

## ***Creating a Culture of Thinking in Action* Book Study: Energizing Our Community**

One of the most powerful ways to support meaningful professional growth is through collaborative learning experiences, where educators have the opportunity to learn from each other's expertise. Our book study on *Creating Cultures of Thinking in Action* by Ron Ritchhart has been a testament to that, offering educators a space to reflect, discuss, and apply transformative ideas in their classrooms. In addition to reflecting on the book, we also study our own teaching practices as the second text.

Through this experience, we've identified key elements that have contributed to the book study's success—elements that others can replicate in their own settings.

### **Key Elements of Success**

#### ***1. Choice in Reading and Application***

Teachers had the autonomy to choose how they applied the book's concepts in their practice. Rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, each educator could explore strategies that resonated most with the needs of their students. This flexibility fostered ownership and motivation, leading to meaningful implementation.

As educators engaged with the text, they practiced reasoning with evidence, using real classroom experiences connecting to the ideas in the text. They also focused on uncovering the complexity of visible thinking routines and instructional strategies, reflecting on what works best for student engagement, deep thinking and ultimately, understanding.

One teacher shared, "This is such a valuable & enjoyable group and process. Revisiting the resources again this year is illuminating and validating. Thank you for cultivating the space, support, and challenge for us to collaborate." This reflection exemplifies "Mindset 6: Learning and thinking are as much a collective enterprise as they are an individual endeavor"—our study thrived because we learned together, not only from our successes, but also in a safe space to learn from our mistakes.

#### ***2. Thoughtful and Engaging Discussion***

The majority of our book study time was spent in conversation with colleagues. These discussions allowed teachers to process ideas, ask questions, and learn from one another's experiences. One of the most impactful aspects was considering different viewpoints—listening to colleagues' interpretations and applications of the book's ideas led to richer understanding and inspired innovative approaches in the classroom. As one participant shared, "Trying out the ideas and collaborating with the protocols & routines kept me motivated and my spirits up." These conversations helped teachers develop a more nuanced understanding of what it means to create a culture of thinking in their classrooms.

Another participant noted, “Glow: great atmosphere, resources, and collaboration to support our cultivation + application of this work. Grow: I’d love to see this work applied throughout our school and others.” This statement aligns with “Mindset 9: The opportunities we create for our students matter to their engagement, empowerment, and learning”—as we created a supportive space for teachers, we also saw these practices expand to impact our students.

### *3. Optional Learning Engagements*

Participation is always an invitation. It is meant to be both intriguing and low-pressure. Teachers could engage with the book and the discussions at a level that suited them, making the experience feel like an opportunity rather than another task on their to-do list. The offerings were differentiated so that educators who are new to the ideas could experience success as well as offering challenges to educators who have extensive prior knowledge and experience with the ideas and concepts in the text. That flexibility encouraged wondering as participants explored ideas at their own pace and in ways that felt meaningful to them.

### *4. A Comfortable, Inspiring Environment*

We want our participants to feel honored as professionals. We wanted to ensure that our book study felt special, offering a space distinct from the typical school setting. Whether meeting in an alternate space or adding thoughtful touches—dim lighting, clean tablecloths, fresh flowers, and a variety of high-quality snacks to meet all dietary needs—every detail was designed to make educators feel valued and at ease. The result? A space that felt more like a cozy café than a classroom, fostering relaxed yet meaningful dialogue.

As one teacher put it, “Thank you for the opportunity to meet with different people. The snacks are amazing! The time is amazing. I always feel refreshed and energized after these meetings!” This illustrates the importance of Mindset 4: Students learn best when they feel known, valued, and respected by both the adults in the school and their peers. The same holds true for teachers—when we feel supported, we are more inspired to engage in meaningful learning and reflection.

## **Markers of Success**

Success wasn’t just about participation; it was about impact. Here’s how we measured it:

- Consistent Attendance – Even during the busiest times of the school year, teachers made time for the book study, a testament to its value.
- Reflections on Impact — Educators shared how the book study influenced their teaching. One teacher remarked, “My practice has completely transformed by working with the suggested ideas in the text (*Creating Cultures of Thinking in Action*).”
- Student Engagement and High-Quality Work— The principles from the book became visible in classrooms, with student thinking and creativity on display in hallways. One

educator shared that without these discussions, he “would have never created the leadership opportunities for his students.”

- Tracking of Learning Targets— Participants reflected on the learning objectives of the book study monthly, at the start of each of the nine sessions, and during periodic feedback submissions

As another teacher put it, “I’ve seen students recognize their power in their thinking.” And we’ve seen that power in our staff as well. The staff told us they looked forward to the sessions, embracing new ideas and applying them in their practice. One participant shared, “We held a gallery walk celebration earlier this month, and the student work on display was some of the most thoughtful and engaging I’ve ever seen.”

### **A Shift in Mindset**

One of the book’s core mindsets — “For classrooms to be cultures of thinking for students, schools must be cultures of thinking for teachers”—was reflected in our experience. By creating an environment where educators could explore ideas collaboratively, there was a ripple effect in their classrooms.

Through discussions and reflections, teachers became more intentional about describing what’s there and uncovering the complexity—not just seeing student created artifacts at face value but deeply analyzing the depth of thought behind it. They also embraced building explanations and interpretations, recognizing the importance of scaffolding student learning in a way that encouraged autonomy and curiosity.

A key realization was Mindset 9: The opportunities we create for our students matter to their engagement, empowerment, and learning. One teacher shared, “I never realized how much power I had to shape my students’ experience. This book study made me more intentional about creating opportunities that allow them to think deeply and take ownership of their learning.”

This journey has shown us that providing opportunities for staff to learn together increases authentic student learning, engagement, and joy for both students and teachers.

As we continue to explore these ideas, we look forward to future discussions, applications, and celebrations of learning. If you’re considering launching a book study at your school, we hope these tips will be inspiring.