

*Strategies for Raising  
An  
Independent Thinker*



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## *Forward*

Some children are born independent thinkers, but these contemplative types are generally the exception to the rule. However, even the most thoughtful, self-motivated child needs guidance and direction.

The purpose of this ebook is to enable you to equip your children with strategies for analyzing and thinking through information and directions without depending on you for constant guidance.

Implementing these strategies will take a little extra effort, time, and organization on your part. But you will see the fruits of your labor begin to ripen quickly and effectively. The strategies I'll share in this ebook will become so natural to you, that you will find yourself using them outside of academics.

The key is discussion and communication. These two elements will not only set the stage for independent thought, but will also enable you to form a bond with your child that time will never erase.

May you be blessed through your efforts.

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How much have you and your children come to rely on the internet for gathering information? It is mind-boggling the amount of data and information available today compared with just 10-15 years ago. And yet many of us have become so accustomed to opening a browser when we need an answer that it has become second nature.

It is because of this incredible tool, and so much else that goes on in the media, that we need to take a fresh approach in the education of our children – one that has been all but forgotten...

Critical Thinking is a *process* – each piece of information that enters our conscious mind needs to be processed. It needs to be reflected on, evaluated, and judged. Many of our own thoughts, ideas, and actions are based on assumptions that we have made, whether critically, sub-consciously, or haphazardly. Since the internet is not “monitored” by the Fact Police, we need to teach our children not to take everything they read as fact. What a daunting task!

Praise God, He has equipped each of us with a mind and free will to use to His glory. Like anything else He has given us, we can use these two gifts for bad or for good. Our job as parents and the chief educators of our children is to teach them how to use their minds for good.

But what is the proper process for determining which information to digest and which information to expel? Let’s look at Socratic Questioning.

# The Socratic Questioning Strategy

Socrates taught his students (including Plato and Aristotle) by asking probing questions and thereby drawing out answers from his students. This is very different from just reading information to our children or using a lecture form of teaching. The very word 'education' comes from 'ex duco', meaning 'to lead out'.

Even Jesus answered questions with questions, forcing each individual to look at his question in a new way and formulate his own beliefs about the correct answer.

While at first this seems daunting to both instructor and student, both will soon ask these questions subconsciously when new information is acquired, as a sort of filtering process. The purpose is to acquire thoroughness and accuracy in our thinking.

Socrates used six strategies in asking these questions:

- Conceptual Clarification Questions
- Probing of Assumptions
- Probing Rationale, Reasons, and Evidence
- Questioning Viewpoints and Perspectives
- Probing Implications and Consequences
- Questions About the Question

Let's investigate some examples in each of these categories.

## **Conceptual Clarification**

- What are they asking us to find?
- What does this mean?
- What do we already know about...?

It is important for your child to fully understand the question or instructions given in order to solve the problem.

## **Probing Assumptions**

- Can you tell me why that is the right answer?
- What else could we assume?
- What would happen if ...?
- Why are we looking at this and not that?

Your child also needs to understand WHY he believes something to be true. It is not enough that the answer key says so.

## **Probe Reasons & Evidence**

- What were you noticing when you chose that answer?
- Where have we seen this before?
- Can you tell me why this other answer is wrong?
- What do you think causes this to happen?

Being forced to give clear, strong support for their reasoning causes anyone to think more deeply about their rationale and their answer – this produces deeper understanding of concepts, as well.

## **Questioning Viewpoints & Perspective**

- Why is this answer better?
- How else could we look at this?
- What if we compared \_\_\_ to \_\_\_?
- How are \_\_\_ and \_\_\_ similar (different)?
- Who benefits from this?
- What else could this mean?

Most reasoning is founded from a single perspective. By ‘attacking’ that perspective, we force the student to see things from another perspective – with new eyes, or in someone else’s shoes. Show that there are other, equally valid viewpoints or ways of solving the problem.

## **Probing Implications & Consequences**

- What are the consequences of that assumption?
- Why is \_\_\_ important?
- How could \_\_\_ be used to...?
- What happens next?

While their solution may make sense, test its logic. Does it make sense when carried a step further? Is there a more desirable solution?

## Questioning the Question

- Why do you think I asked that question?
- What was the point of this question?
- What does \_\_\_\_ mean?
- How can we apply \_\_\_\_ to everyday life?

Turn the question in on itself – this validates its importance further. It's one thing to solve a problem for the sake of solving it, and quite another to examine its validity in needing to be solved at all.

As you can see, each of these strategies, in the order given, delves into a deeper analysis of the material in question. Deeper analysis produces deeper understanding. Deeper understanding allows for confidence in problem solving and ownership of choices and beliefs. This confidence creates a conviction that is wholeheartedly shared with others.

There are some very important elements to this form of teaching:

- Both teacher and student must be willing to begin a discussion of the material presented.
- Both must be willing to accept any correctly reasoned answer – the process being more important than presumed or preconceived facts or beliefs.

# Bloom's Taxonomy

In 1956, a group of educational psychologists developed a classification of levels of intellectual behavior imperative for learning, headed by Benjamin Bloom. Bloom concluded that over 95% of the test questions students encounter require them to only think at the lowest level – the recall of information.

Bloom identified six levels within the cognitive domain:

**Knowledge** – This includes recall, recognizing, ordering, labeling, memorizing, and duplicating.

**Understanding** – This includes explaining, classifying, locating, reviewing, describing, and discussing.

**Application** – This includes demonstrating, illustrating, interpreting, practicing, writing, and scheduling.

**Analysis** – This includes discriminating, calculating, criticizing, appraising, questioning, and experimenting.

**Synthesis** – This includes designing, constructing, developing, organizing, assembling, and otherwise managing data.

**Evaluation** – This includes judging, defending, supporting, evaluating, choosing, arguing, and predicting.

Understanding Bloom's Taxonomy (think of the levels of thinking much like the layers of an onion – with Knowledge being the outer layer), and applying a Socratic Questioning Strategy in the course of your child's studies will develop your child's analytical mind. He/she will become a more thoughtful, independent learner who processes information and instructions with a critical eye.

I have found that my children require my help in understanding what "they want me to do" less and less. They also draw more from each of their regular lessons because they question the validity of facts and research other resources for verification. They also have learned to consider their sources for information as a major factor in choosing to believe a source or not.

These are great skills, and critical thinking skills will carry them throughout their entire lives much more than 'content' ever will. Besides, if they need content, they can always do a "search", right?

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Cindy Powers is an Independent Manager for Bright Minds: The Critical Thinking Company ~At Home. She is available in the greater Connecticut area to do workshops in homes, schools, and other educational organizations, as well as display Bright Minds materials at any regional events that value the education of our children. She also conducts online workshops in 'chatroom format' for those who would like to 'see' a demonstration of the products using online sample pages.

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