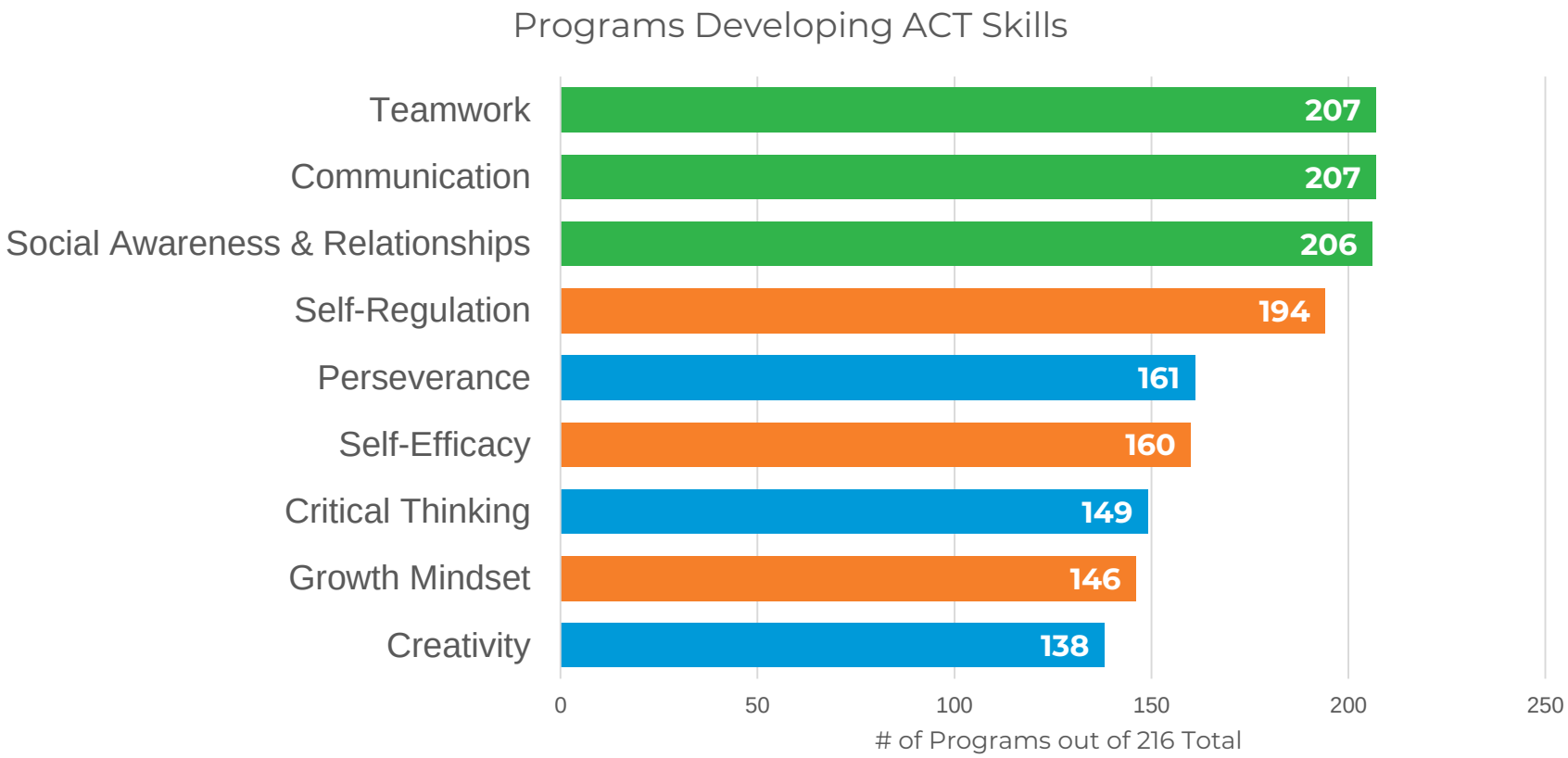
Boston
After School
& Beyond

The ACT Skills: Critical Thinking

The Achieve-Connect-Thrive Skills

Connect Skills are the most widely taught



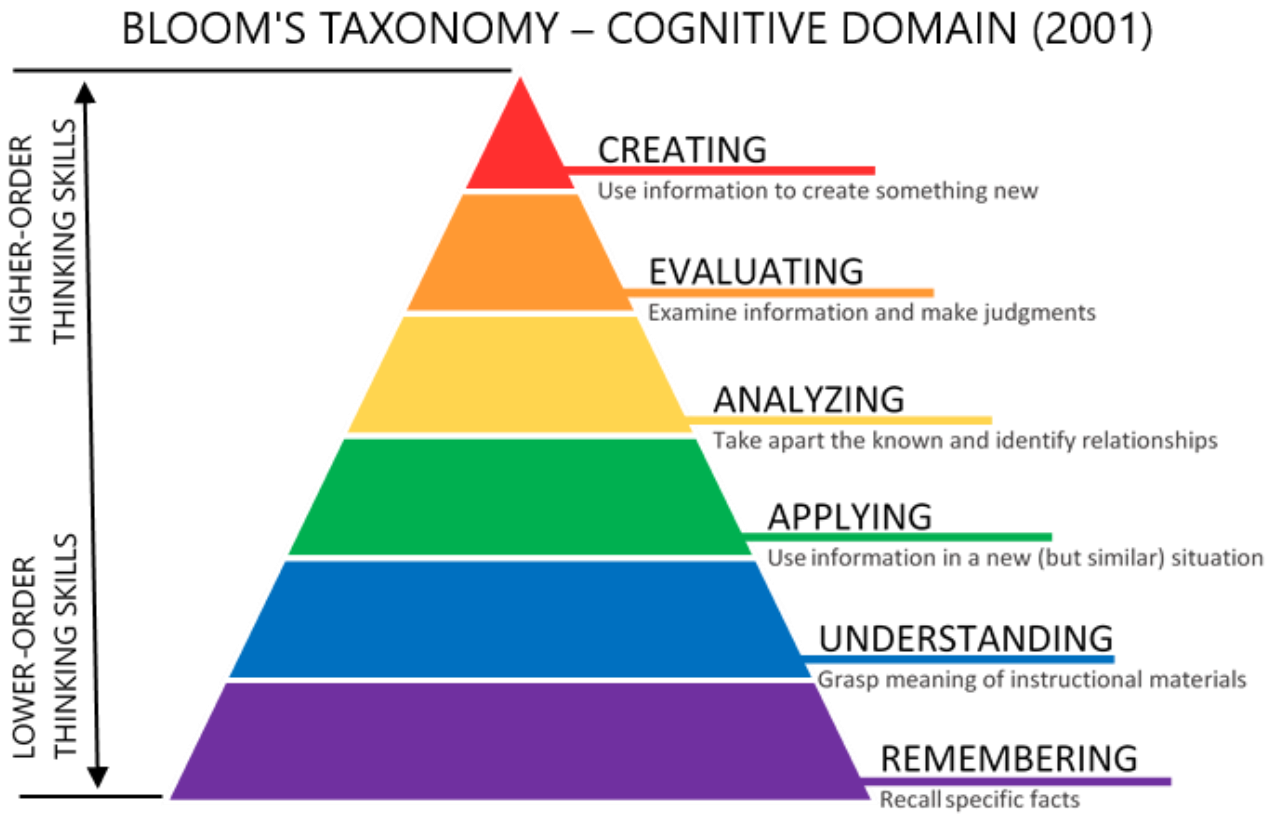
Representative of 2023-2024 School Year

What is Critical Thinking?

Critical thinking is conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating information to reach an answer or conclusion. Critical thinking involves disciplined thinking that is clear, rational, open-minded, and informed by evidence.

Research shows that critical thinking is linked to college and career readiness. Young people with strong critical thinking skills analyze relationships between ideas, consider perspectives other than their own, explore multiple solutions to problems, and use evidence to support their conclusions.

What is Critical Thinking?



Why Critical Thinking?

- “I think, therefore I am.”
  Descartes, 1644

- “Much of our thinking, left to itself, is biased, distorted, partial, uninformed… yet the quality of our life and that of what we produce, make, or build depends on the quality of our thought.”
  Paul and Elder, 2006

What does Critical Thinking look like?

