Critical Thinking in Foreign Languages

Analyzing Culture

Applied Critical Thinking Activity Number Two

1. Explain to students that critical thinking is the focus of A&T’s Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), a SACS requirement designed to improve student achievement in critical thinking and to help them **Inquire, Analyze, and Make Decisions**. As students develop their critical thinking skills, they will be able to better compete with students from other universities.

2. Emphasize that students need to be able to analyze situations to make rational decisions. However, the use of reasonable assumptions is also an important part of developing critical thinking skills.

3. Read the following issue, which is fairly vague, and develop an analysis (list of component parts) that will lead to good advice for a traveler going to another country.

   **How to Avoid Offending Cultural Sensitivities:** When a person from one country travels to another country, it is easy for the traveler to offend people in the host country if the traveler is ignorant of the culture of the host country.

4. Let the traveler be from the United States. Choose a foreign country with which students are most familiar. Have student pairs develop a list (analyze) of the cultural components and/or situations of the host country in which it would be easy for a person from the United States to cause offense. The questions below will help in the analysis. Make students aware that these questions build critical thinking skills, and these same critical thinking skills can be applied in their daily lives.

   - “Is this a question that has one right answer or can there be more than one reasonable answer?”
   - Does this question require judgment rather than facts” (Paul & Elder, 2009, p. 4)?
   - What is “the main purpose of this” analysis (Paul & Elder, 2009, p. 11)?
   - What is “the most important information” needed (p. 11)?
   - What are the cultural components that should be included and why?

5. After about 10 minutes, have student pairs write their lists/analyses and clearly explain why they included each component. After the pairs have presented, lead a class discussion on judging the quality of analysis and the critical thought of others and themselves.

6. It is important to emphasize that students must become self-aware of their own critical thinking.