Creating a Culture of Thinking

- What do we mean by a *Culture of Thinking*?
- How do we nurture and cultivate a culture of thinking in our schools and classrooms?
A Quick Sketch of Today’s Session

- Laying the groundwork & Providing some background
- Defining a culture of thinking
- Uncovering the forces that shape organizational culture
- Looking at how the cultural forces can help make thinking visible in classrooms
What do we want the children we teach to be like when they are adults?
A Chalk Talk
What do we want the children we teach to be like when they are adults?
So...How do schools help them get there?
ENCULTURATION

Children grow into the intellectual life around them.
A disposition looks not only at what one can do, but also at what one does do.

Dispositions put ability into play, bridging the gap between ability and action.
A Dispositional View of Thinking

- **Ability**: the skills one posses, waiting in reserve
- **Inclination**: One’s valuing of those skills and abilities as worthwhile & important
- **Awareness**: An awareness of opportunities: when and where to use one’s skills
- **Motivation**: The motivation in the moment to expend the energy to apply one’s skills to the situation.
unpacking Culture

3, 2, 1, Bridge

Tuesday, July 28, 2009
Demystifying Culture

WHAT IS CULTURE?

CULTURE is what is created from the messages that are received about how people are expected to behave. Cultures develop in any community of people who spend time together and who are bound together through shared goals, beliefs, routines, needs or values. Cultures exist in nations, corporations, sporting clubs, schools, families, religious communities, professions and social groups.

Humans are tribal animals; we are hard-wired to fit in with our tribe. We read the signals about what it takes to fit in, and we adapt our behaviour accordingly. This is a survival strategy. If we cannot do this, we either leave the tribe, or the tribe ejects us. As we adapt to fit in with our new tribe, we in turn reinforce these tribal norms, or accepted behaviours, and thus reinforce the culture.

The process is supported by peer pressure. Existing tribe members work together to ensure that the new member does not rock the boat, and thus expose weaknesses in individual members.

Behavioural norms evolve over long periods of time, and are influenced by many factors including the values or beliefs which brought the community together in the first place; the nature of the activity carried out by the group; past and present leaders and heroes; historical events, successes and traumas; physical and geographical conditions; the demands and behaviour of external parties – customers, owners, enemies; and many others.
I have observed cultures which lift people to operate at the highest level of their intellectual and emotional potential, where the group really does exceed the sum of its parts and individuals seem to become ‘better people’; contributing more, whilst simultaneously supporting the success of their colleagues. Such groups deliver extraordinary results from ordinary people. I have seen others which turn fairly normal and well-meaning individuals into selfish, political, backstabbing monsters.

Behavioural norms become subconscious, they remain long after their original purpose disappears, and eventually may not be particularly useful in relation to the goals the community is seeking to achieve. This is often the case in organisations. Because established behaviour influences the behaviour of new members, cultures perpetuate themselves. They require extraordinarily strong and focussed leadership and/or a co-ordinated effort from a group of influential members, to change quickly.

While behavioural norms may be subconscious amongst existing members, new members notice them most acutely, but, if they are to survive, quickly adapt to the prevailing culture. Where members may be aware of the cultural tendencies, they rarely understand enough about their source, nor have sufficient confidence, power and determination to cause change. Holding one’s own behaviour on a course which is at odds with that of one’s community requires great resilience and self-belief. In the scheme of things, in a work setting, and assuming the required behaviour does not go beyond a certain personal point of integrity, most people adapt to the norm. If you are used to a culture in which everyone speaks their mind in meetings, and you arrive in a new organisation where the norm is not to do so, over time you are likely to speak up less frequently. You get tired of being the only one to object. You find colleagues use you and your outspokenness to further their own ends. Your voice becomes less credible, and you build a reputation for negativity. At this point, most people adapt, or leave.

Cultures are maintained through the messages that are sent and received about what behaviour is expected. These come from many
unpacking Culture

3, 2, 1, Bridge
Making the Bridge

Share with your partner your first 321 and your second 321.

