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Think, Act, Do

Creating *Cultures of Thinking* in our classrooms and in our lives.

Think, Act, Do

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A Time to Think

Has anyone ever told you to think before you speak? Think carefully before you express your thoughts, think wisely through the consequences of your words, think closely about the impact? For Ron Ritchhart, a Senior Research Associate at Harvard University's Project Zero, he has given this idea a lot of consideration. After beginning his career as a fresh-faced teacher of Mathematics many moons ago, Ritchhart and his skills have evolved over time, and he has become something of a celebrity in the circles of education. Those of us who have followed his trajectory have considered in awe the ways in which he can take the everyday of our practice as classroom teachers, the experience of students, and make it all visible.

Ritchhart joined Project Zero almost 30 years ago, although the facility itself was established in 1967 as a branch of the Harvard Graduate School of Education to better support educational research. The function of Project Zero is still to consider relevant sources, conduct research and then use the findings to better inform the education system, as well as to improve the everyday practice of classroom teachers, (Harvard, 2023). When Ritchhart joined the team in 1994, he was principally involved in investigating the ways in which we can “develop, nurture and sustain thoughtful learning environments” for both teachers and students alike, (Ritchhart, 2023). This research led him to pioneer the *Cultures of Thinking* program as the way forward for student engagement and success. Over the years Ritchhart has refined his own thinking, he and the Project Zero team have developed numerous teaching resources, asserting that it is “important to nurture thinking in the daily lives of learners and to make it visible”, (Ritchhart, R., et al 2011). Since its inception, the Cultures of Thinking have propelled the Harvard Graduate School of Education into the limelight and as such, Harvard is celebrated as arguably the best facility in the world catering to students, teachers and the sphere of education, globally.



Ron Ritchhart



Sourced from *Thinking Pathways*

can either use the board, or a class set of whiteboards, or even the whiteboard tables that we are lucky enough to have gracing some of our classrooms.

The philosophy behind the *Cultures of Thinking* program is primarily directed towards thinking skills. It promotes that by encouraging and scaffolding explicit thinking in our classrooms through routines and exercises, this helps students to understand the processes of their learning rather than simply the content at surface level. Fundamentally, this type of teaching is designed to boost a student's capacity to think about ideas, concepts or topics on a richer and more visible level, (Harvard, 2025). For example, one such routine, called simply '+1', invites students to take a whiteboard marker and add one thought to the prompts the teacher has written onto the board, generally focussing on recalling content or provocations from a previous lesson. Teachers and students at Luther

This simple routine invites students to think about the prompts, add one consideration, then move along to add their thinking to the next statement. This low-stakes, high impact routine is an effective way to review what students have retained as knowledge addressed in the previous lesson, whilst allowing them the opportunity to stand up, walk around the classroom and consider what their classmates have recalled. By building on other students' reflections, this helps to deepen understanding, takes ideas into other sometimes unexplored directions, and explicitly makes these pathways visible to all learners in the room.

Project Zero champions thinking about concepts over the basic delivery of content. Ritchhart has built an intellectual empire over the years that shows teachers how to shift their classrooms away from the sterile chalk and talk of the past and into the colourful realm of the *Cultures of Thinking*. Our Luther College teachers are primed and ready to take on board this recalibration. One of the lead teachers facilitating staff professional development and who is our resident Teaching Excellence Coach, Tania Bell, believes that the Cultures of Thinking will “*allow teachers a researched and focused lens through which they can plan leading and productive experiences for our students,*” as well as work collaboratively as departments and teams in pursuing a common goal (Bell, T., 2025).

All staff were privileged to meet with Ritchhart virtually on our first professional learning day this year, and he outlined the eight ‘Cultural Forces’ at play on any given day in any given classroom. These ‘Forces’, when first considered are all completely obvious. Of course, the environment effects learning! Most certainly are routines important! Absolutely is modelling essential for student learning! The genius of Ritchhart’s work is that he makes what we do in our everyday lives, our everyday classrooms, visible. He gives words to our processes; he has observed the daily experiences of schools and classrooms and has given these procedures names. In short, he has articulated what it means to be a good and effective teacher, and Luther College teachers are now becoming champions of his philosophy. Already we have teachers trialling new approaches in their classrooms or considering ways to broaden this thinking impact through explicit instructional strategies. We as teachers are thriving with these innovative scaffolds and we are looking forward to hearing from engaged students who are feeling empowered by the diversity.

