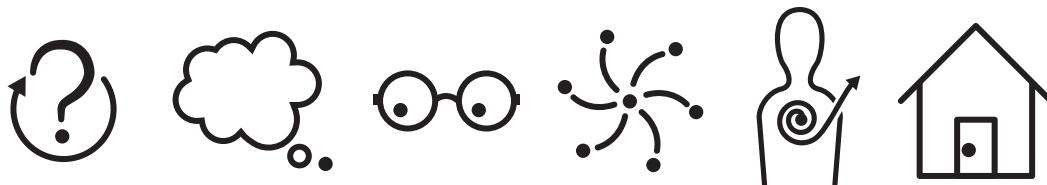# Thinking Environments

Growing Thinking Schools

From the Inside Out

Transformational Professional Development for Schools

Thinking models, processes, skills, strategies and tools
for transforming the whole school environment.

www.thinkingenvironments.com

Thinking Environments

An Overview

Thinking Environments is an awareness, understanding and a process focused upon the design, interface and impact with the environment of the physical learning space. The environment is '*The Third Teacher*' (Reggio Emilia) where we focus on designing the physical space with the '*Image of the Child*' as a root understanding. The '*Image of the Child*' (Reggio Emilia) respects and understands the child's *frame of reference* in regards to how children see, sense, use and interface within the environment. The teacher's decisions — with intentionality — impact the classroom and school's environment. The teachers decisions are crucial to the quality outcomes of the children and youth's learning experiences and how they model the children. And, the teacher's decisions become a model to how students learn to consider using their environment: in school, home and the greater community.

In the research about learning and the physical environment, three points stand out:
- physical environments influence how we feel, hear and see. Those factors, in turn, influence cognitive and affective performance.
- Some variables exert a much greater influlence on student achievement than others.
- Better awareness, smarter planning and simple changes can be made in every environment to improve learning.
  Eric Jensen - Teaching with the Brain in Mind, ASCD

Our Purpose

The purpose of Thinking Environments professional development is for developing an appreciation and understanding of the physical environment's impact while having practical interventions that can elevate the learning potential of children and youth. Thinking Environments is a process of thinking through the development of specific elements that impact the learning environment. The goal is to understand the approach, outcomes and reflectively develop pathways of action that focus on mastery with environment impact.

Our Process

The approach and process recognize three key elements in regards to what, where, how and when they are used:
- **Materials**: the use and choice of natural and recycled materials
- **Objects**: the design and human interface with furniture, lighting and other objects
- **People**: how we as people interface with the environment including space, timing, communication and collaboration

The above elements recognize the focus of using our 'place in space' in regards to local assets and intentionality respectful of local culture.

Contact Info

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Website

Please visit our website for information about upcoming training opportunities, research and documentation on different approaches to the facilitation of Thinking Environments.
www.thinkingenvironments.com

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Participants Guide: Growing Thinking Environments Schools

How to Use this Guide

Growing Thinking Environments is a *guide*, much like a travel guide that you have closely looked through before visiting a new place, or visiting a website with information about different pathways for investigating a new concept. This guidebook is recommended for use with support of a certified Thinking Environments trainer who will guide you and your colleagues through a process of:
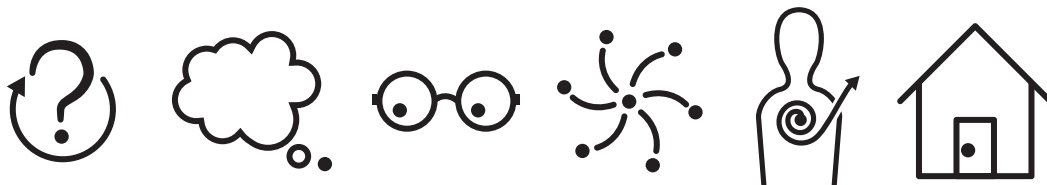
- envisioning what a "Thinking Environment" might look like within the culture of your whole school;
- considering the different possible approaches you may take; and
- beginning the planning stage for the short and long term process of explicitly and systematically integrating "thinking" processes into the existing whole school and classroom environment.

This guide does not provide an answer, but offers starting points for the journey toward becoming a "Thinking Environments School" of the 21st century.

