

## ERIC/RCS Update:

### Teaching Thinking Skills in English/Language Arts

by

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A number of commentaries on public education, including that of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, have expressed concern that students lack the ability necessary to think clearly. A survey of documents recently entered into the ERIC data base shows that educators are beginning to address this problem in a variety of ways. Annotations of a few of those documents, which describe methods of teaching thinking skills in the English/language arts classroom, are presented below.

#### ANNOTATIONS

*Writing to Think. National Writing Project Occasional Paper No. 4.* Marlene Griffith. National Writing Project, 5635 Tolman Hall, School of Education, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720. 1982. 14p.

Intended for middle-elementary through college level writing teachers, this booklet describes a teaching method that lets students write their own way into ideas, merging personal experience with intellectual thought in expository writing. The booklet first describes in greater detail the concept of writing-to-think as focused free writing—required but not graded or revised—that allows students to bring vague perceptions to a verbal level explicit enough for them to reconsider or extend. Griffith then presents and discusses four writing samples (two from students who write with ease and two who have difficulty) to illustrate different kinds of mindwork made possible by this kind of thinking on paper. (ED 251 842; MF01, plus postage; PC available from publisher.)

*GEMS: Gifted Education Module System. Higher Level Thinking in the Junior High.* Hilarie Davis and Others. State University of New York, Brockport College at Brockport. 1981. 114p.

This guide presents units of instruction that emphasize the higher level thinking skills of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. An introductory section explains each of the three higher level skills and presents tasks illustrating each. It then offers complete units in English, math, science, and social studies. The English unit deals with characterization, focusing on description through analysis of elements, ordering cause and effect relationships in character actions, contrasting relationships, and examining character credibility. (ED 216 473; MF01, PC05 plus postage.)

*Enriched Upper Elementary Language Arts Unit: Logical Thinking, Grades 5-6.* Bulletin No. 345-D. Tom Braunreiter. Beloit Public Schools, Wisconsin. 1982. 110p.

Intended for use with gifted and talented students, this guide contains lesson plans that focus on logical thinking enrichment activities. Each plan contains objectives, necessary entry skills, teaching approaches, student activities, resources, and follow-up and evaluation suggestions. Plans are presented for a number of areas, including (1) completing analogies and determining analogous relationships, (2) identifying similarities, (3) learning to be concise, (4) noting inconsistencies, (5) building a case by logically sequencing material, (6) understanding and verifying inferences, (7) identifying and completing syllogisms, and (8) computing probability. (ED 228 816, MF01, PC05 plus postage.)

*Philosophy for Children: An Approach to Critical Thinking. Fastback 206.* Tony W. Johnson. Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, Bloomington, IN. 1984. 41p.

Johnson describes curriculum and resources that foster and expand the philosophical thinking of elementary and middle school students. Following a discussion of Matthew Lipman's illustrative "novel" *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*, (which helps students explore both formal and informal rules of thought), Johnson describes the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children, founded by Lipman at Montclair State College, New Jersey. The remainder of the booklet describes various aspects of the Institute's program, specifically its efforts to develop curriculum designed to expand reasoning skills, beginning in early childhood education with reasoning in language comprehension and followed by skills in ethics, language arts, and social studies. (ED 242 629; MF \$0.97, PC \$3.90, plus postage)

*Teaching Critical Thinking Skills in the Public Speaking Course: A Liberal Arts Perspective.* Paul A. Fritz and Richard L. Weaver, II. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association, Chicago, IL, Nov 1-4, 1984. 36p.

Looking at elements of classic rhetoric, Fritz and Weaver review the literature to discover the thinking skills involved in invention, organization, composition, memory, and delivery. They conclude that students need critical thinking skills that will help them expand perspectives, draw themes together, draw conclusions, present organized data consistent with audience expectations, and write in oral style. Labeling these as framing, scenario, prescription, and imagining skills, the authors present exercises designed to assist students to develop each skill within a public speaking course. They also offer suggestions for testing critical thinking. (ED 249 556; MF01, PC02 plus postage.)

*How Can We Teach Intelligence?* Robert J. Sternberg. Philadelphia, PA: Research for Better Schools, Inc. 1983. 33p.

Sternberg describes his "componential" theory of intelligence, which explains intelligence in terms of three types of component processes that make intelligent performance: (1) metacomponents, the higher order or executive processes that individuals use to plan what they are going to do, monitor what they are doing, and evaluate what they have done; (2) performance components, which carry out what the metacomponents have planned; and (3) knowledge-acquisition components, which are used in learning new material. Sternberg argues that if intelligence can be broken down into this set of underlying processes and strategies for combining the processes, it is possible to intervene at the level of the mental process, teach individuals what processes to use, when and how to use them, and how to combine them into workable strategies for task solution. He describes three programs that train aspects of the theory—Feurstein's "Instrumental Enrichment," Lipman's "Philosophy for Children," and "Chicago Mastery Learning: Reading"—and offers guidelines for use in choosing a thinking skills training program. (ED 242 700; MF01, PC02 plus postage.)

The ERIC/RCS Clearinghouse has several publications related to the topic. These include three ERIC Digests: *Thinking Skills in English and across the Curriculum*, *Metacomprehension, and Language across the Curriculum*, all ERIC Digests, and *Questioning: a Path to Critical Thinking*, a TRIP (Theory and Research into Practice) booklet prepared by Leila Christenbury and Patricia P. Kelly.

**PLEASE NOTE:** The documents listed above are available in either microfiche (MF) or paper copy (PC) from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS), 3900 Wheeler Avenue, Alexandria, VA 22304. The price per document is based on the number of pages. For information on postal rates and translating the price codes into current prices, call the EDRS toll-free telephone number (800-227-3742) or write to ERIC/RCS, National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801.