

### **Learners becoming smarter at thinking**

Laer Volksskool in Heidelberg joined the “Schools as Thinking Communities Project” during 2012, and adopted a whole-school approach to purposeful cognitive improvement and enrichment in all curricular and extra-curricular activities. For the past 18 months, the school has been infusing the Six Thinking Hats and Thinking Maps as teaching strategies across the school curriculum. All teachers apply these strategies during teaching to enhance the cognitive potential of the learners during teaching and assessment. An important aspect of teaching in a school that decides to become a thinking community is that learners should, among others, be encouraged to become smarter at thinking by developing a questioning disposition. Learners should learn that they do not only have to wait for questions to be posed to them. To provide a challenge to the Grade 4 to 7 learners, they were requested to take part in a competition that focused on the learners formulating and answering at least five of their own questions linked to selected topics that were dealt with in some of their subjects during the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of the 2014 school year. An important criterion for assessing the learners’ work was that the formulation of the questions had to indicate what knowledge about the selected topic they regard as important, and the phrasing of the question had to involve different modes/levels of thinking (lower-order and higher-order thinking). On 15 April 2014, the winners in the respective Grades received Easter Egg baskets (see photograph below). An example of the work of one of the Grade 4 learners (translated from Afrikaans into English) follows below the photograph. Overall, the work of the learners demonstrated that many of them are well on their way in becoming smarter at thinking more deeply about the knowledge they acquire in the classroom. Moreover, the learners’ questions mirrored what the teachers expected of knowledge acquisition and knowledge development during teaching, namely that knowledge acquisition does not only involve the accumulation of facts but also reasoning about, and analysing, synthesizing and evaluating facts.



Habitat types of animals in South Africa		Level of Thinking
1. Name at least five habitat types to be found in South Africa	Desert, Sea, Forest, Grassland, Rivers	Factual
2. What influence will the extinction of the Rhino have on types of habitat?	We need rhinos. They are valuable; they open up access to other species in the bush. Rhinos are valuable; their dung enriches the soil with nutrients for plant families.	Application
3. A habitat holds advantages for animals. Name THREE advantages.	Security Safety A proper/adequate source of food.	Critical/Evaluative (positive)
4. What dangers do inadequate habitat types hold for animal species?	Not taking in adequate nutrients that can lead to the animals becoming sick and dying, and not producing offspring.	Critical/Evaluative (negative)
5. How can we encourage our children to save our earth's habitat types?	Avoid littering Protect all Fauna and Flora Support projects like "Save the Rhino" project.	Creative

During March 2014, survey research conducted among 120 parents at the school noted the development of the following skills and dispositions among their children since the school embarked on their journey to become a thinking community: increased motivation for attending to schoolwork, greater precision and accuracy when completing tasks, being positive about school, improvement in academic performance, a questioning attitude/disposition and an eagerness to talk more about the strategies their teachers use during teaching in the classroom. The data provided some preliminary evidence that the learners are apparently becoming smarter at thinking and learning.