In Part 1 of this series, Shaun Crowley considered the importance of 21st Century Skills in ELT, and in Part 2 he explored the merits of a “question-centred” approach. In this post, Shaun offers another idea for integrating critical thinking into your classes.

Being able to think critically is important not only in academia, but in everyday interactions. To form an opinion on anything we need to employ higher order critical thinking skills.

Integrating polls into your classes is a simple activity that encourages students to analyse, synthesize and evaluate a topic matter, encouraging awareness and self-expression.

Polls are also great language learning devices. The poll options can be items of target language, giving students meaningful exposure to the vocabulary you are teaching, helping them to internalize the words.

To integrate voting into your lessons, take a vocabulary theme that you have just covered in your coursebook and create a question around it. For example, if a recent unit covered types of job, your question could be:

*What is the best job?*

Options:

1) a doctor  
2) an engineer  
3) a business manager  
4) an artist  
5) a scientist

Pose this question in class or for homework. If you are using a VLE like Moodle, you may be able to integrate polls into the tasks you assign.

You can take polls further by capturing student’s vote results and displaying these results in class. Then you have a basis for further discussion, giving students valuable practice in applying critical thinking skills whilst communicating in English.

If you don’t have access to an online platform with a polling function, simply ask for a call of hands in class and count the number of votes by marking them on a piece of flipchart paper. Keep a cumulative total if you teach more than one class.

The poll results will give you plenty to discuss:

- What did you vote for and why?  
- Did anyone agree with you? Why / why not?  
- Did you notice any differences in how men and women voted?  
- Why were some options more popular than others?
- What would you need to know to develop a more informed opinion?

Polls can instil a sense of curiosity and cognitive independence in students – helping them to become more autonomous learners and improving academic outcomes.

So far, we have looked at the benefits of open questions and polls. Can you think of any other ways of getting students to think critically in your English classes?