, b. Point of View, c. **Charity**, d. Breadth, e. Significance
5. Which of the Criteria for Thinking asks us to consider whether or not our conclusions follow from the evidence?
 - a. Deduction, b. **Logic**, c. Breadth, d. Significance, e. Clarity

Part Two (five points)

Read the following two statements. Who makes the better argument? Explain your answer in a short essay (200–300 words). Your essay will be evaluated according to the critical thinking matrix.

(1) From “A Defense of Media Monopoly” (*Communications Lawyer*, Fall 2003) by Clyde Wayne Crews, Jr.

Information Cannot Be Monopolized

The most frequent justification offered for restricting media ownership is to prevent monopolization of viewpoints expressed in the media, i.e., to protect diversity in ideas. But the media are merely conduits for information of every sort, and information cannot be monopolized where the government does not practice censorship. The media are an implementation of free speech, not its enemy. Although this article is not a venue for a treatise on the follies of antitrust law over the past century (that has of late found potential monopolies in pickles, intense mints, and premium ice cream), let it at least be offered for consideration that there is no such phenomenon as a media monopoly unanswerable to the rest of society, and to the economy potentially arrayed against the media, if it were to abuse its station in society.

Absent government censorship, there is no fundamental scarcity of information. More information can always be created, and in a free society, nobody can silence anybody else. The most that big media can do is refuse to share their megaphones and soapboxes, which is not a violation of anyone’s rights. Real suppression requires governmental censorship, or the actual prohibition of the airing of alternative views.

(2) From “Policing the Thinkable” (Opendemocracy.net, October 2001) by Robert W. McChesney

Over the past two decades, as a result of neoliberal deregulation and new communication technologies, the media systems across the world have undergone a startling transformation. There are now fewer and larger companies controlling more and more, and the largest of them are media conglomerates, with vast empires that cover numerous media industries.

Media industries are barely competitive in the economic sense of the term. The giants do compete ferociously, but they do so under the rules of oligopolistic markets, meaning they have far greater control over their fate than those in truly competitive markets. It also means that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for newcomers to enter these markets as viable players.

By most theories of liberal democracy, such a concentration of media power into so few hands is disastrous for the free marketplace of ideas, the bedrock upon which informed self-government rests. The key to making markets work in the consumers’ interest is that they be open to newcomers, but the present conglomerate-dominated markets are not even remotely competitive in the traditional sense of the term.

This is not a new problem for capitalist media. In fact, in the United States, it was nothing short of a crisis a century ago, as one-newspaper towns and chain newspapers terminated competition in the American newspaper market, then the primary purveyor of journalism. Journalism at the time was still quite partisan, whence the political crisis that resulted from virtual monopoly. It was one thing for newspapers to be opinionated when there were several in a community and it was relatively easy to enter the market. It was quite another thing to have opinionated journalism when there were monopoly newspapers and they stridently advocated the political positions of their owners and major advertisers.

Example Quiz B

Part One (five points)

1. Perception involves which of the following activities:
(a) Selection, Organization, Framing; (b) Selective attention, Selective exposure, Selective retention; (c) Closure, Proximity, Similarity; (d) Physiology, Psychology, Culture; (e) **Selection, Organization, Interpretation**
2. True/False: According to the lecture, all perception begins with a model or picture of the world that has three parts, what is good, what is possible, and what is logical.
(a) True; (b) **False**
3. Filling in the details so that a partially perceived entity appears to be complete is called
(a) Organization; (b) Similarity; (c) Proximity (d) **Closure**; (e) Framing
4. A _____ is a fixed, previously determined view of events, objects, or people.
(a) Stereotype; (b) **Perceptual set**; (c) Attribution error; (d) Frame; (e) Interpretation
5. The process for attempting to understand the reason behind other's behaviors is called:
(a) **Attribution**; (b) Psychology; (c) Interpretation; (d) Framing; (e) Stereotyping

Part Two (five points)

Take a moment to look at the picture below. What is going on here? In a short essay (200-300 words), describe what you think is taking place and then reflect upon your perceptions; what you think has influenced your interpretation of this picture?



http://chiapas.indymedia.org/display.php3?article_id=147832

Note. The [Independent Media Center](http://chiapas.indymedia.org/) website notes “All content is free for reprint and rebroadcast, on the net and elsewhere, for non-commercial use, unless otherwise noted by author” (<http://chiapas.indymedia.org/>)

Appendix C

Deliberative Dialogue Assignment

What is “deliberation”?

“Deliberation is an approach to decision-making in which citizens consider relevant facts from multiple points of view, converse with one another to think critically about options before them and enlarge their perspectives, opinions, and understandings” (The Deliberative Democracy Consortium at <http://www.deliberative-democracy.net/deliberation/>).

