

Lesson notes to lay groundwork for a Thinking Environment in class

by Michelle Hunter, April 2016

Teaching the basics of a Thinking Environment

Before start: Create open space, chairs in a circle, desks cleared away (keep time back at end to return room to normal – get Ss to help!) Where possible, have this space separate from the main “lecturing” area.

Opening round – what is one positive thing that has happened to you since last semester? (max. 1 minute each, **no interruptions**). Move in clockwise direction once the first volunteer has spoken. Listen closely to each other.

Second round – what do you want to have achieved by the end of this semester’s English classes? (max. 1 minute each, no interruptions). Move in anti-clockwise direction once the first volunteer has spoken. Listen closely to each other.

INTRODUCTION to today

... We’re going to do that with the help of a Thinking Environment. Anyone heard of it before?

It’s a simple process with proven effectiveness. Listen to the following testimonials:

When we use the Thinking Environment process, the quality and outcomes of our work together are staggering.

Tara Stevens, VP, AOL Time Warner Book Group

Do not be fooled by the simplicity of this process. It will unleash the power of your whole organisation.

Denis Reay, Director HR, BT

Learning the framework for thinking is one of my best investments. There are not many things that can transform behaviours in organisations but this has.

Dr Jean Harper, Head of Innovation, Pedigree Masterfoods Europe

I can positively say that as a result of our Thinking Environment culture, our business has improved by at least 20%. And that is measurable in financial terms.

Provincial Director, Financial Services

Set a positive mood in the room – it opens the brain. You can ask any question, as long as it elicits positive reactions.

This is an ideal opportunity to capture your learners’ goals and intentions for your time together. Again, you’re free to formulate your own question. (In subsequent lessons / Rounds, I have asked Ss to pose the question – this shows equality, ie: we are equal thinking peers)

Introduce your lesson per your plan and explain you’re going to share a way of working together to help achieve that lesson / ongoing studies together. Ask if anyone has already heard of TE – don’t assume they haven’t!

For Ss who need concrete examples / proof of TE effectiveness, use testimonials

Pair work – vocabulary check & discussion

Look at these words. What do they mean to you?

What else could they mean?

How would you use them in a sentence of your own?

Pause to think about how your discussions / conversations went during this exercise. What do you notice on reflection? Make a note.

Presentation of Thinking Environment definitions of 5 of the words

Attention: listening with palpable respect and genuine interest, and without interruption

Equality: treating each other as thinking peers; giving equal turns and attention; keeping boundaries and agreements

Ease: offering freedom from internal rush or urgency

Appreciation: practicing a 5:1 ratio of appreciation to challenge

Encouragement: giving courage to go to the cutting edge of ideas by moving beyond internal competition

Probably the most important of these is to give attention; to listen generatively. Our attention generates thinking in another person. Listening to ignite is different from listening to reply.

When you give attention of this calibre:

- you are so present you become invisible
- you matter profoundly because you do not matter at all
- you do not need to be needed but are needed entirely
- you are essential, and you are irrelevant.

It is difficult to maintain full, generative attention. Consider 3 streams of attention, when held in balance, the thinker can sense to the quality of attention and generate ideas without impediment.

1. **Content** - what is the thinker saying?
2. **Response** - what is my response to what the thinker is saying?
3. **Thinking Environment** - am I demonstrating all 10 components?

10 minutes before the end of the lesson: Reflection on the Thinking Environment.

Closing round: How well do you think a TE can be applied to this university setting? Could we maintain a TE for all our time together?

Second round – of appreciation: tell the person to your left one thing you have appreciated about them during your study time together (or as appropriate depending on course).

4. Create sets of cards for pairs, one of the 10 components per card: (go to <http://www.demandhighsilently.com/thinking-environment/> for description of what each means in a TE).

ATTENTION
EQUALITY
EASE
APPRECIATION
ENCOURAGEMENT

FEELINGS
INFORMATION
DIVERSITY
INCISIVE QUESTIONS
PLACE

Intention: elicit what Ss already understand about these words; then ask them what else the words could mean – demand high! Offer the TE meanings to just 5 components – 10 gets a bit tedious in class, but direct them to the webpage if they're interested.

Keep emphasising the importance of giving uninterrupted attention – it is the hardest part to maintain.

With this information, Ss understand why maintaining uninterrupted attention is so hard.

NOTE: I need to be careful about becoming distracted by the story I'm hearing and how it might relate to my own experience; to be wary of becoming emotionally invested in the thinker's story! When I hold all three streams in balance, the thinker can sense the quality of attention and be able to generate their own ideas without impediment.

Self Study opportunity: Get Ss to write a summary of their thoughts about a TE.

Use your intuition with this; there needs to be enough trust in the group to verbalise appreciation publicly. It is worth it if they do participate.