The early seedbed of the growth of TASC: Thinking Actively in a Social Context

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Abstract

This paper reflects on a career through a personal narrative of how I, as an educator, together with my students, have tried to walk in the steps of Paolo Freire. My journey has been an international one, but this particular reflection highlights the development of a Project called TASC: Thinking Actively in a Social Context. The Project was developed in KwaZulu/Natal, literally meaning 'the place of the Zulus', an enforced 'homeland' under apartheid rule in South Africa. The case study highlights the resilience and determination of a group of students who were committed to rise above the denial and repression of opportunities for Black students. It is a story of love, joy and success – a pedagogy of hope. (1)

FOOTNOTE (1)

The first section of this paper is a summarised extract from <u>Pioneers in Education: Essays in Honor of Paulo Freire</u>. 2008 Nova Science Publishers, Inc.

Introduction

Although my personal life path has led me to work in many countries for short periods of time, I spent an intensive and extensive period in KwaZulu/Natal (South Africa), and this first section of the paper will trace this particular journey. In writing about South Africa, however, I have both philosophical and emotional reservations in referring to any country as either a 'third' or 'developing' world, or a 'first' or 'developed' world: so I will use the terms SA and KwaZulu, (now called KwaZulu/Natal). In addition, I acknowledge that this is a personal narrative, shared with you from my own perspectives and system of values. I hope, however, that I can provide a rich case-study based on real life experiences milled and refined both cognitively and emotionally through many processes of analysis and reflection, as an individual engaged in quiet contemplation: and also as an interactive member of the communities I have worked with in partnership, joy and love. Walking in Paolo Freire's shoes, and seeing with his understanding, I have tried:

- to share in the humanity and reality of the community as an equal member of the group, sometimes a mentor, always a learner, but never, I hope, the benevolent imposer of 'liberation' on the 'oppressed';
- to allow the students the ownership of the creation of their own concepts of freedom, autonomy and possible life journeys;
- to develop students' awareness of their own powers of reflective participation in their affairs
  (Freire, 1998a, 1998b; Ramos, 1974).

It is necessary, at this stage, to share with you just a little of my early background so that you can understand the lens through which I learned to view the world as a child and young adult. This early world view has obviously impacted on my adult perception of how I view education principles and practice: endeavouring to influence both by emphasising the indivisible nature of emotion and cognition; the interdependence and reciprocity of teaching and learning; the essential need for relevance and real life experiential learning, and the vital importance of motivation and understanding.

My education fell neatly and very aptly within the framework of the Freire's 'banking' concept, it was a series of acts of 'depositing', in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorise and repeat' (Freire, 1998b, p72).

I was a disengaged observer of happenings and incidents that had no relation to my own life; I was not a participant in an interactive learning-teaching process, I was an object to be processed in the ritualistic practice of listening and memorising to increase my level of 'academic' achievement. I was denied access to any form of enquiring, questioning, or real life experiential learning, and was 'disabled' from learning rather than enabled to learn (McLaren, 1993). .

I survived due to the influence of a singular and wonderful teacher who recognised that I had a talent for writing – with her I received the acknowledgement that I had personal worth, that I was an emotional and thinking being, alive and searching for meaning, albeit to often ill-formulated questions. I experienced the glow of excitement that comes from the reciprocal respect derived from active listening and talking: she was in every sense a mentor, the barrier between teacher and learner invisible; the relationship one of loving respect and understanding. It is to this living learning experience that I attribute the formulation of the direction that my life has broadly followed – to understand and to promote the dynamic processes that bring life, reality and vitality to any learning-teaching interaction (Fraser, 1997; Freire, 1997). .

Learning and Teaching through Lens of SA (KwaZulu, later called KwaZulu/Natal)

<u>Background</u>

The impact of SA on my life and educational vision has been paramount in formulating and refining my personal life path, my aims for education and my practice. Finding myself in a totally different cultural context from that of the UK, the impact of KwaZulu/Natal (SA) was raw, stark and overwhelming: brilliantly vibrant and colourful, socially, emotionally and politically complex and convoluted; a mixture of resilience and submission; a kaleidoscope of despair and hope; and profoundly challenging in its need for change. This personal life change was almost accidental in that it was not really planned, but evolved in response to an overwhelming sense of the need to work with the nation of Zulu people who were excluded within their own country and forcibly segregated in an impoverished, infertile mountainous area euphemistically then called their 'homeland'. So an intended stay of one year's Sabbatical leave became fifteen years of personal commitment from 1984 to 1998: these fifteen years witnessing the crumbling of the apartheid regime. The beginning of this period was characterised by an intense civil war in KwaZulu/Natal, the contest involving members within the system of government of the traditional Zulu king and tribal chiefs; the rising African National Congress (ANC) and the South African National Government; culminating in the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990. The latter part of this time was characterised by a turmoil of instability and change brought about by the new fledgling government, the Government of National Unity, as it endeavoured to establish a new social system: the struggle fraught with considerable contention for political and financial power, and a populace desperate for rapid change and anticipated benefit.

