

Critical thinking: Teaching for transfer

What it involves: Giving students ample opportunity to abstract what it is they *did* when they engaged in critical thinking. The idea here is to actively decontextualize knowledge by getting students to look for general principles and then to anticipate or even practice applying those principles to other areas.

Why it might work: Recent research on college and graduate students suggests that transfer *can* be activated and enhanced by generating abstract principles (see Perkins and Salomon).

Strategies and examples:

- As a follow-up assignment to a paper analyzing and integrating several arguments, ask students to summarize what steps they took in completing the analysis. Or, ask students to abstract their methods as they build an argument, perhaps even handing in the “methods” sheet along with a formal paper.
- As a “capstone” assignment for a course, ask students to reflect on the general principles at work in their arguments or analyses for this class and then to connect them to work done in the past or to anticipate how those skills would apply to problems or situations they might reasonably encounter outside of school.

Resources:

Perkins, D.N. & Salomon, G. (1989) Are cognitive skills context-bound? *Educational Researcher* 18 (1), 16-25.

Salomon, G. and Perkins, D.N. (1989). Rocky roads to transfer: Rethinking mechanisms of a neglected phenomenon. *Educational psychologist* 24(2), 113-142.