Analytical Thinking as an Elective

In many public school systems, Analytical Thinking for Children is incorporated into either the Language Arts or Social Studies area of the curriculum and is taught several times weekly throughout the entire school year. I teach at a very small private school in Fort Worth - White Lake. Here, Analytical Thinking is offered as an elective subject to the thirty fifth and sixth graders.

One problem with Analytical Thinking as an elective is that each nine weeks the students have an opportunity to choose among several elective subjects. Calligraphy, tennis, chorus, art, foreign languages and child care are some favorites among those choices. For most of the subjects, the content is obvious. A student knows well in advance what to expect from a tennis or art class. The title Analytical Thinking, however, can be a bit intimidating to a student, and even an explanation of the content may leave him skeptical. For each of the classes, the teachers write a small explanation of what the course entails. In competition with tennis or calligraphy, the immediate attraction of learning to think more skillfully pales a little.

The other difficulty in getting students interested in Analytical Thinking as an elective is that students who take it are required to commit themselves to at least two nine weeks' periods, rather than just one as with other electives. This is based on the fact that the maximum benefits of the program -

increased reading and math scores - are difficult to achieve and assess in short periods of study. Desirably, students take analytical thinking for at least one full school year. Ideally, students take it several years in succession. In addition, it is extremely difficult to establish a community of inquiry or for students to become accustomed to the amazing notion of really listening to one another and working in a dialogue until after many weeks of working together. This requirement has a tendency to scare students away from even initially trying Analytical Thinking as an elective at White Lake. Students like the potpourri notion of changing subjects each nine weeks. At the end of each quarter, there is a buzz of excitement as students look forward to their new electives.

In spite of recruiting problems, the delightful fact remains that students who appear in my class are apparently interested in the idea of a class that thinks about thinking. They would not have registered for it otherwise. They are curious and eager to talk about some of the important ideas hinted at in the course description. Evidently, the course is satisfying to most, as more than half of the students who took the class for the first semester this year decided to continue with the course in the second semester as one of their elective choices.

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