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how can we use TASC to develop out talents in the gifts we create? how can TASC help us as we account for our lives in our living educational theories?

Abstract

The enquiry process of Thinking Actively in a Social Context (TASC) is influencing the creation of new forms of educational theory that can explain an individual's educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of social formations. Evidence of this influence is provided from self-studies of practitioner-researchers who are seeking to live their values as fully as they can, in enquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing? The action reflection cycles of TASC are used to develop talents in the creation of gifts. They are used to make explicit the meanings of the values that are being used by individuals to account to themselves and others for the lives they are living in making the world a better place to be.

Background Context

The main reason for my choice of the vocation of education some 40 years ago was to do something about a lack I perceived in my own experiences of school and university. This lack was focused on a particular quality of recognition in the educational relationships between teacher and taught. With my parents I would experience conversations in which I felt recognized as a unique individual with qualities of originality of mind and critical judgment, who could exercise some responsibility for his own educational influence in his own learning. In school and for my first degree at university my recall of

the relationships between teacher and taught were characterized by the teacher's intention to transmit pre-existing knowledge from the 'given' curriculum. The relationships were distinguished by the teachers' attempts to develop my mastery of existing knowledge. The relationships did not appear to be characterized by what Biesta (2006) describes as a concern with the individuality, subjectivity, or personhood of the student, with their 'coming into the world' as unique, singular beings.

"Instead of seeing learning as an attempt to acquire, to master, to internalize, or any other possessive metaphors we can think of, we might see learning as a

reaction to a disturbance, as an attempt to recognize and reintegrate as a result of disintegration. We might look at learning as a response to what is other and different, to what challenges, irritates, or even disturbs us, rather than as the acquisition of something we want to possess. Both ways of looking at learning - learning as acquisition and learning as responding - might be equally valid, depending, that is, on the situation in which we raise questions about the definition of learning. But as I will argue in more detail in subsequent paragraphs, the second conception of learning is educationally the more significant, if it is conceded that education is not just about the transmission of knowledge, skills and values, but is concerned with the individuality, subjectivity, or personhood of the student, with their 'coming into the world' as unique, singular beings."

(Biesta, 2006, p. 27)

In 1971, after four years teaching in London's East End and three years part-time study of educational theory in an Academic Diploma and Masters degree course at the Institute of Education of London University, my sense of vocation changed its focus. Studying educational theory at the Institute, while reflecting on my educational influences in my own learning and the learning of my pupils, enabled me to see the error in the dominant approach to educational theory. In what was known as the disciplines approach to educational theory, the theory was constituted by the disciplines of education of the philosophy, psychology, sociology and history of education. My own explanatory principles for my educational influences in my own learning and my pupils' learning were viewed within the disciplines approach as at best pragmatic maxims having a first crude and superficial justification in practice that in any rationally developed theory

would be replaced by principles with more fundamental, theoretical justification (Hirst, 1983), p18.

My rejection of this 'replacement' led me to change my sense of vocation from teacher to educational researcher and to move, in 1973 to the University of Bath, to see if I could help to create an approach to educational theory that included the practical principles of professional educators.

My first breakthrough came in 1976 when working with a group of 6 teachers in a local curriculum development project on improving learning for 11-14 year olds in mixed ability science groups (Whitehead, 1976). I produced an evaluation report that explained what the teachers were doing in terms of theoretical models of change in teaching and learning approaches, of change in processes of curriculum dissemination and in terms of changes in processes of evaluation. When the teachers received my draft report, they unanimously agreed that the report might satisfy my academic colleagues (which it had done), but that it did not include their own accounts of what they had been doing, in a form that they could recognise. As soon as the criticism was made I could see that it was justified. There was an unacceptable separation between the explanations offered by traditional theories and the explanations offered by the teachers for their own practices.

(Biesta, 2006, p. 27)

I went back to the original data, including video-tapes of classrooms, audio-tape transcripts of conversations with the teachers and pupils and the learning resources we had produced. Paul Hunt, one of the teachers, and I reconstructed the account until we felt satisfied that it was a valid explanation of

what we had been doing. This time the teachers agreed that it was a valid description and explanation. As Paul and I worked intuitively in constructing what we believed to be a valid explanation we did not apply any existing model or theory. We worked through the data to see if we could construct a valid explanation from the data. As we wrote the report, I could see that it formed an action reflection cycle in which individuals expressed their concerns when they felt that they were not living their values as fully as they could. They imagined possibilities for moving in the direction of their values. They choose one of the possibilities to act on. They acted and gathered data on which to make a judgment of their effectiveness. They evaluated their effectiveness in terms of their values and understandings. They modified their concerns, ideas and actions in the light of their evaluations. The description and explanation of our activities, learning and educational influences in the learning of the pupils fulfilled Stenhouse's point about research being a systematic enquiry made public (Stenhouse,1975).

