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READING TO THINK AND THINKING TO READ

Dr. Edward D. Watson

New teachers often feel honor bound to "stick to the manual". This frequently results in children responding to fact questions (who, what, where, and when), and missing the opportunity to enrich thinking skills. In order for thinking skills to develop, we have to go beyond recall.

When planning reading lessons, formulate questions which call for the making of inferences, supporting those inferences, and forming warranted conclusions. These processes call for the use of higher level cognitive skills. Classrooms where these processes are seldom called for, are breeding grounds for children who do not learn to think critically. If you want them to think; create an environment where thinking is valued. If teachers don't reflect this value in their lessons, who will be the model?

The following suggestions provide examples of how higher level thinking skills can be fostered through the classroom reading program. Note the use of open-ended (divergent) questions in these examples. Questions which don't call for one word factual responses.



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INFERENCE

Form questions which cause children to make inferences. For example; "What do you think caused Nanook to want to leave the tundra forever?" When you ask children to state what they think is a cause, or an effect, you are asking them to make an inference. This is a higher level thinking than simple recall. Also, it is divergent because it allows children to have different reasons, rather than having to converge on **The** right answer.

SUPPORT

Once inferences are made, they should be followed-up for support. "Why would the introduction of new ways of life cause him to want to leave?" When children are called upon to provide support for their inferences, these inferences become buttressed with a stronger foundation. They also provide opportunity for others in the group to weigh each person's reasoning, and to decide what makes the most sense when it is time to form a conclusion.

CONCLUDE

Having made and supported a number of inferences based on the reading, children should be ready to form conclusions. Questions such as; "From all we've said, what do you think is probably the main reason that Nanook decided to leave?", causes children to form a conclusion. This calls for sifting through the inferences and synthesizing them into one sentence. This requires a large cognitive lift which takes some practice with children. Seek support for the conclusions also. "What did we say that made you decide that was the main reason?" causes children to provide support based on the data read and discussed.

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**A CLASSROOM TOOL
THAT'S ALIVE, MOTIVATING AND
NEVER DULL!
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Do you feel you haven't started your day,
without first skimming a textbook?

Did you use a textbook

- ...to get a job,
- ...to plan a meal,
- ...to help you decide who to vote for
in an election,
- ...or to find a place to live?

Every student's classroom life needs
balance. A time for organized, sequential,
programmed learning and a time to:

- test their skill in real life reading
material
- see words beyond the controlled
vocabulary of their textbooks
- feel in touch with events in the world
and
- feel the joy of reading!

**READING TO THINK AND
THINKING TO READ
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Supported inferences help children to
arrive at "warranted" conclusions. These
skills do not develop by chance, they are
taught. Going beyond the "suggested"
questions in the manual affords teachers the
freedom to teach thinking and reading
simultaneously. This is possible at any grade
level where reading is taught. Only the level
of content and the extent to which
questioning is carried will vary.

Do yourself and the children a kindness.
Teach reading skills and thinking skills
concurrently. Create an environment for
reading and thinking which goes well beyond
recall. Don't be bound to the suggested
questions in the teacher's manual. Teach
them to think critically.