- Considers multiple perspectives
- Solves problems strategically
- Synthesizes information
- Asks questions
- Arrives at well-reasoned conclusions
- Reflects on their thinking

PEAR, Critical Thinking 2 Rubric
PEAR, Critical Thinking Rubric
Paul and Elder, 2006

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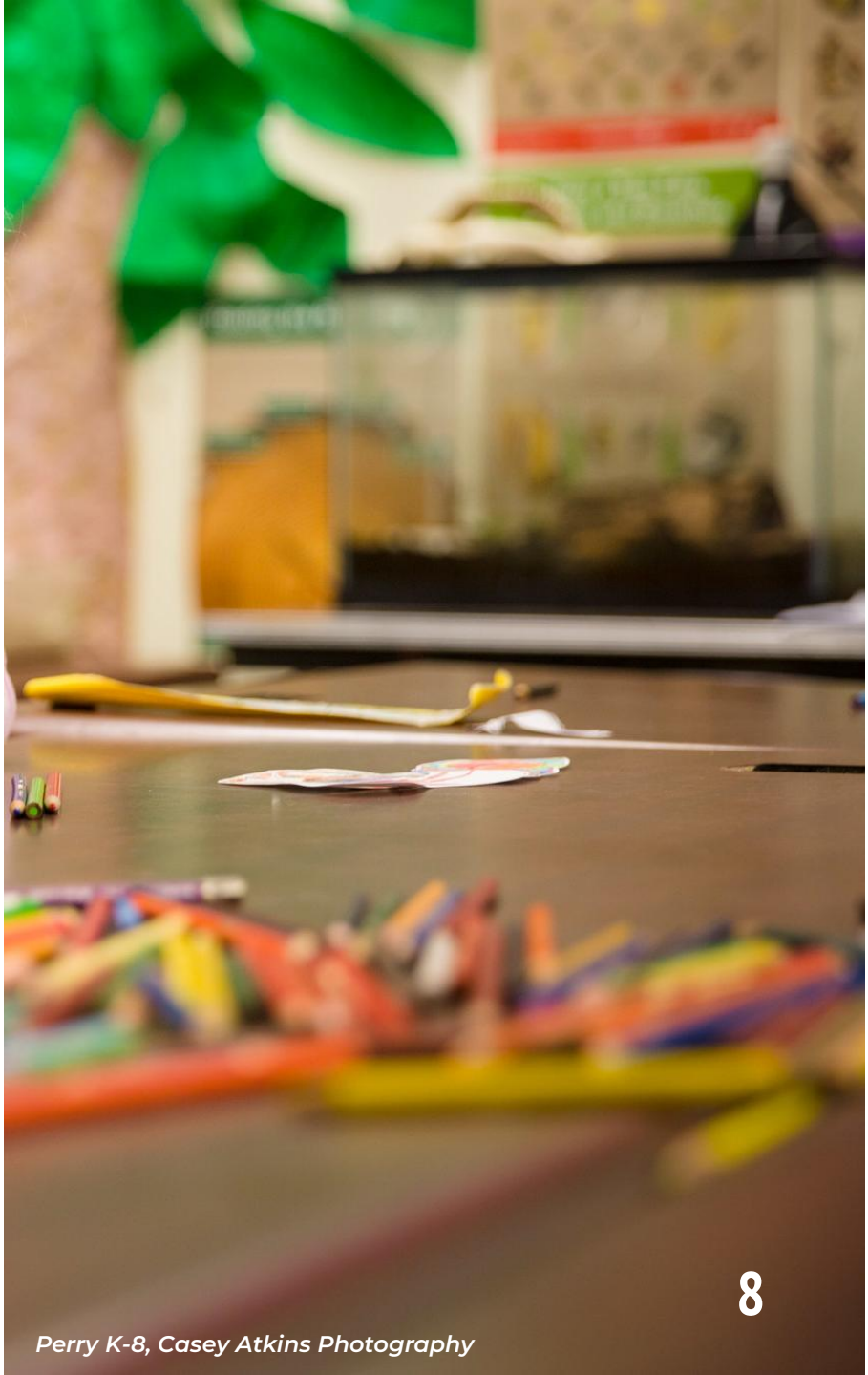
What does a lack of Critical Thinking look like?