A Time to Act

Whilst classroom learning is a critical and core purpose of our role as a school, so too is nurturing the whole student and giving them meaningful developmental experiences to this effect. We must inspire our students with stories, we must build resilience through experiences of setback, we must engage through opportunities to act. By setting strong foundations to think articulately in classes, we also need to ensure that we are offering students different perspectives, opinions and ways of living to build their empathy and ability to feel gratitude for all that they have.



Using the whiteboard tables for the +1 Thinking Routine



Ron Ritchhart, 2025

One media and sporting personality who has won accolades over the years for his successes at winning medals for Australia at several Paralympic games, and who now tours around Australia motivating young people, is Don Elgin, ([Don Elgin – Motivational Speaker | Australian Paralympian](#)). Elgin was born with the lower half of one of his legs missing, amongst other medical complications, and so spent the first few years of his life in and out of hospitals. He explained that *‘for the first four years of my life, my parents didn’t know whether I would live or die’*, (Elgin, D., 2025) but the resilient strength of his character led Elgin to not only survive but really thrive and learn to look at his deficits as blessings in disguise. The self-professed *‘happiest man alive’*, (Elgin, D. 2025) visited our Luther College Year 12 students during the first week back to campus, to launch the new Masterclass program that has been introduced to Wednesday afternoons. The innovative Masterclass initiative is designed to provide Year 12 students the opportunity to begin to build their tertiary capacity by giving a range of experiences from: lectures, to training, to upskilling in certain subjects. These Masterclass sessions run concurrently with the seasonal EISM Sport offering, and hence why Elgin was an ideal candidate to launch this new and relevant program to our most senior cohort. Elgin was able to both outline his own path in life through adversity and explain what helped him along the way to come out the other side, as well as urge our young people to do more, expect more, ask for more in this life.



Don Elgin with College Captains Lauren and Riley



Don Elgin addresses Year 12 students

determiner of success than is IQ or natural ability. Her work explained that “perseverance and passion for long-term goals, grit accounted for an (increase) in success outcomes, including educational attainment” (Duckworth, A.L, 2007). Ultimately, this innate desire to continue to try despite setbacks and the capacity to deal with the difficult but then rise above and through the turmoil, builds more successful people in the long term.

One of Elgin’s core messages was that of living without regret, as he challenged our Year 12’s to *‘be selfish’*, (Elgin, D., 2025), and to take as much as they can get from their teachers, their school, the opportunities that are afforded to them. Elgin explained that whilst life did not deal him a card of full health, it did grant him a positive outlook. He articulated that rather than feeling sorry for himself and dwelling in his misfortune, his father dared him to perceive his journey in a different way. Rather than asking, *‘why me?’*, he started to think, *‘why not me?’*, (Elgin, D., 2025) and this subtle shift in mindset made all the difference to his outlook. By harnessing his own thinking, his own mental strength, Elgin was able to see life for what it is, a complication of hardship, tenacity and beauty. A father of four, an elite athlete, a media personality and a motivational speaker are just some of the hats that Elgin wears on any given day, but at the core of all of these is his grit, determination and will to succeed.

Researchers have long heralded the concept of ‘grit’ as crucial to success, and Angela Duckworth, a leading clinical psychologist and researcher published her team’s findings that proved tenacity is in fact a stronger

Perseverance and grit are qualities that Elgin has in spades. He let us all into a little secret during his Luther College address; that he is now in training to be considered for the next Paralympic games to be held on home soil, which will be hosted by Brisbane in 2032. We will watch his trajectory with eager anticipation, and we shall see what more this remarkable human can achieve.

