

Textbooks

CONNIE MUTHER

What Is the Thinking Required?

In textbook evaluation, the best question to ask is: what is the thinking required? You can apply this question to every item in the text: test and end-of-chapter questions, projects or activities, and those incredible suggestions for "application" to another subject area.

Here are some typical examples found in too many textbooks.

In *mathematics* the thinking required by many word problems is to extract the numbers from the words and then perform the same function as on the rest of the page. Reading the problem is not required; neither is mathematical reasoning.

In *science*, many activities are so obvious that students simply read them and know the results. Doing the activity is not required; neither is any variety of scientific thinking.

In many *English* textbooks that advertise "writing as a process," test

questions focus only on the "correct" form (for example, the "slug" on a notecard goes on the upper right corner of the notecard, not the left, although another program may require it on the left), rather than on how to integrate the content on the notecard into the logic of the writing. Writing, and specifically the thought processes behind the writing, is not required.

Too many questions in those "strong comprehension" *reading and literature* programs merely represent every level in Bloom's taxonomy (or whatever taxonomy is used), regardless of whether they are appropriate to the content. Students try to predict the next question, rather than the author's message: the wrong kind of thinking is required.

Most *social studies* textbooks require memorization of dates and events. Thinking about the reasons why events happen at a specific time and place to a specific group of people is not required.

Far too many textbooks and instructional materials are selected because they offer numerous activities, worksheets, computer programs, tests, and "application" to other subjects. Please don't be swayed by this plethora of goodies. Instead, before looking at any new textbooks, ask yourself:

1. What should my students be able to do *after* completing this course, program, or textbook that they couldn't do before?

2. *Realistically*, how much time do I have to teach them how to do it?

Then open the new textbooks; and for every question, project, and activity, ask:

3. What is the thinking required?

4. Given my time and goal, will this thinking help my students—or is it a waste of time?□

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Research on Teaching

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Teaching Aggressive Children

When teachers understand the needs and abilities of their students and provide opportunities for success, classroom discipline problems are fewer. But what are teachers to do when they face chronically difficult, hostile children who don't respond to even the most stimulating activities?

Jere Brophy and his colleagues at Michigan State University studied 98 experienced elementary teachers' strategies for coping with hostile-aggressive students and have described some ideas for teaching such children effectively. For instance, teachers who were successful in teaching hostile-aggressive children were clear about their expectations for classroom behavior. Some would scold students, letting them know that inappropriate behavior would not be tolerated. More of them would respond less emotionally, giving students logical and moral-

istic reasons for changing their behavior.

In addition to using coercive techniques for controlling aggression—loss of privileges, informing parents or the principal, isolation, or suspension—these successful teachers strengthened their arguments by teaching students how to deal with frustration and conflict. For example, they advocated controlling tempers and talking to resolve conflicts. To these teachers, aggression was a behavior problem calling for students to learn ways other than fighting to interact in stressful situations.

Unsuccessful teachers were also coercive but did not try to teach students how to change. They placed too much emphasis on punishment as retribution and not enough on checking the behavior of students who were out of control. The highly rated teachers were determined to change the behav-

ior of hostile-aggressive students and were confident in their abilities to do so. They were firm in demanding that aggression stop but were often protective of the offenders, listening during tense situations before making judgments.

This column is based on the final report from the Institute of Research on Teaching, September 30, 1986, "Teachers' Strategies for Coping with Hostile-Aggressive Students," Research Series 185; the 60-page report is available for \$6.00 from IRT, the College of Education, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824-1034.□

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