The Obstacles to Critical Thinking

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Expected learning outcomes:

Participants will:

- Experience critical thinking in the Socratic dialogue
- Face with their own obstacles to critical thinking
- Improve their active listening and thinking skills

Component of competences :
- Readiness to question my own and others' views, beliefs and theories
- Willingness to identify and accept my own and other people's strengths and weaknesses
- Readiness to learn from challenges
- Readiness to strive for mutual understanding and meaningful dialogue
- Capacity to face the challenge of doubt and uncertainties
- Self-knowledge and introspection
- Understanding of the subjective nature of all knowledge of self and others
- Knowledge about the relationship of self and group
- Aptitude to elicit and respond to others' beliefs, values and feelings and behaviours

Cards for democracy

Time: 45 minutes

Materials needed: All participants need paper and pencil. A flip chart or whiteboard.

Resources (references, links):

- Brenifier, Oscar (2007): La pratique de la philosophie à l'école primaire, Paris: Alcofribas nasier http://www.pratiques-philosophiques.fr/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/The-art-of-philosophical-practice-mise-en-page-1.pdf

Steps:

1. Participants to sit in a circle (they need to be able to see each other face to face and write).

2. Give an introduction and highlight that the activity is a 'critical thinking game'.

3. Encourage participants to engage in the game because a game is a game only if participants are involved to ply. Then explain all game has its rules and propose three rules of engagement:

1) All participants who want to talk have to put their hand up before they start to talk (or you may use a talking stick)
2) When a participant is allowed to talk he/she needs to say what kind of talk he/she will use (question, suggestion, explanation, answer etc.) You may want to be aware of this list of type of speech acts:
   a. Representatives: assertions, statements, claims, hypotheses, descriptions, suggestions.
   b. Commissives: promises, oaths, pledges, threats, vows.
   c. Directives: commands, requests, challenges, invitations, orders, summons, dares.
   d. Declarations: blessings, sentencings, declaring s.o.out of order, etc.
   e. Expressives: greetings, apologies, congratulations, condolences, thanksgivings...
   f. Verdictives: rankings, assessments, appraising, condoning
3) During the exercise at any one time only one person is allowed to talk and all other participants are supposed to listen.

4. Ask participants if anybody knows what an '*argument*' is. Very often some of the participants are not sure what argument is. If it is that case ask if someone from the group can explain. Allow participants who don't know what argument is to choose who will explain. If the first explanation is not clear to participants who asked for it allow another participant to create an explanation.

5. After explanation (definition) of argument check understandings in the group and make sure that in the end, all participants know what an argument is.

6. As soon as you sure that all participants now what argument is, write on the board aquestion with controversial issue (for example: "*Would I still be I if I changed my gender*").

7. Instruct participants to write an answer and an argument.

8. Ask participants who has answered 'yes' and who has answered 'no'.

This is important step because some of participants would say "maybe", or "partly" or "fifty-fifty". This is a strategy to avoid critical inquiry because those answers don't need strong argumentation. Encourage choosing yes or no.

9. Invite some of participants to read they answer and argument.

In this step after reading an answer ask participants: who thinks that the person who has read their answer and argument have completed their task? Does anyone think that this participant hasn't completed the task? Instruct respondents to ask for explanations and evaluate whether the tasks was completed.

10. Ask participants if they agree on the offered answer and argumentation.

Insist on the exploration of this offered argument, since some of the participants might try to read their answers and not to engage in exploration ideas of others.

Example:

- Ask participants who don't agree with read argument to put hands up.

- Tell the participant who wrote argument to choose who will tell her/him why she/he doesn't agree.

- The chosen participant should answer why she/he doesn't agree with argument.

- The participant who wrote the argument should evaluate this response from the participant who doesn't agree and answer if she/he agrees or not and why.

11. Continue this way until you have explore the topic deeply enough.

12. **Debriefing**: discussion on feelings, thinking and reflecting

    a.   Ask participants to form group of 3 persons. Instruct them to write on the piece of paper individually: their feeling during exercise, reflection on thinking and evaluation what did she/he learnt. After 5 minutes ask participants to share what they have written with each other.

    b.   All groups should report shortly about their debriefing: one member will talk about feelings of all members of the group, another will talk about reflection and the third about learning during exercise. In this step, participants are not expected to follow the rules of engagement described in #3.

