

Professional Learning Activity: Critical Thinking for the 21st Century

Learning Objectives:

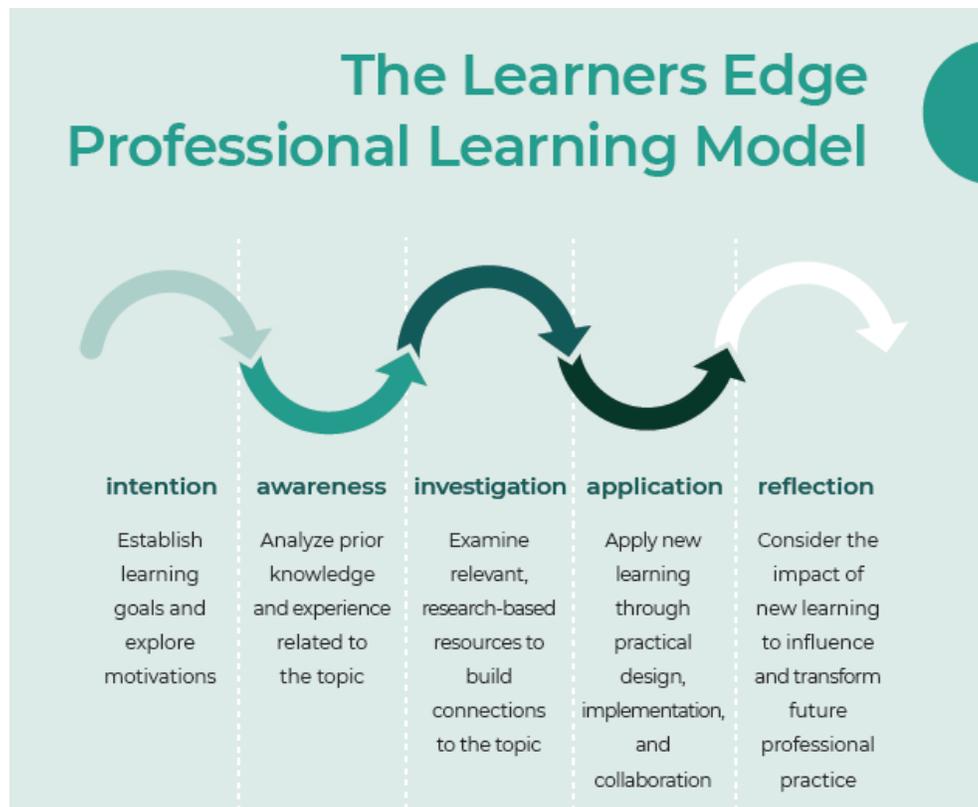
- Participants will identify the importance of teaching critical thinking and problem solving.
- Participants will explore methods for increasing opportunities for students to think critically and solve problems.
- Participants will identify at least one method for increasing student critical thinking in an online, distance learning environment.

Necessary Materials:

- Internet access
- Conversation Notes handout (one per partnership or small group)

Facilitator Email:

Today we are going to discover more about teaching for the 21st Century through examining one of the 4 C's. The four C's are critical thinking, communication, collaboration and creativity. For now, we will focus on critical thinking. To do so, we will follow this research-based professional learning model developed by Learners Edge.



Watch these quick introductory videos to get you thinking about our topic:

[What is 21st century education?](#)

[What are the 4Cs?](#)

Now, take a minute to jot down two reasons for teaching our students to think critically.

“Critical thinking has long been a valued skill in society. Today, every student—not just the academically advanced—needs it. While critical thinking and problem solving used to be the domain of gifted students, now it’s a critical domain for every student.” -NEA’s Educator Guide to the Four C’s

There are many reasons for us to teach students about critical thinking and allow for practice opportunities. You even wrote a couple down!

ISTE’s recommendations for critical thinking are embedded within several standards. Visit the [site](#) for more details.

3 Knowledge
Constructor

Students critically curate a variety of resources using digital tools to construct knowledge, produce creative artifacts and make meaningful learning experiences for themselves and others.

4 Innovative
Designer

Students use a variety of technologies within a design process to identify and solve problems by creating new, useful or imaginative solutions.

5 Computational
Thinker

Students develop and employ strategies for understanding and solving problems in ways that leverage the power of technological methods to develop and test solutions.

Now, it’s time to dig into the skill of critical thinking more deeply and devise a plan for increasing these opportunities for your students. Please complete the following:

1. Read p. 8-12 in this great resource on the 4 C’s: [Preparing 21st Century Students for a Global Society](#)
2. Explore some of the digital resources available to help encourage critical thinking. As you work through this activity, consider how you could develop a lesson around the use of one of the resources below. As you are watching and reading the tutorials, we encourage you to pause intermittently so you can try the features and skills demonstrated. To better understand what quality critical thinking tasks can look like in your classroom, explore the tools in the table below.

Critical Thinking Tools and Resources	
Design interactive presentations to build critical thinking skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pear Deck for Google Slides--Video Tutorials • Heavy Lifting: The Exercise of Critical Thinking
Journaling and ePortfolios help engage metacognition and reflection skills-- essential elements of critical thinking.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital Portfolios for Littles (Elementary) • How to Create Powerful Student ePortfolios with Google Sites • Creating ePortfolios
Coding helps develop critical thinking skills through creative problem solving.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why Teach Coding • Code.org Video Tutorials

3. *For more ideas and strategies for your teaching toolbox, read at least two of the following articles for additional tips to help you increase problem solving and critical thinking in your lessons (with or without technology).*

[12 Strong Strategies for Effectively Teaching Critical Thinking Skills](#)

[10 Tips for Teaching Kids to Be Awesome Critical Thinkers](#)

[4 Cs Series: Critical Thinking](#) by Kate Petty

[Using Webb's Depth of Knowledge to Increase Rigor](#) by Gerald Aungst

[100 Critical Thinking Questions](#) by Wabisabi Learning

[How to Increase the Cognitive Demand of Lessons](#) by Christopher Klein

[Using Students' Emotional Responses to Texts to Boost Literacy](#) by Stefani Boutelier

[6 Scaffolds That Deepen Independent Learning](#) by Sarah Gonser

4. *Draft a quick plan using ONE thing you learned to increase problem solving and critical thinking in your online, distance learning classroom. Remember, starting small is just fine!*
5. *Lastly, meet virtually with a colleague or small group of your peers to discuss the prompts outlined on the Conversation Notes handout.*

To learn more about critical thinking, check out these learning opportunities from Learners Edge:

[Course 5093: Digital Tools in the Connected Classroom](#)

[PD 132: Teaching 21st Century Skills Through the 4 C's](#)

[Course 5112: Engagement Strategies for the 21st Century Thinking Classroom](#)

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Conversation Notes:

Discussion Prompts	Notes
<i>Share one reason you should encourage critical thinking in your classroom.</i>	
<i>What do you already know about critical thinking? What more do you want to know? How do you plan to find out?</i>	
<i>Share one takeaway from the articles, videos or tutorials you watched that will positively impact your professional practice.</i>	
<i>How will you implement ONE thing you learned to increase opportunities for critical thinking and/or problem solving in your online, distance learning classroom?</i>	
<i>How will learning to think critically and solve problems positively impact your students? The school? The community?</i>	