Assessing Thinking: Six Continua

OBVIOUS — BEYOND THE GIVEN

1 — 2 — 3 — 4

States the obvious, just scratches the surface, doesn't stretch to go beyond the given information or surface story.

Continuum one

Probes beneath the surface, reaches beyond the obvious, stretches for new applications, questions, connections.

FUZZY — CLEAR & FOCUSED

1 — 2 — 3 — 4

Thinking moves aren't clear (questions slide into statements, reasons slide into claims, observations slide into interpretations). Sprawling: rambling, unfocused, disorganized. Loses sight of main ideas or goals.

Continuum two

Thinking moves are clearly differentiated, thinking has a clear structure. Goals and purposes are clear and appropriately met. Anchored to main ideas, conceptually well-organized.

SIMPLISTIC — ELABORATED

1 — 2 — 3 — 4

Under-described, no detail or nuance. Overly broad, overly simplified, overly generalized.

Continuum three

Rich in detail, evocative, imaginative, nuanced, descriptive

ONE-DIMENSIONAL — MULTI-DIMENSONAL

1 — 2 — 3 — 4

Only touches on one layer or dimension of a topic, work of art, or idea. Doesn't see complexity, layers, or other viewpoints.

Continuum four

Touches on several layers or dimensions (e.g., facts, big ideas or themes, deep structure, puzzles, perspectives). Recognizes complexity, recognizes that there are different levels, layers, or perspectives.

RESTRICTED — GENERATIVE

1 — 2 — 3 — 4

Closure-oriented. Doesn't seem to want to explore big ideas or ask hard questions. Often shows bias, resistance to thinking

Continuum five

Expands or extends thinking in new directions. Broadens understanding, opens up new lines of inquiry. Often reflects curiosity and openness.

TANGENTIAL — ESSENCE-CAPTURING

1 — 2 — 3 — 4

Doesn't capture or recognize important themes, characteristics or elements. Strays from the topic. Hovers over unimportant details or ideas.

Continuum six

Insightful, captures the heart of things. Identifies key themes, characteristics or elements. Sees deep structure. Shows an appreciation for the relative importance of things.