



William R. Klemm Ph.D.
Memory Medic

Teaching Children to Think

Your kid can be smarter than either of you expect.

Posted Oct 30, 2011



Some might think it is not possible to teach children how to be thinkers. A common belief is that one is either born with intellect or not. Wrong! Creative and critical thinking are skills, something that can be learned.

There are, however, developmental issues. Young children are less likely to be analytical than older ones. How well youngsters think depends on whether teachers and parents have expected them to think for themselves. Schools too often focus on teaching students what to think (read "No Child Left Behind"), not how to think. Parents tend to tell youngsters what to think. But even in the interests of telling youngsters how to behave in proper ways, the instruction is more likely to be accepted if children are encouraged to think through why certain behaviors are preferred over others.

Teachers know that many students have poor thinking skills. Several reasons help explain why. Changes in culture are a factor, such as mind-numbing music, television, video games, social networking Websites, cell-phone texting, and so on. We have no problem telling children what to think, but when their thinking becomes flawed, we are reluctant to intervene. Many parents (and even teachers) think it is bad to challenge children's thinking when it is flawed. They worry that such challenges can be embarrassing and damages self esteem. The reality is that such students eventually discover they are not as capable as their peers who have effective thinking skills, and that gives them real reason to have low self-esteem. Schools and state mandates also contribute to the problem. Too often, students are trained to look for the one "right answer." Then there are state knowledge and skills standards, where students are actively discouraged from thinking "outside the box."

Many students lack the confidence to think for themselves and are actually afraid to try. The reality is that students are natural-born creative thinkers, but the conformity of schools has drilled students into a submission that precludes analytical and creative thinking. In our culture, the only place where it seems that insightful ideas are excluded is in the school.

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How does one teach critical thinking? Three ways:

1. **Expect it.** Require students to defend their ideas and answers to questions. Show them it is not enough to have an opinion or the "right" answer. Students need to defend their opinions and understand how they arrived at the answer and why it is "right."
2. **Model it.** The teacher can show students how to think critically and creatively about instructional material. Even in "teaching to the test," show students how to think about alternative answers, not just memorize the right answer. Show why some answers are right and some wrong.
3. **Reward it.** When good thinking occurs, teachers should call attention to it and to the students that generated it. Learning activities and assignments should have clear expectations for students to generate critical and creative thought. A grading premium and other incentives should be provided.. Rigorous analysis will only occur if it is expected and rewarded.

Web sites and blogs that show how to teach children thinking skills include:

<http://www.oben.powertolearn.com/mathematics/thnkques.htm>

<http://www.suite101.com/content/teach-your-child-to-think-a14551>

http://mabryonline.org/blogs/tyson/archive/2005/08/teaching_children_to_...

http://www.ehow.com/how_4995608_teach-creative-thinking-children.html

<http://ezinearticles.com/?Teaching-Kids-to-Think-and-Preventing-Cheating...> School%2C-Work-and-On-the-Internet&id=467244

<http://www.justenoughblog.com/?p=80>

<http://eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED135889.pdf>



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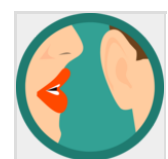


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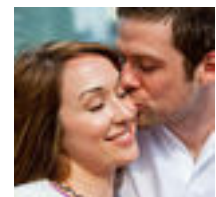
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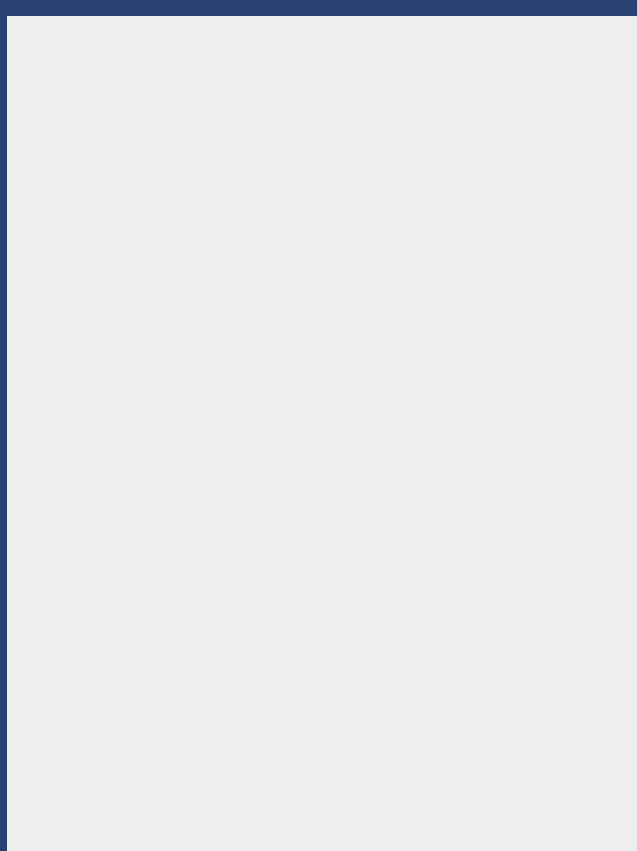
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