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Briefing #3

Please Don't Handicap Student Thinking

“Thinking is too hard. It's boring. I don't want to. I don't care”.

Students say these words at different points during the school day because as an educator I ask them to think. I ask them to question. I ask them to articulate. I ask them to make connections rather than just read from a book.

In truth thinking in the classroom has very little to do with content knowledge as much as the ability to try. When a student says it's too hard and raises their hand right after the directions have been given I wonder if they've made any attempt. I wonder if they looked at the reading, worksheet, or activity and gave up before a single critical thought was attempted. Poor babies!

What am I as an educator to do with you? I read the directions. I remind them of the content and context of the assignment. I let them know the expectation. Lastly, I begin a problem and let them put the pieces together. I walk away satisfied that they have started thinking until two minutes later when their hands are up again. I am disappointed. I thought I did everything I was supposed to do in preparing them for this activity. What more can I do short of giving them the answers for every problem?

Then there is another problem. There are the students who know what to do but don't think about what is being asked of them. Have you ever seen student work completed but incorrect? It's not always a lack of content knowledge but reading the directions and processing what should be done next. In both cases they are choosing not to think.

We must create a culture of critical thinking in the classroom. We must rid ourselves of these blank faces and “I don't care”, “I don't want to” attitudes. Looking at me is not going to give you the answers. Think! Please try! If you don't attempt to try I worry about how far you'll get in life. School means something. The work I give you is not just to keep you busy during the tedious school day. The work is full of content knowledge you'll need someday. The questions I ask you are to stimulate your mind and help you grow thoughtfully. Do you know there are children all over the world fighting and dying for an education? You're thinking is entitled and full of privilege. I'm disappointed.

The tears begin.

I need you to maintain focus. The toy in your pocket is not teaching you and is not helping you think about what is being asked of you. I not only need for you to think but understand the importance and teaching of mental management in the classroom. This goes beyond trying, but thinking about why you refuse to think. The work can not be too hard. It's been modeled over and over again. You all don't have an individual education plan that suggests you need more scaffolding or time. I beg you to please think about what you're doing. Don't just copy me. How did you get the answer? What’s the process? Metacognition is necessary in the classroom. It helps you build up the mindful processing of how and why.

Please think!

If you learn how to think critically you can tackle anything life throws at you. I say life and not school work because we do more than teach content. School is social and forces you to grow up. Stop whining that you can't do it. Someone took your pencil. You’re tired. Mental management cultivates cognitive resourcefulness. You solve this problem you have an application or foundation to solve the next problem. You eventually realize that even if the problem gets more complicated you have a plan in place. You can make the necessary adjustments because you began the process of thinking. You have what you need to make wise decisions.

Think again!

I wish it did not matter where you attend school and learn how to think. Every school is different. Multiculturalism affects critical thinking in the classroom. Diversity in the classroom determines how we think. It determines how we view the world. Yes a letter was issued about the effects of Trump's presidency and how it might affect your lives.

In a school that promotes misunderstandings and tells you that because you were born in a particular circumstance you are marginalized, your mindset is formed. For better or worse the school is implying that thinking is not as important as your background. Your circumstance will determine how you think. I call foul.

This mindset is setting up a handicap. It makes you believe the rules of school and life don't apply to you. The problem is the rest of the world does not allow you this handicap, think about it. If you hit someone outside of school because you're angry there will be real consequences. You can't tell a judge your school didn't force you to think so you hit someone.

If you think that manipulation and not thinking through a problem is the way to go, so be it. If this is the way you choose to spend your days, outside of the classroom playing games with the minds of adults, you're only harming yourself. You are not learning the necessary skills that will push you to think critically about the connections that exist between content knowledge and critical thinking. The connection between thinking and problem solving. Problem solving and life.

My goal as an educator is to push you towards greatness. I told one of my students that she needed to give me a summary of a difficult book because I wanted to make sure she understood it. She cried. She didn't want to read the book again.

Those poor marginalized children!

Critical thinking promotes reflection, reflection promotes social justice. We need better plans to support students rather than just call them marginalized in school meetings. Yes marginalized by a great portion of society but how are we helping them by telling them the rules don’t apply to them. As educators, as a community, we need a more thoughtful plan to get our students to think. Students deserve more for themselves. As a school we can not say we have high expectations for our students’ learning and ignore their behaviors. Thinking is not a consequence. It can not only be the educator pushing our expectations on students the students have to want to change their mindsets. They don't have to believe in the handicap.

Think, reflect, and move past the handicap!