

## Thinking Maps for

## Communication and Collaboration

**Thinking Maps: A Language for Leadership**

The language of **Thinking Maps**, with its vocabulary of thinking processes explicitly stated and supported by visual models, is a powerful tool for engaging people individually and collectively in the essential processes of **reflection**, **inquiry**, and **dialogue**. The use of this language by all members of the school community *promotes and guides reflection, provides pathways for inquiry and analysis*, and embeds in the practices of the organization a **shared language** to *express, communicate and consider ideas from multiple points of view*. The culture of the organization develops around these processes and the norms associated with making them effective. The very nature of sharing a **common language** for thinking and interacting connects people in the most fundamental way necessary for the school to be successful.

*“The creation of a shared language that is based on feelings as well as facts is a powerful driver of change.”*

~ Daniel Goleman, Primal Leadership

**From Positions to Possibilities...**

The use of Thinking Maps creates a fundamental shift in the discourse in group and interpersonal interactions. In an attempt to be inclusive, many leaders will often ask people, “What do

*“The word organization is a product of how we think and how we act: [it] cannot change in a fundamental way unless we change our basic patterns of thinking and acting.”* Peter Senge,

“The Learning Organization Made Plain”

you think?” This question, however, doesn’t necessarily achieve its intended outcome of inclusiveness or collaboration. Instead, some people withdraw from the conversation, not having had enough time to develop their thinking, while others put forth a position to stake out territory or to ensure their voices will be heard, regardless of whether or not they actually have a particular opinion on the topic. Once presented, however, these opinions are often defended, forcing people more deeply into defensive positions (or further to the sidelines) and inhibiting collaborative interactions. The use of Thinking Maps shifts the dialogue immediately from *positions to possibilities*, from *inquest to inquiry*, by simply changing the question from “What do you think?” to **“How should we be thinking about this?”** The focus is now on how people can collaboratively construct an understanding of the topic and the process is aligned with the core values of the school.