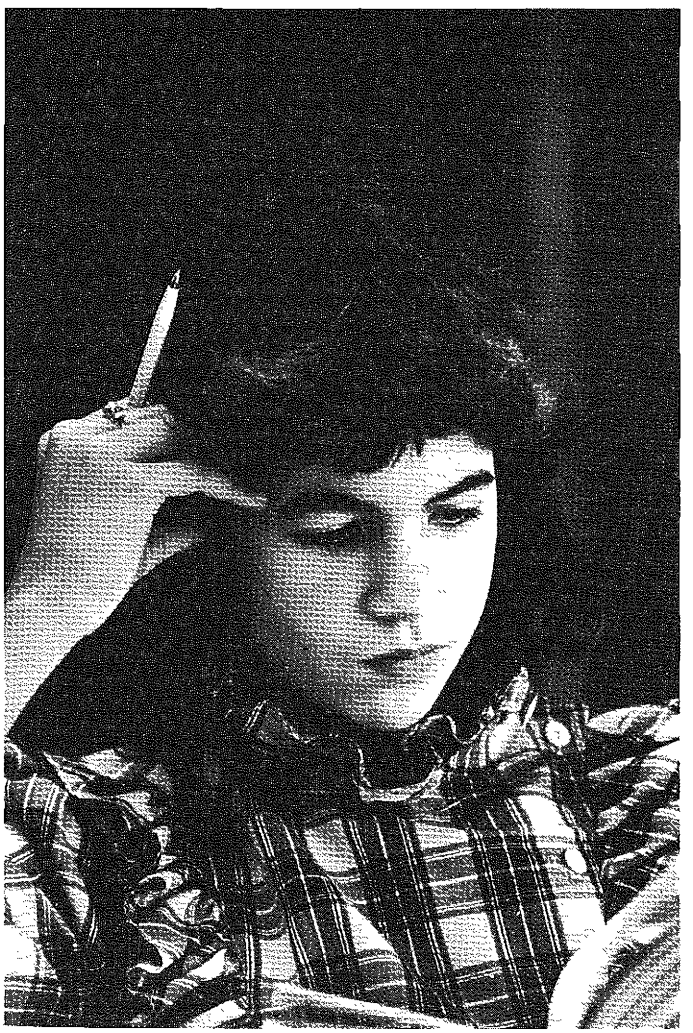
Thoughts on "Thinking Time"

This fall I have been using *Rebecca* to do analytic thinking with my class. The boys and girls involved are first graders in a low socio-economic area of the city. The children are improving their thinking skills as a result of the course of study and can apply those skills in other academic and personal areas of their lives. Our "Thinking Time" is a period of about thirty minutes two or three times weekly.

Development of a community of inquiry is an important goal of the program, but difficult to achieve. Discussions progress from concrete and familiar subjects to the more abstract, less familiar ideas; the not-too-surprising result is that as difficulty increases, the interest level decreases for some children unable to make the transition. Those children who can progress to the more difficult level of thinking are delighted, enthusiastic and eagerly responsive. Gradually, a supportive atmostphere evolves in which *each* child makes some response to the opportunity to expand his awareness and that of the community.



Many of the philosophical concepts which are presented in the first half of *Rebecca* complement the development of skills necessary for reading readiness. Some of these thinking skills emphasized in this course of study are the following: recognizing similarities and differences, distinguishing between reality and whimsy, making assumptions, predicting outcomes, making decisions and questioning. The children are encouraged to participate in the classroom dialogue by expressing their thoughts about the concepts being studied. Community members are required to give justification for their opinions and to be supportive of the efforts of others.

Carryover to other areas of the curriculum is often observed. In a social studies unit we enjoy the comparisons of various ways of life with our own. Science experiments give us exciting visual evidence that appearance and reality are not always the same. Mathematics offers the challenge of changing a physically manipulative problem into a mental activity. Improved language skills allow us to express ourselves more clearly and to appreciate what others are trying to tell us.

The cognitive abilities of little six-year-olds are slowly revealing themselves to me in the form of amazing questions and statements. What limits can there be for young children who begin to consider appearance and reality, cause and effect, and probability? Scientific reasoning, language development and creativity are obvious applications of analytical thinking skills; but more important to me are the increased possibilities for self-realizing personalities stimulated by the examination of personal characteristics and identity. Participants in this program are learning to value each other as individuals with unique qualities rather than seeing those differences as threatening.

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