The following perspectives need to be seen in the light of the volatile situation briefly summarised in the preceding paragraph.

Causes of underachievement in KwaZulu students

The 'banking' system of education

KwaZulu then consisted of (and is largely still) mainly rural settlements of subsistence farming and low socio-economic urban settlements located outside the main 'White' towns. In 1984, the school enrolment was estimated at 1.5 million with only 67% of that population attending school. Another estimation was that 53% of the entire population was under the age of fifteen. The high levels of school dropout, 'failed' students being retained to repeat the same year several times, and failure in the Senior School Certificate at 17+ years indicated severe 'underachievement' amongst Black students. Only 1% of the initial year group gained a level of matriculation which could possibly allow them entry to university: even for these students there was no financial support. Those students who did manage to gain a place at a university were grossly 'under-prepared' and 'failed' their first year of tertiary study (Dostal and Vergani, 1984; Vos 1986). [1]

The concept of SA education lay firmly within Freire's 'banking' paradigm. Rote learning and repetition characterised overcrowded, ill-equipped, mainly tin-roofed or mud-roofed classrooms that were stiflingly hot in summer and shiveringly cold in winter. Many teachers were grossly under-prepared both with regard to pedagogy and subject knowledge; moreover, because the traditional Zulu culture promoted a deep and compliant respect by the young for the elders, it was considered culturally inappropriate for students to question their teachers, or even to make direct eye contact. In addition, the group culture strongly encouraged group identity and it was considered inappropriate to draw attention to oneself as an individual.

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[1] I use the terms around the notions of 'underachievement' and 'failure' in quotes because they were used on the basis of judgements formed on a narrow definition of school and examination success.

The school syllabus had fixed and immutable content firmly rooted in a Western paradigm that had little reality for Zulu learners – comprehension topics such as 'defrosting a refrigerator', the geography of Japan, the history of the castles of Europe, the microscopic structure of a hydra, had no relevance or reality for learners living in simple brick or mud huts without electricity and running water, who did not possess refrigerators, had never been outside their community, and who had little or no concept of an island, a mediaeval castle, micro-cellular structure. Regular tests (control tests) were compulsory every few weeks with learners being required to answer questions soliciting facts reproduced in the exact words of the teacher who read from the prescribed text book. Students seldom had a textbook of their own.

Even at university, the curriculum was Western oriented and there was little attempt to analyse the causes of the gross underachievement of the few Black scholars who gained entry. The few 'bridging' courses that were beginning to be developed sought to 'bridge the gaps' in students' knowledge from the university perspective, the argument being that if universities changed course content then 'standards' would fall.

The deprivation of language for learning

Freire's thinking on the power of literacy to enable or to deny access to learning and life opportunities is well known as one of his most fundamental premises. [2]

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[2] On a personal note, my facility with language was the gateway to breaking down the cognitive, emotional and social barriers which characterised most of my school learning experiences.

In KwaZulu, the language of learning and teaching was English, while the home language of the students was Zulu. The majority of students lived in homes with parents who were working away from home in the White towns, and they were cared for by older Aunts and Grandmothers who had received no formal schooling and whose English was sparse and colloquial. A great number of students were themselves carers of their younger brothers and sisters, and after school, had the responsibilities of fetching water and wood and cooking the evening meal.

Although positive self-concept is an essential component of learner motivation and self-empowerment, the fundamental processes of learning interactions depend on how learners receive, understand and communicate through language – both verbal and non-verbal. Although there is growing acceptance of pupils' differentiated personal profiles of strengths across the full range of human abilities (Wallace & Maker, 2004), essentially language is the dominant mode of communication between people. Not only is language central to both informal and formal learning, it is essential to the processes of thinking. We rationalise and make sense of the world through language which establishes our cognitive map of processes and meanings. But our language and cognitive development is inextricably bound up with our emotional development: from the earliest exchanges of language, our sense of self, our feelings of worth, our emerging identities are reinforced.

