



UNIVERSITY OF
LINCOLN

School of Education

College of Social Science

Briefing Note

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Assessment Companion for Thinking Skills (ACTS)

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



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Key Points

- The ability to think critically is widely recognised as being important for lifelong learning and improved life chances.
- Thinking skills are taught as part of the curriculum in many countries but a lack of teacher experience in this area means there are many missed opportunities to full support the development of children's thinking.
- Helping teachers to develop their awareness of when and how children are thinking will strengthen teaching skills and improve the learning outcomes and life-chances of their children.
- ACTS will consist of a freely accessible e-suite of assessment tools together with a dedicated teacher training package and promotional materials aimed at an international audience.

Erasmus+ is a European Union initiative that aims to modernise education, training and youth work across Europe. A bid for a three year project that focuses on the development of critical thinking skills through innovative approaches and the exchange of good practices was submitted to Erasmus+ by the University of Lincoln in March 2017. The bid for the strategic partnership project was successful and the University and its partners were awarded €390,068 in September 2017.

The Assessment Companion for Thinking Skills (ACTS) Project is a partnership between seven institutions in the UK, Latvia and Finland.

The importance of thinking skills

In the school curriculum In its lifelong learning framework, the European Union recognises the importance of a positive attitude to learning and asserts that thinking skills are a key competency for lifelong learning, and ultimately for improved life chances in adulthood. In recognition of this, many national curricula consider thinking skills to be one of the key elements. However, there is an identified gap in the support for teachers' skills in the teaching of thinking to their pupils. To address this shortfall, the ACTS project aims to strengthen the education and training of pre-service and in-service teachers by helping them to build their confidence, competency and skills in identifying, assessing and strengthening thinking skills in school children.

An international strategic partnership for promoting thinking skills.

The ACTS project team is made up of seven partners from three European Union countries: the UK; Finland and Latvia. The project is led by the University of Lincoln with two partners from the UK - the Let's Think Forum (an education charity) and Carter Community Secondary School; two partners from Finland - the University of Turku and Kirkonkylän Primary School; and two partners from Latvia - the TA Group (an educational company) and Daugavpils Russian Secondary School.

The project team members are all experienced teaching practitioners with a long-held interest in the development of thinking skills in school children of all ages. The strength and experience of the project team was recognised in the application feedback received from Erasmus+, "It is clear that the partners are well-qualified to address the needs of the project."

The project aims to make the identification and assessment of thinking skills more accessible to teachers in the classroom so that they can recognise the progress their children make in their thinking. ACTS will help teachers diagnose their children's thinking ability and help the teachers to direct their support towards guiding their children to become more skilful thinkers.

The project will have achieved its aim when teachers tell us that the training they have received, and the use of the ACTS tool, has made them more confident to assess children's progress in thinking – they will know what thinking sounds like and looks like.

"It is clear that the partners are wellqualified to address the needs of the project." (Erasmus+ application feedback)

Intended outcomes of the ACTS project

- An online suite of assessment tools that will support pre-service and in-service teachers in the identification, assessment and development of thinking skills in their children.
- Promotional materials to advertise and disseminate ACTS to local, regional and international audiences.
- A dedicated teacher training package that will support teachers in using the assessment tools. Project resources will be openly-accessible through partners' websites.



Progress so far

The full project team met in Lincoln in October 2017 for a three-day joint training event where ideas were shared and developed to explore the different cultural understandings about what effective thinking in the classroom means.

Following this meeting, assessment tools are being developed and the process of collecting and collating video and audio examples of children's thinking in the classroom is well under way. Units of learning are being prepared ready for the next phase of the project that will trial the materials with inexperienced trainee teachers and qualified teachers ahead of dissemination events in the third year of the project.