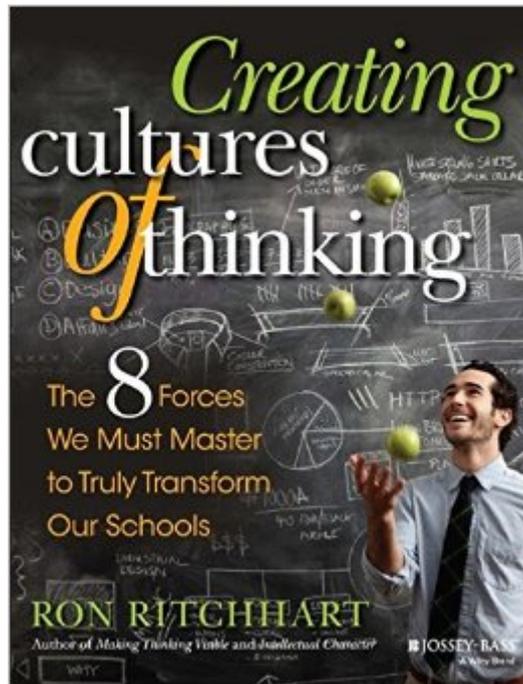


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# Creating Cultures Of Thinking: The 8 Forces We Must Master To Truly Transform Our Schools



## Synopsis

Discover why and how schools must become places where thinking is valued, visible, and actively promoted. As educators, parents, and citizens, we must settle for nothing less than environments that bring out the best in people, take learning to the next level, allow for great discoveries, and propel both the individual and the group forward into a lifetime of learning. This is something all teachers want and all students deserve. In *Creating Cultures of Thinking: The 8 Forces We Must Master to Truly Transform Our Schools*, Ron Ritchhart, author of *Making Thinking Visible*, explains how creating a culture of thinking is more important to learning than any particular curriculum and he outlines how any school or teacher can accomplish this by leveraging 8 cultural forces: expectations, language, time, modeling, opportunities, routines, interactions, and environment. With the techniques and rich classroom vignettes throughout this book, Ritchhart shows that creating a culture of thinking is not about just adhering to a particular set of practices or a general expectation that people should be involved in thinking. A culture of thinking produces the feelings, energy, and even joy that can propel learning forward and motivate us to do what at times can be hard and challenging mental work.

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## Customer Reviews

If you had to select one, just one, book on education, because you were hoping to get a sense for what we can do to bring out the LIFE in learning for all students--and teachers, of course as well--then choose this book. It is a profound read, an unusual combination of high level educational

research combined with practical what-to-do-now ideas for launching into a whole new and much better plan for learning in classrooms. Learning with meaningfulness, depth, bustling energy, and full participation. We're talking about meaningful for everyone: students, teachers, administrators. Parents who want their children to be deeply engaged in learning. People who value learning. People who look to education to nurture the development of thoughtful adults and life-long learners. This is the book. Likely to rise quickly to the best book in education of our time, this book--and way of thinking about learning--launches us into a new and much more vibrant, hopeful, and (at the very highest level) purposeful way of going about things in education. Let's get beyond "testing cultures" and into "learning cultures." Let's develop intellectual character; let's encourage habits of mind, intellectual passions and thinking dispositions that nurture the highest development of all. We do this by creating our own cultures of thinking, designed from within, designed by educators and members of the learning communities. The messages from *Creating Cultures of Thinking: The 8 Forces We Must Master to Truly Transform Our Schools* are not superficial. What Ritchhart is having us think through will not lead to a quick fix. But what he writes about can be enacted immediately. We get a clear sense of how to go about nurturing the development of the highest capacities of all of our students, along with strong positive feelings about school and a very high level of engagement. From reading the book, we know how to start. We know how to add to our beginnings and keep going, ultimately designing learning ecologies that are beyond most anything in the "old plan." We learn to...send new messages about what learning is and how it happens. Chapters in the book correspond to "cultural forces": Expectations: Recognizing How Our Beliefs Shape Our Behavior; Language: Appreciating Its Subtle Yet Profound Power; Time: Learning to be Its Master Rather Than Its Victim; Modeling: Seeing Ourselves through Our Students' Eyes; Opportunities: Crafting the Vehicles for Learning; Routines: Supporting and Scaffolding Learning and Thinking; Interactions: Forging Relationships That Empower Learners; Environment: Using Space to Support Learning and Thinking. In each chapter we examine an ultimate (and sometimes hidden to our daily consciousness) underlying dynamic tension in learning. Should we go for the desultory historically-arrived-at factory model of education, or should we go for deep learning as the essence of life and growth and becoming all that we can be as educators and students? An obvious choice. And Ritchhart guides us through seeing how to go about the change. Chapters contains rich portraits of teachers involved in cultures of thinking who are at work, doing lessons, sharing their classes. Ritchhart's reflections help us see the nuanced layers of "split-screen" teaching in which you're not only involved in

