



Dr Robert (Bob) Swartz, Director of the National Centre for the Teaching of Thinking, Boston, on one of his recent visits to New Zealand.

EPISODES OF SKILFUL THINKING DON'T JUST HAPPEN. THEY NEED TO BE TAUGHT.

Welcome to the new networking newsletter of the Teachers of Thinking Aotearoa Collaborative! I am delighted to be a part of this new network. It fulfills one of our long-term objectives at the National Center for Teaching Thinking in the USA – to make the good work of teachers in fostering the skilful thinking of their students available to all teachers everywhere. We view committed teachers as the real experts on what works in classrooms to foster learning and yet, in the normal situation, this expertise is kept behind closed doors! Newsletters like this one will open those doors!

One of the great innovations that teaching thinking has brought to students is the idea that they can take charge of their own thinking to make it more skilful. And one of the great innovations for teachers has been that they can teach students how to do this. In the most developed of the classroom work that I have seen, teachers teach students explicitly how to engage in various types of thinking with skill, (like decision making, problem solving, and even comparing and contrasting) and, in consort, teach them also to develop habits of mental behavior (like managing impulsivity, being openminded, and listening seriously to others) that enhance the practice of these skills. But they don't stop there. They also teach students how to guide

themselves in the practice of these skills and habits of mind when they face important thinking tasks on their own.

That is as it should be. An old student of mine once told me a story. He said that when he made purchases he always had a tendency to want to get it all over with fast. A few years ago he needed a new car. So he went and looked at the latest models of the car he had been driving. There was one model that really looked good, and the dealer praised it to the heavens! But he said to myself: "Roger, you have a tendency to be impulsive with big purchases and that's got you into trouble in the past. So this time don't do that!" He then sketched to himself what he would do instead: "Instead I'll resist this temptation, keep my mind open, and go and look at a few other cars that might also serve my needs. I'll gather information about them, and not just from the salesman. Maybe I can find someone who has owned one before and get some information about it. And maybe there is a consumer magazine that has reviewed these cars. Then I will compare and contrast them carefully, making sure that I take into account all the relevant factors." And he also said to himself, "Maybe I should also try bouncing my ideas off my daughter, who may also be using the car from time to time. Maybe there is something that I've overlooked that she will contribute, so I need to listen to her carefully before I make a decision. Only when I am satisfied that I've covered all the bases will I decide which one is best for me."

When I think about this now I recognize, of course, that he was using a procedure – a strategy – for decision making that he had learned (think about options, consequences, etc.), and he was setting himself to practice some of the important mental habits he had also developed (manage impulsivity, take what others have to say seriously). But it was also very clear to me that it was he himself who was guiding himself in his thinking – taking charge of his own thinking – and not anyone else. That was something he learned as well. Without internalizing the habit of doing this none of this skilful decision making would have occurred.

Wouldn't it be wonderful on this planet if more people made decisions this way!

Episodes of skilful thinking don't just happen. They need to be taught. And they can be. We can all do this in our classrooms. And when they are taught by infusing instruction in skilful thinking into our content instruction dramatic improvements in content learning also take place. This newsletter, and the other activities of the Teachers of Thinking, will, I am sure, contribute to making things like this happen in your classrooms and your schools!

Robert Swartz, Director, National Center for Teaching Thinking, Boston, Massachusetts.



THE SKILFUL THINKER

Teachers of Thinking - Aotearoa Collaborative



Debbie has been teaching for 7 years. She trained at Massey University, taking their distance learning course. She has had experience in special education before becoming a classroom teacher. She is also the school's Board Rep. In her spare time she can be found riding her 900cc motorbike.



Debbie discussing a mathematics problem with a group of students.

Member Profile - Debbie Adding
Team Leader, Year 8, Birkdale
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WHICH MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR HOME WILL I PURCHASE?

Debbie's Year 8 class, Room 10, have been working on a science investigation into Auckland's geology called, 'Let the Buyer Beware.' Using skilful compare and contrast they have been working on solving the problem set in their scenario.

"Your family is about to purchase a very expensive new home. The real estate agent has shown you homes in the Thorne Bay area, Takapuna and others on the cliff top south of Takapuna Beach. As it is so costly you decide to investigate everything possible about the two locations. Make sure you take a very close look at the geology of the area before making your choice. Using skilful compare and contrast which house would you buy and how does your new knowledge of the geology of these two areas affect your decision?"

Debbie has spent time with her class co-constructing the questions for investigation from the scenario and developing a skilful compare and contrast thinking map that they will use to guide their thinking.

During my visit to her classroom I spoke to Leonard a 12 year old student. I asked Leonard what were the new insights and understandings he had gained from the inquiry into the geology of the North Shore.

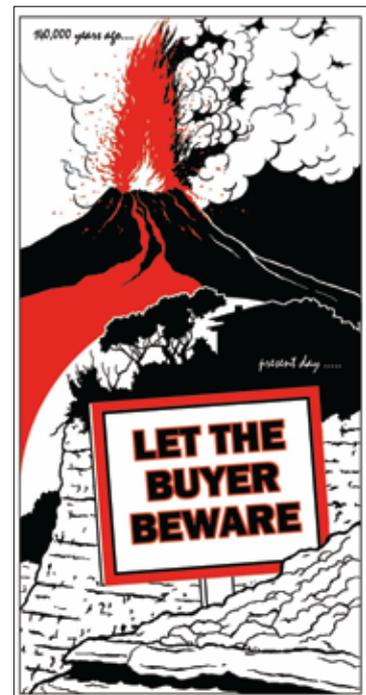
"I now know that before you buy a house, instead of its looks, you need to check the geology of the land."

