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Promoting Student Thinking  
in Primary School:  
Successful Strategies in New Zealand's  
Year 3-6 Classrooms

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Education at Massey University

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2002

## Abstract

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This thesis examines the promotion of student thinking by six primary school teachers in Auckland, New Zealand. All students think; however, cognitive research indicates the powerful ability teachers have to *promote* higher levels of student thinking. In a rapidly changing world, the researcher believes now is an ideal time to link relevant literature to the practices of New Zealand primary teachers.

This study has three aims: firstly, to investigate why the teachers believe in the significance of promoting student thinking; secondly, to examine what the teachers are doing to facilitate higher levels of thinking by investigating their teaching practices and learning environments; and lastly, to provide descriptive examples of how New Zealand teachers in Year 3-6 primary classrooms are promoting student thinking.

The qualitative, case study research design provided descriptive data that was subsequently analyzed. This study was undertaken in three phases to achieve the research aims. The first phase asked teachers to assess their promotion of student thinking on a written scale. The second phase involved the observation of lessons that the teachers believed facilitated higher levels of student thinking. Individual interviews comprised the third and final phase of this study. The collection and triangulation of the data informed the analysis from which emerged the common themes and results.

The teachers represented a range of experience levels and worked in schools with differing socio-economic statuses. All teachers believed in developing the children 'holistically' with consideration of the children's academic, social, emotional and physical growth. They involved their students in collaborative activities, stressed the importance of literacy, and included time for children's reflections. Discrepancies in the extent to which children were engaged in metacognitive activities and the school support received by the teachers appeared to be the largest disparity. The differences and similarities provide important discussion points.

The researcher suggests that successful approaches to promoting student thinking are first and foremost in the hands of teachers. This research indicates that teachers can independently develop their professional knowledge in this area; however, a whole school promotion of student thinking benefits the teaching staff and the student body, which in turn can positively affect New Zealand.

## Acknowledgements

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I wish to thank the teachers who were the participants of this thesis. Without their interest in the topic and their willingness to share their precious time, this research could not have been undertaken.

I extend my gratitude to my supervisors Teresa Ball and Roger Openshaw. I would like to thank Teresa especially for reading my drafts and offering constructive criticism. Her advice has been valuable throughout the duration of my research. I wish to thank Roger for 'elevating' my understanding of the research process.

Thank you to all my family for your love and support. My deepest gratitude is extended to my parents, Michael and Barbara Wright, for ensuring I grew up in a supportive culture of thinking. I continue to admire the creative thinking skills of my brother Joshua. My grandparents, Helen & Lloyd Galbraith and Fran & Bob Wright have supported me throughout my life's journey. And to my husband Peter, a heartfelt thank you for your continuing friendship, your inquiring mind and your unconditional love as we explore the wonders of this world together.

# Table of Contents

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<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	ii
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....	iii
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b> .....	iv
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</b> .....	1
Background to the Research .....	2
Purpose of the Research.....	6
Organization of the Thesis.....	6
Summary.....	8
<b>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	9
The Thinking Movement .....	10
Process versus Content .....	11
Constructivism as the Theoretical Basis for Promoting Student Thinking .....	13
Diversity in Thinking.....	15
Rationales For Education.....	16
Lifelong Learning in Education .....	16
Education for Democracy.....	17
Economic Rationalization .....	18
New Zealand Educational Reform.....	19
Educating in the 'Information Age' .....	21
Achieving Thinking Dispositions .....	23
Metacognition.....	24
Linking the Classroom Climate and Thinking Skills.....	26
Developing Thinking Through Guided Support And Interactions.....	28
Professional Development .....	29
Summary.....	32
<b>CHAPTER 3: THE RESEARCH PROCESS</b> .....	35
Justification of Research Design.....	35
Qualitative versus Quantitative .....	35
Case Study.....	37
Reliability and Validity .....	38
Triangulation .....	40
Coding .....	40
Methodology .....	41
Introduction .....	41
Information Packets.....	43
Responses .....	44
Participants .....	46
Ethical Considerations .....	47
Informed Consent.....	48
Rights .....	48
Confidentiality.....	49

Potential Harm to Participants.....	49
Benefits.....	49
Field Work .....	50
Phase One: Self-Assessments.....	50
Phase Two – Observations .....	51
Phase Three – Interviews .....	53
Focused Interviews .....	54
<b>CHAPTER 4: RESULTS .....</b>	<b>55</b>
Profiles of the Teachers .....	55
Teacher A .....	55
Teacher B .....	57
Teacher C .....	58
Teacher D .....	59
Teacher E.....	60
Teacher F.....	61
Part One: Self-Assessments .....	62
Part Two: Observations .....	66
A Safe Learning Environment.....	66
Listening and Sharing Ideas .....	69
Prior Knowledge and Experiences .....	71
Thinking Tools .....	73
Student Choices.....	74
Expectation for Explanations of Reasoning .....	75
Part Three: Interviews.....	76
Teaching Rationale.....	76
Teacher’s Role Promoting Student Thinking.....	77
Class Climate .....	77
Direct Instruction of Thinking Skills.....	78
Modeling.....	78
Language.....	80
Reflection.....	80
Thinking Tools.....	82
The Development of Professional Knowledge About Thinking Skills.....	82
Assessment .....	83
Summary of the Data Results .....	84
<b>CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION.....</b>	<b>87</b>
Research Question 1: Why do teachers believe that promoting student thinking is important? .....	88
Research Question 2: How are teachers in New Zealand middle and upper primary schools consciously promoting higher levels of student thinking? .....	90
A Safe Classroom Climate .....	91
Explicit Skills Instruction.....	92
Collaborative Interactions .....	95
Metacognition.....	97
Research Question 3: How have teachers interested in promoting student thinking developed their professional knowledge in this area? .....	98
Summary .....	102

<b>CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS</b> .....	104
Research Aims .....	105
Implications for Teachers .....	106
Implications for Schools .....	108
Implications for the Government.....	109
Recommendations to Promote Student Thinking .....	110
Suggestions for Future Research .....	111
Concluding Remarks.....	112
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	114
<b>APPENDICES</b> .....	128
Appendix A Promoting Student Thinking. J. O'Brien's Teacher Self-Assessment Scale: Phase One.....	129
Appendix B Information Sheet for Principals.....	131
Appendix C Information Sheet for Teaching Participants: Phase One.....	133
Appendix D Consent Form for Teaching Participants .....	135
Appendix E Information Sheet for Teaching Participants Involved in Audio or Video Recording Their Classroom Lessons: Phase Two and Three ..	136
Appendix F Information Sheet for Parents of Student Participants.....	138
Appendix G Information Sheet for Student Participants.....	139
Appendix H Consent Form for Student with Parent/Guardian Consent .....	140
Appendix I Summary of Self-Assessment Responses: Phase One.....	141
Appendix J Extract from an Observation: Phase Two .....	142
Appendix K Focused Interview Questions: Phase Three .....	147
Appendix L Extract from a Teacher Interview: Phase Three .....	149
Appendix M Timeline of Data Gathering .....	152