the learning but also in learning about learning. Metacognition is what it's all about, and that isn't an abstract thing at all, but a tangible, energizing, empowering tool for ongoing development of full intellectual capacity. Building up our reflection on the "how" of learning makes us able to create joyful, empowering, fresh ways to go about growth and learning. Students and teachers dive into design of learning cultures that bring out the highest level of engagement for all learners. Perhaps best of all, each chapter ends with a list of things we can discuss, do, try, experiment with, use as launching points. Ready to try? Begin here! Ready to move deeper? Try this. Ritchhart's lists are lively, accessible, and challenging. Reading the book together with colleagues is a great way to start right now with educational transformation. This is a "new story of learning where thinking is valued, visible, and actively promoted." We see that "we must become the shapers of culture and message managers to realize our vision and transform our schools." We cultivate dispositions through purposeful forms of enculturation. We enculturate what we value, the kinds of thinking we hunger to see. What kinds of thinking are of value? You'll be encouraged to generate your own lists. Here are several that we explore in the book: "asking questions, identifying puzzles, and wondering about the mysteries and implications of the objects and ideas of study...building ongoing and evolving explanations, interpretations, and theories based on one's ever-developing knowledge and understanding...identifying, gathering, and reasoning with evidence to justify and support one's interpretations, predictions, theories, arguments, and explanations...delving deeply to uncover the complexities and challenges of a topic and look below the surface of things...being able to capture the core or essence of a thing to discern what it really is really all about." The book is a strong move away from teaching as transmission of facts (or knowledge-bits, as David Perkins would say) toward creation of something quite different, a culture of thinking. What's presented in the book is not a "lay it on you" curriculum, not at all. The book is about a collaborative transformation that gradually occurs across all subjects, grade levels, and forms of interaction in school. It is relevant to all subjects, all ages. "Culture is foundational. It will determine how any curriculum comes to life." Through reading *Creating Cultures of Thinking: the 8 Forces We Must Master to Truly Transform Our Schools*, we begin our immersion in "the ongoing apprenticeship of learning how to learn." The references and research provided in the book are the stuff of dreams. Do you want to be informed about the very latest substantial, cutting-edge knowledge and discoveries in the field of education? You've got it. Use the book as your road map for extensive inquiry. At the end of the book, we find six case studies written from the perspective of leaders currently involved in

various stages of the transformation. For instance, here is Rod Rock, superintendent of Clarkston Schools in Michigan: “In my experience, competitiveness, rote learning, large amounts of practice work, and multiple-choice tests are the norm in schools, while collaboration, deep thinking, and demonstrations of understanding are the exceptions. In my previous role as director of curriculum, I had visited schools engaged with Cultures of Thinking and witnessed firsthand the depth of students’ thinking, the effects on teachers’ practices, and the strength of the learning environments. I sensed that this work was deeply personal and altered teachers’ perceptions and beliefs. In these schools, standardized test scores were strong, yet they were not the focus of the curriculum, professional development, planning, or teaching. Instead, students were asked to think with what they know, solve problems, communicate effectively, collaborate, infer, summarize, consider multiple points of view, and make connections between ideas; thus they were well prepared for the tests. These visits convinced me that learning to think well represented the true purpose of schooling in the twenty-first century. The six cases illuminate, from various viewpoints in various settings, the power of the transformations we can design. Some excerpts: “We became students of our teaching and not just implementers of someone else’s ideas.” (Adam Scher, principal, Way Elementary, Bloomfield, MI). “Probably the most vital element in the success of this ongoing work has been building the capacity of teachers to teach one another and share their enthusiasm for the ideas with colleagues and parents.” (Jim Reese, Director of Studies, Washington International School) “...using the cultural forces as entry points to explore these teaching and learning dilemmas really seemed to make the cultural forces something they learned with and through rather than something they learned about.” (Mark Church, CoT Consultant) “We felt we needed to go slow to go fast. We knew that creating cultures of thinking was unlike other educational initiatives that districts had been involved with in the past. We had to crack the mindset of teacher training and rollouts. How do we build this differently? How do we sustain the communication and support of these school leaders such that they are not doing a new program but rather, living culture change?” Lauren Childs (School Quality Consultant, Oakland Schools, MI) Ritchhart summarizes, “...all six cases demonstrate the importance of allowing teachers to own the process of creating a culture of thinking. This means listening to teachers, engaging teachers in teaching one another, and providing avenues for teacher leadership. Doing so gives the efforts an organic, bottom-up spirit, which enables teachers to feel empowered. Teachers should never get the sense that cultures of thinking is something that is done to them. Creating a culture of thinking