Collaboration, Authorship, and Appreciation

The Thinking Environments process and guide has been developed, designed, written and tested in the field by Robert Seth Price. Becky Fogler-Bradley and Christopher Nunn have been co-contributors in the development of process and guide. Their invaluable insights, experience and support with the development of Thinking Environments deepen the foundations of this guide and process. They are deeply gifted in their knowledge and practice, and how to learn and think with, to, about and from children.

Thank you to David Hyerle <www.thinkingfoundation.org> for sharing and thinking about thinking ideas on visual tools and beyond. I am very appreciative to my colleagues with Thinking Schools Ethiopia and my work there which continually deepens my thoughts and understanding on thinking about education <www.thinkingschoolsethiopia.com>, and my colleagues with Thinking Schools International.

Preface
Thinking Environments: Translating Internal Cultures into Action

Thinking Ahead
This guide, a companion to the Thinking Schools approach proposes *intentionality* with the 'environment' we learn and teach in is a major contributor to an environment that makes learning exciting and more doable. Intentionality is a major input - making decisions that we choose to based on assessing our environment. This guide approaches three key constructs of the classroom, school and ultimately life long thinking:
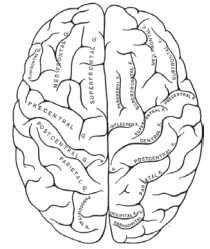
- materials
- objects
- people

How we understand the use and implications, and then make intentional choices will enhance outcomes while making our learning journey more productive.

A Vision
The first three stages of the journey as presented in this guide are to engage you in reflective questions such as:

- What is the relationship between *physical environment* and *thinking*?
- What is a *thinking environment* for children, youth and the teacher?
- How have other schools created *thinking environments*?
- What are a variety of ways, definitions and approaches to developing a *thinking environment*?
- How do these beliefs fit within your belief system?

You will also learn some new techniques and see how approaches you are already using may be enhanced with explicitly teaching students within and about a thinking environment.

Understanding, Planning and Leading the Journey

As facilitators certified by *Thinking Environments*, we are guides and offer our collective background, experiences and knowledge to help you plan *your own path* over time as an ever-evolving Thinking Environments School. Your work and design will be unique. We will have answers to many of your questions and/or be able to seek out our links to experts in the field.

What we don't have is a solution for what your school "should" look like. This does not fit with the purpose of our work: we do not believe that there is one way to becoming a Thinking Environments School.

There are unique pathways for each school, within each community, within the diverse countries and continents on this planet. Our time with you will include starting points for considering different pathways.

A Global Journey

We know that we will learn from you along the way and also that we will be able to connect you with people and schools around the world who are also on a similar journey. We will be your collaborative partner in this journey.

Our website will be a common ground for sharing the insights from your experiences and the journey ahead around the world. Every person (and community) has their own ways of thinking about the purpose of schooling and how to define learning and refine practices to support thinking.

We do not have one definition, but we do have much to share about this new direction in education around the world. There is a growing awareness and with that a global network of like minded educators who want to share in this new journey, this new adventure. You can find them at: www.thinkingenvironments.com

Multi-Directional Development

Human capacity for innovation and other human resources are often overlooked or devalued. A model of "multidirectional collaborative development" shifts this assumption and belief system to one where all participants recognize their own capacity for aiding others. Expertise is surfaced, shared, translated and adapted to other contexts for each partner to use as they determine what is appropriate. Examples might be in environmental protection, education, agricultural sustainability, nutrition, and leadership. If the 'world is flat' as Thomas Friedman has proposed, perhaps the potential of real systems change and innovation might evolve in a seemingly unlikely places. Places that would seemingly have less in structure, yet if they have the capacity of intentionality in making thoughtful decisions, having less might result in more. To quote the singer/songwriter Bob Dylan *"When you've got nothing, you've got nothing to loose."*

Stage 1 Getting Started

Step 1   Who are we: ourselves and collaboratively?

Step 2   What is the Image of the Child?

Step 3   What is the vision of a *Thinking Environment*?

Step 4   How does the Physical Environment affect
student outcomes?

Step 5   What is a Quality "Thinking Environment"?