



# DEVELOPING A THINKING CURRICULUM IN YOUR SCHOOL

A HANDBOOK FOR  
EDUCATORS

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# FOREWORD

Clearly the aim of schools everywhere is to provide quality education.

Quality education implies delivering a curriculum that is appropriate in both time and place. Much of what was appropriate twenty years ago may no longer be appropriate today and what is appropriate now may well no longer be so in another twenty years.

With ever-increasing understanding about brain functioning and a reality of an ever-changing world, teachers in schools across Australia, New Zealand and beyond are looking to a curriculum with a thinking focus that is appropriate for today's classrooms. Current state-based curriculum documents in Australia all address the need for developing skills for lifelong learning and all have a strong emphasis on thinking skills as a result. The existence of Productive Pedagogies in Queensland, the Essential Learnings in South Australia and Tasmania, VELS in Victoria and Key Competencies in New Zealand are just some examples of this.

The infusing of thinking into content delivery, the use of the language of thinking and the explicit teaching of thinking is becoming an ever-present feature of classroom practice. However, the issue faced by many school leaders in particular is how can such methodology be imbedded within and across the school as part of the ongoing culture of every classroom?

This handbook outlines a five-step process that will assist schools at all levels in implementing a whole-school approach to infusing thinking into the curriculum. It provides frameworks for ensuring that practices such as the explicit teaching of thinking becomes an enduring part of the culture of the school.

A whole school approach will require comprehensive and ongoing attention to developing a shared vision, generating an implementation strategy, putting the plan into action, monitoring the progress, reflecting upon success and responding to problems and challenges.

Section one describes how establishing a whole-school approach will require staff to come to some common understandings about the process of thinking itself as well as what teaching and learning with a thinking focus may imply.

Section two asks what the explicit teaching of thinking may look like at the reader's school. What baseline data would assist in mapping progress?

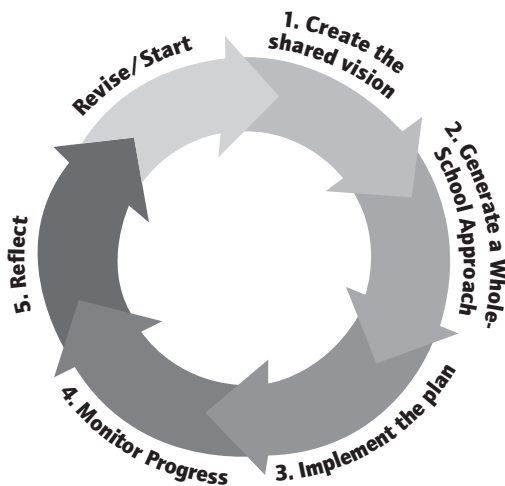
Section three investigates the challenges surrounding implementation, focusing upon the role of teachers as they develop a classroom culture of thinking and what could be expected of students as they work within a culture of thinking.

The next section provides strategies for the tracking and monitoring of student progress, whilst the final section provides thinking tools for reflection and identifies some common pitfalls.

Whilst the model is portrayed as a step-by-step process, one would hope that the implementation of a range of thinking skills, tools and strategies explicitly taught at all levels of schooling would see the emergence of an enduring framework that allows for a continual spiralling progression of skills within a seamless integrated thinking curriculum across the school.

— Figure 1

## A Thinking Curriculum at our School



# 1 CREATING A SHARED VISION

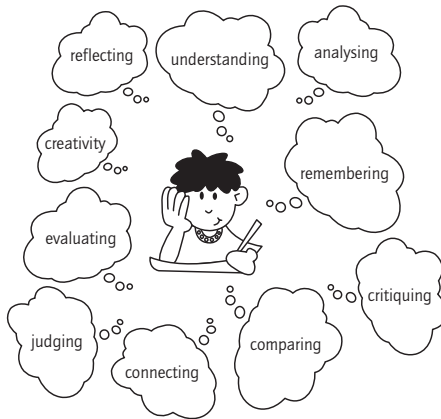
## Developing common understandings

... about thinking

... about a thinking curriculum

One only needs to conduct a group brainstorm of words that have something to do with thinking to realise what a complex process it is. Such a brainstorm commonly generates hundreds of words!

— Figure 2 —



In developing a whole-school approach to teaching and infusing of thinking, developing some common understandings about what it is that teachers are expected to teach with, for and about will be an important, if not paramount starting point.

## Common understandings ... about thinking

In order for practitioners to successfully teach thinking in their classrooms, the task must be seen to be a manageable one. With an already overcrowded curriculum and many things outside the core business of teaching requiring attention, the last thing teachers need is more work to do.

Undertaking a brainstorm about thinking as described earlier will highlight the possible complexity of the task and may lead some to believe it to be too overwhelming for them to handle. It is important, therefore, to work through a process that will have teachers come to an understanding about what are the core elements of thinking – elements that can be easily taught within content.

An example of a workshop activity that would have teachers defining and then refining core elements of the thinking process may look something like this:

### STEP 1:

#### GROUP BRAINSTORM

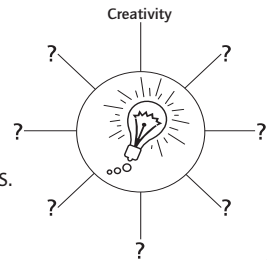
In a circle in the centre of some paper, draw a **symbol** that represents, for your group, what good thinking is all about.



### STEP 2:

Draw lines radiating from the circumference of the circle to begin a simple web.

At the end of the lines, write attributes of good thinking or some of the qualities of good thinkers.



### STEP 3:

#### NOW ...

As a group, can you decide what is at **the heart** of all good thinking:

What are **three or four essential** ingredients? \_\_\_\_\_

# SHEET 1

## THE THINKING CURRICULUM


Discuss the concept of a thinking curriculum as:


### A PROCESS


Record some thoughts below before passing the page onto other groups who will add further ideas.


Following this, we will draw ideas together to formulate a succinct statement.

As a **process**, a thinking curriculum provides an approach to teaching and learning that describes:

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