BOOK REVIEWS

Fisher, R. (2005). *Teaching Children to Think* (2nd ed.). Cheltenham, UK: Nelson Thornes Ltd, softcover, 248 pages.

The question of how to teach children to think is the subject of much academic discussion these days. With this in mind, Robert Fisher's book, *Teaching Children to Think* can be viewed as a successful attempt to address this discussion.

Robert Fisher describes throughout the text how to teach children to think, to reason, and to solve problems. He explains practical ways through various diagrams and examples to develop the thinking and learning of children of all ages and abilities. On the first page of his Introduction, Fisher states that he "reviews the main concepts, methods and research findings in the teaching of thinking skills that have been developed in recent years" (p. ix). He remains true to this theme for the remainder of the text.

This well-written book presents a practical approach to empowering educators, parents, families, and the wider community with knowledge about the importance of teaching children to think. Each chapter begins with a quotation, followed by related discussions, questions, dialogues, and diagrams and ends with a summary of the chapter. For example, chapter 6 is based on philosophy for children. The chapter consists of dialogues, discussions, and questions such as "If education is supposed to be about teaching young people to think, why does the educational system produce so many unthinking people?" (p. 128). To answer this specific question and many others, Fisher uses ideas presented by Socrates, Vygotsky, Bloom, Piaget, Rogers, Lipman, and many others. As an example, Lipman's response to the question is "We do not sufficiently encourage the child to think for himself, to form independent judgements, to be proud of his personal insights, to be proud of having a point of view he can call his own, to be pleased with his prowess in reasoning" (p. 128). Fisher also explains how and why children fail in general, attributing some of these oversights to cognitive deficiencies.

One of the things that struck me about the book is the fact that, as Fisher explains, children should be encouraged to develop the habit

of self questioning such as "What do I believe?" "How did I come to believe it?" or, "Do I really accept this belief?" (p. 59). The challenge confronting children is to develop ingenuity, initiative, and resourcefulness. This challenge becomes all the more important when we are brought to the realization that in the future we may be forced to rely upon the creative ability of our children rather than upon diminishing natural resources.

Our aim should be to design educational programs to develop creative abilities in children. Educators should move towards a creative type of teaching in all subjects – a type of teaching which will combine thinking effort with learning effort, and thus develop thinking ability while implanting knowledge. Creativity is the ability to visualize, to foresee, and to generate ideas. In Fisher's terms, "Creativity is a collection of attitudes and abilities that lead a person to produce creative thoughts, ideas, or images" (p. 24).

Environment is not the pre-eminent factor in shaping a child's thinking. In Fisher's words, "It is through thinking that we make meaning out of life. ... Thinking takes place in a social context, is influenced and moulded by our culture and our environment. Learning to think is not achieved in isolation from others. The thinking child is a social child." (p. 3). According to Fisher, children have an innate creative ability, but such ability must be fostered in a supportive climate. The environment can play a very important role in the intellect and creativity of a child. The poor and unhealthy environments in many developing nations prevent children from developing their intellect and creativity and from thinking independently. However, once children are relocated to an enriched environment their creativity may flourish. For example, the author discusses Moroccan Jews and Falashas from Ethiopia and how Moroccan children have been successfully integrated in Israeli society. He further states, "Teaching children to think means, among other things, the ability to make use of new experiences. One way of decoding experience is through social values and shared habits of thought" (p. 109). As an important part of their environment, Fisher explains that children need a role model and must see people thinking independently.

According to Fisher, to have a critical mind is the ability to challenge the ideas of others. In other words he states that if we want our children to become critical thinkers then we must allow them to question traditional ways of thinking. In further exploration of this

idea Fisher points out that "One of the challenges of teaching children to think is to help them to discover that the process of evaluating, approving, and disapproving of one's own ideas is natural and healthy; the confidence to be self-critical can strengthen the sense of self" (p. 54). These processes develop in healthy social, economic, and political environments. In addition, ideas are the lifeblood of good writing and speaking.

What is refreshingly different about this book, however, is the way in which Fisher begins his discussion and dialogues in order to specifically illustrate the mechanisms important for teaching children to think. The only distinct criticism I offer to this text is that the discussion might have been well served by the inclusion of an international perspective to address the varying needs of children from different parts of the world. This would expand Fisher's arguments on how to teach all children to think.

This book provides useful information that will enable parents, families, educators, and communities to better understand each other and become advocates of children in teaching children to think. Courses in creative problem solving can be especially helpful since they not only develop the ability to think creatively but they also instil the desire to act creatively.

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McCaskell, T. (2005). *Race to Equity: Disrupting Educational Inequality.* Toronto, ON: Between the Lines.

Tim McCaskell's book is a detailed journey of his work with the Toronto School Boards between 1983 and 2001. The book provides the reader with a comprehensive explanation of the fight for educational equity in Toronto's schools combined with vivid details with respect to the political movement in Ontario during this time period.

Quite early on in his career, while working for the Riverdale Intercultural Council, McCaskell learned that one of the best ways to bring together equity groups that felt that they were being marginalized, was to invite representatives from the various