13. **Evaluation**:

    a.   How many participants took part in exercise?
    b.   How many participants experienced strong emotions?
    c.   Did all participants experience cognitive conflict?

Tips for trainers

We suggest you follow these principles for Socratic questioning:

- **Answer each question by a question**.
- **Enforcing yes/no answers during workshop.**
- **The workshop is guided as an agenda, not as a debate.**

   Many participants are using "maybe" or "fifty-fifty" options to answer and some of them are advocating for it. It can appear meaningful and noble because intuitively we feel that the world isn't black and white. On the other hand, our answer is never balanced to be in the middle of "yes" and "no". Finding a balance is extremely difficult and it demands to explore "yes" and "no" options. Participants who answer with "maybe" commonly are trying to avoid mistakes and avoiding mistakes is good way to avoid learning.

- Underline that the whole exercise is a game or experiment.
- Keep on rules of the game.
- Keep on hard feelings! Don't be angry, just follow the game.
- Everything what is happening during a workshop is a real thing, not a preparation for real life or an imitation of life.
- Follow the process of dialogue; focus on process not outcome.
- All statements should be followed by argument.
- Follow arguments wherever they lead.
- Participants are free to talk about their ideas and about things they don't understand.
- Keep on logical fallacies. You should debunk faulty logic (this is different from censorship and preventing the expression of 'bad' thoughts).
- Everything that happens during workshop should be object of inquiry and stimulus for the agenda.
- Students, participants are listening to each other.

- All present are participating in the workshop.
- Students mustn't find out the facilitator's/teacher's opinion about the discussed object.
- Study Plato to prepare yourself for this exercise (follow argumentation in dialogues "Meno", "The Republic", "Protagoras", "Trial of Socrates", "Symposium".
- If participants are young children or people inexperienced in critical thinking they will pass three phases:

<u>1. Subjectivism</u>

You can expect arguments based on the personal opinion. Examples:

"She/he is not right because I think differently."

"I will read my answer to show that she/he isn't right!"

<u>2. Relativism</u>

Some participants don't want to confront with others and relativistic position is common ground for them. Examples:

"She/he is right for herself/himself."

"Everything is relative."

It is extremely difficult to overcome this situation in one session. Be patient and try through a few sessions. You can use this story about Mulla Nasrudin:

> *Judge Nasrudin was listening to a case. After hearing the plaintiff present his side, Nasrudin remarked, "You're right."*
> *Then, after the defendant had presented his case, Nasrudin again remarked, "Yes, you're right."*
> *Nasrudin's wife had been listening to the case, and remarked, "that doesn't make any sense—how can both the defendant and palintiff be right?"*
> *"You know what?" Nasrudin responded. "You're right, too!"*

<u>3. Dogmatism</u>

Some participants would be dogmatic about their adopted attitudes and knowledge. Try to confront them with counterexample.

During a workshop with primary school children I proposed question: "Should you always trust older people?" I was really surprised when I found that all children answered positive. Then, I proposed next question: "Should you trust your father if he told you that he has talked with the dog?" There were opposite ideas on this question and this counterexample provoked thinking.

The task is to overcome all of it and develop meaningful dialogue.

Reflections on challenges and potential difficulties

Typical situations which should be used as challenges and opportunity for critical thinking:

Participants ask for explanation

Do not explain anything! Ask explanation from participants. Participant who ask explanation should assess if explanations offered by other participants are fine for her/him.

Participant arrived late

Ask other participants to explain what was happening while she/he wasn't come.

Participant doesn't participate in exercise

Propose her/his non-participation as subject of agenda ☺

Participant is experiencing hard feelings.

It is a very good sign. Ask her/him what to do. Offer choice to leave workshop or only to observe. Participant has opportunity to rejoin when she/he is ready for it.

"I created answer in my head, but I haven't written it."

Insist on writing because a spoken and written idea is a different thing.

"I have a problems choosing." Some participants have a problem to make decision. At first explore is it a dilemma or some confusion. You may encourage participants to make a decision by choosing randomly (flip a coin for example).

Participant is not reading the answer but improvising

It is usually attempt to change the past ☺ Insist on reading. Again, you can propose this situation as a subject of the agenda.