"You should think before buying so you check out all your options."

Asked about skilful compare and contrast Leonard replied:

"It makes everything more reliable. Instead of the basics you dig deeper. By digging deeper you see more truth."

Looking around the classroom I saw a display of charts with the new learning clearly evident. One useful idea was to create charts using printouts of their keynote (power point) presentations.



Schools interested in this idea can find the teachers guide that comes with this unit on Birkdale Intermediate's web site at www.bis.school.nz. The school also has a CD ROM of resources on the geology of Auckland which is available for \$20 to cover copying, postage and packaging.

In July of this year Debbie will be travelling to study at Harvard University. She and a group of teachers from the Beach Haven, Birkdale and Birkenhead areas will be studying with David Perkins, Howard Gardener and Steve Seidel at the Graduate School of Education's Project Zero.

Check it out at:

<http://www.pz.harvard.edu/index.cfm>



Member Profile - Del McFarlane-Scott
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Del has been teaching for 8 years. She came to teaching from a career in hotel management. She trained at Christchurch College of Education taking the distance learning option. She is the Board rep. and leader of the 'Habits of Mind' and 'Formative Assessment' teams.



Del working with a group of her students during a creative writing lesson.

HOW DO YOU REMOVE SLIME FROM A TOWN USING SKILFUL THINKING?

Del's Year 5/6 class, Room 6, has a strong focus on skilful thinking. On my visit to her classroom they were working on a creative language theme based around the fictional story, 'Bad Day at Riverbend' by Chris Van Allsburg ISBN 9780395673478. The class had read part of the story and was now using a skilful problem solving graphic organiser to assist them in writing a solution to a problem posed in the story, '...one fateful day a stage coach rolls into town its team of horses covered with an unidentifiable substance.' This slime that is now covering the town is the problem Room 6 are being asked to solve through skilful problem solving and creative thinking! Looking at Constantijn's graphic organiser I see the use of a flame thrower being suggested, I asked him where his idea had come from and he replied, "from a playstation game I used at my friend house." The classes graphic organisers show a wide variety of creative solutions to the problem.

Kaurilands School has purchased a set of Chris Van Allsburg's books as they are a great source of ideas for creative writing.

You might like to check out his other books, Ben's Dream, The Garden of Abdul Gasazi, Jumanji, Just a Dream, The Mysteries of Harris Burdick, The Polar Express, The Stranger, The Sweetest Fig, Two Bad Ants, The Widow's Broom, The Wreck of the Zephyr, The Z was Zapped and Zathura.

The walls also displayed posters from a social studies homework task 'What is a Hero?' The subquestions to be answered were, 'What makes

a person a hero?' 'Who are your heroes?' and 'What Habits of Mind do your heroes use and how do you know?' The children had skilfully compared and contrasted two people they saw as heroes. Many had chosen a member of their family to compare with someone famous. Graphic organisers displayed on the walls made their thinking visible. Ella discussed her uncle Victor who is a policeman, 'My uncle Victor uses two 'Habits of Mind,' taking responsible risks and striving for accuracy. He strives for accuracy by learning everything there is to know about being a good Policeman. He takes responsible risks every day to make our country a better place. He is special to me because he is my Uncle and I love him.'

One of the features of Room 6 is the availability of graphic organisers. They are easily accessed by the children from tote trays set out around the room. Del explained that she first introduced the parts-whole organiser at a staff meeting by comparing and contrasting it with the simpler bubble map the staff were more used to using. It quickly became clear that skilful parts-whole thinking developed deeper thinking than was possible using the bubble map. After the staff meeting the new graphic organiser for skilful parts-whole thinking was placed on the school's server for other classes to use.

Del is one of the lucky members of our collaborative to have been able to travel to Boston, Massachusetts to study with Dr Robert Swartz at the National Center for Teaching Thinking (NCTT) Summer Institute held in July each year. She told me she is going again this year! We hope to get a full report for the collaborative on her return.

Check it out at:

<http://www.nctt.net/summerinstitute.html>



OUR LOGO COMES FROM NORRKOPING, SWEDEN



Posters went up around Norrköping welcoming people to the 13th International Conference on Thinking.

Last year a number of New Zealand teachers travelled to Norrköping, Sweden, to attend and present at the 13th International Conference on Thinking. The conference theme was 'Curious Minds Think and Learn by Exploring the Unknown.'

Held every two years ICOT is an excellent platform for meeting people with innovative minds from across the globe. It has consistently attracted world leaders in education, business and industry, health, government and community organizations including cultural, scientific and educational institutions.

The Norrköping conference logo was designed by Swedish artist Åsa Till. The conference logo has been given to our collaborative to use as our own.

If you are interested, the next conference will be in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 22 - 26 June, 2009.

Check it out at:

<http://www.14ththinkingconference.com/>

JOINING THE COLLABORATIVE

Membership of the 'Teachers of Thinking, Aotearoa Collaborative' is simple. If you are interested in improving your students thinking skills and would like to receive the collaboratives newsletter all you need to do is email:

Richard at rcoote@bis.school.nz

Thats it, you are now a member! There are no fees or other committments.



The old industrial town of Norrköping, Sweden with redundant factories turned into museums and conference facilities - creative thinking!

BACK ISSUES OF 'THE SKILFUL THINKER'

Back issues of our newsletter will be available on Birkdale Intermediate's web site. Click on the 'Thinking Based Learning' button at:

www.bis.school.nz