Our 'first' language is non-verbal and we never lose the intuitive awareness of understanding expressions and body language – that sense of feeling in communication with others. But we need verbal language to give symbolic structure to thought, and it is in developing appropriate structures and expressions, that we become truly human (Freire 1998a, 1998b, Schlesinger, 1993). Although debate continues as to whether thought precedes language or language precedes thought, it is obvious that the two processes are closely intertwined. Lev Vygotsky (1978) argues that the quality and quantity of children's language development depends heavily on interaction with adults

and more capable peers. When language is developed through interactive dialogue in the active process of problem-solving, then the more capable learner leads the less capable learner through the stages of the uncertainty of not knowing and not understanding, to the full realization of knowing and the crystallization of meaning and understanding. The adult learner reaches out to identify the level of understanding of the child, and constructs and builds understanding within the child's 'zone of proximal development'. We can see immediately what this means for the teaching-learning interaction: through active, relevant problem-solving, mediated by appropriate language, the child understands and gains mastery and is ready for further learning.

Zulu learners *possessed command of language rich in imagery and expression,* but it was mainly language developed in the informal setting of home life and activities in the rural locations and urban townships. Obviously, Zulu learners also possessed a *language of emotion alongside the rich experiential knowing through mediation*; but the content of school learning seldom, if ever, embraced the realities of either the learners' practical learning experiences and values or their feelings. In addition, as stated above, school learning was firmly located within the framework of 'banking' and not within the framework of mediation for understanding.

When the school language for learning (L2) is different from the home language (L1), learners are faced with the huge cognitive and emotional challenge of negotiating meaning and understanding between the two modes of expression. Learners with well-developed home language, with appropriate mediation, can build bridges and *acquire* the school language of learning because they have a rich internalised language structure, and can draw parallels and make the cognitive and emotional links between the two languages. However, for this interaction to occur, the learners' home language needs to be fully accepted, used positively and celebrated since it is closely linked with the sense of personal identity and sense of self-efficacy. In

addition, the content of the curriculum needs to be derived, developed and extended from the reality of what learners already know.

The acceptance and practice of *additive bilingual* language acquisition as the means of learning and making meaning, actively celebrates both home and school language. Learners can switch between the L2 used in school and the L1, negotiating the meaning from one to the other (Wallace, 1996ff). Additive bilingual learning, however, is still dependent on the learning being related to the social context of the learners: their culture, home background, sense of values, etc. The heavy cognitive load of negotiating meaning by straddling two languages is lessened when learners can identify with the content and find relevance within their own lives (ibid). Moreover, the processes of teaching and learning using an additive bilingual approach are necessarily interactive, with learners having the time and opportunity to think, negotiate meaning, and communicate. In addition, the rules and grammatical structures are initially of secondary importance to the understanding of meaning: when the teacher makes the input comprehensible, the rules of the L2 become internalised naturally by the learner and are used automatically (Omaggio, 1986). We can find a parallel to this process when we analyse how children acquire first language expressions, structures and syntax in a richly verbal home that accepts, celebrates and mediates the child's tentative language efforts, while supporting and extending the base of the child's own emerging language.

However, with children who have under-developed L1, the problems of acquiring the school language of learning are exacerbated. The school language can be a second language in two senses: different, more formal modes of the same language (extended L1); or a completely different language (L2). In both cases, children have not learned a rich range of expressions and structures within their L1; and when faced with learning in the *extended* L1 of school language, or the L2 of school language, they do not have the parallel or compensatory structures to build bridges linking L1 and L2. The same principles of mediation and extension of language through

negotiation of meaning, apply to the development of both extended L1 language, and L2 language. Teachers need to begin language mediation from the base of the learners' own language: the language of the street, the peer group, and the home language, extending this to incorporate 'new' language for more formal learning. The teacher input *has to be comprehensible and relevant* to learners (Freire, 1998a, 1998b)

Dromi, (1993) and Krashen, (1981) identify three variables which relate to learners' ability to access the meaning of teacher/pupil exchange:

- When learners' motivation is high, they can take risks with expressing ideas, however tentative that expression may be;

- When learners have high self-confidence and good self-image, they tend to be more open to accepting adaptations to their everyday L1, and to accepting the new L2;

- Low levels of personal and classroom anxieties are indispensable for the acquisition of both extended L1 and L2 language.

