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Introduction

The idea that teachers need to teach students how to think on complex levels is not a new one for either of us. Anne has worked with gifted students for over ten years, and Joan has been an innovative, challenging regular classroom teacher for over fifteen years. We have worked together on a number of complex-level units for students and recently have been part of a project to increase the teaching of complex-level thinking in the regular classroom. Writing a book about our experiences of teaching complex-level thinking had been percolating in Anne's head for awhile, and when the people at Zephyr Press called, the ideas now had a place to bloom. This book is the culmination of over two years of hard work.

As we began to write, it became increasingly clear that changing the "status quo" of the classroom was a monumental task, and such a transformation does not occur overnight. Time and effort were needed. Results were inevitable but often indiscernible at first. In fact, creating the thoughtful classroom was akin to taking a journey, with teachers as the tour guides.

So, our book is about this journey of change from one style to another style of teaching. We have based the content of this book on current thinking in the field, but more important, we have grounded it in our personal experiences in the classroom. We have tried every suggestion in the book—in fact, if an idea is here, we have used it successfully.

The first three chapters of the book focus on broad ideas concerning thinking and teaching of complex-level thinking. If the thinking skills movement is new to you, we highly recommend reading the early chapters first. In chapters 4 through 7, we focus on the pragmatic realities of teaching thinking in the regular classroom, first discussing the thinking lesson in detail. The heart of the book is contained in chapters 6 and 7, in which we explain the roles of teacher and students in the evolution of the thoughtful classroom. In the last chapter, we discuss how to evaluate progress on the journey.

Some of us are further along the path than others on the journey to teach thinking. The book follows a chronological outline, starting at the beginning of the trip with a description of the various preparations one must make and exploring the stops along the way. We invite you to seek out the parts of the book most applicable to your level of awareness and interest. We hope that you find the challenge of creating the thoughtful classroom as exhilarating as we both do. Bon voyage!

Creating the Thoughtful Classroom: Taking the Ultimate Journey

*My idea of education is to unsettle the minds of the young,
and to inflame their intellects.*

Robert Hutchins

The HOT topic in education today is complex-level thinking—what it is and how to teach it. Evidence of this concern abounds in universities, schools, homes, and businesses. In the academic hallways, eminent philosophers in education argue over the true nature of thinking. Scholars separate the components of complex-level thinking into various categories, the result of which is a bewildering array of available models and confusing terminology. Theories are everywhere. School boards and superintendents insist that complex thinking be part of the school curriculum. Parents and business leaders worry about the inability of students to think in a sophisticated manner. National reports call for more complex thinking from our students.¹

This intense focus on thinking has been fairly recent. In the 1970s and 1980s, American society placed little value on provocative dialogue; and, as schools mirror the political and economic structure of the society they serve, they consequently did not specifically teach thinking. More emphasis was placed on mastering basic skills than on mastering skillful thinking. Now, however, the emphasis has shifted toward teaching critical thinking. When asked, business and political leaders clearly state that future graduates need to be able to think critically, solve problems, and be creative.² Today teachers are being asked to teach students how to think with sophistication and complexity.