

Developing a Classroom Culture of Thinking

Learning to Think: Thinking to Learn

Models and strategies to develop a classroom culture of thinking

Michael Pohl

Cheltenham, Victoria, Australia:

Hawker Brownlow Education, 2000

AUS\$28.50, pp97

reviewed by Mia O'Brien

This publication begins with a dedication to «those teachers who share my belief that the teaching of thinking is an empowering process that will see students of today become critical, creative, and caring adults of tomorrow». In doing so, the author's intent to provide a very practical and usable resource for teachers is clear from the outset. Pohl's book provides models and templates aimed at fostering a «classroom culture of thinking» that many teachers would find immediately usable.

However, the value of any pragmatically-oriented publication lies within the educational advantages such «models and strategies» will enable. While this book presents clear, accessible and easily understood strategies for diversifying the classroom repertoire, its claim to enabling a «classroom culture of thinking» must be carefully considered.

Most of the student teachers who glanced at this book were excited by the «ready to use» templates and guidelines. For these beginning teachers, and perhaps for busy practitioners, this book offers strategies for the practical interpretation, planning and implementation of contemporary learning theories (Bloom's Revised Taxonomy, Gardner's Multiple Intelligences, Taylor's Multiple Talent Model, and a range of strategies to support critical and creative thinking). To assist readers further, the author locates each model and strategy into four broad sections according to their educational aims:

- Instructional approaches to develop a broad range of thinking and feeling processes;
- Instructional approaches to tap into different ways of knowing and understanding the world;
- Instructional approaches with a focus on critical, creative or caring thinking;

- Integrated instructional approaches.

While the theorists themselves may take issue with such categorisations, the author provides subject-specific and cross-curriculum examples of each model applicable to different levels of schooling. Each model is introduced with a concise theoretical narrative, and the examples provide ample stimulus for extending and elaborating upon the planning and implementation of one's own practice. For student teachers, beginning teachers, and indeed many practicing teachers, this book provides very concrete strategies for diversifying classroom activities, and articulating a broader range of task-oriented questions, themes and stimulus. The models also facilitate linkages between specific educational goals and appropriate learning activities (making a distinction, applying knowledge, creating a solution, using a different «intelligence», deploying knowledge in a variety of ways). Achieving congruence between instructional objectives and learning activities is a difficulty commonly experienced by beginning teachers.

We return to the original proposition, does the diversification of classroom repertoire enable a «classroom culture of thinking»? Perhaps. The caveat here is that strategies and models themselves may not constitute a «culture of thinking». Many of these strategies have the potential to enable a progression from the single-perspective, monological classroom thinking tasks to the analytical and interpretive benefits that multilogical thinking brings (Splitter & Sharp, 1995). However, Gardner himself advocates (through his work with the Harvard Project Zero group) the importance of conceptualising thinking and learning as the achievement of understanding - an «ability to make productive use of concepts, theories, narratives, and procedures» (Boix Mansilla & Gardner, 1998:162). Perkins further elaborates on the notion of understanding by describing it as evident when «people can think and act flexibly around what they know»: (Perkins, 1998:42). Transforming any classroom into a «culture of thinking» cannot rely upon the injection of «thinking skills» alone. A «thinking» culture must foster a language for thinking, develop dispositions, habits of mind and inclinations towards thoughtful encounters, teach students to manage one's own thinking, facilitate self-direction, and clarify our perceptions of what «higher order thinking and understanding» may mean in a range of contexts (Tishman, Perkins, & Jay, 1995).

In this regard, Pohl's intention to support teachers in an endeavour to explicitly teach thinking skills is achieved to some extent. However, the context within which these strategies are implemented must be considered in detail. «Cultures of thinking» certainly draw upon a range of ways in which to «think about» an issue, topic, theme, idea or concept. On the other hand, classroom contexts that engage students in dialogue, evaluate the quality of their own thinking and the thinking of others, provide opportunities for in-depth and sustained probing, and require participants to try out ideas and rethink their own, attend to the heart of learning as understanding and inquiry.

Pohl's book provides stimulus and practical strategies for the diversification of classroom activities. Located within a broader thesis of how classroom experiences may assist children to think, reflect, reason and effectively utilise their understanding, Pohl's models provide useful tools for planning and organising rich learning experiences.

REFERENCES

- Boix Mansilla, V. & Gardner, H. (1998). What are the qualities of understanding? In M. Wiske. (Ed). *Teaching for Understanding: linking research with practice*. Jossey Bass: San Francisco
- Perkins, D. (1998). What is understanding? In M. Wiske. (Ed). *Teaching far Understanding: linking research with practice*. Jossey Bass: San Francisco
Splitter, L J. & Sharp A.M. (1995). *Teaching for Better Thinking*. ACER:Melbourne
- Tishman, S., Perkins, D., & Eileen, J. (1995). *The Thinking Classroom: learning and teaching in a culture thinking*. Allyn and Bacon: Boston.

Address correspondence to:

Mia O'Brien
School of Curriculum, Teaching & Learning
Faculty of Education
Griffith University (Mt. Gravatt campus)
Nathan, Q. 4111
Australia

[Back to current electronic table of contents](#)