

2021 Teacher Takeaways: Practical ideas for classroom teaching

Q&A List

**Adapting and experimenting with tasks
to encourage thinking skills in
classroom tasks**

Date: 16 September 2021

Time: 16.00 – 17.00

Question Details		
#	Question	Answers
1	<p>Thanks for the presentation. The activities that promote critical or creative thinking are really useful. Please could you share any examples to promote the creative thinking especially for young learners in Grade one or two students, who are just starting to learn English in formal education? They may have limited vocabulary for reading and speaking.</p>	<p>Thank you for your question. In lower grades such as grade 1 or, or even grade 3 where many learners in China and other countries start their English education you can use similar tasks to the ones described in the webinar, but without the writing aspect. For example for critical thinking you could use flashcards or realia to categorise language on student's desks, or indeed sticking images on the board/wall posters in the correct categories.</p> <p>This is why "adapt" is so important as there are many activities that with a little creativity on our part can be adapted to meet any demographic.</p> <p>Many classes will rely on what is often referred to as creativity with the big 'C.' I.e., drawing and making things such as collages, posters etc and this is great. But perhaps adding some more challenge to this such as creating themed infographics (with a mixture of cut and paste and drawing) or mind maps that build from an open question may help students think more about what they are creating. It is especially good if you can assign roles within the groups.</p> <p>There are certain theories of learning such as 'big ideas' and 'essential questions' (See Wiggins and McTighe's work) that offer interesting ways of expanding student's thinking creatively but in a way that ties together logically. That might be worth looking at.</p>

		<p>Ultimately, if you can encourage students to think divergently and create activities that offer chances for students to be original and imaginative but with a clear task and task objective to meet then you are very likely to be promoting creative thinking at any age.</p>
2	<p>Hello. It will be great to have some ready-to-use teaching resources on thinking skills. Thanks!</p>	<p>Thank you for your question. I think one of the key takeaways from today's webinar is, I hope, that we don't need to change too much about what we teach. E.g., the prescribed textbook content, but we can adapt and extend these activities to exploit them for thinking skills.</p> <p>Think: how can I guide the learners or even help them learn for themselves. Tables such as those highlighted in the webinar are useful and the tools KWL, PMI and Thinking Hats are tools that I like personally. You may also find more activities to adapt here from a psychology perspective: Edward de Bono - Direct Attention Thinking Tools (edwarddebonofoundation.com)</p> <p>Think about how you can extract maximum ELT and language value from them though!</p> <p>I would also be thinking:</p> <p>What is the task? In addition to language, what does it focus on? (E.g., perspective, assessing evidence, deeper structure etc – create a checklist for yourself)</p> <p>How might I make the task more challenging?</p> <p>How can I feedback?</p> <p>What questions can I use to feedback?</p>

		<p>How can I extend the task?</p> <p>Don't think that you always have to create something new. For me the most important part of a lesson to develop thinking skills is in feedback (during or after the task). That is where most of the learning or confirmation of learning will take place regardless of the tools e.g., Teacher feedback – what questions can go deeper to understand why learners were right or wrong? How will you display this to help others follow? Can you guide students to consider other possibilities without telling them what is right or wrong (I.e., don't let the teacher state this as the students may consider that definitive)</p>
3	<p>How can a teacher help a Chinese native speaker student to think logically? 99 percent of Chinese students are not trained in logic/ logical thinking in the national curriculum, so they may improve on vocab or grammar but logic remains the biggest challenge for them to learn to make a sound and justifiable argument. Any tips please?</p>	<p>Logic means different things to different people. I think Chinese students can be very logical. I do think that it is important when coming to conclusions, however, that we consider the facts, that we have all of them (or as many as possible) and that we keep an open mind I.e., 'I might be wrong and someone else's may offer a better solution, etc.'</p> <p>Debating, with rules, is often a good way to help students develop this skills. Try using slightly controversial statements:</p> <p>E.g., Chinese is easier to learn than English.</p> <p>Have Ss debate. Maybe, ask initially what students are for the statement and then have them prepare and debate the against the statement. This will help them look at both sides.</p> <p>Activities like barometer can also be useful in getting students to think about how much they actually agree or disagree with different points and how they may be able to explain them: Teaching Strategy: Barometer: Taking a Stand on Controversial Issues Facing History</p>

		<p>In terms of the teacher guiding students, I think the best way is using questions as a guide. Think of where the student is (their current perspective) and then what you want them to achieve/see/notice I.e., is it another perspective to consider, a solution to a problem, highlighting an issue or critique, etc.</p> <p>Then, think what are the small steps a student needs to follow to recognise that new idea or solution? Turn those small steps into small questions and use the questions to guide students to think in a different way. They may still think their first idea was right afterwards but that is fine too.</p> <p>E.g.,</p> <p><i>So, if we did XXXX, what would happen</i></p> <p><i>Why might someone do that...?</i></p> <p><i>Are there any advantages to that...?</i></p>
4	<p>What would you see the most encountered challenges, when teacher combine thinking skills in ELT classrooms?</p>	<p>I think teachers sometimes make problems for themselves. I say that as teachers are sometimes overwhelmed with the thought of developing thinking skills and often, they are just not clear what this means or how they might achieve it. It is almost as if it is another subject to be taught in addition to English. It isn't!</p> <p>But, unfortunately because of this many teachers either don't try and instead focus only on the syllabus content I.e., vocab and grammar as that is what will ultimately be assessed, or limit themselves to certain strategies, e.g., certain favoured reading strategies or simple questions; or indeed they just rely on the book.</p> <p>How do we solve this? Well, I am an advocate for planning thinking skills development into the lesson explicitly at the planning stage. Place it in the lesson objectives (maybe as a secondary objective behind language) and make sure there is some consideration of Higher Order</p>

