

Critical Curiosity

Overview

Critical Curiosity is about asking questions. It is to wonder who, why, what, when, where, if and how. It is the refusal simply to accept information at face value, and the determination to look beneath the surface. It knows that asking questions might ultimately be more valuable than having all the answers.

Critical Curiosity is dynamic and an expression of 'learning energy'. It reflects a desire to drill down into information looking for further clues and related messaging. These learners are much less accepting of received wisdom, like to get below the surface of apparent truths to find out more than is being offered to them. They value 'getting to the root cause' and are more likely to adopt the more challenging learning strategies.

Learners with high levels of critical curiosity will be unlikely to accept what they are told uncritically, enjoy asking questions and are more likely to reveal their questions, doubts and uncertainties publicly. They like to come to their own conclusions and are inclined to view new knowledge as an opportunity for investigation and enquiry. They are often the first to take responsibility for their own learning and enjoy the challenge. These learners may be something of a teacher's nightmare, but a gift to the corporate learning and personal development executive.

Conversely, learners low in critical curiosity exhibit passivity, indicating a low level of 'learning energy' with the learner quick to accept what they are told uncritically, believing that 'received wisdom' is necessarily the truth. Laziness and detachment are often traits, not participating because they do not have the ability but because active speculation and exploratory debate requires an energy that is not currently part of their persona.

But, students do not acquire these skills by themselves. Rather, the evidence suggests that the innate curiosity of the infant often erodes rather than strengthens in the face of 'schooling'.

The promotion of critical curiosity requires a new role for teachers, which is based not on the traditional transmission of information but on process-oriented teaching, which ensures that students are actively involved in the learning process and become lifelong learners and where critical curiosity depends on productive interactions between student and teacher.

Critical thinking, therefore, is unlikely to develop within a classroom culture that is highly teacher-directed, where responsibility for asking questions sits firmly with the teacher and learner participation revolves around answering teacher's questions.

Going deeper

Curiosity sparks the 'what if?' moment of invention. But Curiosity is also the beginning-point of an 'authentic enquiry', to wonder why something might happen, to wonder who, what, when, where, if and how. This kind of enquiry has to occur more or less spontaneously for genuine learning to occur. It is impossible to fake, and either 'spoonfeeding' students or 'training to the test' does nothing to inspire curiosity – especially when asking a question might be viewed as a challenge to the teacher (who may also be reluctant to appear wanting for knowledge); or otherwise as an admission of ignorance on the part of the student. Remember that asking questions might ultimately be more valuable than knowing all the answers. **Critical Curiosity might be thought of as the Enthusiasm to Learn.**

From the research: 'Some learners manifest a desire to find things out. They like to get below the surface of things and try to find out what is going on. They value 'getting at the truth', and are more likely to adopt 'deep' rather than 'surface' learning strategies. They are less likely to accept what they are told uncritically enjoy asking questions, and are more willing to reveal their questions and uncertainties in public. They like to come to their own conclusions about things, and are inclined to see knowledge as a product of human inquiry. They take ownership of their own learning and enjoy a challenge. The opposite pole is passivity. Passive learners are more likely to accept what they are told uncritically, and to believe that 'received wisdom' is necessarily true. They appear to be less thoughtful, and less likely to engage spontaneously in active speculation and exploratory kinds of discussion.'

The Principal Characteristics of the critically curious learner are:

- Enjoying a challenge and confronting complexity.
- Learning principally by working things out personally, a natural problem-solver seeking out information but always needing to understand its applications and implications.
- Tending not to accept any proposition at face value.
- Reflecting a desire to drill down into information looking for further clues and related messaging.
- Much less accepting of received wisdom, likes to get below the surface of apparent truths to find out more than is being offered to them.
- More likely to reveal their questions, doubts and uncertainties publicly.
- Calling up logical and rational skills to work things out.
- Constructing good arguments and spotting the flaws in others'.
- Often being the first to take responsibility for their own learning and enjoying the challenge.

These learners are both a teacher's joy and a teacher's nightmare, not being prepared to accept what appears to them to be either unsubstantiated or incomplete.