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## the time is now!

*'The time is now, break free and fly..... if you have the courage!'*

### Abstract

*Joy Mounter outlines the learning journey through which she and her six-year-old learners dynamically fuse the roles of teachers and learners as they collaboratively developed and discussed the TASC Framework as a Tool for Thinking. Joy discusses the deep perceptions of these young learners as they reflect on their own learning.*

'Perhaps learning is a journey we undertake our whole lives, by realising the quality of the experiences on the journey and not the results, we learn more about ourselves and our values grow and change'.

(Wallace, Belle. 2004)

It's simple, I love teaching. I am still excited by the possibilities and the children I teach, their way of thinking and expressing themselves. I am writing this as a teacher-researcher who wants to contribute to educational knowledge, through the masters' programme at Bath University with Jack Whitehead. I write as someone with a passion for learning and the opportunity to experiment with new ideas. Someone keen to take a risk and share the journey and learning with the wonderful and curious children in my class.

I currently teach in a small 6 class rural primary school, a school keen to look to the

future and embrace creativity and the language of learning for every child in our care.

My journey of hope and change began with the arrival of 'Excellence and Enjoyment' from the Department of Education and Science (DfES, 2003). For the first time I felt we had the opportunity to take the curriculum and review it with flexibility and enthusiasm. I remember reading the first page and introduction by Charles Clarke and reading it a second time, just to make sure I had understood the meaning correctly.

'There will be different ways. Children learn better when they are excited and engaged..... different schools go about this in different ways.' (DfES, 2003, p. 3)

For the first time since the rigidity of the Literacy Hour, (a prescribed hour required in English schools), I felt we had hope to really

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make changes that would matter and have an impact: to develop creativity and flexible ways of thinking and learning.

Developments have happened at the discretion of individual schools, without a cohesive national or local policy. Leading figures in the fields have toured and shared ideas, for example Guy Claxton, (2002) *Building Learning Power: Helping Young People Become Better Learners*; Shirley Clarke, (2005) *Formative Assessment in Action: weaving the elements together*; and Belle Wallace, (1993) *Thinking Actively in a Social Context*. I have read everything I can, listened to speakers and visited schools with new and forward thinking ideas.

One of the difficulties facing schools is knowing that we want to change, but maintaining levels of value added achievement. How do we balance the risk of change, with not changing and playing it safe, but being criticised for that too?

Many schools have identified one area they think they can introduce safely. For myself, I am excited by the possibilities and want so much more for my children. I know I want to explore personalised learning in a creative and stimulating learning environment. To support this I have developed a way for the children to look at being a good learner as a group of skills in 7 categories, the 7 colours of the rainbow. Within these categories the individual skills are grouped. Statements for each skill show different aspects and strengths and provide a format, a learning log from Year 1 to Year 6 (pupils from 5 to 11 years). Evidence such as observations are written on sticky notes, photographs, poems, are all collected and stuck to coloured pages to match the colour of the skill. This is spiral bound and forms a journal to keep and reflect upon as they grow and develop; understanding of

themselves, the things that make them tick, their worries and strengths, the quirks that make them an individual and influence their emotional learning, will all identify the learner they are and the potential learner they could be. Only then can the children begin to form their own learning values and articulate them to others. Art Costa highlights that:

'All human beings have the capacity to generate novel, clever or ingenious products, solutions, and techniques – if that capacity is developed.' (Costa, 2000, p. 32).

This is what I want the children to develop:- to have the opportunities to work creatively on any task, thinking outside of the box with freedom and risk taking; to see learning as being flexible and fluid, that requires different skills and responses; to think beyond their immediate learning and begin to generalise and create their own theories of learning. For me, personalising learning is enabling a child to react to any learning situation with an understanding of self and the ability to empathise and evaluate, working with the learning skills of others around them.

But this has to be in the context of a learning environment and a creative curriculum where the children are involved in developing their own educational theories. I want to dev, and use this as a platform to create their own knowledge and values.

I am interested in the writings of Alvin Toffler, and I am drawn to quotes of his that I have found.

'Teachers become coaches – encouraging the children to open up questions for research for themselves.'

