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## “Better Thinkers, Better Futures” (3) The Perry model (cont’d)

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Welcome back everyone! This promises to be an especially exciting year as we prepare for our move to the New Campus next fall. I would like to extend a special welcome to our new faculty and to our first group of post-docs.

This issue continues with the theme that we started last spring, namely that of exploring and understanding our student’s intellectual development with the aim of helping them attain higher order thinking skills. We discussed studies (Perry, 1970; King and Fischer, 1994; Baxter Magolda, 1992) that showed that most students entering college are not ready for higher order thinking. This is particularly true of our students who, for the most part, are the product of an educational system where memorizing information is rewarded with success.

In the past two issues of New Chalk Talk<sup>12</sup>, we specifically referred to W. Perry’s seminal work to guide us in understanding our students. In his work, Perry recognizes different “stages” of intellectual growth for students. He divided these stages into four broad categories – dualism, multiplicity, relativism and commitment – and we discussed the dualistic stage where students perceive knowledge as “received truth” and believe that all problems have uniquely “right” answers/solutions which “authorities” know. Finally we suggested strategies to help students move on to the multiplicity stage.

In this issue we will address the characteristics of the next three stages: multiplicity, relativism and commitment. Students transit into the **multiplicity stage** when they are forced sooner or later to recognize that experts and authorities sometimes disagree. They come to realize that uncertainty is legitimate, and that, at least in some areas, no one knows the answer. The transition is difficult and students are often frustrated. Some students may even resist their teacher and oppose anything he/she advocates demanding justification and evidence (Egyptian students are typically shyer than their American counterparts and may not express their resistance overtly).

Slowly, they learn to reach their own conclusions without relying exclusively on experts and learn to understand other points of view. While this development is an advance over dualism, multiplists typically see all opinions as equally valid. They do not attempt (or do not know how) to evaluate evidence which they may confuse with unsupported personal opinion. Because

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<sup>1</sup> A. Ellozy’s “Better Thinkers, Better Futures” 1. What Research Tells Us”, New Chalk Talk, Vol. 7, Issue 1 found at <http://www.aucegypt.edu/academic/clt/Newsletter/V7issue1.pdf.htm>

<sup>2</sup> A. Ellozy’s “Better Thinkers, Better Futures” 2. The Perry Model: Dualism”, New Chalk Talk, Vol. 7, Issue 2 found at <http://www.aucegypt.edu/academic/clt/Newsletter/V7issue2.pdf.htm>

"everyone is entitled to his or her own opinion," they may be surprised when their work is criticized and may view the criticism as arbitrary. Our role as teachers is to provide them with a framework to develop skills needed to help them interpret and evaluate information from multiple viewpoints.

For this, I would recommend the Wolcott-Lynch "Steps for Better Thinking" framework which is shown on page 3. This framework can provide students at different stages of intellectual growth with the necessary support that they need to progress from the less complex to more complex cognitive skills.

Typically freshmen and sophomores need to develop Step 1 skills while upperclassmen should focus on their Step 2 skills. Once they learn how to distinguish between weak and strong arguments and how to prioritize alternatives or solutions (Step 3) they have entered Perry's **relativistic stage**. At this stage students typically have a hard time taking decisions on complex social, political or personal issues because of the diversity of choices.

The majority of college students never get past relativism and the highest stage, "commitment", happens later on in life after they have genuinely reflected and integrated knowledge with personal experience. This is when they commit to a position (choice of career or a decision regarding their personal lives etc) with the realization that intellectual growth is an on going process.

### Sources:

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- King, P.M., & Fischer, K.S. (1994). *Developing reflective judgment*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Marcia B. Baxter Magolda (1992). *Knowing and Reasoning in College: Gender-Related Patterns in Students' Intellectual Development*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass Publishers.
- Lynch, C. L. & Wolcott, S. K. (2001). Helping Your Students Develop Critical Thinking Skills. IDEA Paper No. 37. Found at: [http://www.idea.ksu.edu/papers/Idea\\_Paper\\_37.pdf](http://www.idea.ksu.edu/papers/Idea_Paper_37.pdf)

