The Thoughtful Learning Cycle (TLC)

Founded by Barbara K. Stripling and Judy M. Pitts, the model that asserts that the learner needs a mental model to put new information into a context or framework. This process may involve reorganizing ideas or inventing a new framework for old ideas until pieces fit logically into the learner's mental model. Instruction in information seeking and use must be integrated with content for subject matter learning to occur.

1. Choose a broad topic
2. Get an overview of the topic
3. Narrow the topic
   Reflection Point: Is my topic a good one?
4. Develop a thesis or statement of purpose
   Reflection Point: Does my thesis or statement of purpose represent an effective overall concept for my research?
5. Formulate questions to guide research
   Reflection Point: Do the questions provide a foundation for my research?
6. Plan for research and production
   Reflection Point: Is the research/production plan workable?
7. Find/analyze/evaluate sources
   Reflection Point: Are my sources usable and adequate?
8. Evaluate evidence/take notes/compile bibliography
   Reflection Point: Is my research complete?
9. Establish conclusions/Organize information into an outline
   Reflection Point: Are my conclusions based on researched evidence? Does my outline logically organize conclusions and evidence?
10. Create and present final product
    Reflection Point: Is the paper/project satisfactory?
TLC
Encircling the core of personal understandings are the integrated content and process elements that provide the structure for learning.

In the content strand, a student progresses (recursively) through four stages:
1. Need to Know/Concept and Essential Questions
2. Information
3. New Understanding
4. Assessment Product

The information processes occurring simultaneously with the content phases include three aspects (information seeking and use, life skills, and production):  
1. Inquiry
2. Synthesis/Decision Making
3. Expression

This whole structure is surrounded by an essential network of ongoing assessment involving both reflection and feedback. Peers, teachers, and the learners themselves should reflect on the content and process and provide feedback to the learner at all phases of the cycle.

The overall structure of this model is a cycle, because real learning should always lead to more questions and further investigation. Basing investigations on a linear problem solving model in which the final step is a completely resolved solution leads to trivialization of thought. If students are pursuing real areas of concern (e.g., teenage pregnancy), they will not be able to solve the problem with their research and thinking. Their process should enable them to synthesize, draw conclusions, suggest ideas to pursue in more depth. A cyclical model like the Thoughtful Learning Cycle should help students understand that learning is continual and recursive, and that the main goal is not a final product or solution but the formulation of ideas, understandings, and further questions.

At the center of the Thoughtful Learning Cycle are the personal understandings (or mental models) about both process and content that form the basis of learning. Children begin building mental models as soon as they experience the world. Any new learning starts with these mental models; real learning occurs only when these models are restructured to include new ideas in a meaningful context. Mental models affect learning throughout the process and that teachers must take these into account as they plan, teach, and support learning.