For the classroom

Create a community of metacognitive thinkers

A focused thinking environment does not just happen by itself. Through modeling and implicit instruction, teachers can show all learners how to successfully utilize their metacognition. Teaching students to be metacognitive thinkers and to question themselves as they work can strengthen differentiated activities and strategies such as curriculum compacting, tiered lessons, contracts, learning menus, literature circles and journaling. Incorporate Think Alouds and practice sessions to teach students how to think about their thinking.

Metacognitive thinkers learn to consistently ask themselves these questions:

- How should I approach this work?
- Why am I doing this?
- What will be challenging for me?
- What should I do first?
- Why is this important?
- Is there another way to look at this?
- Are there other solutions?
- What else am I wondering about?
- What am I confused about?
- What should I do if I get stuck?
- How will I know if I have successfully completed this task?
- Do I notice any connections to my life or knowledge?
- What do I keep finding myself thinking about? Why?
- Can I explain my thinking?

It is important to provide many opportunities for students to share their ideas, questions, understandings and misunderstandings. Move away from single-student responses and expand student voice using strategies such as Turn & Talk; “I Think, You Think, We Think” Groups; Think Alouds; Think, Square, Share; Today’s Wondering; and Look, Lean, Whisper.
Develop think time by teaching and practicing Stop & Think with your students:

1. Read a sentence from a text or pose an idea. Then, hold up a stop sign or red card and set a timer.
2. The class will think about the topic for 30 seconds. When the timer goes off, display the go sign/green card and discuss what they were thinking about.
3. Record all responses. Revisit the chart and talk further about initial ideas.
4. Continue practicing Stop & Think, varying think time.
5. Finally, incorporate the strategy into instruction.

Capture student thinking

Good thinkers take time to reflect, share ideas with others and think about their own thinking. Because students cannot see or touch their thinking, teachers must consistently teach students the value of capturing their thinking.

Some quick strategies for capturing all levels of student thinking include the following:

**Brainstorming:** During student discussions, solicit responses to questions about how students know things, figure things out or find their evidence. Gather these responses and ideas on a chart, video or app such as Padlet. Ask students what they notice about the patterns of thinking that develop, as well as the differences and similarities of the ideas. By capturing their thinking, students can return to their ideas again and again.

**Graphic Organizers:** Graphic organizers such as maps, webs, diagrams and KWLs are essential for capturing thinking because they help students to focus on a range of concepts and see how relationships develop between ideas. Graphic organizers provide structure for students to organize their thinking and are easily modified based on student needs.

**Beginning, Middle and End Reflections:** Do not wait until the end of a text or activity for reflection time. Ask students to think before an activity begins to generate predictions and connections, and pause in the middle of a read aloud to provide opportunities for all students to think and question. As a culminating reflection, students can ponder alternative endings, what ifs and what might happen next. Reflections may take many forms and can be writings, videos, blog entries and/or wiki postings.

**Spectrum Posters:** Use color-coding to capture and categorize students’ thoughts, questions and ideas. Assign a different color to each level of Bloom’s Taxonomy, such as green for Remembering and yellow for Understanding. Display posters with each color and use markers and stickers to indicate where to place thoughts, ideas and questions on the framework. Provide time for students to discuss, compare, contrast and evaluate their responses. Students can practice explaining and justifying how they classify their thoughts.
**Traveling Charts:** Work with a small group of students of similar ability to create one question at the beginning of a unit, and write the question at the top of a small chart. Create a chart with each group. Pass the charts around the room (table to table, group to group, student-to-student) throughout the lessons of the unit so everyone in the classroom community can add their thoughts and ideas to the question charts. It is important for students to return to their initial responses to add how their thoughts have changed. Review the charts as a culminating activity and discuss how questions could have been improved. Create new charts for units in other subjects as an ongoing activity.