A Time to Do

And so as Don Elgin prepares himself for his next personal challenge, so too are we here at Luther College, firing up our cylinders and preparing for the road ahead. One of the current trends in education is to better support student growth through agency, which may lead to building student's understanding about themselves when starting to search for post school pathways. The research is showing us that when students are provided this agency, "they become more engaged, motivated, and invested in their education", (Wilkos, R., 2024) and therefore, more likely to succeed. When a student has actively elected to join a class, their interest in the course has already been sparked. With a gravitational pull, students are more likely to show up with an open mind, participate in the lesson with enthusiasm, and take heed of the content delivered with curiosity. Michael Fullan, a renowned authority on educational reform, explained that "if we want learners who can thrive in turbulent complex times, apply thinking to new situations and change the world, then we must re- imagine learning", (Fullan, M., et al 2018). If we are to future-proof our students, we must bolster them through innovative pedagogies and creative practice.



One way that Luther College is using this research and embedding these concepts into our curriculum is by building choice into our new senior school offerings with our three, innovative programs: Life Skills at Year 10, Global Stewardship at Year 11, and Masterclass at Year 12. Each new stream is being tailored by our capable staff and is designed to not only spark student interest but also provide the autonomy of choice in their learning. Director of Teaching and Learning, Simone Boland, believes that *"these revolutionised approaches to teaching empowers all students and gives them control of how they construct their own learning as opposed to the teacher being the 'dispenser of all knowledge'".* Through this process, it is hoped that *"all students develop the values, attitudes, knowledge and skills needed to make responsible decisions and take appropriate actions in regard to their own learning because they feel engaged and motivated"*. Boland further extrapolates, *"students are very capable of having agency, through their own efforts and choices to develop the ability for inquiry and critical evaluation. The renewed focus on how to manage one's own learning, allows our pupils the space in which to be self-directed both at school and at home, as well as how to respond to difficulties or challenges in their learning; to find the solutions themselves"*. As a school, at our core *"our belief is that this pedagogical approach will cultivate independent habits of mind"*, (Boland, S., 2025), and build our senior students into resilient, capable learners who have had autonomy over their own direction and are ready for their post school pathways when they arrive.

Throughout many of these new programs and sessions, Ritchhart's *Cultures of Thinking* will play a central role, as another function of these senior years programs is to give students a sense of life beyond the gates of Luther College. Marian Wright Edelman, an American activist for both civil and children's rights, coined the adage, *"you can't be what you can't see"*, (Dreizler, S., 2022) meaning that positive role modelling embedded through culture is crucial to student growth. Edelman was herself the first Black American woman to be admitted to the Mississippi bar, where she was visibly able to inspire the next generation of young women to work hard for their ambitions. She paved the way for others to follow in her footsteps, and we here at Luther are trying to do the same through the Year 12 Masterclass program.

It seems palpable that students need to see the road of those who have come before them, if they are then to tread the path themselves, or alternately, veer away in a different direction. As such, one of the sessions being offered during the Year 12 Masterclass block is tutoring run by recent graduates of Luther College. These 'Year 13 Tutors' have



worked hard throughout their time at the College, they have successfully navigated these first few months on their post school path, and they are now capably ready to shed some light onto all that follows when students leave our gates for the last time. One of our Year 13 Tutors, Daisy Evans, was Birt House Captain last year and she has been keen to share her wisdom and knowledge of her subject areas, Food Technology and Health and Human Development. Evans has enrolled to study Primary and Secondary Health and Physical Education (Honours) this year at Monash University, and she believes that the Masterclass program “*has the potential to facilitate*

important relationships between students and their mentors, to encourage in- depth learning and (building) strategies to improve their knowledge and understanding, eventuating in VCE success”. Evans articulated that the initiative will also support her in her quest of becoming a teacher one day, and she shared that “*I have always had a passion for learning and teaching from a young age and loved going to school each day. The Year 13 Tutoring program allows me to share my wisdom, knowledge and resources with other like-minded students who have a passion for Health and PE*”, (Evans, D., 2025). Evans, along with several other past Luther College students have already started working shifts as ‘Year 13 Tutors’ and the feedback thus far has been resoundingly positive.

Ultimately, the time for change is upon us and the future for our young people lies in their education. The world needs thinkers; people who are prepared to look at life through a different optic, problem solve despite setback and adversity, create a new future vision whilst being able to navigate the past. Luther College is actively preparing our students in this capacity, so let me ask you again, has anyone ever asked you to think before you speak? What a wonderful place it will be, if we can all do this, all of the time.

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