Get Thinking Skills into Your Lessons

10 Step Framework

1) Clarify your **long-term vision** for one particular class.

   Ideally, what would you like your learners to be like in your lessons? Create a vision of it – behaviour, relationships, motivation, capacities etc. This will act as a helpful constellation to navigate by. Short-term steps should be guided by a long-term – and motivating - idea of what you're after. Think of it as a setting a successful ***direction***, not an 'impossible dream'.

2) Ensure pupils recognise the importance of skills – **motivate them**.

   Using the activity on page 5, help pupils see *why* the development of skills (as well as content) is essential to successful learning. Give them a real reason to persevere and progress. Can they see the point of skill development for themselves?

3) Select **six target skills** or dispositions they need for that vision.

   What do your pupils need to achieve that vision? What skills or dispositions do they lack? Perhaps underline the *verbs* in your Programme of Study / Scheme of Work for suggestions, or choose 6 from the list on page 6.

4) **Co-ordinate** this process with colleagues where possible.

   An ideal option: Progress is dramatically enhanced if shared with other colleagues working with your particular pupils (e.g. TAs), or if it is adopted as a departmental or whole school approach to Thinking Skills development.

5) Diagnose those skills in your class. Then chose **one focus skill**.

   Of the six skills, which one is most urgently needed? Which one is the immediate priority? Keep things manageable by identifying just one skill that you'll target in your next lessons. Remember that improving one skill often affects other skills as a benign by-product (e.g. listening & speaking).

6) Assess their abilities with that skill as a **benchmark**.

   Your focus skill should be one that the class needs to develop as a whole, but individual pupils' present ability will differ of course. Create a way to assess the focus skill with each pupil. Use some of the activities and ideas in the following pages to help them see where they're starting from with that skill.

7) Create lessons that will **develop that skill** alongside the content.

You can either just focus on the skill itself (as in PLTS), or develop it using the topics or subject content you aim to cover anyway. Both approaches have advantages; judge for yourself. Consider how lesson starter games, displays, examples, exercises, IT use, resources, collaborative activities, grouping, and closure / reflection tools can develop that skill. You might also use the models & techniques mentioned in the following pages.

8) After your skill-focussed lessons, **check for progress**.

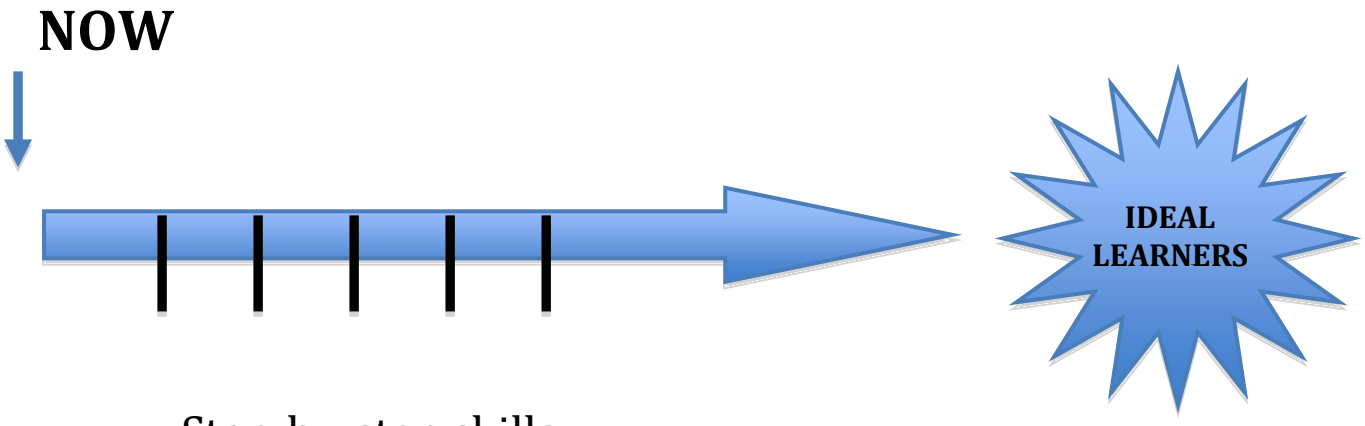
Is your approach working? Use your original benchmarking method (see 5) to reassess their abilities after a few lessons. Which pupils have progressed? Which ones haven't? What can you do to help or stretch individuals (i.e. personalise their learning)? Consider mixed ability peer learning groups, differentiated tasks / homework, shrewd questioning that diagnoses problems or challenges learning even further etc.

