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# Introduction

## Why a whole school approach?

It is not uncommon to hear teachers in schools talking about developing a *thinking culture* within their learning communities.

In developing a thinking culture, it will be important to provide teaching and learning activities that will

- empower students with the language, tools and strategies to engage in a wide range of analytical, critical and creative thinking tasks
- provide on-going opportunities for developing, practising and refining the skills of thinking
- provide instruction and practice in ways of managing, organising and recording thinking
- engage students (particularly the more gifted learners) in the higher order thinking skills
- assist in the transfer of skills to everyday life and everyday situations as tools for life-long learning.

Achieving such outcomes will require more than the efforts of a few teachers occasionally using one or two thinking strategies as a part of their normal classroom practice.

An essential element in developing a thinking culture will be the explicit teaching of thinking skills to all students.

A whole-school approach that provides a scope and sequence for the introduction of thinking skills at specific year levels will have a much greater chance of success in achieving the outcomes outlined above.

## What are the benefits of a whole school approach?

A whole school scope and sequence for the teaching of thinking skills will assist in overcoming some of the less desirable practices to be observed in some schools e.g.

- the '*feast or famine syndrome*' that occurs when in one year, a class group have many opportunities to actively engage their thinking but are starved of similar opportunities the next.
- the '*We're a six-hat school syndrome*' that occurs when a single strategy is adopted by teachers and used exclusively across the school. Whilst teaching one strategy is better than teaching none, a range of strategies needs to be introduced if students are to be adequately skilled in all aspects of organising, recording and reflecting upon their thinking.
- similar to the last scenario is the the '*flavour of the month syndrome*' where, for a short period of time everyone is designing teaching and learning activities around similar frameworks or models until something 'better' comes along.

## What will this mean for teachers?

Developing a thinking culture within a school will require that all teachers are familiar with a diverse range of thinking strategies so that they may use the tools of thinking:

- when planning learning activities for students, both within and across curriculum areas
- as an integral part of their classroom teaching practice
- while evaluating student learning outcomes.

It will also require teachers to employ strategies in the classroom that will include

- appropriate modelling
- explicitly teaching the tools and strategies and explaining the significance of each tool in the thinking process
- providing many opportunities for students to interact with:
  - the newly-introduced tools and strategies
  - each other
  - the teacher

as they become familiar with the tools, as they practise applying their new knowledge and then as they become confident users of the strategies in many diverse situations

- giving feedback in a variety of forms that encourages the learner to engage in both
  - risk-taking
  - reflective and metacognitive thinking.

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## **What will students learn?**

As students progress through the modules, they are exposed to a range of thinking strategies that will develop their skills in many different types of thinking which includes:-

- analytical thinking
  - critical thinking
  - creative thinking
  - metacognitive thinking
- responding to a wide range of different question types
- framing their own questions using question-generating tools
- using graphic organisers to record thinking and to present the products of their thinking
- making decisions and solving problems

## **What aspect of thinking is covered by each of the modules?**

The scope of the modules provides the opportunity for students to receive explicit instruction in seven distinct aspects of thinking.

Choosing to introduce all modules will mean students will have covered the following concepts before they leave primary school:

- de Bono's Six Thinking
- Extended Brainstorming
- Questioning Techniques
- Tony Ryan's Thinker's Keys
- Graphic Organisers
- Bloom's Taxonomy
- Decision Making/Problem Solving

## **How are the modules structured?**

All modules share a similar format. The content to be covered over a school year has been broken down into manageable learning tasks that could be reasonably achieved within one school term.

Each module indicates the:

- suggested skills to be introduced each term
- anticipated student learning outcomes
- a brief explanation of the strategy to be taught
- some examples of learning activities which use the strategy
- proformas, student worksheets and opinionaires to assist teachers in assessing and recording student progress, achievement and attitudes
- other resources to support the introduction of the module