

# RAISING *healthy* children

BY NATALIE HARVEY, KATIE MACTAGGART, & ABBY OBANDO

Educators from Carolina Friends School in Durham explore  
the relationship between health and education



Natalie Harvey



Katie MacTaggart



Abby Obando

## thinking is more than you thought

*This past fall, eager to improve their practice (and go back to school), Carolina Friends School teachers Natalie Harvey, Katie MacTaggart, and Abby Obando collaboratively participated in the Visible Thinking course from Harvard University's Project Zero.*


**V**isible Thinking, created by the educators at Project Zero, seeks “to deepen content learning and to cultivate students’ thinking skills and thinking dispositions.” As outlined in the book *Making Thinking Visible*, this moves the focus of classroom education away from delivering content and information and toward “fostering students’ engagement with ideas.” We feel that this is not so much a change for us at CFS but an extension of ongoing efforts. We have made an intentional shift in the way we approach teaching and how we ask students to approach learning.

Our practices at CFS seem to naturally align with the ideas presented in *Visible Thinking*. It outlines “thinking moves” essential to understanding: observing; building explanations and interpretations; reasoning with evidence; making connections; considering different perspectives; forming conclusions; wondering and asking questions; and uncovering complexity and going below the surface of things. *Visible Thinking* provides a set of routines formed around these moves.

Implementing the routines in our classrooms is a simple yet extremely effective way to create a high-level culture of thinking in our students. Thinking is a messy, complex, dynamic, and interconnected process. Giving students the skills they need

to notice and name their thinking allows space for a deeper understanding of the world around them.

For example, Katie used the *Creative Questions Routine* with Sky Class, asking these first- and second-grade students to reflect on the Jack and the Beanstalk story they read to change an aspect of the plot: “how would the story be different if you changed X problem in the story?” Students came up with solutions to the newly imagined problems they had listed, including having Jack parachute down the beanstalk or capturing the golden goose in a cage. What could have been a simple story retelling turned into an in-depth conversation that got students thinking about different perspectives and creative problem solving. Students were so inspired that this naturally led to a design challenge, where students created physical representations of their ideas.

As Quaker educators, our teaching is firmly rooted in the belief that “the truth is continually revealed.” After just three months using *Visible Thinking*’s routines with our students, we already see a shift happening. Giving time and space to the process itself helps students realize its importance, not just that of the end product. Our students also engaged in deeper conversations that produced more curiosity. Because *Visible Thinking* requires less direct instruction in content and focuses instead on asking probing questions and inspiring thinking, each class is a unique, student-driven experience. Although our course ended in May, we plan to continue using *Visible Thinking* in our teaching next year and look forward to sharing our experiences with the community. 

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