Explain how your responses shifted as a result of the reading.
Cultures of Thinking ... are places in which a group’s collective, as well as individual, thinking is valued, visible, and actively promoted as part of the regular, day-to-day experience of all group members.
Drawing from our experience

1. Where and when have you been a part of a thoughtful micro-culture?

2. What were some of the cultural practices, anchors, forces, or influences that held those cultures in place? What made them work?
A Culture of Thinking: Shapers

• All group members contribute and feel valued
• Feeling like you can take risks
• Time allowed to reflect, share thinking, discuss & implement
• Common vision or goal/values
• Models of thinking
• Respect—equal value
• Flexible—open minded
• Effective time management and follow through
• Open communication
• Group collaboration, had personal meaning (beyond the table)
• Group members are invested in task and each other
• Shared philosophy and commitment
• Personal and group ownership
• Collaborative planning

Tuesday, July 28, 2009
1. Where and when have you been a part of an un-thoughtful micro-culture?

2. What were some of the cultural practices, anchors, forces, or influences that kept a culture of thinking from developing?
A Culture of Thinking: Inhibitors

- Anxiety — nervous
- Not feeling valued or that your ideas don’t count
- Lack of motivation — lack of relevance
- Rushing, no time
- Judgmental; no equality, power issues
- Inflexible
- Lack of vision/purpose: No clear direction
- Lack of responsibility of group members
- Feeling of wasted time: lack of leadership, lack of agenda
- Value placed on hierarchy of group members
- Task lacked relevance to group members
- Maximum effort for minimal gain = energy vampire
- No leadership support
- Working in isolation
A Culture of Thinking

What does it look like?

• Watch the video clip of Leslie Revis’s High School Spanish Class?

• Write down at least five adjectives to describe how her classroom feels.

• Share your adjectives in small groups.

• For each adjective, tell what you saw that made you choose that word.
A Culture of Thinking

What does it look like?

• What adjective would you use to describe Leslie’s classroom?

• What did you see that makes you say that?
A Culture of Thinking

Cultural Forces at Work

- Routines & Structures
- Use of Language
- Expectations Communicated
- Opportunities Created
- Interactions/Relationships
- Physical Environment
- Modeling
- Time
Through Cultural Forces

We communicate to our students:

- What’s valued and expected.
- What learning looks like and how it will unfold.
- What kinds of thinking and work will be counted.
- How learning and thinking will be managed and documented.
Defining a *Culture of Thinking* Operationally

A *Culture of Thinking* exists in a classroom when the cultural forces of that classroom are directed toward and aligned with the support of good thinking.
Leveraging the Cultural Forces to Make Thinking Visible

- **Expectations** • • • • • For thinking & learning
- **Opportunities** • • • • • For engaging in thinking
- **Routines & Structures** • • • • • That scaffold thinking & learning
- **Language & Conversations** • • • • • That name, notice, and highlight thinking
- **Modeling** • • • • • Of thinking
- **Interactions & Relationships** • • • • • That show respect for students’ thinking
- **Physical Environment** • • • • • In which the process of thinking are made visible
- **Time** • • • • • For thinking
With a partner, pick one of the cultural forces to focus on as you watch the video.

Where and how do you see it coming into play to shape the classroom culture?

What other forces did you notice as you watched?

How did the cultural forces contribute to the overall feel of the classroom?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expectations</td>
<td>For thinking &amp; learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities</td>
<td>For engaging in thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routines &amp; Structures</td>
<td>That scaffold thinking &amp; learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language &amp; Conversations</td>
<td>That name, notice, and highlight thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeling</td>
<td>Of thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactions &amp; Relationships</td>
<td>That show respect for students’ thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Environment</td>
<td>In which the process of thinking are made visible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>For thinking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Culture of Thinking

Why is it important?

- Real, deep, and lasting learning is a product of thinking. Students’ thinking needs ongoing support & encouragement.

- Habits of mind and dispositions toward thinking and understanding cannot be taught, they must be enculturated over time.

- Learning is a social endeavor and unfolds within that context.

- Instructional methods and curriculum aren’t enough to develop understanding. It needs the ongoing support of the environment.
For more information on the Visible Thinking and the Cultures of Thinking Project:

www.pz.harvard.edu/vt

RonRitchhart.com

Upcoming Events

August 4-7, ’09: COT Institute
International School Amsterdam

August 23-25, ’09: COT Conference Melbourne, Australia
End for PZSI 08
3-2-1 Bridge

A Picture of Practice