

# Assessing a Culture of Thinking through the 8 Cultural Forces

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## Are We Living Our Beliefs and Values? Looking at Our Use of Expectations, Language, Modeling, and Time

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### Expectations

- A. Is the classroom learning versus work oriented? For example, does the teacher value thinking and learning as outcomes as opposed to 'completion of work'?
- B. Is the purpose of classroom activity well understood and kept at the forefront of classroom activities? For example, do students see how their actions are building their understanding?
- C. Is learning viewed as a positive, engaging endeavor, rather than a compulsory exercise?
- D. Is "developing understanding" the goal of classroom activity and lessons versus knowledge acquisition only?
- E. Are students regularly expected to employ deep learning strategies in their learning?
- F. Is student independence being actively cultivated so that students are not dependent on the teacher to answer all questions and direct all activity?
- G. Do students and teacher believe in the potential to grow smarter as they learn from their mistakes, take risks, and embrace challenges?

### Language

- A. Teacher Language
  1. Does the teacher use conditional language ("What might it be... Are there other ways to... One possibility... It could be...") as opposed to absolute language ("It is... Who knows the" answer?) to keep conversation and ideas open?
  2. Does the teacher use a language of thinking that invites specific thinking actions on the part of the students ("I want you to compare these two objects. Identify the perspectives on...Look for evidence...Explore possible connections.")?
  3. Does the teacher use a language of curiosity ("I wonder...? I'm puzzled by...? I'm finding this challenging...? What if...?")
- B. Student Language
  1. Does the student language mirror that of the teacher in terms of conditionality, a focus on thinking, and curiosity?
  2. Are student responses and contributions in class elaborate, supported, and/or complex?
  3. Do students' contributions reflect confidence (versus inflected responses that are implicitly asking "is that right?")?



## Modeling

- A. Is thinking regularly made visible and “on display” in the classroom?
- B. Does the teacher share his or her thinking, providing reasons and evidence for the decisions that are made?
- C. Does the teacher display curiosity, passion, and interest for ideas?
- D. Is there a sense that the teacher is learning too? This may be evident in the teacher taking risks and trying new things.
- E. Do students model their thought process by spontaneously justifying and providing evidence for
- F. their thinking?

## Time

- A. How much wait time does the teacher provide after a question and before they call on students for a response?
- B. How much time does the teacher provide after a student responds or makes a contribution before calling on another student or responding themselves?
- C. What is the ratio of teacher talk to student talk?
- D. What is the length of student responses and contributions in class?
- E. Does the teacher provide the “space” for students to extend, elaborate, or develop the ideas of others?



## Assessing a Culture of Thinking through the 8 Cultural Forces

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### How Are We Shaping Classroom Life & Learning? Looking at Our Use of Opportunities, Routines, Environment, & Interactions

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#### Opportunities

- A. Does the teacher prompt students' for their opinions, questions, and ideas as opposed to just their knowledge of the topic?
- B. Is there a focus on big ideas and generative topics that advance deep disciplinary understanding?
- C. Is the learning of the class connected to the larger community outside of school?
- D. Are there opportunities to reflect on how one's thinking has changed and developed over time?
- E. Are there opportunities to explore ideas in depth?
- F. Are all students regularly being stretched, extended and challenged?
- G. Are the activities in which students engage purposeful and full of personal meaning for students beyond preparing for tests and assessments?
- H. Do assignments and tasks empower students to take ownership of their learning?

#### Routines

- A. Are thinking routines used flexibly, spontaneously, and effectively to deepen students' understanding rather than just as activities?
- B. Do students' use routines and structures to further their understanding and as a platform for discussion, rather than as work to be done?
- C. Does the teacher create his or her own structures/routines to facilitate the thinking he or she is after?
- D. Have thinking routines become patterns of behavior in this classroom; that is, do students know particular routines so well that they no longer seek clarification about the mechanics of the routine, instead going straight to the thinking?
- E. What thinking has become routine for students?

#### Environment

- A. Are students' questions, words, ideas, and thoughts documented and on display?
- B. Do wall displays have an ongoing, inchoate, and/or dialogic nature to them versus a static display of finished work?
- C. Are there teacher reflections and comments accompanying wall displays?
- D. Through the wall displays, can one discern the learning of the class as opposed to just the activity?



- E. Through the wall displays, is the learning process of the group evident?
- F. Is the physical environment arranged to facilitate various kinds of group learning as may be needed?
- G. Are the resources needed for learning present in the room or readily accessible?
- H. Do the displays in the room inspire learning in the subject area and connect students to the larger world of ideas by displaying positive messages about learning and thinking?

## Interactions

- A. Teacher response to students
  1. Are students pushed to elaborate their responses, to reason, and to think beyond a simple answer or statement? For example, by using the “What makes you say that?” routine.
  2. Does the teacher challenge, or invite others to challenge, ideas and comments?
  3. Does the teacher provide specific feedback to students in an effort to move their learning forward rather than merely affirming or negating a response?
  4. Does the teacher listen to student conversations without interrupting them and guiding them in a pre-ordained direction?
  5. Does the teacher listen to and show an interest in students’ contributions as opposed to trying to elicit a specific response? This may entail building on students’ contributions.
  6. Is the learning of the group, as well as individuals, celebrated and acknowledged?
- B. Students’ responses to the teacher and one another
  1. Do students ask questions that show a curiosity for and interest in the topic?
  2. Do students spontaneously (versus being prompted) build on others comments and contributions either through elaboration or challenge?
  3. Is there a sense of academically focused, conversational threads in the room, as opposed to a teacher-directed question and answer session?
  4. Do students spontaneously make connections between ideas offered by others?
  5. Are there student-to-student exchanges on the topic of discussion?
  6. Do students disagree with others in a respectfully manner?
  7. What percent of students participate in class discussions? Do students of all levels and abilities contribute versus a few dominating?
  8. Do students participate with the teacher more equitably in the activity of the classroom? Rather than merely responding to teachers’ questions and prompts, do they also react to others responses, ask questions, and suggest changes to activities? That is, do students take on more teacher-like moves?
  9. Do more students make meaningful contributions to class and the incidence of “I don’t know” diminish.