## Task Prompts for Different Levels in “Steps for Better Thinking”<sup>3</sup>

Steps for Better Thinking	Task Prompts That Address These Skills
<p><b>Step 1: Identify the problem, relevant Information, and Uncertainties (low cognitive complexity tasks)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identify problem and acknowledge reasons for enduring uncertainty and absence of single “correct” solution</li> <li>▪ Identify relevant information and uncertainties embedded in the information (may including “stacking up” relevant reasons and evidence to support some solution or conclusion)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Explain why people disagree about _____.</li> <li>▪ Explain why _____ can’t be known with certainty.</li> <li>▪ Identify aspects of _____ in which uncertainty is a major factor.</li> <li>▪ Explain why even an expert about _____ can’t predict with certainty what will happen when _____.</li> <li>▪ Create a list of information that might be useful in thinking about _____.</li> <li>▪ Consult experts and explore literature or other resources to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Create a list of issues related to _____.</li> <li>○ Create a list of different points of view related to _____.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Identify a range of possible solutions to _____.</li> <li>▪ Sort pieces of information to identify reasons and evidence that support a given solution to _____.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Step 2: Explore Interpretations and Connections (moderate cognitive complexity tasks)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Interpret information</li> <li>▪ Recognize and control for own biases               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ articulate assumptions and reasoning associated with alternative points of view</li> <li>○ qualitatively interpret evidence from a variety of points of view</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Organize information in meaningful ways to encompass problem complexities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of a particular piece of evidence related to _____.</li> <li>▪ Interpret and discuss the quality of evidence related to _____.</li> <li>▪ Interpret and evaluate the quality of the same body of evidence related to _____ from different points of view.</li> <li>▪ Compare and contrast the arguments related to two or more solutions to _____.</li> <li>▪ Identify and discuss the implications of assumptions and preferences related to one or more points of view about _____.</li> <li>▪ Identify and discuss the implications of your own experiences and preferences for how you think about _____.</li> <li>▪ Develop one or more ways to organize information and analyses to help you think more thoroughly about _____.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Step 3: Prioritize alternatives and Communicate Conclusions (high cognitive complexity tasks)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ After thorough analysis, develop and use reasonable guidelines for prioritizing factors to consider and choosing among solution options</li> <li>▪ Communicate appropriately for a given audience and setting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prepare and defend a solution to _____.</li> <li>▪ Identify which issues you weighed more heavily than other issues in arriving at your conclusion about _____.</li> <li>▪ Explain how you prioritized issues in reaching a solution to _____.</li> <li>▪ Describe how the solution to _____ might change, given different priorities on important issues.</li> <li>▪ Explain how you would respond to arguments that support other reasonable solutions to _____.</li> <li>▪ Identify the most important information needs of the audience for communicating your recommendation about _____.</li> <li>▪ Explain how you designed your memo/presentation/ _____ to effectively communicate to your audience.</li> <li>▪ Describe how you would communicate differently about _____ in different settings.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Step 4: Integrate, Monitor and Refine Strategies for Readdressing the Problem (highest cognitive complexity tasks)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Acknowledge and explain limitations of endorsed solution</li> <li>▪ Integrate skills in on-going process for generating and using information to monitor strategies and make reasonable modifications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Describe the limitations of your proposed solution to _____.</li> <li>▪ Explain the implications of limitations to your proposed solution to _____.</li> <li>▪ Describe conditions under which you would reconsider your solution to _____.</li> <li>▪ Explain how conditions might change in the future, resulting in a possible change in the most reasonable solution to _____.</li> <li>▪ Develop strategies for generating new information about _____.</li> <li>▪ Establish a plan for monitoring the performance of your recommended solution to _____.</li> <li>▪ Establish a plan for addressing the problem strategically over time</li> </ul>

**Share with us your experiences by contributing to the New Chalk Talk series, or by sending comments/suggestions to [alloy@aucegypt.edu](mailto:alloy@aucegypt.edu) , [pandeli@aucegypt.edu](mailto:pandeli@aucegypt.edu)**

<sup>3</sup> Wolcott, S. K., & Lynch, C. L. (2001). *Task Prompts for Different Levels in Steps for Better Thinking* [On-line]. Available: <http://www.WolcottLynch.com>.