

# IMLOC's Effective Example

Developing critical thinking skills through journaling

by MSgt Freddy A. Armijo

The new operating environment for Marines as described by the 2015 *Commandant's Planning Guidance* and *Expeditionary Force 21*<sup>1 2</sup> is characterized with uncertainty, complexity, decentralization, and constant evolution. Successfully overcoming the new challenges of this environment requires individuals and a force with effective critical thinking skills. An action in support of developing critical thinking skills is the application of reflective journaling. The Intermediate MAGTF Logistic Instructor Course (IMLOC) provides an example on the effective use of reflective journaling for the enhancement of individual and group critical thinking skills.

A critical thinker is an individual who emphasizes "questioning and reasoning, recognizing assumptions, presenting and evaluating data, and

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drawing conclusions."<sup>3</sup> Scientific research supports the ability of critical thinkers to make better decisions and judgments when confronting complex problems and situations.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, an individual or a group with critical thinking skills has a greater chance to successfully develop and implement the *Commandant's Planning Guidance* and *Expeditionary Force 21* in this new operating environment.

Multiple professions utilize reflective journaling for developing individuals and to encourage effective critical thinking skills.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, journaling

helps an individual to reflect on every step of their life experiences, including reflection on learning, working, or general living. This reflection occurs through the writing of personal concepts and perspectives with the intent to describe the experience and the connection of this experience with personal views and ideas. Through writing in the reflective journal, the student is able to communicate, evaluate, analyze, and challenge conceived perceptions, ideas, thoughts, and concepts of their own reality. These actions happen before, during, or after the experience. Nevertheless, the use of reflective journaling increases the value and the results from the experience of the individual and for the organization.<sup>6</sup>

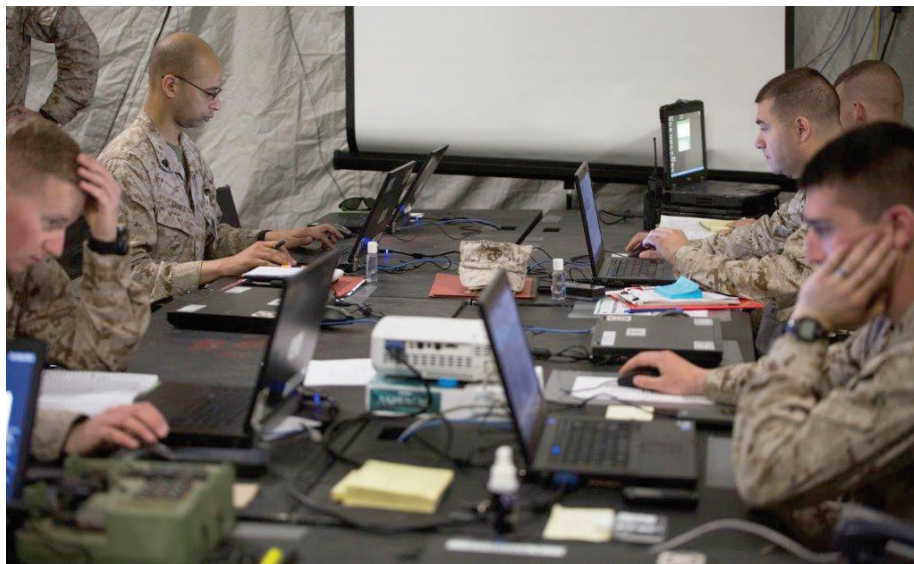
An effective example for increasing the value and long-term results of a learning experience is the application of reflective journaling at IMLOC. The official website for IMLOC at Twenty-nine Palms describes the school mission as to provide

billet enhancement training for officers and enlisted serving (or slated for assignment) as unit Operations Officers and Operations Chiefs within the Logistic Combat Element (and other ground logistic units) at the battalion and regimental level or as staff logistics officers and chiefs above the battalion/squadron level.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, it is not surprising that IMLOC—with these educational and



**Reflective journaling provides the opportunity to share ideas. (Photo by LCpl Ned Johnson.)**



**IMLOC provides training for LCE operations officers and chiefs.** (Photo by LCpl Melissa Martens.)

organizational goals—utilizes reflective journaling as a method to provide critical skills to the participants.

Participants of IMLOC receive a journal for personal reflection on the first day of class. The guidelines for filling the journal at IMLOC are to answer three of the following six questions:

- 1) What new concept(s)/issue(s)/topic(s) did I learn about today?
- 2) What resource(s) did I discover today?
- 3) What did I hear today that challenged my view (s)? What is a legitimate point of the opposing perspective?
- 4) I am having a hard time understanding the following;
- 5) Today made me want to learn more.
- 6) How can today refine how I approach my mission?<sup>8</sup>

Answers to the questions are written before, during, or after the class every day. Each morning, faculty advisors collect all journals, review the entries for the day prior, and provide feedback or responses as required.

Instructor’s daily feedback and responses to the participants’ journal entries create a valuable dialogue. This dialogue creates a deep, personal, and critical connection between the learning material, learning experience, the faculty, and the student. Indeed, this dialogue on reflective thoughts creates an environment for growth and for the

enhancement of individual and group critical thinking skills.<sup>9</sup> The utilization of reflective journaling is firmly grounded on the andragogy principles for internal motivation required of adult learners and the benefits of adult learners knowing the true, practical value of the learning experience.<sup>10</sup>

Reflective journaling at IMLOC provides an opportunity for participants to share their personal input in order to enhance the learning experience via their writing of the journal. Indeed, careful crafting of sentences and ideas to communicate with others in a personal and professional level ensures the success of the educational curriculum. Furthermore, utilizing a reflective journal provides an opportunity for recording great ideas and “eureka” moments through the experience for future use, revision, or possible implementation. Participants are left with a permanent record of their educational journey, which is filled with self-reflection on the learning experiences provided during IMLOC.

Utilization of reflective journaling supports the education and training of critical thinking for individuals and groups. IMLOC provides an effective example on the use and application of reflective journaling to reach personal, educational, and organizational goals. Indeed, utilizing reflective journaling must be required at all possible levels during the training and education of

Marines so long as the requirement exists for critical thinkers to solve complex problems in the operating environment.

**Notes**

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4. C.P Dwyer, M.J. Hogan, and I. Stewart, “An Integrated Critical Thinking Framework for the 21st Century,” *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, (2014), accessed at <http://eds.a.ebscohost.com.proxy1.ncu.edu>.
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7. Marine Corps Logistics Operations Group, Intermediate MAGTF Logistic Operations Course, (Twentynine Palms, CA: 2015), accessed at <http://www.29palms.marines.mil>.
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