Double-Loop Learning: An Approach to Critical Thinking

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There is a general consensus that critical thinking is an essential part of college. Instructors should therefore be aware of the following:

1. How they define and conceptualize critical thinking
2. How they are teaching critical thinking to their students
3. Expectations for how students can exhibit critical thinking

### Single-Loop

Research-based how to strategies would be an example of single-loop learning, one form of critical thinking. For example, first-year experience students often learn research-based strategies for how to become financially literate.

### Double-Loop

If students not only discussed how to manage their loans, but also if students should be in debt to go to college, they would then be engaging double-loop learning, another form of critical thinking. Double-loop should questions help students critically examine values and assumptions of relevant topics.

#### Procedural Evidence

Procedural evidence that double-loop learning benefits UNLV students is apparent from the intelligibility of this practice and its consistency with common-sense knowledge (Rychlak, 1974).

Asking students to question if they should be in debt to go to college or if they should volunteer in their local community while attending UNLV necessarily engages them in examining their own values and assumptions about these topics. This common-sense questioning:

1. Engages a form of critical thinking that critiques commonly held assumptions and values and
2. Benefits students by helping them engage more fully with course content.

#### Validating Evidence

Validating evidence that double-loop learning benefits students broadly in higher education is evidenced in our highlighted literature on double-loop learning.


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**Literature**

The following literature is informative for learning more about critical thinking and double-loop learning:

  - Discusses double-loop learning in the organizational context
  - Analyzes the potential for double-loop learning in leadership education
  - Hypothetically situates critical thinking within an entire college curriculum
  - Applies double-loop learning to higher-education diversity initiatives.
  - Investigates how to implement a “thinking curriculum” (K-12 emphasis)
  - Applies double-loop learning to higher education at the institutional level

**Application of Concept**

- Students learn how to
- Students learn process of how to execute task
- Students examine values and assumptions of topic

Instructors can use the general concept to fit their respective subjects. For instructors teaching critical thinking itself, the concept itself can be explained, and then applied to a given subject of the curriculum.

When requiring students to exhibit critical thinking, assignments can be designed so that students must demonstrate they can identify should questions, as well as identify potential values and assumptions of a topic.