The challenge of 'Ebne': The 16th International Conference on Thinking

By Joy Whiteside

Thinking strategies, tools and organisers have been included in my teaching practice for a number of years. Gradually, as I have learnt more about engaging students in thinking, these practices have become more explicit and purposeful. In recent years I have used the **Harvard Project Zero** Visible Thinking routines (Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2013). These simple routines or strategies are designed to be incorporated into a teacher's regular classroom practice, and to be used in a way that becomes routine for students. Effectively, they coach the teacher to guide students in skilful thinking. Ritchhart, Church and Morison (2011) explain that by making thinking visible, we know what students understand, how they understand it, and their misconceptions. We are then informed to plan opportunities for further learning.

In January, I attended the 16th International Conference on Thinking (ICOT13) in Wellington, New Zealand. I was one of over a thousand delegates, many of whom were international. I also attended a preconference Master Class, *Thinking to Learn*, with David Perkins from Project Zero, Harvard, USA, and Robert Swartz, from the National Center for Teaching Thinking, USA. I was drawn to attend by the conference theme 'Expanding Global Thinking', and the diverse sessions that focussed on types of thinking, such as 'reflective, creative, innovative, critical, analytical and organisational thinking, as well as learning about thinking, developing thinking skills, key paradigm shifts in thinking, understanding how we learn and how to promote lifelong learning, and the implications for education of recent research on the brain' (Core Education, 2013). As a teacher-librarian, my interest in attending the conference and Master Class was to further my learning journey in creating and developing a culture of thinking in the library as well as in my classroom practice. I was also excited about the opportunity to learn directly from the Harvard Project Zero team.

The Visible Thinking routines have enabled me to encourage students to be active rather than passive learners. The routines provide the opportunity for the thinking of every student in the classroom to be valued and visible. When using the thinking routines, students are encouraged to connect to prior knowledge, share learning, take responsibility for further learning, and reflect on learning. The routines enable students to have a voice, make a visible contribution in the classroom, and promote accountability. Students are able to participate in class discussions in an informed way because they have been given thinking time and space, and an opportunity to share their thinking. Students learn to value their own thinking, and the responses of others, and are more engaged in their learning. While I was interested in a range of thinking sessions at the conference, learning more about making thinking visible was my major focus.

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Prior to attending ICOT13, I had read the text *Making Thinking Visible* by Ritchhart, Church and Morison (2011). In this text the authors explore thinking, introduce the Harvard Thinking routines, and consider the development of a culture of thinking in the classroom. The thinking routines are organised into three major categories: Introducing and Exploring, Synthesizing and Organising, and Digging Deeper. For each routine there is a contextual introduction, a step by step explanation, variations and examples, assessment guidelines and further information. The examples model the use of the routine, as well as the reflective practice of a contributing teacher. They also demonstrate the ways that the routines can be adapted to suit a variety of curriculum contexts. But, the Visible Thinking routines are only part of the whole. I was to come to an understanding that there is more to creating a culture of thinking than using the Visible Thinking routines in classroom teaching and practice.

During the Master Class *Thinking to Learn,* Perkins and Swartz (2013) demonstrated that using thinking routines, explicit teaching of thinking skills, and developing thinking 'habits of mind', are enabling of deep

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content learning. Perkins and Swartz (2013) referred to the work of Ritchhart, Church and Morison (2011) and further explained that in order to foster a culture of thinking in the classroom, the cultural forces of environment, routines, interactions, language, modelling, time, expectations, and opportunities need to be well-tuned. Reflectively, I wondered how I could foster a culture of thinking in the library physical and virtual spaces further. My thinking focus at this stage was still on the use of thinking routines and how they can be used effectively with content learning.

Often at conferences, some of the best learning occurs over a cup of tea or coffee during break time. I experienced such learning during a conversation with Ravi Grewal from Bialik College. Ravi was a co-presenter with her colleagues from Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education, during the breakout session 'Making Visible the Invisible'. After the session I asked Ravi about the use of thinking routines at Bialik College. It was during this conversation that Ravi talked about the thinking routines as just one of the important parts of developing a culture of thinking. Equally important are the cultural forces of environment, interactions, language, modelling, time, expectations, and opportunities. I recalled the learning about these cultural forces during the Master Class a few days earlier, and also during my reading of *Making Thinking Visible* (Ritchhart, Church and Morrison, 2011). This was a significant moment of realisation for me! The thinking routines were part of the whole culture of thinking picture. I realised that the challenge for me was to explore a deeper understanding of these cultural forces so that they could also be nurtured and developed further in the context of the library and my classroom teaching opportunities.