Working independently in Kwa Zulu Natal, Belle Wallace (1993) formulated the TASC Wheel to describe Thinking Actively in a Social Context. (For the diagram showing the TASC Framework, see p148). Reference to TASC Diagram in this issue.

What I like about the TASC Wheel is its visual representation, with its inclusion of the 'I' of the learner/researcher. I like its focus on the task, on ideas, on choice, on action, on evaluation, on communication and on learning. The TASC Wheel, with its form of action reflection cycle, is consistent with an action research approach to improving practice that can be used by learners across generations to create their own living educational theories with their talents and gifts.

Using TASC in the creation of living educational theories with gifts and talents.

Over 40 years of professional engagement in education has taught me to take great care with the language I use. I am thinking especially about the need to recognize the cultural and colonising assumptions in the meanings carried through the words I use and the words used in government policy documents. I mentioned earlier the colonizing influences of the old disciplines approach to educational theory with its assumptions that an individual's practical principles needed replacing by principles drawn from the disciplines of education. A recent example of the colonizing tendency of Government policy documents can be seen on the Standards Site of the Department for Children, Schools and Families where readers are told the meanings of gifted and talented in England (info@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk).

The government site states that gifted and talented children are those who have one or more abilities developed to a level significantly ahead of their year group (or with the potential to develop these abilities). In England the term 'gifted' refers to those pupils who are capable of excelling in academic subjects such as English or History. 'Talented' refers to those pupils who may excel in areas requiring visio-spatial skills or practical abilities, such as in games and PE, drama, or art. Some gifted and talented pupils may be intellectually able but also appear on the Special Educational Needs (SEN) register for behavioural, literacy or physical difficulties.

The government site also states that provision for gifted and talented pupils can act to counteract disadvantage. Direct intervention is particularly critical for pupils

from disadvantaged backgrounds to enable them to make full use of their abilities and to raise their aspirations accordingly.

Now I live in England, I am English, and I do not use gifted and talented in the above way. I understand our talents in terms of the qualities we express in subjects such as English, History, Drama, Art, Science, Music and other curriculum areas. I also include within our talents our expression of values such as a passion for compassion for social justice, for love, for care, for democracy and for educational enquiry.

I see gifts in terms of what we create from our talents that we offer freely to ourselves and others. This understanding of talents and gifts has educational significance in seeing talented and gifted education in terms of the development of our talents in the creation of our gifts. This approach to talents and gifts seems consistent with Hymer's (2007) doctoral research programme in which he describes and explains the source of his dissatisfaction with traditional western, rationalist approaches to the field of gifted and talented education. In the creation of his living educational theory, Hymer develops his talent for individual intellectual respect as a contributor to the creation of generative-transformational giftedness. Enhancing the expression and influence of intellectual respect in the creation of the gift of his systematic enquiry made public (Stenhouse, 1975) is a generative and transformatory contribution to making the world a better place to be.

In the process of living, clarifying and communicating the meanings of these practices are formed, I argue, living epistemological standards of judgement for a new, relationally dynamic epistemology of educational enquiry. I record also how through my professional activity, my

reflections on and revisions of this activity, and the process of creating this account, I have moved in the direction of creating and living my core personal and educational values and realizing the critical standards of judgment which are both consisting in and attendant on these values. These include the value of individual intellectual respect as a contributor to the creation of generative-transformational giftedness – i.e. giftedness which is co-constructed (not identified) in a social, relationally respectful, activity-oriented, dialectical, tool-and-result (Vygotsky, 1978) manner and context. (Hymer, 2007)

Huxtable (2007) also draws from Hymer's insights in developing her inclusional understanding of gifts when she says that the gifts and talents of all pupils can be engaged and enhanced in improving the quality of learning by moving beyond attempts to define and categorize people in terms of an objective measure or judgment of gift and talent:

I hope through this account you can see my commitment to educational practice that embodies inclusive and inclusional educational values and that you understand that as I talk of 'gifts' I am talking of a dynamic concept where 'gifts' are understood through their creation, valuing and offering. I have tried to show you how I have sought to resolve my conundrum faced with the contradictions inherent in national strategies by focussing on the values explicitly or implicitly embedded within them (Huxtable, 2007).

