



**Receiving the news that we had achieved Thinking School status felt like the culmination of many years of preparation. Notting Hill Prep has been on its journey since it opened 11 years ago but working more formally towards accreditation during the last 3 - 5 years.**

We were founded in 2003 by a group of parents wishing to create a school that had at its heart a sense of community, of educating the whole child and of developing a bond of mutual respect. Our headmistress, Jane Cameron, was asked to lead NHP having established this ethos in her Nursery School, The Acorn. Listening to children and responding to their views and ideas plays an integral part of NHP culture. Staff, parents and children all have a stake in the 'ownership' of the school. Her vision for NHP embodied all the key ingredients for a successful school.

Starting a school at the beginning of a new millennium was of itself an exciting enterprise. Coinciding with a climate of greater understanding of cognitive development, against a backdrop of the constricting demands of curriculum planning and delivery being called into question by some of the leading thinkers in Education, we were jettisoned into a challenging opportunity to consider the transformational nature of cognitive approaches to learning.



We recognised the need for a framework to support us on our journey. The Thinking School provided us with a model that pulled together all that Jane had envisaged in educating children with the ideas and strategies of current pedagogies which we were trying to implement.

Our 'thinking about thinking' journey began with the introduction of Philosophy for Children (P4C) into the curriculum. The children's ability to engage with big questions, to participate in collaborative and rigorous enquiry and exploration of ideas developed quickly and proved to be transferable to other areas of the curriculum. And it was clear that they were enjoying the flexing of intellectual muscle.

De Bono's Six Thinking Hats, Assessment for Learning, Thinking Maps and Habits of Mind have all added to a rich resource of 'tools', our 'NHP toolbox', to enhance independent thinking and problem solving.



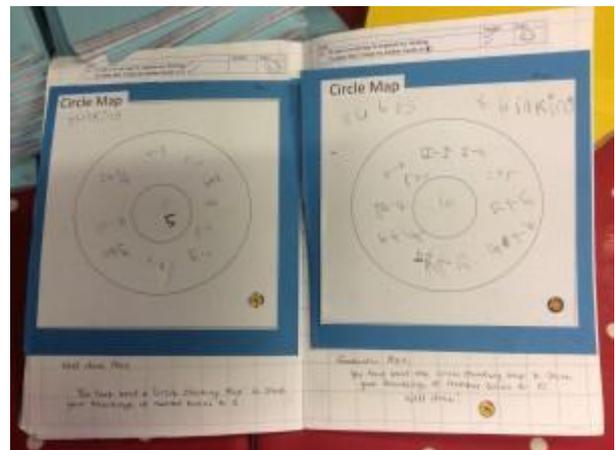
Using De Bono's 6 Thinking Hats

For example, as a school with restricted outside space, Art Costa's Habits of Mind have proved to be an effective means of independent conflict resolution in the playground. Managing Impulsivity, Listening with Empathy, Persisting, to name but a few, are becoming default 'Habits' to enhancing the children's learning power, resilience and confidence to 'find out what to do when they don't know what to do'.

We work with our pupils to help them select which habits are most useful for a particular task and why. This takes time and teacher modelling. By example, we show that we value the habits and that we put them at the centre of our learning. Within any classroom the habits are seen as ways of being an effective learner.

Thinking School strategies have enabled us to have a common language so that our pupils can build upon their thinking skills year on year. It also provides us with a clear focus to steer our teaching and learning practices and engage in purposeful and meaningful professional dialogue.

Our children are living and breathing thinking skills and much pride is taken from how they learn as much as what they learn. The Thinking School has become deeply embedded in all aspects of school life, the 6 Hats in strategic planning meetings with Governors, informing policies, Performance Management, Behaviour Management, playground routines and even transferring to the households of our families. It is not uncommon to hear a 5 year old congratulate a friend for 'persevering' with a task or a 6 year old celebrating a mistake!



The Thinking School framework is most importantly an effective school improvement tool. To say that our journey has been straightforward and effortless would be far from accurate. Implementing the Thinking School required thoughtful planning and sensitive implementation to ensure the commitment of all staff. We made mistakes along the way, expecting too much too soon but the long-term vision made it realistic and achievable.

Our first priority was to create a 'learning culture' where teachers could share practice openly. Initially we did this through the creation of 'working parties', which focused on specific teaching and learning practices. Then we introduced TALCs (Teaching and Learning Club), which took place at the start of each staff meeting where teachers shared ideas or experiences of successful learning. It was not long before the teaching and learning 'buzz' was felt and the doors opened and the walls came down in each classroom. We promote the great practice around the school through our Teaching and Learning Bulletins and, excitingly, we have embarked on the Japanese model of Lesson Study, where teachers plan a research lesson together and then take it in turns to teach the lesson in front of their colleagues. This process requires a high level of trust in each other for it to be effective. It is early days but the feedback from teachers has been extremely positive so far.

Whilst the culture continued to grow inside the school, we also made sure our parents were well on board by hosting various events and workshops e.g. critical thinking dinners, a Thinking School Conference and a 'Back to School' event where our parents became our pupils! Leading educationalists in the field of cognitive development, Guy Claxton and Graham Watts have visited the school to talk to staff and, in Guy's case to parents also, bringing into sharp focus the potential for the 'education plus' that a thinking school can provide - and the need for all members of the school community (staff, children and parents) to engage with the vision.

We have now successfully embedded the thinking tools in our 'toolbox' and we are keener than ever to evaluate these programmes over time. We are very much in our next phase of measuring the impact of the Thinking School strategies on achievement and have been very excited and pleased with the data we have gathered so far.

As we are all aware that the pace of life, and thus change, is moving at an unstoppable rate we can no longer feel we have done our job if we have prepared our pupils for their Senior Schools only. We need to ensure that we equip them with skills and habits that will allow them to become life-long learners.

It continues to be an exciting journey for us. We and all members of the school community are committed to creating an environment where the ability to think critically and creatively will be a given for all pupils of NHP - both in the immediate and in the long term so that they may meet the unknown of the future with the confidence that 'they will know what to do when they don't know what to do'.

Helpful Hints in considering the Thinking School Framework as a tool for School Improvement

- Ensure there is 'buy-in' from Governors and SMT
- Map out a long-term vision 3 – 5 years
- Prioritise the creation of a 'learning culture'
- Start with very simple changes!
- Gather momentum
- Visit other Thinking Schools
- Continue to share good practice
- Publicise the good practice – shout it from the rooftops!
- Evaluate what works/what doesn't
- Don't give up.
- Just take time...you will succeed!

**Submitted by Lisa Low**

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