



**SEDFIELD  
COMMUNITY  
COLLEGE**

**When Sedgefield Community College was successful in becoming a Thinking School in summer 2012, the view of everyone connected with the school was that we were still only in the early stages of our development as a thinking school in every possible sense of the word. We knew that we still had further work to do in developing our practice and ensuring that students did develop the skills that they need to be highly effective independent thinkers.**

Our approach to become a Thinking School had hinged on the idea of a metaphorical 'Learning Box' into which we placed various thinking tools such as Hyerle's eight Thinking Maps or De Bono's six Thinking Hats. To become an Advanced Thinking School, we felt that we needed to develop what the Learning Box approach meant to our students and staff. Having been successful in becoming a Thinking School through the focus on a number of key thinking tools and approaches, we understood that introducing more approaches would not be effective in further improving our practice. Instead, we believed that it was in taking the existing thinking tools and refining our use of these that we could take the thinking of our staff deeper and further. With this in mind, we looked at how we would develop the tools we were already using and become more expert in their application, as detailed below:



### **The Three Storey Intellect**

Without question, the Three Storey Intellect is central to the approach to teaching and learning that we employ at Sedgefield Community College. We use this to help staff and students understand the learning sequences that take place within and beyond lessons and as we often say, it is the learning sequence that has to come first. Other thinking tools such as the hats or maps are not a means in themselves, but rather a means to an end; we want our staff to use these approaches when they will help to secure better learning and progress for our students.

As a way of raising the awareness of everyone in the school about the way in which the three storeys of the TSI are used across learning sequences, we use three icons within the school that link to each level of the building:

- Gathering – Where we gather the information that we need to learn.
- Processing – Where we process the information to understand it more effectively.
- Applying – Where we apply our learning to demonstrate our understanding and reflect on this.

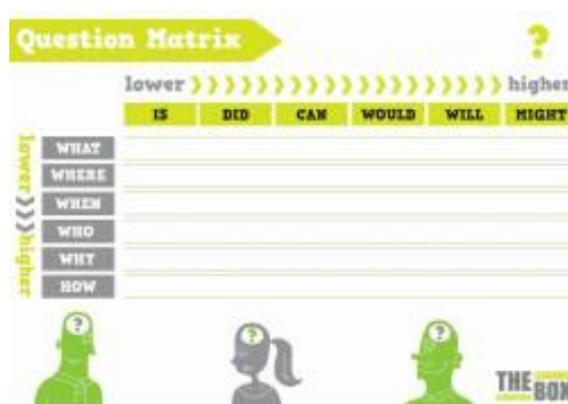


Using these icons in lessons has helped to ensure that both staff and students are highly conscious of the level at which they are thinking and learning and deepened our school understanding of the learning processes that are taking place.

## Thinking Hats, Maps and The Question Matrix

Recognising the importance of Thinking Hats to our students, in providing them with a framework that enables them to think deeply and with independence, we knew that we needed to continue to embed this approach across the school. Not only is it an approach used extensively within lessons across all curriculum areas, we have ensured that the thinking hats are embedded into many other elements of the work that we do as a school. For instance, they are used by Heads of Faculty when completed their subject self-evaluation documents, feedback is provided to staff using a lesson feedback format structured around the hats and the whole school AFL policy is built around yellow hat comments about the strengths of a student's work and green hat comments with an idea for development.

The refinement of our approach with Thinking Hats has also been seen in our approach with other tools. We have continued to share good practice relating to the way in which we employ the Thinking Maps and there has been a particular focus on being increasingly flexible with these, combining multiple maps and also linking their construction to other thinking tools such as De Bono's hats. We have also looked to develop the way in which we employ the frame of reference to deepen the thinking of students when constructing maps, but recognise there is further work that needs to be done in this area.



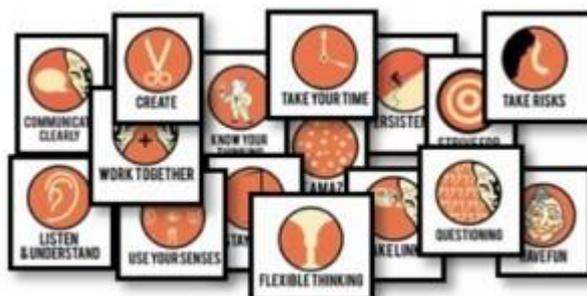
Finally, with the Question Matrix, we have begun to question whether or not the axes indicating which words will help to construct higher and lower order questions can sometimes be a little misleading. Rather than the wording of the question itself, it is the way in which the question is posed and responded to that is more significant. With this in mind, we have started to look at how we might consider questioning at each of the three levels of the TSI as below:

- Gathering questions – That help us to secure our understanding.
- Processing questions – That help us to deepen our understanding.
- Applying questions – That help us to develop the deepest level of understanding possible.

## Habits of Mind

Other significant developments since becoming a Thinking School in summer 2012 have related to our use of Art Costa's 16 Habits of Mind. We have always taken two approaches to the use of Habits of Mind in the school:

1. Raising awareness of each of the habits and when / how it might be beneficial to demonstrate it.
2. Changing our practice to better support students to develop a habit that we recognise as important.



To take this approach further, we have now moved to each subject area linking their report comments to one of the 16 Habits of Mind, helping students and parents to understand the underlying characteristics that they need to develop to achieve future success. Another

development that is underway is the identification of 12 'Teaching Habits' that we feel staff need to develop in order to be successful in our school. These 'Teaching Habits' draw upon the Habits of Mind, but help our teachers understand the underlying behaviours that they need to develop, as opposed to becoming overly focused on one very specific element of practice.

In summer 2015, the school received its assessment visit in order to become an Advanced Thinking School and were successful in this. The developments in practice that have taken place, a number of which are referenced in this article, indicated that the criteria to become an Advanced Thinking School were clearly being met. As in summer 2012, we continue to recognise that our development needs to continue and with this in mind, we always welcome opportunities to discuss practice with colleagues in other schools who are committed to the Thinking School ethos.

As a school, our Learning Box approach is more than a series of thinking tools within a metaphorical box. It is our mindset to the processes of teaching and learning and supports students and staff to think consciously and reflectively about their practice and learning.

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[See more about The Sedgefield Learning Box here](#)