must always be a goal that individuals embrace to improve their teaching and advance the learning of their students. From this place, teachers can then support, push, and nurture the efforts of their colleagues as the school collectively grows into a culture of thinking, and the lives and learning of all are truly transformed. So the book is about everyone working in collaboration, about changes rising organically and powerfully from within. We're talking about...an outcome that encapsulates a higher vision for us as educators, representing what we are able to achieve when we allow ourselves to dream outside the well-worn constraints of the school bureaucracy. It is the stuff of passion, energy, and drive--both for our students and us. At one point in the book, Ritchhart points out, "All too often we educators find it difficult to dream. But this time, it's different. We can not only dream but enact our dreams, live them out. And thanks to *Creating Cultures of Thinking: The 8 Forces We Must Master to Truly Transform Our Schools*, we can begin right now.

Phenomenal writing. As an administrator it gives me a wonderful approach to embrace teaching for understanding. It's a great compliment to Ritchhart's *MAKING THINKING VISIBLE*. This book gives the philosophy and necessity behind the need for thinking routines. I love the breakdown of the book. This makes it easier to grasp the 8 components of culture in our schools and classrooms.

Admittedly, books that inspire my growth as a teacher are some of my favorites, so you'll have to trust me when I tell you that *Creating Cultures of Thinking: The 8 Forces We Must Master to Truly Transform Our Schools* takes that love to a whole new level. *Creating Cultures of Thinking* is the latest installment in a decade-long conversation that began for me in 2004 with *Intellectual Character: What It Is, Why It Matters, and How to Get It*, and continued with *Making Thinking Visible* in 2011. In this trilogy Ron Ritchhart creates a vision of teaching, classroom culture, and intellectual life worthy of our highest aspirations. *Creating Cultures of Thinking* also works as a stand-alone title. It's Low Threshold High Ceiling professional development. No matter the career stage, there are entry points here for all teachers passionate about honing their craft. In the midst of intense and multi-faceted pressures relentlessly pulling our attention and energy in other directions, *Creating Cultures of Thinking* dives into the complexity of creating transformation, of anchoring our daily classroom interactions in the "promotion of the dispositions needed for students to become active learners and effective thinkers eager and able to create, innovate, and solve problems"(34). Committing to a culture of thinking requires submitting to vulnerability. Ritchhart acknowledges the struggle and recognizes that these changes grow only from examining and

judging our own understandings, expectations, practices, and authenticity as thinkers. "It takes a degree of nerve, ambition, and fortitude to steadfastly and honestly work to uncover the story of learning one is telling students. Once we have done so, we must then assess how that story stacks up against what we truly want for our students," (29). "(This) requires a conviction on our part. We must first set and then calibrate our internal compass if we want it to act as a reliable guide"(43). If it is true that children grow into the intellectual life around them, it is incumbent on us to be model thinkers. It takes courage to enter this arena, and Ritchhart inspires that courage. He asks us to recall a time when we have been a part of a culture of thinking, "A place where the group's collective thinking as well as each individual's thinking was valued, visible, and actively promoted as part of the regular day-to-day experience of all group members"(108). He reminds us, "(a) culture of thinking produces the feelings, energy, and even joy that can propel learning forward and motivate us to do what at times can be hard and challenging mental work"(5). With *Creating Cultures of Thinking* at my side, I am ready for the challenge.

Ron Ritchhart's latest book builds on his previous two and provides a strong theoretical argument for focusing on thinking in the classroom; he then backs up that argument with a wealth of practical applications of the theory. This is Project Zero bridging the idea-action gap, as David Perkins terms it, at its best. Ron has been doing important work in schools around the world, and it shows in this book and in *Making Thinking Visible*, its predecessor. At my school, we will buy a copy for every teacher.

I've been teaching for more than 20 years and this is probably one of the best educational books I have ever read. It spoke to my soul and I couldn't put it down. I read it once over the summer break and was so inspired by it that I am re-reading it now we are back at school. It is going to be my 'bible' this year and a text that I know I will refer to often. If you are serious about creating life-long learners in your classroom - buy it. You won't regret it.

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