

Chapter 67

I'd Like to Teach the World to Think: Mind Genomics, Big Mind, and Encouraging Youth

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ABSTRACT

At the time of this writing, 2017, there is noticeable reduction in the perceived ability of people to think critically. Both the popular press and the scientific/professional literature recognize this worldwide drop. This chapter presents the use of experimental design of ideas, conjoint measurement, originally a tool used in marketing, as a tool to inspire creative thinking. The chapter presents the approach and application of conjoint measurement as a tool for discovery, and then delineates a new computer APP, Big Mind, as user friendly to enhance critical thinking. Big Mind embodies conjoint measurement to help researchers study topics, uncover new substantive findings, and learn to think critically as an outcome from the process.

INTRODUCTION: THE DECLINE OF THINKING IN THE WORLD (ACADEMIC AND POPULAR LITERATURE SEARCH)

A greater percent of the world's population is educated, year after year. At the same time, pundits and professionals alike are lamenting the loss of critical thinking (e.g., Schurman, 2013, but many others in the popular, non-academic press). And so, we face a quandary. Our young people today, those of school age, are digital natives, playing increasingly complex, often competitive video games with an enviable ability and with concentration and perseverance, behavior seems not to appear when otherwise needed for schooling. Yet these same young people do not read much, have limited attention span, and worst of all, appear to have lost the ability to think critically, or at least the ability to focus, perhaps because they live in a world of instant messaging and tweeting. The world, filled as it is with increasingly competent 'tech-savviness' is losing that fundamental ability to think through a complex problem, a problem which lacks entertainment value but might be the kind of problem to be later faced in one's life or one's profession.

This chapter is not going to be a eulogy on thinking, but rather will present the authors' approach to encouraging critical thinking by turning the young person into an experimenter, albeit an experimenter with ideas. The chapter is, in fact, a description of an ongoing project begun some years ago, the Mind Genomics project, to create a new science of the mind. The Mind Genomics that was created in the 1990's has evolved into a tool by which to stimulate critical thinking, as well as a tool to create a corpus of knowledge about what we think.

The Digital Age

The past 30-40 years have seen the at first gradual and now rapid emergence of a new age of information and communication, an age many of us call the 'digital age.' The advent of widespread computation, of heretofore unknown computing power, and the nearly universal availability of computation, either in computers or in cell-phones, has changed the way we think. Technologies like the ubiquitous search engine from Google® give us almost immediate access to much of the world's publicly available information. Facebook® lets us stay in contact with people, and send pictures and news of ourselves to distant acquaintances and friends. Twitter® lets us broadcast our news, albeit in 144 or fewer characters. News can be fabricated to the point that we don't know the veracity of what we read.

The foregoing, with the massive increase in information available to people, has also had an effect on the way we think. We are no longer at peace, with little to do but contemplate, finding solace and interest in books. There is not enough time to read, not with the ever-present desire to check in with our friends, about what we are doing, read the bursts of information pushed into our phone, and multi-task, doing several actions simultaneously, switching our attention in a way that, without context, an outside observer would think is a sign of mental aberration, an inability to concentrate.

Lest the foregoing seem to be overstating the case, the reader is invited to observe the behavior of people walking around, and requested to count the number of people who, when walking, running, wheeling a baby carriage, even crossing the street, are seemingly 'glued' to a smart phone, looking, talking, or texting.

The consequence of this described behavior is the gradual loss of our ability to hold discourse with great minds, the loss of free time just to think, the loss of the ability to mentally review what we have learned, either consciously and deliberately, or the loss to fantasize simply because we have free time and ideas flit into our mind, ideas from what we have read. We are too busy, too preoccupied with planning,

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