

Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment Department

Best Practices in Critical Thinking

Teacher utilizes **critical thinking skills** to enhance student understanding and comprehension.

Critical Elements – Evidence of critical thinking skills is utilized to support standards-based learning in the content areas.

- Create a thinking environment
- Map the metacognitive conversation
- Vocabulary development
- Questioning
- Habits of Mind
- Movement toward independent learning

Create a Thinking Environment

- Establish and uphold shared norms for classroom routines and procedures.
- Set the tone for the class by motivating students, providing positive reinforcement, and modeling thinking strategies.
- Develop procedures for students to interact and get to know each other.
- Develop procedures for using collaborative work groups or study groups in class.
- Build classroom libraries and resources.
- Provide a variety of alternative materials to meet students' developmental learning needs.
- Provide opportunities for individual choice of assignments or responses.
- Use writing as an instructional tool for introducing topics, reflecting on ideas, and summarizing for discussion, more extensive writing assignments, or test preparation.
- Provide opportunities for discussion skill development including sharing initial thoughts, brainstorming, debating, and other forms of discussing ideas, concepts, and issues.
- Provide opportunities for personal reflection and making connections including text to self, text to text, and text to world.

Map the Metacognitive Conversation

- Use think aloud strategies for deepening comprehension in the content area.
- Use reciprocal teaching strategies as a way to summarize and focus understanding of a single text.
- Establish a format for literature circles to strengthen understanding of content area readings based on students' interests and reading abilities.

- Develop activities that encourage student interaction with the text using note-taking and paraphrasing for clarification and greater understanding.
- Provide opportunities for reflection through learning logs, journals, diaries, and think-pair-share and KWL activities.
- Pose questions to provide opportunities for students to make inferences and see connections in material, data, and ideas.
- Provide opportunities for students to synthesize information as they summarize what they are reading, what they have discussed, and what they have learned.
- Provide opportunities for students to evaluate what they have read, written, observed, or discussed in class.

Vocabulary Development

- Establish word walls to identify the language specific to the content area.
- Create classroom glossaries that study the language of the discipline.
- Encourage students to highlight new and unknown words and promote both an understanding and ownership of new language.
- Use semantic mapping as a tool to increase language development and recognize relationships among words and their meanings.
- Examine the words of the content area and identify classifications for words and associations between them.

Questioning

- Use the essential questions of the planned course of study as a guide to introducing, reinforcing, and assessing critical concepts of the content area.
- Employ the use of before, during, and after questions in the reading process.
- Encourage the development of student-generated questions as a classroom practice.
- Use questions to help students interrogate:
 - Purpose of an assignment
 - Information and data
 - Inferences and conclusions
 - Concepts and ideas
 - Assumptions
 - Implications
 - Points of view.

Habits of Mind

- Encourage students to be accurate and seek accuracy.
- Encourage students to seek clarity.
- Encourage students to be open-minded and remain open to new ideas.
- Encourage students to restrain impulsively and promote contemplation and thoughtful examination of ideas.
- Encourage students to take a position by using information to support an idea.

- Encourage students to be sensitive to the feelings of others and to their level of knowledge.

Movement Toward Independent Learning

- Create classroom environments where instruction is flexibly delivered in both whole-group and small-group settings.
- Practice tiered-learning as a method of differentiating instruction and meeting students' independent learning needs.
- Provide multiple assignments so that students can have choice based on learning styles.
- Provide enrichment activities for students to extend their learning of a topic of particular interest or level of expertise.
- Encourage opportunities for students to reflect, evaluate, and consider their own thinking, writing, and other forms of personal expression.