(Quotes, Dec 2006, [www.nswppa.org.au/pwinspire.html](http://www.nswppa.org.au/pwinspire.html))

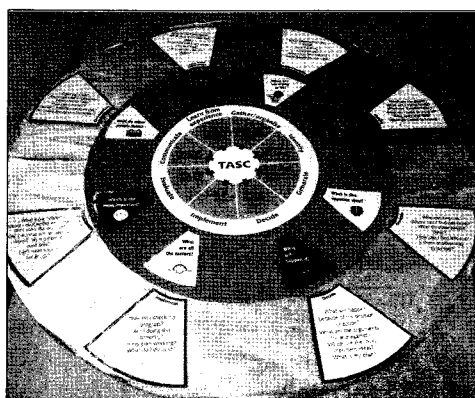
'We need to cultivate qualities of mind and spirit that seem most relevant to life in the 21st century.' (Quotes, Dec 2006, [www.nswppa.org.au/pwinspire.html](http://www.nswppa.org.au/pwinspire.html))

The exciting thing is in sharing the journey with my class: they are exciting companions and look at the world through very different eyes. We talked about the research I am carrying out about learning. They were surprised and challenged me immediately, if I was writing about learning, didn't I need their help! From the tone of the comment, child C couldn't even comprehend that I could write about learning without the class' help. It made me take a step back and look at learning in my classroom from a different perspective. Their ideas are thought provoking, challenge my thinking and help me to see as a learner through their eyes.

The start of my awakening and desire for freedom arose from the restraints I felt were imposed by new government frameworks, and began with a chance meeting with someone who was to become my challenging, critical friend. Someone who always encouraged my journey even when I felt alone and didn't always know my path. Marie Huxtable is a Senior Educational Psychologist, co-ordinating the Local Authority's Able Pupils Extending Opportunities programme, she is also part of the masters' sessions celebrating our thinking, visiting and talking to the children we work with.

For us as a class sharing a journey, our departure together began with an introduction to the TASC Wheel (Thinking Actively in a Social Context) by Belle Wallace. The excitement and possibilities this presented us began our quest for self awareness as learners, and provides the framework within which we travel together.

We quickly made a large TASC Wheel that we keep on the classroom wall. It was initially used a lot but soon the flow of the segments became integral and embedded within the classroom. We started with a topic focus enquiry week using the TASC Wheel to plan and implement through out the week. This enabled us to see all of the segments of the Wheel working and supporting each other in a small time frame. It enabled everyone to be involved, to clearly understand the steps we were taking, but didn't limit our creative learning. Rather it allowed us to fly, but gave us the vocabulary and ideas as prompts.

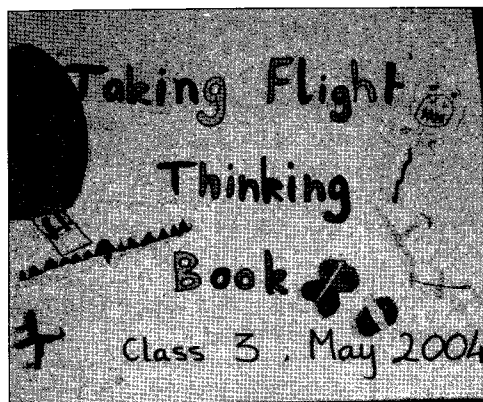


*Our TASC Wheel*

### ***Taking Flight Project***

We wanted to build on the relationship we already have with the other schools in the valley, and take our curriculum forward. 8 local schools worked together for a special 'Thinking skills' week. With support from Marie Huxtable, we had training in sessions together on the 'TASC Wheel' and 'Thinking Skills' over several months, culminating in a week of activities based upon the theme 'Taking flight'. We worked in phase groups from all the schools and made our plans together. Many trips were planned for all the

children in one year group across all the schools. For example all the year 6 teachers (classes age 11+) chose space travel as their theme. A trip was planned to Bristol and the Eye Max theatre, year 4 studied birds (classes age 8+) and all the schools visited Chew Valley Lake together. Many exciting topics and activities were planned with the children using the TASC Wheel. My class communicated with others, including parents, through our class assembly. We also took part in the Chew Valley Enterprise Fair. This was an exhibition sponsored and supported by local businesses; we had a stand here to promote our work through the 'Taking Flight' topic and the TASC Wheel we used. This was such a success that we decided to introduce Thinking Skills weeks throughout the year based on different curriculum areas. We have also found changes to the Curriculum Map and timetables, lend themselves much more to using the TASC Wheel with the children to plan and deliver topics.



For all of our topics we keep a journal of our learning as a book. It tracks subject knowledge and self reflections about each other as a learner.

From that moment the children and I saw the value of using the TASC Wheel for its simplicity if we needed it, but also for the

layers of thinking it encouraged and challenged us to use. Soon the Wheel became the framework for all of our work, even if not explicitly talked about it had become so embedded that we talked and planned using the format confidently. Its uses were quickly found for short planning of topics, termly topic plans, science or any area of the curriculum. Using the TASC Wheel as whole or smaller parts of it for focused evaluation. The children felt more confident knowing it was on the wall and actually saw it as a resource if they were 'stuck', often looking at the flow of the segments and focus questions on the inner Wheel to help them. I asked the children to record the ways they could help themselves if they were stuck, and most children referred straight away to the Wheel.

As a school whatever the age group you teach there is a suitable format of the TASC Wheel.

It seems almost strange looking back at the beginning of our journey. The TASC Wheel stimulated the children to explore the writings of adults about learning. We explored the writings of Belle Wallace critically and even wrote to her, challenging some of her ideas. One child in my class asked a simple question:

'Why is it that grown ups write about learning and don't ask us?'

A thoughtful question for which I had no answer.

Our journey has enabled us to develop our understanding of ourselves as learners and as people. We reflectively challenge ourselves and others. In a quiet way, a most innocuous discussion in the classroom has had the most profound impact on me, of this whole process. I was talking about the MA Action Research Group I belong to and some of my writing. The children's response was

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immediate and surprised:

'How can you write about learning without us?' child C

'We'll do it together!' child A

The ethos of the classroom has changed, the roles being more fluid between the children and myself. The class had written poems to go in their learning logs about their thoughts and feelings of themselves. Child 'C' who had been shocked in a previous discussion that I could write about learning without him, began to lead the discussion with what we should do with them. Ideas bounced back and forth and I quietly sat back and let the children control the discussion. Turn taking continued, child C pulled ideas together and assumed the lead role. The other children agreed they wanted to perform the poem before the school together, although at this point they had 30 versions! Child C heard an idea from one member of the class about pulling the poems together into one performable version. Child D looked to me and suggested we wrote it up on the board and I found myself in the role of scribe for the class. Child C gathered the ideas and suggested the format and style. With a lot of shuffling and help from all the class they arranged themselves and decided to have a practice. Yes, child C had led the group but ideas from everyone were considered by the whole class, and the most popular ones incorporated. It was very interesting when they decided that in order to make it 'fair', a line from everyone's poem was included. It was a strange experience to have the lead role for learning taken by the children. I sat as an observer listening to the flow and body language and felt so proud. We have been on a tremendous journey together, from me being the teacher and delivering the learning to them, to a class of children confident to work independently

and switch roles comfortably. The session lasted for forty minutes without any support through prompts or questions. More importantly, although child C had become the coach in the session, all of the children were focused, involved and listened to.

We talked about how the session had felt and linked this back to our research on learning. The class felt we had learned a lot about ourselves and our 'places', as they called them, changed sometimes. Child D2 said we swapped around, meaning that sometimes I was the teacher and sometimes not. We opened this up further and recorded some of the roles. Child K and others agreed that initially they thought that I, as the teacher, would tell them the things they needed to learn, and they would practise them and then know them. I knew everything!

But the list on the board of our roles now, as learners, was very interesting and different:

We are the teachers ( children)  
Mrs Mounter as the teacher  
Mrs Mounter as the learner  
Us as the learners ( children)  
We learn together, sometimes none of us know

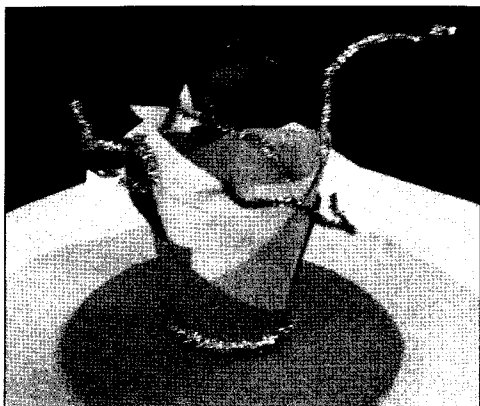
'I like learning together best, it feels nice like I am important' Child A.

This gave us a platform to look at the best way to learn, at different times and different parts of the curriculum. I was so excited as I sat and watched, hardly daring to breathe initially, feeling so proud of them. At that moment the journey we have travelled together was so clear and far, I wanted to tell everyone.

Our discussions are never planned;

sometimes a time slot is set aside but the learning from it flows between the children and myself - our own reflections, actions, and ideas forging the path for the next part of our journey, sight unseen.

My children are confident exploring learning skills and using the TASC Wheel, but are dissatisfied as well. There is more, child 'P' described the Wheel as too flat, too two dimensional, whereas his thinking spirals around and flows over the edge of the circle and up through the middle of the Wheel and explodes, sometimes showering others with sparks from his learning. They describe the Wheel almost as a cushion, with no outer edge, more of a curve below spiralling our thinking up through the middle: never quite being in the same place again. This is a photograph of the Wheel the children developed from their experiences and reflections as learners.



