

How To Teach Your Child How To Think: Dispelling the 3 Most Common Myths – Part 1

By Victor Storkel

If you are like most every parent I have talked to over the past 8 years, you want your children to learn how to think. Most of us will readily admit that we weren't taught how to think from the public school system, so teaching our children how to think becomes unusually difficult. Practically everyone would agree that teaching their children how to develop this thinking skill is very important, but most would also admit that they are not sure how best to do it.

In this article we will seek to examine what keeps us from teaching our children how to think and what we can do to start that process of teaching our children to think effectively.

(NOTE: You are encouraged to print this article for your reading convenience. You will find that printing it will make it easier to read, study the content and take notes. Plus, you are welcome to forward this article to other interested parties, providing you do not alter, change or delete any content.)

Fact: Most children are taught *what* to think, but not *HOW* to think.

If you doubt the fact that our children (public, private and home school educated) are not being taught how to think, then what accounts for the continually lower reading and writing levels?

Example: In the mid 1700's, Thomas Payne wrote the book "Common Sense" which was reportedly read and discussed by 90% of the then almost 250,000 colonists. The common man (the baker, the barber, the banker, the butcher) could all read, digest and discuss the concepts in that book.

That book ("Common Sense") is today considered high level college reading. This means that, the reading material that was common to the public at large in the early days of our country, is now largely indigestible to the general public, for the average book today is written not on a college level, but on a 6th grade reading level.

Most publishers insist that common reading material, (books, articles, etc.) be written at about the 6th grade reading level and the newspaper sports page to be written at a 3rd grade reading level. So you tell me, have our thinking skills gotten worse or better over the last 200 years?

Two important questions then must be considered at this point:

1. Are you teaching your children how to think and how can you know?
2. If you are not teaching your child how to think, or I want to improve in this area, how do you go about doing that?

Before we discuss the right way to teach our children how to think, we must find and destroy the many erroneous assumptions that have infiltrated our thinking and thus our practices.

In this article, we will examine the first of the three common myths and how they adversely affect your ability to teach your child *how* to think and their critical thinking skills.

Myth #1 – Most popular home school curriculums do an adequate job in teaching my child how to think.

My question to you is this, how do you know? Do you know what key ingredients are necessary for your child to learn how to think? Should we assume that the popular curriculums have those elements in them and will correctly show you how to apply them to your child?

[To complete a simple assessment [to determine if your student is learning how to think, go to: <http://www.virtueinknowledge.com/Writing-Thinking-Assessment.pdf>]

There are many essential core elements in teaching your child how to think, which the scope of this article can't address. But I'm going to boil down a few of the elements to this one example.

When I went to public school (it seems like almost 50 years ago), we had two types of teachers. The first group graded us by the true and false or multiple choice exam and the second group graded us by written exams. We'll look at both groups here for a second.

The first and easily the largest group of teachers would grade their students using either true or false, or multiple choice type exams. You remember them, right?

Now, think with me for a second. What was characteristic about this first group of teachers that graded everyone by the true and false or multiple choice exams?

I've asked this question to literally hundreds of parents across the country in my seminars and they all come up with the same answer. It was the ease to which we could pass this course, right? The class was easy because the tests were easy! We could easily study for the test the night before by cramming our head with the material, only to spew out the correct answers on the test the next day without understanding most of it. We didn't have to know or

understand the material, we only had to give back the correct answer to the correct question.

If we were really stuck, we could guess our way out. On true & false exams, we had a 50-50 chance of guessing the right answer. If you were like me, you didn't do too bad in this type of exam, right? I mean, how bad could you be with the odds of 50% of getting it right?

In the multiple choice tests, we could usually narrow the 4 or 5 answers down to two choices, which is again a 50-50 chance of guessing at the right answer.

Think about this with me here. Is this any way to teach your child how to think? Do we really want to teach our children to progress thru their educational process by being a good guesser?

Now let me ask you this. Did you or I *really* know the material in that course? Did we understand the subject matter or were we able to interact critically with the topics covered?

NO! I know I couldn't.

I knew that all I had to do was memorize some preset answers to some preset questions and I would pass the class.

Here's my concern: I fear that much of our educational system falls into this category! And of course, this example clearly illustrates the fact that those using this type of educational system are not teaching their child how to think.

Is your current curriculum much like this methodology? Do you still think you are effectively teaching your child how to think?