I maintain that successful teaching and acquisition of language, and the teaching of problem-solving and thinking skills, are inseparably fused together and, consequently, share the same common aims and purposes:

- Both should seek to develop language and cognitive skills through purposeful real-life situations that provide learners with authentic and meaningful contexts for learning;

- Both should view the acquisition of language and learning to think effectively as active processes. It is not sufficient for learners to learn *about* them; they need to *do* something constructive with the acquired skills;

- Both should see language and thinking skills as vehicles for self-expression, personalisation and ownership of the learning processes;

- Both should see the development of language and thinking as skills to be used and transferred across the curriculum;

- Both should have an underlying philosophy of curriculum development in which a range of appropriate teaching/learning processes that develop learners' positive self-image, internal locus of control, and the belief in life-long learning (Wallace, 1993).

The TASC Project: Thinking Actively in a Social Context

To begin to address some of the issues embedded in the school learning of Zulu learners which are outlined above, in 1985, I, together with Harvey Adams, established the Curriculum Development Unit attached to the Faculty of Education, University of Natal, South Africa. We began a Project which was to last for 14 years. The overall aims were to research the needs of the disadvantaged Zulu population in the then apartheid homeland of KwaZulu; to develop teachers' and learners' L1 and L2 skills; to develop a range of appropriate thinking skills to promote self-esteem, independence and empowerment; and to design curricula which were relevant to, and contextualised in, Zulu culture. We worked within a repeating spiral framework of collaborative, reflective action research, using a constructivist approach involving pupils, teachers, educational psychologists and parents or carers. Vitally and essentially, we did not work from a deficit framework of the skills the learners apparently 'lacked', but from a framework of skills the learners already had: namely strong powers of memory due to their rich oral culture, well developed group listening and leadership skills; democratic ways of working through discussion and sharing of ideas; ease of, and enjoyment in, co-operative learning; a tremendous motivation to learn as a means of self-development; and a deep and incisive awareness of the political, economic, social, and emotional dimensions within a country wracked by division and inequality.

The Project began with an initial group of 28 mid-secondary school students identified by their teachers as amongst the 'most able'; this rough and rather

crude assessment being based on the fact that these students were achieving relative success in the school when compared with other students. From a purely pragmatic standpoint, we also needed to begin by working with students who had a reasonable command of English, since our command of Zulu was very elementary and we wanted to work in an additive bilingual way, mediating purpose and meaning. We wanted to work in Freire's mode of interactive teaching and learning, with learners and teachers as equal partners; although in practical reality we were learning extensively from the students. As we gained confidence and greater fluency in Zulu, the Project was extended to involve groups of students perceived as 'mixed-ability' in both primary and secondary schools.

The following detailed case study will focus on the intensive work carried out with the first pilot group of 28 mid-secondary students, although the Project rapidly widened its target group as we gained understanding and greater confidence. The Project came to be known as 'TASC: Thinking Actively in a Social Context'; its name evolving from a series of workshops where the students and their teachers identified the needs and problems they faced in both home and school. It is important to stress at this point that the learners very perceptively expressed their need to work in ways already discussed earlier in this paper: they cemented through their personal experience and insight, the interpretation and application of the theories of learning and teaching outlined above. The development of thought and practice were symbiotic – the one refining the other through reflective discussion. The students also identified their need to be able to think and learn in ways that made the Western curriculum manageable, but they could not yet identify or formulate these particular thinking and learning skills. They strongly articulated their need for a more relevant curriculum, but expressed their immediate, practical need to manage their current studies. Generalizing from these vivid and often emotional discussions, and clarified by the current theory and research, the following tenets of TASC emerged:

- Thinking: Although all learners can, and do, think, there is a vast range of 'formal' thinking tools and strategies that learners need to develop,

so that the capacity of every learner increases. All learners can cope with complexity if they understand the task and can communicate effectively. The power and confidence to engage in effective thinking stems from the individual's self-efficacy and self-regulation. Although language is a major tool for thinking, people can think using the full range of human abilities, for example, through dance, art, music, architecture, etc.

- Actively: Learners need ownership of their learning; they need to play active roles in decision-making about how and what they learn; and they need to be involved in discussion of both immediate and long-term goals.

- Social: Co-operative learning is powerful in its mediatory function; learners need to learn with and from each other. But there is also a need for learners to know how to work independently; and additionally, there is a need for learners to realise that they are globally responsible and enviro-dependent.

