

Why teach Thinking Skills

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Take a topic and choose a question to create a debate or discussion. What is the result? Often it is a disappointing mishmash of emotion, convoluted logic or superficial comment with no result, no outcome, no direction and no purpose.

However, if we have an understanding of a cognitive framework, such as the one developed by Benjamin Bloom in the 1950s and updated not so long ago, we can take a topic, decide on a cognitive outcome such as asking for facts, basic understanding, application, analysis/investigation, passing judgement or suggesting alternatives, then choose an explicit question related to one of the six levels of thinking. The purpose of the question is now clear in terms of one of the previous outcomes. For example, if the outcome is analysis, then one could choose the word 'debate', 'discuss' or 'investigate'.

If one is seeking true elegance in the debate or discussion, there is a further step to take. This is in the selection of an appropriate thinking tool. If the outcome is to encourage debate, (investigation or analysis) choosing a *SWOT Analysis*, the *Pros, Cons, Questions* or the *Icon Prompt* thinking tool will lead to a fuller answer.

If the outcome is to pass judgement (evaluate), then an Extent Barometer, Elimination Draw or Decision Making Matrix, will provide the means to a more elegant and persuasive decision.

If the outcome is to offer more original ideas or alternatives, then a MAS, Word Association tool will more likely lead to true and genuine productive effort.

Master craftsmen select the appropriate tool for the particular job or outcome. Masterful teachers do the same. They look at the outcome in terms of Bloom's taxonomy of the cognitive domain, choose the correct questions or activities and then select an appropriate thinking tool. They know that their students will be far more eager, accountable, responsible and motivated to ensure that the final product is worthy of public evaluation and scrutiny.

The ITC Thinking Skills Framework is an invaluable tool assisting teachers in designing meaningful questions and activities for their learners, offering appropriate verbs, sentence starters and appropriate thinking tools to achieve more elegant responses from their students. This framework is

the basis for much of the material in the Innovative Teachers' Companions, diaries for teachers offering hundreds of classroom teaching ideas.