

ESC/TLDE *Tips & Strategies*

Take the Challenge: Finding opportunities for Critical Thinking

Critical Thinking

That's a pretty powerful term.

But what does it really mean to give our students the opportunity to think critically in our classrooms (the indoor settings or the outdoor settings)?

For that matter, let's just talk for a moment about giving students the opportunity to think.

Oftentimes, I enter into a learning environment to find students who are passive recipients of

information, or maybe who are regurgitating the application of a skill (someone showed them how and they are repeating the demonstration). They aren't thinking—they aren't actively engaged in figuring something out—and if they aren't thinking, we aren't doing our due diligence in developing them as thinkers.

Think of the last time you cooked something using a recipe.

You read what it said to do, and then you did what it said. End of story. I'd argue there isn't much thinking involved in this process.

Now imagine the same recipe-following scenario, but you don't have all the measuring devices you need. Let's say the only measure you have is a tablespoon. If you need a cup of flour, what do you do? I'll tell you what I would do---Google some measurement conversion tool and see how many tablespoons in a cup. Just this minor deviation in my environment has introduced some level of thinking (or problem-solving) to my work.

Now let's make me think more---let's put a limitation on my Googling---I can only research one conversion measurement for the entire recipe. Which will it be and why? By manipulating the environment, in this case the materials and resources I have available, I have set up the situation to require some thinking to occur--by introducing this analysis (*which will it be?*) and evaluation (*and why?*). I am no longer just following a recipe, I am actively involved in solving a problem, finding out information, making judgments as to what I need, and evaluating my choices. I am now in the realm of **CRITICAL** thinking.

Think (v.): 1. to have or formulate in the mind. 2a. to reason about or reflect on; ponder. 2b. to decide by thinking. 3. To judge or regard.

The American Heritage Dictionary, 2nd Ed. (1982) Houghton Mifflin

The Educational Support Cell (ESC) provides support for the uniform application of USAJFKSWCS educational processes across the Institution to include:

-Support to Curriculum & Instruction [Courses and Instructors];

-Support to Leadership & Professional Development Initiatives;

-Support to the development and implementation of program evaluation and assessment systems; and

-Support to the design and implementation of SOF Career Pathways.

For more information, contact Mr. Geoff Jones at geojones@soc.mil.

ESC/TLDE

Tips & Strategies

Quick USAJFKSWCS translation:

Let's say you are developing or teaching a lesson on UW. A typical approach may be to discuss what UW is and then provide examples of UW campaigns to illustrate the concept. A **thinking** approach may be to give students 5 minutes to come up with their own definition of UW, and then check that definition against doctrine. The follow-up may be to put the class into small groups, give each group a military campaign to read over, and then have each group determine if their campaign does or does not fall within the parameters of UW. Each group reports this out and leads a short discussion on their evaluation.

Given this approach, this is what I may hear, and how I might respond:

My students don't know anything about my topic to begin with.

Response: *If this is truly the case, let them discuss their perceptions of the topic. If we use a pre-assessment to determine what they already know, we would know if this could work or not. If they have no prior knowledge or perceptions, give them an assignment prior to the class to have them develop some ideas before you ask.*

What if students brief out the wrong information?

Response: *If the instructor does a good job of circulating, he can catch any errors in student thinking prior to getting to the brief out. If a group reports something erroneously, open it up to discussion and correct the thinking before moving on.*

This approach would take too much time.

Response: *It may take longer, but it will also transfer to long-term memory more distinctly (a.k.a. students are learning it), AND it also involves developing ARSOF attributes such as Adaptability (wherein lies Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving) and Team Player.*

My classes are too large to use this approach.

Response: *Invite me or one of the ESC team to visit and we'll assist you with using this sort of approach. My personal record is an auditorium of 600 people.*

Students learn to think critically by answering challenging, open-ended questions that require inquiry, analysis, and evaluation and then by getting genuine feedback on their thoughts so they can refine that thinking. ***Take the challenge to find opportunities to infuse critical thinking into the curriculum and classes for which you are responsible.***

For assistance with transforming your classes or course into a facilitated, outcome-based experience, contact Mr. Jones (geojones@soc.mil) and the ESC.