

Teaching matters

T

he *National Curriculum* document goes further than any of its ancestors in highlighting the need for learners to be good thinkers. In the 'Values, aims and purposes' section, the 'why?' of the *National Curriculum*, there are a couple of bold statements aimed at schools. School curricula should 'enable pupils to think critically and creatively, to solve problems and make a difference for the better'. They should also promote 'an enquiring mind and capacity to think rationally'.

A set of thinking skills are also recommended and specified later in the *National Curriculum* but there is a qualification in the introductory paragraph. The thinking skills of *Information processing, Reasoning, Enquiry, Creative thinking* and *Evaluation* are said to be 'embedded in the *National Curriculum*'.

This implies that if the content of the *National Curriculum* is covered then, as learners progress through their Key Stages and tests, they will just soak up the skills and evolve into creative, critical and enquiring citizens.

This is wishful thinking. If learners are to be good thinkers and enthusiastic enquirers, they need to be initiated into the practices of reasoning and enquiry by teachers who value such practices, demonstrate them and know how to elicit them from learners. That is why all serious initiatives on teaching thinking stress the overriding importance of how teachers teach. Whether it is called *Guided participation, Mediation* or *Community of Enquiry*, effective teaching for good thinking will involve a lot of structured discussion in a classroom culture that values and acts upon student questioning.

Such customs and cultures are not 'embedded in the *National Curriculum*'. On the contrary, they are often displaced by the roaring juggernaut of curriculum content. Teaching for thinking needs to be learned, practised and developed. If it is to flourish, it has to be prioritised by schools because teachers who give learners time to think need support. At the management level, adjustments may be required of timetables and schemes of work. Above all, teachers who want their learners to enquire, reason and create need the opportunity to come together to learn and share in order to develop their own capacities to, in the words of the *National Curriculum*, 'make a difference for the better'.

That is why *Teaching Thinking Magazine*, have organised the 'Getting Started and Keeping Going' conference on 22 February 2002. We are also going to offer a series of training courses in conjunction with *The Questions Publishing Company* for teaching thinking across the curriculum starting in early 2002. They will be led by experienced practitioners and will cover a range of Key Stages.

There is no single route to the effective teaching of good thinking – no 'one size fits all' method. However, impressive progress can be made when teachers and school leaders are determined to invest in training and then protect their 'thinking time'.

One example comes from Tuckswold First School in Norwich. Teachers at the school didn't rely on being told what to do by government agencies. They made the development of good thinking a priority and they sought out specialist trainers to help them achieve their vision. You can read about their initiatives on the school's award-winning website (www.tuckswoldfirst.norfolk.sch.uk). Their risk-taking has been rewarded. They believe that the quality of thinking, teaching and learning has improved across the curriculum. This was recognised in a positive OfSTED report. We are pleased to announce that Sue Eagle, the headteacher of Tuckswold First School has agreed to join the editorial board of *Teaching Thinking Magazine*. We hope that other schools at all Key Stages will follow the example of Tuckswold First School by thinking for themselves and by emphasising the importance of how teachers teach.

Steve Williams