

The Main Idea's PD Suggestions for Cultivating a Culture of Thinking

Note that the questions at the end of each chapter in the summary (and there are more in the book) are also an excellent place to start to cultivate a culture of thinking in classrooms and schools.

Another suggestion for PD: Since schools often start with the Thinking Routines, consider distributing The Main Idea's summary of Ritchhart's Making Thinking Visible, and using the PD ideas in that summary with them as well.

I. Discuss Beliefs About School

Research has shown that what teachers do in the classroom is much more the result of *their beliefs* than any set of learned practices. What we believe about teaching, learning, and schools affects most of our actions in schools. For this reason, the activities below help teachers and leaders explore their *beliefs* about school.

A. The 3 Stories of School – What do we value in schools?

What we value in schools shapes what we do and how we spend our time. With a group of teachers (or leaders or parents), discuss the story of school we understood as children, the story of schooling now, and the potential for a *new* vision of what schools could be. Use a version of this routine from Ritchhart's earlier book: **Generate-Sort-Connect-Elaborate (GSCE)**:

Give each person 3 pieces of paper. In the center of each, write each of the following in a circle (to create a concept map):

My experience in schools as a student

The experience of students in schools today

What you would like the children you teach to be like as adults

Then give people time to generate a list of words or ideas they associate with each central idea. For example, in thinking about their schooling experience as children, they may write, "silent" or "timed tests." Then have them draw lines to connect the different ideas on their papers to one another so they can sort their ideas and come up with themes about these three experiences. As a full group, discuss the themes that emerge.

B. What Ifs

We are often limited by thinking that there's nothing we can do to change the educational system. Instead, conduct a discussion that allows people to open up their understanding of what school *could be*. Using the **Chalk Talk** routine (from Ritchhart's earlier book) to have a group of staff members, students, or even parents discuss new ideas about schooling.

1. Take 4 pieces of newsprint or other large paper, and write each of these questions on one piece:

- What if schools were less about test prep and more about preparing students for a lifetime of learning?
- What if we measured success less by individual results and more by what the group accomplishes?
- What if students had more control of their learning and were really engaged rather than compliant?
- What if understanding were the goal rather than the acquisition of knowledge?

2. Conduct a silent **Chalk Talk**:

Divide everyone into 4 groups and have each group stand around one of the pieces of paper. Invite everyone to read their "What If" prompt, then think about and write their reactions, ideas, and questions on the paper for 5 minutes silently. After this time, have the groups rotate to another piece of paper and continue the silent routine for another 5 minutes. After the groups have rotated to all the questions, have them return to their original table and read the responses there. Then discuss: What were the common issues? What questions arose? How did everyone's thinking develop as they went from table to table?

II. Self Assess: How much do you already promote a culture of thinking at your school?

As a leader or a teacher, there may be a lot you are *already* doing to promote a culture of thinking in your classroom and school. Conduct a self-assessment of your strengths in the 8 areas introduced in this book. Ritchhart has two very thorough self-assessments you can use (one for leaders and one for teachers) in the Appendix. Below is an excerpt from the *leader's* self-assessment. Rate yourself from 1 (no one would notice) to 5 (it is apparent to all).

Eight cultural forces that support a culture of learning	Rating
1. Expectations: I communicate that our school values thinking; I emphasize that the job is about professional learning not just test scores and doing the work; I make decisions based on how they will impact <i>student learning</i> ; and I praise teachers when they develop students as <i>thinkers</i> , not just test takers.	
2. Language: I give specific feedback; I invite others into the conversation by using conditional language (e.g. “might be”); I name the specific thinking I observed in debriefing classroom observations (e.g., “I noticed you got students to evaluate...”); and I use inclusive language (e.g., “we” and “our”).	
3. Time: In meetings I give people time to think through ideas; I respect people’s time and make sure meetings have a clear focus; and I monitor the amount of time I speak so I don’t dominate meetings.	
4. Modeling: I try to be present at events, meetings, and groups to show people that I value what they are doing; I demonstrate my own curiosity, passion, and openness to new ideas; and I model the behaviors and interactions I want to reinforce in others.	
5. Opportunities: In meetings I focus people’s attention on the mission and core issues; I try to create opportunities for staff to direct their own learning rather than being dependent on me; I create opportunities to collect evidence to inform our work; and I provide opportunities to reflect on our progress.	
6. Routines: I utilize protocols, thinking routines, and other structures to help groups discuss, reflect, and problem-solve; I look at the way I lead groups and determine if any patterns or structures are <i>not</i> effective; and I try to streamline the work with more efficient systems so we can spend more time on student learning.	
7. Interactions: I ensure individuals show respect for each others’ thinking; I try to be a collaborator, not a blocker; I try to push people to elaborate (e.g. “What makes you say that?”); and I listen to others and show interest in their thinking.	
8. Environment: I ensure my work space conveys positive messages about learning and thinking; I organize my work space to facilitate thoughtful interactions; and I use a variety of ways, including technology, to capture the thinking and decision-making processes of groups.	

III. Introduce One Cultural Force at a Time

In this section, I provide suggestions for introducing the *first* cultural force: **Expectations**. You can then design follow-up workshops for the other seven or have different groups of teachers each take responsibility for presenting one each week. One idea is to suggest they use one of the thinking routines from Ritchhart’s *Making Thinking Visible* to introduce each cultural force.

A. Expectations: Unpack the 5 belief sets that significantly impact teacher actions

As was mentioned previously, research has shown that what teachers do in the classroom is much more the result of *their beliefs* than any set of learned practices. Further, as Stephen Covey states, if we want to change the results, we don’t *start* by changing our behavior, we start by changing our perceptions. This is why teacher expectations for students are so important. Copy the chapter in the book on Expectations or the summary of chapter 2, and have teachers **read it before** coming to this workshop.

In pairs or small groups, have teachers unpack what each belief set would look like in the classroom and then discuss as a large group.

<i>What might opposite sides of each belief set look like in the classroom?</i>	
1. Focusing students on the work:	Focusing students on the learning:
2. Teaching for knowledge:	Teaching for understanding:
3. Encouraging surface learning strategies:	Encouraging deep learning strategies:
4. Promoting student dependence:	Promoting student independence:
5. Developing a fixed mindset:	Developing a growth mindset:

B. Use the **Compass Points** thinking routine to delve further into the 5 belief sets

This is a version of a thinking routine from *Making Thinking Visible*. Use the following four compass points (E, W, N, S) to label the board or 4 large pieces of paper. Rather than cardinal directions, in this routine these letters stand for:

E = Excitements. What excited you about this idea? What’s the upside?

W = Worries. What do you find worrisome about the idea? What’s the downside?

N = Needs. What else do you need to know or find out about this idea?

S = Stance, Steps or Suggestions. What is your current stance about it? What are possible suggestions or next steps?

Start with the first belief set: *Focusing students on the learning vs. the work*. Give everyone sticky notes and time to write their thoughts down, put the sticky notes up on the appropriate compass point, and read the comments of others. Conduct a large group discussion paying attention to commonalities and suggestions for moving forward. Do this again with the other 4 belief sets. It would also help to make the discussion more concrete if teachers shared what they *already do* in the classroom to focus on the learning, teach for understanding, encourage deep learning strategies, promote independence, and develop a growth mindset.

- To provide more *feedback* for students and teachers.