9) After sufficient progress, select your **next focus skill**.

Judge whether you move on to the next (i.e. second most needed) of the six skills, or keep developing the one you're already on. If you feel enough progress has been made with the first skill, repeat the process (i.e. steps 4 – 7) with a second skill, and so on.

9) Help pupils keep a **record of the skills** they're developing.

Use the ideas on Page 10, or create a Skills Diary for pupils to see how they are becoming more skilful, and to make their own 'skills targets'.



Step-by-step skills development

Get Thinking Skills into Your Lessons

10 Step Framework – Summary

1) Clarify long-term vision for learners
2) Motivate pupils with purpose
3) Choose 6 target skills for a class
4) Co-ordinate process with colleagues
5) Select ONLY ONE as your ‘focus skill’
6) Assess pupils’ abilities in it
7) Create lessons to develop it
8) Check for progress – reassess it
9) Next focus skill?
10) Pupils create Record of Skills

HELPFUL IDEAS FOR 10 STEPS

1) Clarify long-term vision for learners

For a particular class, what would you like them to be like as learners? This vision might be an ideal, or might be based on what you think could be possible over a year or two. The key thing is to have a clear idea of your long-term direction so that incremental steps are part of a bigger, coherent, and motivating learning journey for you and your pupils.

You could create a list, but also consider using mind maps, sketches, colour & shapes, diagrams (e.g. concentric circles?) etc. to form your vision. Where helpful, collaborate with colleagues.

Consider…

a) Behaviour
b) Social & Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL)
c) Enthusiasm & motivation
d) Learning to Learn abilities
e) Collaborative / group work, supportive relationships
f) Breadth & depth of thinking skills
g) Organisation, punctuality, helpful learning habits
h) Ownership & pupil intiative
i) Abilities with process & content
j) Enjoyment, challenge, engagement levels

2) Motivate pupils with real purpose

Motivating pupils with real and meaningful reasons for developing thinking skills is essential. Why should they bother? What's to be gained from their perspective? How does the learning connect to life? The following activity helps pupils to:

i) Find reasons for learning about skills
ii) Develop their skills awareness & vocabulary
iii) Reflect on how skills relate to learning
iv) Understand how skills might affect emotions too.

Activity: Valuing Thinking Skills

1) Challenge pupils to list '10 ways our minds think' on the board. You might vary the number (5 or 15?) and model some examples to provoke ideas for different age groups. For example, "you go into a shop with £2.50 and want to buy some sweets… what kind of thinking do you need to do that?". "Making sums" or "calculating". Great… that's one! Others might be wondering, dreaming, concentrating, remembering, solving, linking, questioning, making sense, understanding etc.

2) Consequently point out that our minds use many 'methods of dealing with life & learning' (or better, can they find a way of saying it?). You might explore which they think they're good at, and which ones they'd love to improve or learn. Crucially, do they believe we are just born with them or are they learnable?

3) Get them to choose 3 of the 10 at random. Cross them out. In pairs or groups, ask them to discuss "what would life be like if you couldn't do those three at all?". Maybe flesh this out with an example… "If you couldn't remember anything, what would happen?". Perhaps use 'think, pair, share' as a process for this.

4) Share views and facilitate the dialogue with shrewd questions that make them search their thoughts more deeply or broadly. For example, you could question them on how 'not remembering' would affect different areas of life like school lessons, friendships, home life, going shopping etc.

5) Even very young pupils can see that life would be *more difficult* without thinking skills. Perhaps push this a bit further now… "how might you *feel* if you couldn't do them? If you couldn't 'concentrate', what would your friendships be like? How could that make you feel?".

6) Invite pupils to summarise what they might learn from the exercise. You could use simple writing frames (e.g. "Thinking is…" or "Without thinking skills, we…") to help them shape their conclusions or ideas.

7) Finally, ask them to imagine a person who could use thinking skills amazing well. What would their life be like? Would it be more fun? Would anything be more difficult? Again, emphasise the fact that skills are *learned*… we may not be able to do them all well *now*, but we can always develop them. Perhaps give some personal examples; feelings, failures, and triumphs!

