10 Suggestions for Getting Started with Thinking Routines in Early Childhood Classrooms

1. Have great expectations. Young children surprise us with their connections, ideas, and the multiple languages they use to make their thinking visible.

2. Do the routines pretty much as they are initially without trying to change them. At the beginning it may feel uncomfortable but wait to see what you learn from using them as they are before adapting them.

3. Match the routines with provocative topics and projects that are significant to the children. The routines aren't the content; they are vehicles for exploring the content.

4. Model the language for younger and less language able students. Build up the language over time and by modeling your own thinking. Be part of the routine with the assistant or someone else in the class to facilitate the modeling.

5. Use the language of thinking as often as you can. Name children's actions: "you made a connection" or "I find your point of view very interesting," and so on.

6. Document students' thinking. It sends a clear message of how much we value students, their thoughts, and work; and it allows revisiting, reflecting on and re-enforcing the topics later.

7. Give yourself permission to be learner and try the routines in a variety of ways to get a feel for them and then try to incorporate them in their daily routines and language.

8. Understand this is a process that takes time. Be patient, consistent and take some risks. Just by trying you will be making a difference already.

9. Focus on the thinking you want to promote and why it is important. Use it as a tool not an activity. This will help you attend to students' thinking as it emerges because you will know what you are looking for.

10. Include parents in the process, they are your allies and it is amazing how they become advocates for the use of thinking language at home.

PZ PROJECT ZERO
HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION