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Overview

RON BRANDT

Teaching of Thinking, for Thinking, About Thinking

Five of the articles in this issue were prepared for an invitational conference held in May at the Wingspread Conference Center in Racine, Wisconsin. The 60 participants had been invited to help decide how ASCD could contribute to development of students' thinking skills.

The idea of teaching thinking may seem redundant. Good teachers have always tried—with varying success—to teach *for* thinking: to teach academic content in a way that strengthens students' cognitive abilities. But some programs are now designed for the teaching *of* thinking: deliberate attention to particular mental skills as the primary aim of instruction. *Instrumental Enrichment* (p. 41), for example, teaches basic mental operations considered prerequisite to all other thinking.

There is also increasing interest in teaching *about* thinking: helping students become more conscious of their own mental processes. Capable problem solvers possess metacognitive skills: they know what they know and what they need to know; they can monitor their own thinking.

A fully adequate curriculum, then, should provide for teaching *of* thinking and *about* thinking as well as teaching *for* thinking. Planning such a curriculum is complicated by the diversity of approaches and the kinds of thinking sought in various programs.

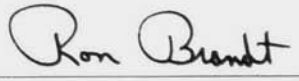
Richard Paul (p. 4), for example, insists that students should learn critical thinking by being exposed to ideas they disagree with—because democracy requires citizens who can understand their opponents' points of view. Edward de Bono (p. 16), on the other hand, conceives of critical thinking as poking holes in other peoples' arguments. Teaching that, he says, will not equip students to solve their own problems. De Bono's *CoRT* program uses timed exercises to get students to withhold judgment, look at problems in new ways, and consider alternatives.

Matthew Lipman's *Philosophy for Children* takes a very different approach: teachers use readings from specially written children's novels to provoke free discussion of such topics as freedom, truth, and beauty. Lipman (p. 51) contends that philosophy should be part of the curriculum in elementary and secondary schools; in fact, he argues that philosophy is *the* basic subject—because its content is thinking itself.

The existence of these programs raises the question of whether thinking skills should be incorporated into regular classes or taught separately. Many schools may eventually choose to do both, just as they now provide for instruction in reading and writing even though they also want these skills taught in context.

Educators across the country are reviewing their curricula and looking for assistance in planning thinking skills programs. As suggested at the Wingspread conference, the ASCD Executive Council has decided to sponsor an information network (see p. 95), cooperate with other associations, publish a resource book to be sent to all comprehensive members, and develop a video-based inservice program. We will also continue to promote attention to student thinking in our institutes, conferences, and publications. For example, this issue of *Educational Leadership* will be followed by a second theme issue in November called "When Teachers Tackle Thinking."

The stress on intellectual development voiced in the recent national reports makes it prudent for schools to provide for teaching thinking throughout the curriculum. ASCD will try to help.



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