Both Hymer and Huxtable acknowledge their existence as living contradictions in the sense of believing in certain values yet feeling their denial in practice. They feel that working within social contexts with power relations that are supporting the

implementation of government policies, they deny their own meanings of gifted and talented education. Both researchers create and share their own living educational theories as explanations for their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which they live and work (Whitehead, 1989, 2006). Both researchers use action reflection cycles that are consistent with the TASC approach.

One of the values of the TASC approach to the generation of living educational theories with talents and gifts is that it can be used across generations of learners who wish to enhance the growth of their educational knowledge and educational influence in the world. It is being used by teacher-researchers working on doctoral and masters degree programmes, as well as by 6 – 18 year olds in schools, as the following evidence shows.

Sally Cartwright is a Head of a Sixth Form Year who is researching the educational influence of the TASC approach with both colleagues and students. She says that:

'Subsequent developments are that in each of the Faculty's teaching rooms there is a wall display showing the TASC Framework and that has been used in particular at Key Stage 3 and 5 by the Faculty. In Year 12 it became the vehicle through which students of Psychology planned and developed a presentation on Classical Conditioning showing an understanding of the case of Little Albert.

The Key Stage 5 Coordinators Group has included the qualities of the 4Rs and the TASC Framework in it's list of skills that all 16 –19 students should develop as they progress through the curriculum in the Sixth Form. A further unexpected

outcome is that there is now a voluntary group of staff who have met three times with representatives from the Departments of Business Studies, Philosophy and Belief, Psychology, English and History to consider how the TASC Framework can be implemented. A pilot project will be run in September 2007 for one term with the incoming Year 7 resulting in a jointly delivered piece of work called 'Differences'.

(Cartwright, 2007).

Perhaps the most impressive evidence of the use of the TASC approach to improving learning has been offered by Joy Mounter in her research with 6 year old pupils. Her visual narrative includes video-clips with her pupils. These can be accessed from the urls below. The video shows three 6 year olds working with Joy in a creative and critical conversation about the use of the TASC Wheel in their learning and how they can integrate insights from TASC in explanations of their own learning.

Wallace's TASC Wheel enables us to describe our learning in a way that communicates to others; so elegantly simple that a 6 year old can follow. We point to the evidence for this in the account by Joy Mounter and you can hear and see the sophistication of thinking of her pupils as they critique TASC with her to develop their own learning theories to account for their own learning:

'What use is the TASC Wheel?'

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hH2-5xexbAQ>

'What do you think of the TASC Wheel?'

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ti4syOrIDdY>

and at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LSq1phEEaM>

TASC offers a Framework for communicating, not a constraint to our thinking. What the children show us is that their learning is multidimensional, flowing and relational and they understand and can communicate the complexity of their thinking as they strive to go beyond TASC while constructing their own living theories as explanations of their learning.' (Huxtable & Whitehead, 2007).

In her analysis of the educational influence of the TASC approach in her own learning and in the learning of her pupils, Joy writes:

'The children I had in my class last year consider themselves expert learners, beyond their age, they are confident to lead others and share their thoughts. We have called them 'Learning Coaches'. The children and I were invited to share our experiences at a day's training on TASC run by Belle Wallace. The children weren't worried, rather pleased and excited to be sharing their 'learning'. Photographs were taken and even a video recording made of their thoughts of the TASC Wheel. This is an incredible short extract of the children developing their thinking, expressing their reflections and clarifying their ideas to develop an adults 'learning theory'. (Please see video clips referred to above) By expressing their thoughts and feelings to adults, the children felt a sense of value as having something important to say. They received an email from Belle thanking them and asking for photographs and more details of their work. They glowed' (Mounter, 2007).

In 1993, Erica Holley, a member of the Conference Organising Committee for the Third World Congress on Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management suggested the theme of Accounting for

Ourselves. The Committee liked this and it became the theme of the Congress held at the University of Bath in July 1994. The Action Reflection Cycles embedded within the TASC Wheel helped to form many of the contributions to the Congress. The 2009 World Congress of the Action Learning and Action Research Association will be held in Singapore in 2009 and Proposals from action researchers in Bath are already being drafted to show the growth of educational knowledge, using TASC, between 1994 and 2009. We are focusing on accounting for our learning to live loving and productive lives for the Practitioner-Researcher Day on the 6th September 2008 of the British Educational Research Association..