8) **Extension activities**: Pupils could see how many different skills they could list, or draw a picture / diagram describing some of them, or write a poem or short story about someone who could or couldn't do them, or target a skill they'd like to develop or research.

3) Choose 6 target skills for a class

Which skills? Try underlining the verbs in Programmes of Study, Key Skills, Core Competencies (QCDA), Functional Skills, Schemes of Work, RE Syllabi, & other relevant National Curriculum documents etc. to provide a list to choose from. Alternatively, roughly score your class out of 10 for the following skills and pick the lowest scoring 6.

LEARNING SKILLS CHECK LIST

1) Listening…….. /10
2) Reasoning……
3) Collaborating……..
4) Questioning……
5) Agreeing & disagreeing……..
6) Sharing a clear view in group / class……..
7) Critical thinking……..
8) Risk taking……..
9) Dealing with 'failure' well……..
10) Suggesting a theory / idea…….....
11) Giving an example (or counter examples)…….
12) Reflecting on what we learned…….....
13) Reflecting on how we learned…….....
14) Identifying what we want to improve / learn.....
15) Supporting others……..
16) Empathising……..
17) Open-mindedness……..
18) Resourcefulness……..
19) Staying on task / a line of enquiry……..
20) Remembering……..
21) Explaining……..
22) Summarising (progress or ideas)……
23) Transferring skills to new areas…….....
24) Identifying purposes……
25) Problem solving……..

6) Assess pupils' abilities in the focus skill

Benchmark pupils' abilities now so that progress can be assessed later on.

EXAMPLE: BENCHMARKING 'QUESITON CREATION'

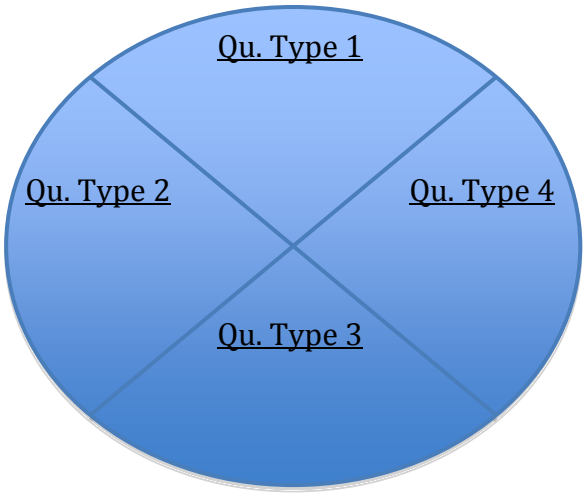
What are my pupils' present abilities with creating *types* of questions?

CAN PUPILS CREATE…

7 QUESTION TYPES	NO	NEARLY	YES
Any question at all (Can I read a story now?)			
Questions about a resource (text, photo etc.) (Why is Goldilocks sleepy?)			
Factual questions (requiring research) (Where do bears live?)			
Speculative questions (wondering if…) (What would happen if Goldilocks had a gun?)			
Enquiry / big / philosophical questions (Is stealing always bad?)			
Questions about learning (What did I find difficult about that task?)			
Questions about next steps (How could I discover more about…?)			

In addition… *how many* questions do they ask?

How many questions are my pupils asking at present? Put crosses in the grid below to record how many questions (of 4 chosen types) your pupils ask in lesson / day:



7) Create lessons to focus on that skill

Consider…

a) Making your skill objective explicit at the beginning of the lesson.
b) Helpful displays (vocabulary, examples, 'step by step' charts etc.)
c) Asking "what would life be like if we *couldn't* do this skill?" (purpose)
d) Activities, starter games, resources, and evaluation / reflection techniques to hone in on the skill during content coverage.
e) How they might assess their progress and create next steps

EXAMPLE: History lesson introducing 'war' / First World War for KS3.

Objectives:

- To develop questioning skills: creating them and discerning types
- To explore how questions are useful to learning, & history
- To extend their understanding of the concept of war.
- To begin investigating a war in context: First World War.

