

Creating a Thinking School

South Africa Presentation 2011



Outcomes

- A definition of a Thinking School
- An understanding of the process involved in becoming a Thinking School
- What might a Thinkers Toolbox contain
- Recognition of some of the Issues
- Benefits of becoming a Thinking School



Creating a Thinking School



**Thinking
Schools**



Background: How did we arrive at our model

- Frustration at the ineffectiveness of one-off training in school
- Gill Hubble
- Development of a set of criteria
- Establishment of a national network



Definition of a Thinking School

“An educational community in which all members share a common commitment to giving regular careful thought to everything that takes place. This will involve both students and staff learning how to think reflectively, critically and creatively, and to employing these skills and techniques in the co-construction of a meaningful curriculum and associated activities. Successful outcomes will be reflected in students across a wide range of abilities demonstrating independent and co-operative learning skills, high levels of achievement and both enjoyment and satisfaction in learning. Benefits will be shown in ways in which all members of the community interact with and show consideration for each other and in the positive psychological well-being of both students and staff.”

Creating a Thinking School



Look
Like

Feel
Like

Sound
Like



The Approach

The success of the approach is that schools take a whole-school approach to the teaching of thinking. This means that thinking becomes central and explicit and all teachers and students develop a common thinking language and toolbox.



The Approach

As students move from lesson to lesson and teacher to teacher they will be using the same tools and strategies as part of a coherent and well-planned approach. This applies to both primary and secondary schools.



The Approach

Each school will identify and select specific thinking tools which can be used across the curriculum. These tools will develop specific types of thinking and thinking processes. The students will develop an understanding of how they think and be able to articulate how they think. Teachers will talk about thinking with their students.



The Process

- A school commits to taking a whole-school approach
- One of our consultants is allocated to work with the school
- The consultant will talk to the head of the school about what he or she wants to achieve
- Thinking tools will be identified as part of the planning process
- Training with all staff will take place and the tools embedded
- Assessment by the Cognitive Education Centre at The University of Exeter



Getting Started: Reflective Questioning

Reflective questioning is the use of Prompts and questions to engage students in both thinking about 'what' they know (factual memory) but also 'how' they know (critical reflection). High quality questions guide students to think about their thinking (metacognition), dispositions that they are drawing on and how they are collaborating with others as they are learning.



Thinking Skills

Psychologists, cognitive scientists and educators have developed many different models and theories for defining and organising a range of thinking skills. Of these models differentiate between 'lower' and 'higher' order skills. In general terms there are fundamental cognitive processes for organising information; skills of analysis and synthesis and processes of creativity and evaluation.



Visual Mapping

There are many different kinds of visual mapping techniques such as brainstorming webs, graphic organisers and conceptual and 'systems' mapping. Usually visual mapping approaches mirror specific kinds of thinking skills or theories of learning. Some of these tools are used in isolated ways for certain tasks, some are open ended. There are also visual 'languages' for school-wide use.



Collaborative Networking

The techniques for cooperative learning are many and there are models for establishing collaborative groups, classrooms and schools. The research on cooperative learning in schools and the need for high quality collaborative groups in the workplace connect to the recent evolution of social networking through new technologies as learners engage other learners around the globe.



Developing Character

Educators interested in the area of developing thinking often start by differentiating thinking 'skills' such as cause-effect reasoning and the ability to make inferences from thinking 'dispositions' such as persistence, remaining open-minded, and metacognition. Dispositions are often related to the new field of emotional intelligences and the developing empathy in relationships to others.



Structuring Environment

How the classroom, school, and Surrounding area is physically structured has a great effect on teaching and learning. Positioning of students on the floor, seating Arrangements in the classroom and the accessibility of learning materials are all dimensions of the environment. The use of all the resources available within and around the school and wider community is key to engaging students.



**What difference do we want to make?
For whom?**



Common characteristics of Thinking Schools

Based on evidence from several hundred schools with whom we have worked these are the common characteristics of Thinking Schools.

- A coherent school-wide approach
- Deliberately planned for
- A common thinking language
- Everyone does it
- Explicitly taught and reinforced over time
- Infused throughout the curriculum
- Adaptive as new learning takes place

Common outcomes across a Thinking School

Improvement in:

- Levels of independent learning
- Academic attainment
- Literacy and communication skills
- Motivation to learn and think
- Behaviour
- Attendance
- Classroom management and teacher facilitation

What does a Thinking Student look like?

Traditional

- Questions asked by teachers are factual and closed
- Teachers telling students about how well they are learning
- Emphasis on student recall of prescribed content information
- Different ways of thinking remain personal and private

Thinking

- Students independently asking a variety of questions
- Students recording and reflecting on their thinking processes
- Students applying core thinking skills to constructing knowledge
- Students actively discuss and share different ways of thinking

What does a Thinking Student look like?

Traditional

- Knowledge is expressed in linear speech and writing
- Focus on passing closed-ended exams for selection purposes
- A belief in a singular, static intelligence is Fostered and students are perceived

Thinking

- Students use a range of learning modalities such as visual mapping
- Students learn how to become self-assessing and metacognitive
- Students are aware of a range of forms of multiple, dynamic intelligences that can be improved

What kind of learners do we want?

- Students who can...
- Students who are...



Some key questions for a Thinking School

- What difference do we want to make? For whom?
- What outcomes would we expect?
- What is the difference between thinking skills, thinking curriculum, thinking classrooms and thinking schools?
- What is powerful learning?
What is powerful to learn?
- What kind of learners do we want? Students who can...are...
- What kind of thinking do we want
students to do? What do they do well? Not well?
- What are the essentials of a thinking curriculum?
- What would we need to consider in a strategic plan?

Key Questions

- What structures would we need for planning, monitoring and reviewing a school-wide initiative?
- What teacher training would be effective? When?
- How would we get students and staff to value it?
- What would our implementation targets for the introductory year?
- How could we involve students



**What difference do
we want to make?
For whom?**