Exploring the cultural forces and fostering a culture of thinking in the library

The cultural forces of environment, interactions, language, modelling, time, expectations, routines and opportunities are at play in every classroom. An important and critical question is to ask whether these cultural forces are conducive to fostering good thinking.

Environment

When reflecting on the library environment and whether it encourages thinking and the development of ideas, it is important to consider the physical and virtual library spaces. The questions that come to mind include: How are the processes of thinking displayed and encouraged in the physical library space? What messages, if any, are conveyed by the notice boards and the work that is displayed? How are the notice board displays connected to learning? In the library context, it is important to note and validate that there will also be displays that are promotional. For example, the Victorian Premiers' Reading Challenge is promoted on a display board to encourage and inform participants during the Challenge.

Focusing on the virtual library environment, it is important to reflect on how student contributions are encouraged and enabled. Is the online learning environment a place for thoughtful and reflective interactions?

The organisation of the physical space can also enable and encourage thoughtful interactions. Are there spaces for small collaborative groups or pairs to be working together? Are there withdrawal spaces that would enable groups of students to work independently? Is the classroom area organised so that it facilitates collaborative thinking and learning?

Routines

The explicit routines and structures that are in place in the library or classroom are important; the students need to know what is expected of them on a daily basis. Routines can free up thinking space because students know what they have to do and, if the routines are practised regularly, students need few reminders of these routines. How do the routines, or daily organisation, currently in place in the library or classroom enable, encourage and foster thinking?

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The Visible Thinking routines scaffold and guide students' thinking as well as provide tools and patterns of thinking that can be used independently as 'habits of mind'. How can I further develop the routines and strategies that I use to enable, encourage and foster thinking? The Harvard Thinking Routines (Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2013) that I have used regularly in the library and in my classroom practice include:

- See, think, wonder – encourages students to describe what they see, articulate their understanding, and question for further understanding;
- Headlines – students synthesise and summarise their understanding and capture the essence of their understanding in a headline;
- CSI: Colour, Symbol Image – this routine captures the students' understanding through the use of metaphors, using the comparison of a colour, symbol and image to Sentence, Phrase, Word – this routine captures students' understanding of the significant or important points and can be used when examining a text or website;
- Connect, Extend, Challenge – students connect to what they know, identify new information and recognise questions and challenges;
- I used to think . . ., now I think . . .. – this routine encourages students to reflect on their learning, synthesise, and summarise their learning at the conclusion of a class or unit of work;
- The Story routine – this routine explores and encourages students' analytical responses to text.

A challenge for the future could be to expand the number of thinking routines that I use with students and to display more evidence of student thinking in the library. Some of the routines could also be displayed on noticeboards as thought provoking prompts. Since the conference I have displayed the routine 'I used to think . . ., but now I think . . ..' on a noticeboard as a prompt for teachers and students in the library space. Similarly, the story routine questions 'What's the story? What's the other story? How do you know the story? Why know or tell the story? Where's the power in the story?' (Ritchhart, 2011, p. 32) have also been displayed as a prompt, and have been useful for probing deeper during library sessions that focus on texts or issues. The powerful thinking question 'What makes you say that?' is a prompt that could also be displayed to encourage deeper thinking. If this routine became a 'habit of mind' for me as a teacher-librarian, rather than giving a quick evaluative response to the thinking of a student, then students would be given routine opportunity to deepen their thinking.

Interactions

How does the library or classroom demonstrate a respect for, and valuing of, students' understandings, ideas and thinking? The structure of the Visible Thinking Routines gives the teacher the opportunity to encourage positive interactions between members of the classroom because they include time for student interactions and for sharing responses. These opportunities are valuable teaching moments. For example, they could be used for conducting mini lessons on effective and respectful listening. The routines also give students thinking space and the time to prepare their responses and contributions. It is important for the teacher to proactively remind students that their contribution and response will be expected, respected and valued.

Language

How do we use 'thinking' language in the library or classroom? The language of thinking that is used by the teacher can encourage, support, develop and deepen thinking and learning. Teachers can use more effective questioning techniques and highlight the specific kinds of thinking and ideas that are important to the learning. For example, are we asking students to analyse, compare, contrast, reflect, or create? Naming and labelling the type of thinking that is expected will contribute to a greater understanding of thinking and the development of thinking habits that students can draw on and apply to different learning contexts. Thinking language can be discussed and displayed in the library or classroom and this would also contribute to the students' use and understanding of the language of thinking.