- Struggle with deducing logical relationships
- Accepts info at face value (unquestioning)
- Lacks their own opinion
- Does not consider other perspectives
- Does not connect activity with underlying concept

PEAR, Critical Thinking 2 Rubric
PEAR, Critical Thinking Rubric
Paul and Elder, 2006



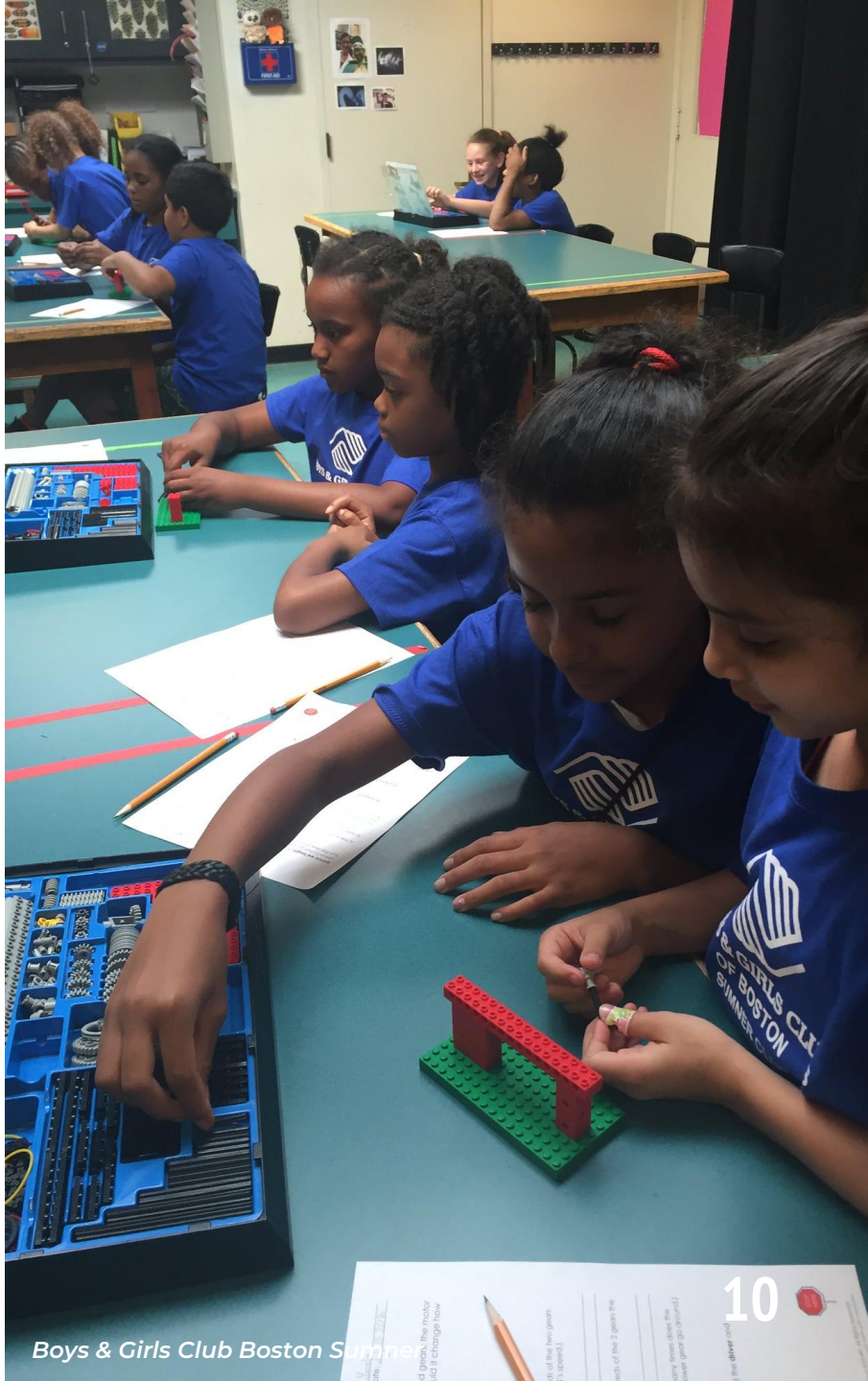
Perry K-8, Casey Atkins Photography

How to Encourage Critical Thinking

1. Engage in Problem Solving
2. Ask Open-Ended Questions
3. Reflect Together

1) Problem Solving

- Small group problem solving → generate and evaluate ideas
- Activities that require problem solving most of the time
- Encourage reasoning out loud (present, defend, evaluate)



PEAR, Critical Thinking Rubric

Surr, Wendy B. with the National Institute on Out-of-School Time, Wellesley Centers for Women, Wellesley College, APT-O Rating Anchors, p. 26

