Reflective Judgment: A Developmental Model of Critical Thinking

Venture Studies courses center on questions or problems in order to offer students the opportunity to develop strategies for ever-more sophisticated responses. Professors focus first on developing students’ recognition about the nature of knowledge. As students advance through the curriculum, they learn to apply knowledge to problems, take a position, and come to understand that knowledge does something. At the highest level, the student considers the risks of erroneous conclusion and the consequences of alternative judgments in order to defend the most complete, plausible, or compelling conclusion based upon the available evidence.

The Stages of Critical Thinking

Pre-reflective Thinking

Students are interested in authority-based “right” answers, believe knowledge is certain, and offer no evaluation of evidence to support a claim.

Quasi-reflective Thinking

Students understand that knowledge is contextual, but do not yet understand how evidence leads to a conclusion.

Reflective Thinking

Students see that knowledge yields conclusions about complex problems, having evaluated information from a variety of sources.

Venture Studies is indebted to the University of Michigan, which has been a leader in using The Reflective Judgment model. Based on research by Dewey, Piaget, Perry, Fischer and others, it describes how changes in epistemological assumptions affect critical thinking. The University of Michigan website is a useful resource:
http://www.umich.edu/~refjudg/index.html