Accounting for our learning to live loving and productive lives with the help of TASC

The idea that human beings value loving and productive lives is at the heart of the life's work of Erich Fromm (1960). Fromm believed that we are faced with the choice of uniting with the world in the spontaneity of love and productive work or of seeking a kind of security that destroys our integrity and freedom. He says that if we can face the truth without panic we will realize that there is no purpose to life other than that which we give to our own lives through our loving relationships and productive work. Fromm was a critical theorist in the sense that he believed that by unmasking the political, cultural and economic interests and ideologies that sustained capitalist social formations, it would be possible to create a more loving and just world, a world that would be a better place to be. I like the idea that each individual can and should account for their lives in terms of the values and understandings they believe can contribute to

making the world a better place to be. Hence my commitment to supporting the creation and communication of the living educational theories of individuals as their explanations of educational influence in learning. I believe that TASC is enabling the expression and communication of relationally dynamic and responsive values that are constituting new forms of educational knowledge and living standards that are directly related to improving practice.

The significance of these new values-based, relationally dynamic and responsive standards can be appreciated in the differences between the language of policy discourses and the language of living educational theories. In the language of standards in policy discourses, the standards are usually set out as lists of statements as if the meanings and application of the standards are contained solely within the statements. Government policy documents on standards are characterized by this form of discourse. The standards carry the disciplinary power of government agencies in their implementation. They appear to be external standards that individuals have to internalize and master.

In contrast to this discourse, living educational theorists such as Charles (2007) and Naidoo (2005) acknowledge Lyotard's insight about the postmodern condition:

'A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgement, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. The artist and the writer, then, are working without rules in order

to formulate the rules of what will have been done' (Lyotard, p. 81, 1986).

What the TASC approach to the generation of living educational theories supports is an educational process in which individuals are clarifying and evolving the meanings of their values and understandings in the course of their emergence in practice (Laidlaw, 2007). This is why the generation of living educational theories is such a creative process. Individuals are continuously engaged in their responses to their experiences in the world. They are generating their living standards in their practice as they seek to improve it and enhance their understandings with the help of the most advanced theories of the day.

What the TASC process can illuminate is the relationally dynamic and responsive nature of each individual's living educational theory. As these theories contribute to the growth of my own educational knowledge, using the action reflection cycles in the TASC Wheel, I have come to understand the importance of a living and inclusional logic in comprehending the rationalities of others. My understanding of inclusional logic has evolved from an initial commitment to the kind of propositional logic advocated by Karl Popper (1963) in which he rejected the rationality of dialectical logic on the grounds that it embraced contradictions and hence was based on nothing better than a loose and woolly way of speaking. Marcuse (1964) in his support for dialectics explained that logic is a mode of thought that is appropriate for comprehending the real as rational. For Marcuse, theories which eliminated contradictions were masking the dialectical nature of reality. The battle between formal and dialectical logicians has been going on for some 2,500 years. It has been distinguished by the rejection of the rationality of the other's position.

I owe much of my comprehension of dialectical logic, with its nucleus of contradiction and its coming to know through question and answer, to Ilyenkov (1977). However Ilyenkov was stuck with the problem of contradiction when he died. I am meaning that he was stuck with the problem of communicating meanings dialectically, that include contradictions within the language of statements, when it can be demonstrated using two laws of inference that theories that contain contradictions between statements can be used to 'prove' that any statement, and its negation, is true! (Popper, 1963). In moving beyond this problem I was helped by video-tapes of my own practice and by working with six teachers for two years in a project to improve learning for 11-14 year olds in Mixed Ability Science Groups. The teachers showed me the importance of finding ways of representing their lived experience, their understandings and practice in a way that did not distort their understandings by fitting them into inappropriate conceptual frameworks drawn from traditional theories (Whitehead, 1976).

My own belief is that Ilyenkov could not resolve his problem with expressing contradictions in through the language of statements because of his choice to 'write' logic, rather than to research the rationality of his form of life as he engaged with questions of the kind, 'how do I improve what I am doing?'

"The concretisation of the general definition of Logic presented above must obviously consist in disclosing the concepts composing it, above the concept of thought (thinking). Here again a purely dialectical difficulty arises, Namely, that to define this concept fully, i.e. concretely, also means to 'write' Logic, because a full definition cannot by any means be given by a 'definition' but

only by developing 'the essence' of the matter "(Ilyenkov, 1977).

In the use of the TASC approach to the generation of living educational theories I believe that we can show ourselves coming into the world, as Biesta (2006) advocates, in the exercise and evolution of our value of educational responsibility towards ourselves and others. In this process we can show that our rationality can be distinguished by a living form of inclusional logic that is relationally dynamic and responsive. I imagine that when you think of your educational relationships and your educational influences in learning you recognize these as relationally dynamic and responsive.

