

EDWARD B. BURGER

# MAKING UP YOUR OWN MIND

*Thinking Effectively through  
Creative Puzzle-Solving*



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## THE JOY OF LEARNING

*Creating a Meaningful Piece of the Human Mosaic*

**This book is written for . . .**

. . . people who believe that education should be an uplifting, life-changing proposition designed to enable the individual to think more effectively, and create and connect ideas to make greater meaning through an ever-evolving mindset that allows one to persistently flourish.

. . . people who see themselves as students—whether their formal education is unfolding in front of them today or disappearing in life’s rear-view mirror—people who are committed to embracing empathy and open-minded doubt in the noble pursuit of improving their world by first improving themselves.

. . . people who enjoy practicing effective thinking through brainteasers that help generate new insights and original solutions to both the whimsical puzzles within these pages as well as the far more important puzzles within their own lives.



**This book was inspired by . . .**

. . . a half-century journey through formal education that began when I was a struggling young dyslexic student, then as a tutor, instructor, scholar, professor, author, online video math semicelebrity, and university president. Today I apply all these experiences as I continue to create educational growth opportunities with the hope of lifting the lives of others.

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Every aspect of our education should be viewed as offering a meaningful piece to the living mosaic that will inevitably define our self. The goal of that creative process is not the indoctrination of specific points of view, but rather becoming a truly independent and wise thinker and *making up your own mind*—that is, creating yourself.

This volume includes essays on this perspective of learning and living, on how academic institutions can change and challenge the educational status quo, and on how these philosophies and my colleagues have inspired an unusual course entitled *Effective Thinking through Creative Puzzle-Solving*. This book also allows the reader to experience personal growth by mindfully delving into the puzzles offered in that course. However, unlike traditional puzzle

books, the ultimate goal here is not to solve the puzzles but rather to practice a way of thinking through the puzzles.

Engaged participation is essential in your learning—you must have agency over your own, ongoing education. Thus, to realize the greatest impact from this tiny book, you must intentionally use the puzzles ahead as a playground in which to practice elements of effective thinking that can then be applied to all of life's challenges and opportunities.

The two chapters following the puzzles offer thought-provoking prompts and deeper insights that arise from effective thinking. However, given the unusual expectation of active engagement, those two chapters are formatted so that reading them requires unusual effort. The first is printed upside down and the second is printed as a mirror image. Those chapters hold the promise to model effective thinking in action but will have maximum utility only after you have invested the requisite time and patience to first engage with the challenges by practicing the suggested mindsets.

As in my classes, I want you independently to generate your own “Ah-ha!” moments of excited discovery. So please do not be deterred by the inevitable frustration generated by the puzzles themselves or the puzzling format of the two epilogues . . . they were deliberately designed to provoke greater thought.

Hence, your mission—should you decide to accept it—is not to quickly solve these classic puzzles and move on, even if you have seen similar such puzzles before, but rather to explicitly practice the templates of thinking offered herein. So look upon these puzzles—previously seen or otherwise—with a fresh mind’s eye and with a goal of applying the practices of effective thinking to see everything—the foreign as well as the familiar—in novel and richer ways. That is, thinking *through* these puzzles offers an opportunity for impactful learning and personal growth—the ideal and ultimate goals of a meaningful education. *Enjoy the mindful opportunities that await.*

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# 1

## The Academy

### *Making Meaning through Impactful Education*

Today we hear much talk about the economics of formal education (especially within higher education), in particular, the ever-mounting costs together with existential questions of dwindling *demand*. However, absent in the din of these debates is the basic issue of *supply*. What does formal education offer, and is that offering truly worth the investment of both time and money? In fact, it is interesting to observe that the phrase “formal education” is not even well defined.

Formal education has become a paradigm in which the goal is a diploma with (*idealis*) Latin words embossed into an elegantly encased rectangular parchment. That certificate and the degree it implies—high school, associate, baccalaureate, and other degrees—then lead to a starting job with a starting salary. That parchment is necessary in order to cash in on that initial income and thus has devolved into today’s practical