The discussion of the children talking about their thinking about the TASC Wheel can be viewed on YouTube.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=ti4syOrlDdy](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ti4syOrlDdy) and

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=LSqg1phEEaM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LSqg1phEEaM)

I think often we get caught at the end of the Wheel and it is easy to just share our learning in a topic through an assembly, and think about how many facts we have learned. However, the TASC Wheel encourages us to self-reflect, evaluate skills we have used and those we need to develop within the topic. It is the knowing of 'self' that moves our thinking forward and the emotional aspects of the self that are reflected in the learning.

For us, the last two segments of the Wheel are the most important, the ones we learn most from: perhaps then, they should be the start of all reflections leading to learning and not seen as the end. A slight turn of the Wheel and they appear at the top and the beginning and not the end.

We feel as a group of learners that we have something to say, something to share, and something new to learn.

During one of our conversations as a class, the conversation returned to Belle Wallace and her TASC Wheel. The children were curious as to whether lots of schools used the TASC Wheel, and for a while that thread of conversation lay quiet. I introduced the vocabulary of having a learning theory. This was a difficult concept for the children to comprehend and we struggled together for a while, some still cannot explain back our discussion. From it though, came the idea that the children wanted to have a learning theory of their own. As experts, they felt that people should listen to them, as it is children who are the learners all day, for years as they grow.

The talk about theories had awakened a keen need to begin planning and articulating their ideas to form a learning theory of our own. Following the idea that TASC meant something when you looked at each letter,

the children talked in pairs for a special word of their own to summarise the learning theory. I was amazed as 'A' suggested the word 'Quiff', quite quickly. The children liked the sound of the word and began thinking what the individual letters could stand for, just like in TASC. They didn't have to argue or even debate ideas, they quickly agreed and all ideas seemed to come from the group almost as a collective mind.

**Q** 'questions we all have to ask to learn'

**U** 'understand – making sense of things around us and ourselves which is harder'

**I** 'I am important'

**F** 'feelings' so important as a learner

**F** 'focus' to be able to concentrate and persevere

QUIFF, 'I' as in 'I am important' is in the centre, just as we are the centre of our learning and self. 'I' is surrounded by our understanding of 'things' and of ourselves, the feelings which often control our learning. Focus means applying ourselves as a learner. The class then decided that as TASC is represented by a circle, they needed a visual image for QUIFF. Paper to draw out ideas was quickly given out, and thoughts turned to the shape Quiff would be. The pictures are all so different and thoughtful. Below is 'A's' picture. She has used a triangle with 'I' at the point, represented by an eye, the most important point. An eye to the world and into ourselves. Questions are at the bottom, the start and widest part of the shape. Focus is almost like an egg floating in between our questions and feelings that control us, our thoughts and learning. Kellett (2005) highlights the opportunities for pupils to engage with a subject in great depth and

work with primary, self-generated data. The depth of the children's thinking surprises anyone we share our journey with. Age, knowledge and skills have often been quoted as barriers to children taking part in action research successfully, but this study will challenge these preconceptions, encouraging the children to critically challenge each others' thinking and funnel down their research question and test their hypotheses.

## QUIFF

Following this session we used the Interactive Whiteboard to record our questions and thoughts, narrowing down our ideas behind 'Quiff'. We began thinking about how children learn best, and we worked in pairs and then fours to come up with ideas, share them and then discuss and record those we all agreed upon.

We learn best when we:

1. Understand and use our learning skills (Child P) ('Understand' in Quiff)
2. Believe in ourselves (Child M) ('I am important' in Quiff)
3. Think about ourselves as a learner (Child A) ('Focus' in Quiff)
4. Are curious (Child TH) ('Question' in Quiff)
5. Are happy and calm ('Feelings' in Quiff)

These are the 5 key points or rules for QUIFF that we agreed upon. Behind these are values that the children feel are important but come under the headings or rules above. Child 'E' felt that not worrying if things go wrong is a very important skill, because even when things are wrong you are learning. Child 'Z' felt it is vital to do the right thing. I was unsure what she meant and asked her to explain, she said, 'You have





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Then the quiet thread from earlier in the conversation, rose in a new way.

'Will they listen to us like Belle Wallace? asked child T.

A question I cannot answer. Even if others listen - will it be understood for the incredible thinking that it is, evidence of a journey and not a moment, or will it be listened to and forgotten.

My children will not forget, not for a moment. Never!

The children in my class asked a simple question to which I really didn't have the answer:

Why is it only adults that find out and write about learning? Why haven't we been asked?

Child O's comment recorded in his maths book, smiling he said:  
'I got lots wrong, but I learned lots too.'

This cannot be the end, but the beginning. The beginning of a new range of voices with a powerful message, a message they are excited and keen to share. My innermost fear is that people will listen, but not hear what the children are saying.

*Listen and we will learn!*

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