

What is going on in a Child's brain?

Dr. Robert Leech's article. "[Analogy as Relational Priming](#)," clearly adds support to the evidence that critical thinking skills MUST be taught to youngsters as a vital part of their elementary school experience.

"We" are pouring huge amounts of data into their "just-now-forming relative-relational data base system" without any rules or tools to handle all that data. They are entirely left to their own devices to learn how to manage their knowledge and emotions, yet we are still amazed that about 50% of all mental illness manifests around age 14.

Our brain automates all the data handling processes it can. Driving is a great example. We must pay attention, and do, until we master the skill. After that we never give it a thought, although some really should. It is a fairly obvious conclusion that all thought processes are subject to the same automation.

This is the most important reason there are so many behavioral problems in our species today. Since youngsters cannot apply critical thinking skills to their own thoughts because they were allowed to develop their own way of handling data, the teen or adult they will become will not be able to either.

What are the processes at work in a child's brain when they go to school and why is it so stressful for them? Why does the systematic approach we are using frequently fail to yield the peaceful, well-behaved adult we had planned?

They are switching from experiential thinking, to metaphoric thinking. In other words, they are learning to translate their experiences into language. In that, analogy is an absolute requirement because a word is not an experience. A word may be a noun, verb, adjective, adverb, etc., but the relationship created by attaching it to an experience converts it into analogy. That being said, and correctly so, what are they supposed to do with all of them? How do they learn to process all of what they are learning in a manner that doesn't lead to harm?

While teaching these skills however, the basic lesson must be to help children understand they are not their thoughts, or the object of their thoughts. They aren't actually even their metaphors, analogies, similes, reasons, evidence, contentions, claims, or any other known data handling process we teach later as part of a critical thinking curriculum. Children need to be taught that thoughts are symbols, tools, descriptions, options, and relationships. Thoughts are not the person's identity. They need to be taught to see themselves as "the thinker." Thinkers use thoughts, just as Mechanics use tools.

Children must be taught that their emotions are only memories of physical sensations experienced during different events. They are only adjectives. Emotions are what make us stop breathing just because something is so beautiful and we are overcome by the sight. Emotions are what make us weep for joy and laugh until we cry. Emotions are what powers our dreams and desires, fuels our intentions and makes us tingle all over when we have done something really well.

They are also what can make us kill a stranger in a fit of rage or take our own life because we feel that is the only solution for our unbelievable hopelessness and despair.

Emotions, however, are not facts. Emotions are only the part of our memory of an experience that describes how much we enjoyed that experience or how horrible or anxious we felt. Emotions are not absolute commands requiring us to do something and we should not base our choices solely on the emotions we have about something.

The part of our brain that handles emotions is a very, very old part as compared to the part of our brain that allows us to have this conversation. There are many parts of our brain that are categorized as either "higher" or "Lower, " and the "lower" parts of our brain still function exactly as they did millions of years ago.

The part of our brain that handles our emotions is one of these. Most of our non-verbal behavior is handled by parts of our brain that actually developed eons before we had words or even self-awareness. In fact, our emotional brain is incapable of reasoning in any form.

Trying to deal with someone when they are very emotional should have taught us that long ago, but we didn't understand what was really going on in their brains. As it turns out, nothing reasonable is what is going on.

If the emotional part of our brain can't reason, how can we depend on it to guide our lives? We cannot, and should not, is the obvious answer. But we usually do, don't we? We have been taught what we feel is as important as what we know to be fact.

How did this happen? It happened because our mental health paradigm is focused on how we feel when we are so emotionally messed up that we can no longer think clearly. It should have been focused on helping us control the thoughts that would lead us to such crazy conclusions.

This should be the most important aspect of elementary school education. The rest of their life depends on learning how to keep what they learn in perspective; how to use what they learn to become happy, peaceful and prosperous adults. They need to be taught "rules and tools" for handling their own thoughts along with all the rest of their lessons.

What they choose to think about, and that choice up to them as individuals, determines the biochemical makeup in their bodies for better or worse, for illness or health.

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