		<p>Thinking (H.O.T) in some of the activities. This can be monitored by senior teachers and teachers can work together with peers to improve it. #communities#</p> <p>I tried to give a helping start to this in the webinar. Many of the words I associated with H.O.T. (See the 'volcano slide') can translate directly into activities and that is a starting point for planning. But, over time teachers need to become comfortable with extending activities and following interesting responses and ideas that come from the students, and importantly help the students explore this too. In English of course!</p>
5	<p>Do you think that we could also include thinking skills practice in primary classroom? How</p>	<p>Yes, absolutely! See some of the responses above.</p> <p>We have to grade tasks for the students and often this may mean less writing or reading based on the milestones the student has achieved but there is absolutely no reason not to develop thinking skills alongside speaking and listening, for example.</p> <p>In fact, if you go to any toy shop and look at some of the early learning toys available you will see that many of them do just that! E.g., Think of a toy putting a square tile and square shape! That is basically Remember/Analyse/Apply. Perhaps some classroom ideas can come from such environments as toy companies have great R and D! Why not "stand on their shoulders" and be innovative?!</p>
6	<p>How can we judge it is hot or not?</p>	<p>Consider what students have to do in the task to complete it. Generally if they are simply recalling from memory and from that applying something basically e.g. repeating phrases remembering a word, then it will often be L.O.T. Where students are starting to think behind the surface of what they see and think more about the relationships and meaning behind the word, for example, it will probably be H.O.T. It is not always clear, and it doesn't always have to be as this will largely be for your reference as the planner and teacher. What do you want in your lesson?</p>

		<p>Look at the 'volcano slide' in the PPTs. The words given there relate to activities you can do. That is a good starting point. You can also use the checklist for critical and creative thinking I gave to help think about the outcomes of your task.</p>
7	<p>Could you please share more models of critical thinking that are easily to assess the development?</p>	<p>This is one of the problems with thinking skills and 21st century skills in general. It is not always something you can assess. There are rubrics out there that might help you, but I am not sure it will be so relevant to the classroom you teach in. You could use portfolios or more formative assessment techniques along with traditional summative assessment but until this is formally recognised as part of your course it may only be extra work for the teacher.</p> <p>You might want to explore some of the work in relation to PISA for such assessment: Teaching, assessing and learning creative and critical thinking skills in primary and secondary education - OECD</p> <p>In many cases teachers must accept that they are developing these skills and will not always get recognition for it through assessment as they might with more formal tests. Teachers, as they often are, need to be selfless in this respect</p>
8	<p>What are the benefits of using 21st Skills at classroom ?</p>	<p>Many. The world is changing and while learning a language is important (probably more than one if we are honest) a language alone is not enough. Students need skills that allow them to function in a globalised and constantly changing world. Knowledge is important but the ability to utilise, evaluate and create from that knowledge is ever more important in modern society. 21st century skills such as Communication and Collaboration, Global Citizenship and understanding the world around us, Digital Literacy , and Leadership are all areas that need more than just knowledge. Critical Thinking and Problem Solving and Creative Thinking (based on thinking skills) play a big part in these.</p>

		<p>Even for those in rural areas, where economies may not be globalised, these skills in tandem with English language learning could offer new pathways to opportunity that may not otherwise be available. It may also bring relevance to English in the daily lives of those who may not normally think of it as important.</p>
9	<p>How to apply thinking skills in remote teaching?</p>	<p>In some part, I think this depends on the platform you use and what tools this allows you to have.</p> <p>For synchronous learning, it can be challenging as having students work together and share ideas is harder online in real time. But breakout rooms can help with this. Often the best tools will be questions and using the chat box such as we did today. Maybe give more time than I did though! Time is often important if we want students to think.</p> <p>For asynchronous learning there are more options and students can work together offline or have more time to complete tasks individually between lessons so you could actually use many of the classroom task you already use.</p>
10	<p>hi, Fraser. Glad to see you again. I'm a teacher from ZhuZhou. Any difference between critical thinking and creative thinking?</p>	<p>Hi, thank you for joining. Great to hear the name Zhuzhou again.</p> <p>Yes, is my answer, but they do have similarities in terms of creating an innovative solution and working with parameters. I think the easiest way is to look at the examples I gave. E.g. Divergent Vs. Convergent. Are you allowing students to think openly and come up with as many possible ideas as they can or are you asking them to narrow down to the best idea or solution?</p>
11	<p>Any good reading materials you can recommend to us?</p>	<p>I found this article to be of great interest. It also covers a lot of what we discussed today.</p> <p>Critical Thinking: Why Is It So Hard to Teach? (bath.ac.uk)</p>