Dialogue Assignment & Issue	Date
Dialogue #1: Proposed Statewide Smoking Ban	
Dialogue #2: Issue TBD	
Dialogue #3: Race and Racism	
Dialogue #4: Issue TBD	
Deliberative Dialogue Response Paper	

We hope this project may become a lens through which you see your role as a citizen of your community, state, nation and world. But, again, achieving such lofty goals, both in the “real world” and this classroom, is anything but easy; it will require us to utilize a number of interpersonal, intercultural and small group communication skills ...

Your Responsibilities as Participants:

Speaking:

- ✓ Follow the guidelines listed under “Preparing Your Statement”
- ✓ You have approximately one minute to make your statement – be sure to practice in advance
- ✓ PA 105 is long and narrow -- speak as loudly and clearly as possible
- ✓ Practice the skills of effective delivery – make eye contact, use gestures appropriately, use inclusive language

Listening:

- ✓ Listen carefully and thoughtfully to what others have to say
- ✓ Don’t mentally practice your statement while others are making theirs
- ✓ Avoid any distracting nonverbal feedback – rolling eyes, shaking head, clapping, yawning
- ✓ Do not engage in any direct verbal response – don’t try to build consensus (“It sounds like what we’re all saying is ...”), don’t cross-talk (“Building off of what Mary said earlier...”) and don’t offer commentary (“If you believe what Robert said, then our nation is headed ...”).

After Each Dialogue Session:

- ✓ Turn in the written/typed copy of your statement, including the reference for your “formal” source
- ✓ Take a few notes on what you heard, and how you felt about what you heard – you’ll need them for your Deliberative Dialogue Response Paper
- ✓ Keep any personal anecdotes or statements of belief you heard confidential

My Responsibilities as Facilitator:

Timekeeping:

- ✓ Everyone will be heard -- at the 1 min 30 sec mark I will cut a speaker's comments off.

Moderating:

- ✓ If emotions flare, I will step in and try to restore a sense of calm. A personal statement can sometimes feel like a personal attack, and when people are attacked, they tend to respond in a similar fashion. My job is to keep the discussion running smoothly and safely for everyone.

Questioning:

- ✓ If a participant offers too short of a statement (particularly in the first two dialogues), I will ask them questions which will attempt to draw out the requisite components of his/her statement.

Listening:

- ✓ The same rules for the participant apply to the facilitator.

Grading:

- ✓ You will have earned the full 20 points if you fulfill your responsibilities as listed at left.
- ✓ If your behavior impairs the ability of any participant to participate in the dialogue, you will lose all points for that session.
- ✓ Religious, cultural and/or political perspectives will have no impact on participant's grade for this assignment, or on any other assignment in this course.

Preparing Your Statement

Your statement must contain three essential elements:

Stake: How directly does this issue affect your life? What do you have to gain or lose from your position within this issue?

Source: What have other scholars or researchers said about this issue? What statistics, findings or comments support, refute or generally inform your position?

Statement of Position: Where do you stand on the issue? Are you firm in your position, or are you ultimately undecided? What values have brought you to this position?

Depending upon the nature of the issue being discussed, your statement may also contain one additional element:

Solution: What do you think should be done? What kind of a solution would you find to be fair?

Sample Statement for the Statewide Smoking Ban Dialogue:

My "Stake"

I have to admit, I'm a bit split on this issue. I don't smoke, and I truly enjoy a smoke-free environment when I go out to eat. I want people to be healthy, and if the figures cited in the "Tobacco Industry" article from CQ Researcher are accurate, state governments in the U.S. spend well over seven billion dollars annually to treat smoking-related diseases. That's certainly a lot of money for taxpayers to pay. But, I'm troubled by the way this debate uses the term "smokers." I drink alcohol on occasion, but I would be upset if people referred to me as a "drinker." Smokers are people, and all people make choices – both good and bad. I have to remember that even as I point the finger at others' consumer choices, I should also be willing to look critically at my own consumer choices as well. Should my ability to eat ice cream, drive a car and purchase products be regulated for the health of myself, others, and the environment? Maybe so, but I'd hope we could do it in a shared, thoughtful and inclusive way. Maybe a better, more inclusive solution than an overall ban would have been to offer permits for "smoking" establishments, and make low interest business loans available to owners of bars and restaurants so that they could raise ceiling height, redesign lounges and/or update ventilation.

My "Source"

My
"Statement"My
"Solution"**Citing Sources:**

Please use APA style (see below) for citing your academic sources. Most databases will create a citation for you using the "Cite Now" feature. If you have questions, please see or email me.

Cooper, M. H. (2004, December 10). Tobacco industry. *CQ Researcher*, 14, 1025-1048.
Retrieved September 10, 2006, from CQ Researcher Online,
<http://library.cqpress.com.ezproxy.mnsu.edu:2048/cqresearcher/cqresrre2004121000>