1) Starter activity. The answer is "war". What could the question be? Think for themselves first (reflection time to jot down initial ideas). Discuss possible questions in pairs. Share as a whole group.
2) Make explicit: today's lesson is about the topic of 'war', and the skill of questioning.
3) Group challenge: List as many wars by name as you can. (Offer examples, perhaps through a collection of pictures from different countries and times?). Collate their war examples on the board. Any questions about any of them *individually*? Can we ask any questions about them as *a whole group*? Again, offer examples if needed. Record, but don't answer, their questions.
4) Are all the questions the same *type* of question? Can we make any categories of questions? (e.g. factual questions about a particular war, philosophical questions about the concept of war, the ethics of war, purpose of wars etc.). Perhaps offer categories for them to fit questions into. Ask 'are some *types* of questions more useful than others?'. Respond to views with further questions about their views ('what would someone who disagreed with you say?' for example).
5) Now use a stimulus to ignite their curiosity about the First World War. For example, it might be a clip from the DVD 'Oh What a Lovely War', or a series of powerpoint slides with emotive music, or audio / visual resources from the Imperial War Museum website (superb!).
6) In pairs or groups, they must create at least one question in a grid of types of question. Either use their categories from earlier or use a prepared table featuring 'factual', 'ethical / about right & wrong', 'research', 'wondering if', 'philosophical' etc.).
7) Each group selects just **one** they really want to ask. List on the board.
8) The class votes for which one they want to explore as a class next lesson.
9) What questions might help them to prepare for the next lesson? Research questions / survey questions to ask others / questions for 'an expert'?
10) Finally, ask them to complete 2 sentences: "So far, I think wars are…" and "If we couldn't ask questions in history, then…".

Other questioning activities (KS1 – 4):

• Pile of 2 types of question – separate them

Mix two types of question on pieces of card connected with your topic. In groups, pupils must separate the two types into separate piles (factual ones which have one definite answer we must all agree on, and philosophical ones which invite opinions and enquiry). Eg. History: When was the battle of Hastings? (factual), and Are all wars always bad? (philosophical). Then get pupils to create their own questions to challenge others with.

• 'Statements to questions' (how, why, what, and when)

Sometimes young or low ability pupils create statements rather than questions. Take the statements they create and help convert them into questions using question stems such as: "how, why, what, where, when, ought, should, to what extent, I wonder if…". So "he's got a bandage around his head" (statement) could become "why has he got a bandage around his head?" (question).

• Categorise by question (15 objects)

Questions are often used to help categorise data into meaningful chunks. To demonstrate this, pupils might work in groups to reflect on 15 objects and ask questions that will group some of the objects in different ways. For example, in maths there might be 15 numbers scattered on the board. Pupils could ask "are they prime?" in which case they group all the prime numbers together in a separate space and then think about groups found in the remaining numbers. Are they fractions? Are they divisible by nine? etc. Adapt to your topic or subject!

• Photos / artefacts to questions

Pupils are best motivated to ask questions about things that make them very curious or connect with their lives. Use exciting stimuli (artefacts, quotes, You Tube clips, concept cartoons, pictures, story books, role play etc.) to get them thinking. In pairs they ask as many questions as they can in a given time period. Use the questions produced to do 'Pile of 2 types' above… can we categorise our questions?

• Question the question

Select a philosophical or perhaps an exam question. Pupils must not try to answer it. They can only ask questions about the question. Eg. Why is this question important? Could there be more than one answer to it? Are there words we need to define? Assumptions? Interpretations? Could this question be answered 500 years ago? Etc. You may have to model this process a few times to get the idea across, but do persist! Very good for analysing the question before trying to answer it (saves many pupils from missing the heart of the question in exams).

10) Pupils create ‘Record of Skills’

Pupils might track their own development with skills. There are many forms this could take. Here are ideas for one: A ‘Record Of My Learning Skills’ Booklet. It might include…

- A chart of 20 (?) learning skills.
- The 6 focus skills for that term / year / subject.
- Definitions / descriptions / examples of skills.
- Levels of each skill to use for summative & formative assessment
- A way of dating & summarising ongoing progress (reflexive learning)
- Colour, illustrations, diagrams, stickers
- Diary sections; feelings & thoughts about skills
- A blob sheet (see ‘Big Book of Blobs’ on Amazon)
- Room for teacher comments
- ‘My next target’ spaces
- ‘Celebrating progress’ areas
- ‘Peer assessment’ areas