Modelling

Thinking routines enable teachers to model thinking processes. By being fully present in the classroom as thinkers we can model how we think and learn so that the process of our thinking is transparent and explicit. Developing a practice of modelling in the classroom can encourage and enable students to model their thinking for each other as well. It can also demonstrate risk taking in learning with open ended questions, wonderings, and questions to come back to at a later date. Thinking can be discussed, shared, valued, and

most importantly, made visible. Modelling is not just about being procedural so that students know how to progress through a task. It is about being focussed, mindfully present, and revealing of the depth of understanding. It is about being comfortable not knowing all of the answers.

Time

Another contributing cultural force is time. How do we make time for thinking in the classroom or the library? Allowing thinking time can literally be time consuming. It also requires patience. A strategy that I use increasingly in my teaching is the use of 'sticky notes'. By posing a question, pausing for thinking time, and inviting students to make notes on their sticky note, I am giving students valuable thinking space. By moving around the learning space when students are writing on their sticky notes, it is easy to gauge engagement and understanding. The expectation is that all students will be thinking, writing, and responding. If I didn't take the time to invite students to write for a minute or two, it would be easy to be impatient and ask the eager responders for their thoughts. The quiet thinking moments would be lost as a few students dominate the thinking space by verbalising their thoughts.

Some thinking time strategies include:

- Think, pair, share
- Exercising 'wait time' before inviting students to respond
- Think, write, share
- Thinking time limit (1 minute) and then write, and pair or small group share
- Use a timer, set a time limit, and honour the limit. This is a purposeful strategy that helps students to stay focussed and accountable.
- Pose, Pause, Pounce, Bounce - Ewen McIntosh (2013) explained that this strategy involved posing a question, pausing for thinking time, pouncing on a student for their thinking, and then bouncing to another student for their thinking.

Expectations

Establishing learning intentions or expectations for learning, and the type of thinking required contributes to the development of a classroom culture that values thinking and learning. How do we convey clear learning intentions for every class? How do we select a thinking routine that will focus explicitly on the goals and purpose of the session? It is important to note that not every class will require a Visible Thinking routine: students may be learning independently, or may be required to listen to direct instruction. However, there may still be the opportunity to synthesise or evaluate learning at the end of the session using a routine such as 'I used to think . . .. But now I think . . ..'. We can also consider the value of thinking and learning as outcomes, as opposed to the value of the completion of work or activities. Fostering and developing a culture of accountability requires consistency and a practice of conveying the message that we will remember to follow up and reflect on learning.

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Opportunities

Every learning experience is an opportunity for thinking. It is an opportunity to provide provocative, purposeful and challenging experiences and resources that provide meaningful interaction with content. A challenge is to have a thinking focus and to infuse thinking skills into content instruction, so that thinking and learning will be achieved at every opportunity. In contrast, a pedagogical practice of student 'busy activities' with content will not achieve the depth of learning.

Making the most of opportunities also means probing further by asking clarifying questions such as 'What makes you say that?', or by asking other students what they think, rather than giving an evaluative comment.

Beyond library resources and learning content

Creating a culture of thinking in the library setting takes us beyond the print and digital resources that we manage and curate. It takes us to a space where we invite students to create meaning with the information. It

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For the teacher-librarian, the provision of resources and research guides for colleagues and students is the foot in the door, or the starting point, for collaborative conversations about experiences that infuse thinking with content. A culture of thinking can be fostered by providing students with an environment that encourages and enables thinking, the routines that scaffold and guide their thinking, the language to synthesise and describe their thinking, meaningful interactions to share with and listen to the learning of others, the time and space to think, and the expectations and opportunities for deep thinking and learning. Each of these is equally important. Understanding that facilitating and enabling students to make sense of the information, and engaging them in thinking for understanding is the key.

The Challenge

On the final day of the conference, Keynote speaker Dr Edward de Bono (2013) posed a challenge for us all. Dr de Bono encouraged participants to think about the need for a new word 'Ebne'. This new word would mean 'excellent, but not enough', a challenging concept. Isn't excellence enough? Dr de Bono explained that if we thought that excellence was enough, we would not look for further learning opportunities or new ways of thinking. He challenged us to think beyond the standard and beyond excellent. 'Ebne' can encourage us to think reflectively about our practice as teacher- librarians. The challenge for me has been to reconsider all of the forces that contribute to fostering a culture of thinking as well as using Visible Thinking routines. Dr de Bono's challenge and the conference experience enabled me to return to school with new vision.

The 17th International Conference on Thinking will be held in Bilbao, Spain, in 2015.

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