

Core Thinking Skills

An effective thinker has a wide range of skills that help them to create meaning, gain understanding, make judgments, make good decisions, self-analyse and reflect. There are many lists of skills available, and there is also much debate about what the skills of an effective thinker are. Considering the large and growing list of thinking skills, it seems that amongst this large group of skills there must be some that we would consider as being base or foundational skills. These are the skills that we would not to ensure that we equip our pupils with.

Now obviously there is no one right answer to this question and it is one that could be debated extensively. As I consider the question I have a short list of skills that I currently consider as crucial basic skills. These may well change as my own understanding and knowledge deepens. Watch this space.!

There are many approaches one could use to find the answer to this question. Each approach could well provide a different answer.

The method I used to arrive at this list was to think of a problem solving situation and then to identify the simple essentials of the process that would take a person through to establishing a workable solution. This would give us 10 broad skills that we could start to concentrate on.

Essential or Basic Thinking Skills:

- Recognise a need or problem
- Recognise inadequate information or evidence
- Clarify relevant language
- Ask relevant questions
- Differentiate between fact and opinion
- Evaluate credibility of information & sources
- Generating solutions
- Assessing solutions
- Consider long and short term consequences, sequels and outcomes
- Make wise decisions

Of course some of these are fairly broad skills and many actually include further skills sets in their own right.

I suppose an interesting sub-question would be... "Is there one central skill that

is absolutely vital?"

For myself I would consider the skill of questioning to be central to the whole exercise of effective thinking. I would agree with Edward De Bono who states that "Questioning is the engine house of thinking". It seems to me that without the ability to ask effective, relevant and probing questions then thinking itself would cease to be effective.

Another approach that I have used with schools is to look at the Inquiry Learning process that the school is using and determine which thinking skills match with each part of the inquiry process. When we examine the SAUCE model we get the possible answer to the question of basic skills, again it is still a debatable answer.

Setting the Scene

Skills: Clarify relevant language, Clarify issues, Ask relevant questions

Acquiring Information

Evaluate validity/credibility of information & sources, Clarify and critique texts,

Weigh evidence, Ask relevant questions

Using the Information

Make wise decisions, Consider long and short term possible outcomes and consequences,

Assess possible solutions, Generating solutions, Ask relevant questions

Communicating outcome, thinking and decisions

Ask relevant questions

Rather than try and identify further specific thinking skills for this stage we felt it was more relevant to point from here towards the schools documentation on communication skills... which will also have thinking skills embedded.

Evaluating product and process

Ask relevant questions, Analyse and evaluate actions

Again there is the very obvious factor that questioning seems to be a central skill.

We also end up with a very similar set of base skills with only a couple of variations.

- Ask relevant questions
- Clarify relevant language,
- Clarify issues,

- Evaluate validity/credibility of information & sources,
- Clarify and critique texts,
- Weigh evidence,
- Make wise decisions,
- Consider long and short term possible outcomes and consequences,
- Assess possible solutions,
- Generating solutions,
- Analyse and evaluate actions

I believe it is important for schools to spend some time deciding what skills they see as being central or core to thinking. If you do this it gives you some solid targets to aim at. I have a strong suspicion that many schools have decided that thinking is important, state they will address thinking skills, and then fail to take this on to the development of an effective programme that deliberately targets specific skills and attitudes.