By Tracy Summers

Encouraging Growth:

Students Adapt to Real-World Situations
if They Learn Critical Thinking Skills

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As future instructors, we should find ways to promote creative thinking and problem solving skills because they are rarely taught, but these skills will have a big impact on students. Svinicki and McKeachie explain that it's not enough for students to gain knowledge without relating that knowledge to the real world—otherwise students won't know how to use "it" when they leave the academic environment. They have difficulty remembering what they "know" because the situation differs (Svinicki & McKeachie, 2011).

Young children will take chances because "they are not frightened of being wrong" (Robinson, 2006). As they get older, they take fewer chances, and that's where we can make a difference. We can encourage them to think for themselves and to creatively work through situations. Robinson puts it like this: "If you're not prepared to be wrong, you'll never come up with anything original." (Click here to watch Ken Robinson's TED Talks video.)

Encourage students to think for themselves (and promote their critical thinking/problem solving skills) by creating an environment that demonstrates those kinds of discussions. Dannels (2015) suggests we do the following to get students to participate in discussions:

- Use warm-calling techniques that encourage reluctant students to talk

- Present a problem and have students find multiple ways to solve it

- Use brainstorming techniques to generate ideas

- Welcome students to express their opinions

Image Resource: TED Talks

Even though the academic environment seems to educate students to become good workers instead of critical thinkers (Ken Robinson, Ted Talks), as instructors, we have multiple opportunities to improve their thought processes and creativity. In fact, we can make a big difference in our students by helping them gain critical thinking/problem solving skills and by giving them the platform to use these skills.

Discussion Question: What are some additional ways instructors can get their students to participate in discussions that promote critical thinking/problem solving?

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