(By the way, do you know why this educational methodology is so popular? Everyone likes things that are easy. The students do and the teachers do as well. This type of teaching methodology is easy for teachers and that is very appealing. We are all very busy and have many demands on our time, so easy is very desirable, especially if we convince ourselves it is accomplishing something important.

This second group of teachers was much smaller than the first group. Why? Their classes and tests required the student to think critically about the subject material. Therefore, they were much harder than the previous group. And therefore they were far less popular than the easy classes, especially if we had a choice in the matter. We all know that critical thinking is work, and in most cases, hard work!

So how did this small group of teachers test their students? They used the "essay" method. No easy answers like in the true or false, or multiple choice. The teacher would tell the class something like this;

"During the past few weeks we have studied these concepts... Now give me 3 reasons that show how they fit together, what they mean and tell me why. And don't forget to support your answers."

Yep! (It almost sends a cold shiver down your spine, right?) We had to interact critically with the material (no easy answers or guessing here) and then we had to be able to communicate our thoughts in some type of understandable written format. Tough, right?

Could you cram for a test like that? NO! Could you easily bluff your way thru the class and test if you really didn't know, understand and interact with the material? Of course not!

This is where the real thinking takes place. This type of teaching and testing produces real thinkers. Is yours like this? If not, don't expect your child to learn how to think critically.

So here is the first key:

1st KEY - If your child can pass a test just by memorizing the necessary material, you have not taught him/her how to think critically.

If all their tests are fill in the blanks, multiple guess or true or false, connect the dots, etc., then you are not teaching them to think. All that is happening is that he/she is memorizing the preset answers to preset questions and giving that information back to you! Very little real thinking is taking place.

Most Critical Thinking experts would agree on at least 5 elements to real thinking; analysis, inference, interpretation, explanation and evaluation that must take place as the student interacts with some reading material thru an effective writing process. (We'll talk more about those elements and the most effective way to accomplish this in a future article.) The 5 elements mentioned simply represent the ability of the students to interact, discuss, digest and apply the material to different situations.

Now, is memorization necessary in learning? Of course it is! Should we do away with memorization in our education process? No, absolutely not!

So what am I saying then?

In the child's early educational years (grades 0-3), memorization is the bulk of what they do. They memorize the alphabet, numbers, words, facts, etc., etc. That is fine and appropriate, for those grade levels. But even as a child

progresses thru these lower grades, some basic level of increasing understanding of what they are learning should be going on.

As the child moves into 4th grade and beyond, if the majority of what your child does is memorize the answers and give them back to you without any real interaction, understanding, thinking and real writing, then they are not being taught how to think.

Before we close this article, let me give you a tip on the most effective way to increase your students understanding of what they are reading or studying.

The **KEY** is this:

Remember our teachers that tested us by using an “essay” type exam? Why did they use writing as the means to evaluate and increase our understanding of the material?

The reason is this – essay or compositional writing is the most effective way to teach a student how to think, *especially* when it is linked to what they are reading! History proves this fact.

For example, look at any of the “great” thinkers produced from our early (non-public school) educational system over the last 200 years. What common element do you find? Writing!

From Abraham Lincoln, to Daniel Boone and Davy Crocket, to Benjamin Franklin, all these men wrote extensively whether through a journal or diary or in a more formal manner. The common educational element was the reading and study of good books and essay writing based on those books. Not much more, but certainly nothing less!

That’s something to ponder about as you consider how best to teach your child not just *what* to think, but *how* to think. For those interested in learning more about one of the most effective methods of teaching you children how to think, go to:

<http://www.virtueinknowledge.com/Write-Thinking.htm>

Here you’ll find tools, resources and tips for teaching your student not just what to think, but how to think.

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In part 2 of this series, we will cover the second and third myths that keep your child from learning How To Think and the 4 indispensable keys to teaching your child how to think.

You can download this second FREE article at:

<http://www.virtueinknowledge.com/Write-Thinking-Articles.htm>

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Until next time, may the Lord bless you as you seek Him who is the *only* source of all wisdom and knowledge!

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Critical Thinking without a thorough foundation and focus on God's Word leads a student into the temptation of two major sins: the sins of intellectual idolatry and pride. Only by "The knowledge of the holy is understanding / discernment." (Pr.9:10) and only the humble have true wisdom.

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