Provenzano, 2023

2) Open-Ended Questions

- Prompt students to think more deeply
- Help students form opinions and explain their reasoning
- Help students evaluate arguments

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PEAR, Critical Thinking Rubric

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3) Reflect Together

- Summarize learning, connect activities and concepts
- Understand how they learn
- Connect learning with their lives (relevance)

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PEAR, Critical Thinking Rubric

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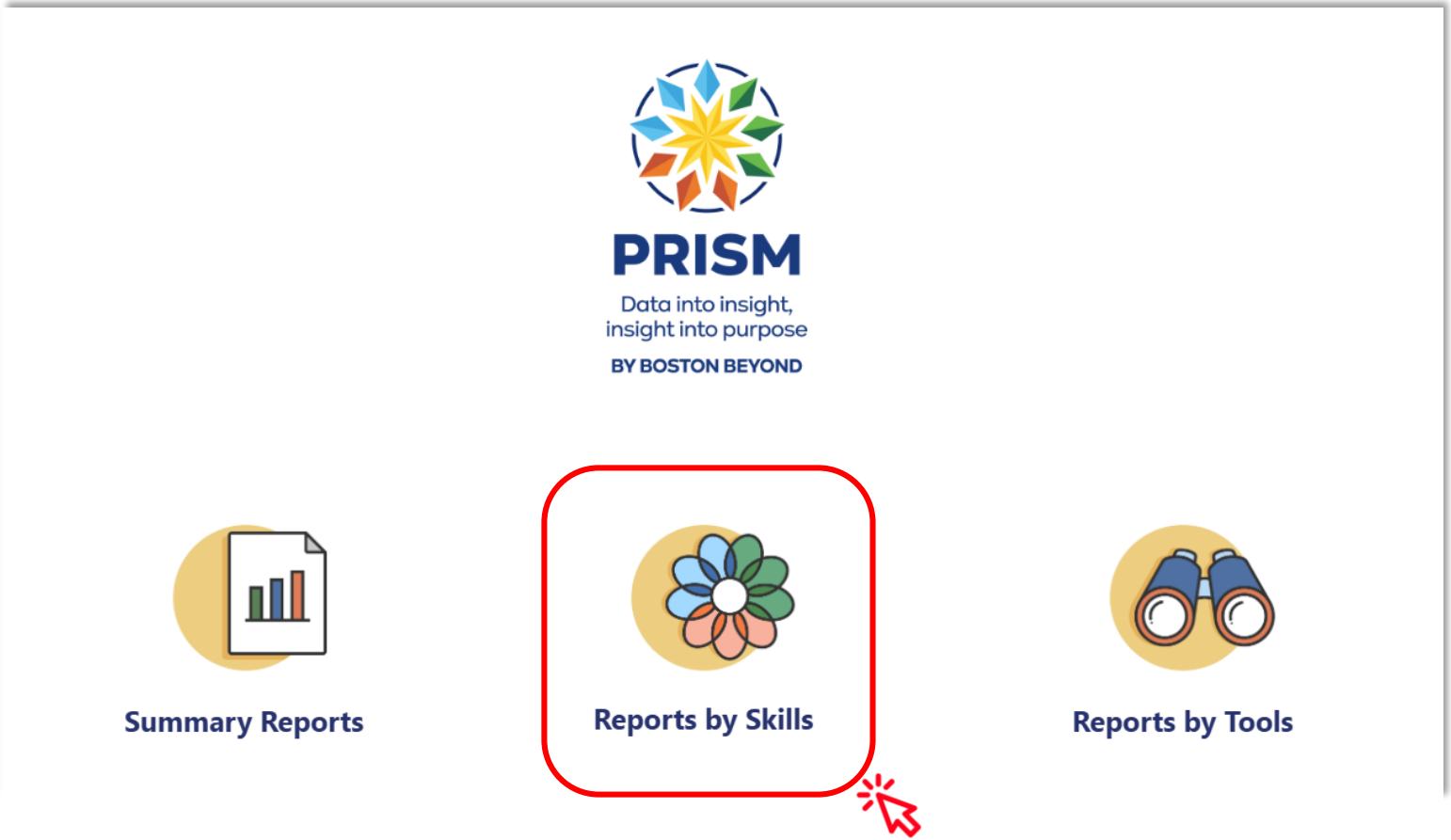
Provenzano, 2023

Building Critical Thinking beyond school

Don’t forget the Reports by Skills in the PRISM



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