Eden Charles (2007), Marian Naidoo (2005), Eleanor Lohr (2006), Margaret Farren (2005), Bernie Sullivan (2006), Swaroop Rawal (2006), Tian Fengjun and Moira Laidlaw (2006) and Jean McNiff (2007) are practitioner-researchers who have created their own living educational theories using an action research approach. They have shown how they have expressed and evolved their talents as educators in a range of professional and cultural contexts and offered their living educational theories as gifts to be freely accessed from the world-wide web. I do hope that you will access their stories from <http://people.bath.ac.uk/edsajw/living.shtml> and <http://www.jeanmcniff.com/reports.html>.

For example, Eden Charles has brought his living theory thesis of an Ubuntu way of being, enquiring and knowing from Africa into the Western Academy. This is significant because he says:

"This is a living theory thesis which traces my engagement in seeking answers to my

question that focuses on how I can improve my practice as someone seeking to make a transformational contribution to the position of people of African origin. In the course of my enquiry I have recognised and embraced Ubuntu, as part of an African cosmology, both as my living practice and as a living standard of judgement for this thesis. It is through my Ubuntu way of being, enquiring and knowing that my original contribution to knowledge has emerged. Two key approaches are identified and described in depth: 'guiltless recognition' and 'societal re-identification'. These emerge from a perception of self that is distinct within but not isolated in an awareness of 'inclusional'. They are intimately related concepts. Guiltless recognition allows us to move beyond the guilt and blame that maintains separation and closes down possibility. It provides a basis for action and conception that moves us towards the imagined possibilities of societal re-identification with Ubuntu"

(Charles, 2007).

Those readers who know Nelson Mandela's inspiring life story will recognize that Mandela has also affirmed the influence of an Ubuntu way of being, enquiring and knowing for his own life. Charles (2007) offers his living theory as an action research account that shows the transformatory influence of the relationally dynamic and responsive way of being of Ubuntu. The transformatory influence includes an understanding of the significance of relating to others with a 'guiltless recognition' and the hope of a 'societal re-identification'. Charles shows what he means by these terms with the help of video-clips of his practice. These include clips with his son as he challenges stereotypes of the 'absent' black father. They include his work in a school for black young people in London, his

work as an international consultant and his eulogy at his grandmother's funeral. In holding his life and learning to account in relation to his values and understandings and their evolution, Eden Charles shows the generative and transformational potential of living theories that have been generated with an action research approach to learning.

In creating her living, inclusional and responsive theory of her practice with an action research approach, Naidoo (2005) brings a passion for compassion as an embodied value and living standard of judgment into the Academy:

"I believe that this original account of my emerging practice demonstrates how I have been able to turn my ontological commitment to a passion for compassion into a living epistemological standard of judgement by which my inclusional and responsive practice may be held accountable. I am a story teller and the focus of this narrative is on my learning and the development of my living educational theory as I have engaged with others in a creative and critical practice over a sustained period of time. This narrative self-study demonstrates how I have encouraged people to work creatively and critically in order to improve the way we relate and communicate in a multi-professional and multi-agency healthcare setting in order to improve both the quality of care provided and the well being of the system. In telling the story of the unique development of my inclusional and responsive practice I will show how I have been influenced by the work of theatre practitioners such as Augusto Boal, educational theorists such as Paulo Freire and drawn on, incorporated and developed ideas from complexity theory and living theory action research. I will

also describe how my engagement with the thinking of others has enabled my own practice to develop and from that to develop a living, inclusional and responsive theory of my practice. Through this research and the writing of this thesis, I now also understand that my ontological commitment to a passion for compassion has its roots in significant events in my past”.

I have encountered many writings that have ended with a rhetorical flourish that loses connection with a specific site in which individuals are working to improve the quality of life. My own choice of ending is to focus on a question asked, researched and answered by Swaroop Rawal (2006) in her research enquiry in Mumbai with children with specific learning disabilities.

“On one level it deals with the question ‘How can drama be used to enhance life skills in children with specific learning disabilities studying in a school in Mumbai?’ On the second level it is related to the question ‘How can I improve my practice?’”

What I believe the TASC approach to the generation of living educational theories provides is the opportunity to focus on questions of the kind, ‘How can I improve my practice?’ and to account to ourselves and others for the lives we are living as we work out and learn how to live loving and productive lives in developing our talents and producing the gifts of our living theories that are freely given for others to share. In learning to live loving and productive lives and in sharing our living educational theories of this learning in such e-forums as Action Research Expeditions (Whitehead, 2004) and the Educational Journal of Living Theories (Laidlaw, 2007), I see hope for the future of humanity. I look forward to reading

your story in which you account for yourself in terms of your learning to live a loving and productive life in your living educational theory (McNiff, 2007).

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