

Commentary & Recommendations on the words “Critical” and “Critically” in the Act 1 Working Group’s Revised EQS Manual & Further Thoughts on Drafting a Definition of ‘Critical Thinking’

*Amanda Garces and Mark Hage
Chair and Vice-Chair of the Act 1 Working Group*

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On August 24, 2022, the Act 1 Working Group [submitted](#) a definition of “critical thinking” to the State Board of Education EQS Subcommittee. In light of the discussion that took place at the subcommittee’s meeting on the 24th, we offer additional thinking on the necessity and placement of the terms “critical,” “critical thinking,” “critically examines,” “critical focus,” and “critical examination” where they appear in the Working Group’s revised EQS Manual. Furthermore, we were tasked to take into consideration definitions of “critical thinking” by M. Scriven and R. Paul and E.R. Lai. We will explain where we feel these fall short.

The commentary and recommendations below were composed by our colleague Michael Martin, and we submit them on behalf of the Act 1 Working Group. To begin, we again recommend for adoption the definition of “critical thinking” that the Working Group proposed on August 24:

“Critical thinking” is the objective analysis of an issue in order to better discern or form a judgment based on evaluating evidence, checking assumptions, and adopting multiple perspectives to better understand the question at hand.

Other changes as follow:

Page 3:

These rules further require all schools to strive for a culturally responsive pedagogy that **critically examines** and imparts a comprehensive historical and socially conscious understanding of:....

In this section, we recommend “critically examines” stay as is, since it is meant to convey critical thinking as delineated in our working definition: evaluate evidence, check assumptions and adopt multiple perspectives.

Page 7/ Definition17:

“Ethnic Studies” means interdisciplinary, age-appropriate and grade-appropriate curricula and programs dedicated to the historical and contemporary study of race, ethnicity, and Indigenous Peoples (including the Indigenous People of Vermont, the Abenaki, Mahican, Pennacook, Pocomtuc, and others). This requires a **critical** focus on the experiences and perspectives of racial and ethnic groups and Indigenous Peoples that have suffered systemic oppression, marginalization, discrimination, persecution and genocide, within and outside the United States. “Ethnic Studies” also involves a **critical** examination of these experiences and perspectives through the lens of the characteristics and lives of “Social Identity Groups.”

In definition number 17, we recommend removing “critical” in the first sentence since it is not needed and keeping “critical examination” in the last sentence for the same reason cited above on page 3.

Page 10/Definition 38:

"Transferable skills" refers to ~~a broad set of knowledge~~ lifelong learning skills such as, but not limited to, creativity, communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and intercultural competency. Transferable skills are interdisciplinary skills that are vitally important for students’ personal agency and contributions as members of a diverse and democratic society. ~~work habits, and character traits that are believed to be critically important to success in today's world, particularly in collegiate programs and modern careers.~~

In definition number 38, we recommend keeping “critical thinking” listed as a single entity because it is a widely valued skill needed for high-quality education. Please note: The Act 1 Working Group removed, as you see above, an earlier use of “critically important” to avoid any confusion as to the word’s intended meaning.

Page 13:

a. literacy (including critical thinking, language, reading, spelling, comprehension, speaking and listening, and writing);....

In the literacy section found in Curriculum Content (Section 2120.5), we recommend keeping “critical thinking,” as it expresses a single entity, namely an important skill.

Consideration the critical thinking definition by Scriven & Paul and Lai:

1. **Scriven & Paul (2003)**¹ “Critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action (Scriven & Paul, 2003).”

This definition, in our estimation, is too open-ended. Having listed many skills and steps that may support critical thinking, Scriven & Paul seem to imply that critical thinking could be any combination – or perhaps only one element from the list —depending on the context.

2. **Lai (2011)**² “Critical thinking includes the component skills of analyzing arguments, making inferences using inductive or deductive reasoning, judging or evaluating, and making decisions or solving problems.”

This definition cites important aspects of critical thinking that are already in our recommended definition (e.g., analysis, evaluating evidence, problem-solving); however, it lacks some important ones, namely, perspective taking and checking assumptions/bias. And thinking

¹ Scriven, M. & Paul, R. (2003). *Defining critical thinking*. <http://www.criticalthinking.org/University/univclass/Defining.html>.

² Lai, E.R. (2011). *Critical thinking: A literature review*. Pearson Assessment: <http://images.pearsonassessments.com/images/tmrs/CriticalThinkingReviewFINAL.pdf>.

about Pre-K through Grade 12 students' skill development, we are concerned that including inductive/deductive reasoning here would not be helpful.