Elementary teachers in Howard County, Maryland, are using Lee Winocur's Project IMPACT to incorporate critical thinking skills into their teaching. Although Project IMPACT was originally designed for remedial junior high students, the elementary teachers and administrators have successfully adapted it for their students in grades 2-5.

We began the project with training for the teachers and administrators in the pilot school, Running Brook Elementary. After training, the teachers revised the Project IMPACT materials, making them age-appropriate for their students. Next, teachers in grades 3-5 were organized into teams to identify critical thinking skills for their grades.

The Project IMPACT materials teach 22 critical thinking skills, 10 teaching behaviors, and a lesson plan design using many components of mastery teaching. A typical IMPACT lesson includes direct teaching of a critical thinking skill followed by opportunities for the students to apply the skill in language arts, science, or social studies. For example, an introductory lesson on “cause and effect” can be followed by using a graphic organizer to visualize causes and effects of inappropriate school behavior, or of the actions of a character in a story, or of an earthquake in California, or the American Revolution.

We have high expectations for the academic success of our students, and Project IMPACT helps us remain on the cutting edge. As we integrate content with critical thinking skills, we are discovering new ways to help students understand, question, and remember content material.

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