- Context: Learners need to start learning in a context that is practical, related to real-life and concrete. The context needs to be relevant and meaningful so that they can relate to it and bring their own knowledge into the learning situation. As learners develop mastery, they move into deeper, more abstract contexts, but these contexts are still related to their own world and level of understanding. [3]

Theoretical underpinning of TASC

The theoretical underpinning of TASC evolved directly from the philosophy of Paolo Freire as outlined in the earlier section of this paper, but we adjusted our pragmatic application of Freire's ideas to meet the needs of the learners

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[3] Since the early development of the TASC Project, the 'Western' curriculum is currently going through major revision to produce a curriculum more relevant to learners in a multi-racial, multi-cultural context.

within their particular and immediate contexts. In addition, other theorists' ideas played both supportive and formative roles. The work of Vygotsky supported and extended that of Freire: namely that the importance of social and cultural transmission and construction of knowledge as the fundamental vehicle of education, runs parallel with the vital role of mediation for understanding and mastery. Through co-operative, interactive learning, pupils negotiate language and meaning, internalising concepts and gaining conscious control over their thoughts and actions. As they develop these understandings, they form language and thinking tools for further learning: the role of the teacher is to scaffold the task until learners become independent. Modelling thinking behaviour and thinking language is another key strand in TASC: the senior learner demonstrates, verbalises, and facilitates the active learning situation. A further element underpinning TASC is the essential requirement to develop self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-regulated learners through relevant context, constant success even in small stages, and positive assessment that feeds forward to further learning (Eggen, & Kauchak, 1997; 1996; Bandura, 1982).

When we consider the range of thinking skills and strategies encompassed within TASC, then the work of Robert Sternberg (1985, 1997, 2001) has had a dominant influence. Sternberg proposes that 'intelligence' consists of three inter-related aspects:

- The contextual sub-theory in which intelligence is viewed as mental activity directed towards the purposeful adaptation to, selection of, and shaping of real world environments relevant to life. There are clear indications in this for the recognition of cross-cultural differences in cognition.
- The experiential sub-theory which proposes that intelligent performance on any task requires: the ability to deal with novel tasks; and the ability to automatize the processing of information.
- The componential sub-theory that specifies the strategy for information processing, i.e.

- the executive (meta) processes that are used to plan, monitor and evaluate strategies used in problem-solving;
- the performance components used to carry out the task; and
- the knowledge acquisition components that are used to learn how to solve problems in the first place.

All three components outlined above, are interactive and need to be trained in parallel.

Many theorists stress the importance of metacognition, which Freire refers to as reflection, but the particular influence of the seminal work of Campione et al; Borkowski, and Sternberg is particularly evident in the development of the TASC Framework (Campione et al 1984; Borkowski, 1985; & Sternberg, 1985). Metacognition is viewed as a component of intelligent behaviour used throughout life; as a process of generalising effective thinking strategies; and, as a key link between intelligence, self-knowledge and self-regulation. Through the process of metacognition, learners reflect upon their learning, crystallizing and automatising thinking skills and processes. Problem-solving is the key to effective learning and involves reflective processes of creative, analytical and practical action and thought.

Teaching and learning principles of TASC

The teaching and learning principles of TASC evolved as we engaged in various learning tasks with the students: learners and teachers reflected on the kinds of thinking they needed to use and develop in order to accomplish the learning task effectively. Teachers and students reflected collaboratively on the most effective strategies for teaching and learning; and how they could generalise and use the strategies across the curriculum and, importantly, in life itself. Gradually, the following principles emerged:

- Derive, trial, refine and adopt a generalised working framework of universal problem-solving, through processes of collaborative action research and evaluation, solving problems relevant to learners. Learners and teachers need ownership and understanding of the problem-solving process.

- Negotiate and use relevant language for thinking and problem-solving: naming strategies and skills appropriately to enable reference to and later recall of these strategies in further problem-solving.

- Model relevant thinking strategies then provide experiences for learners so that they use the strategies and perceive themselves as successful problem-solvers.

- Give attention to motivational aspects through praise and positive reinforcement of thinking and problem-solving behaviour. Celebrate the criteria for success, the criteria having been negotiated with the learners.

- Use co-operative, interactive teaching and learning methods with learners working in small groups.

- Encourage self- and group-monitoring, evaluation and reflection on success, ways of improving and opportunities for transferring skills and strategies to other contexts.

<u>Outline of the TASC problem-solving processes of teaching and learning</u>

The processes of the TASC Problem-solving Framework can best be described as a flexible spiral of sub-processes that are simultaneously cognitive, emotional and metacognitive. The stages are sometimes cyclical, sometimes sequential, and sometimes recursively flexible as the situation demands. Learners evolved the nature of the TASC Framework through

active and practical, hands-on, everyday problem-solving activities which they identified as problematic to themselves. These everyday problems included:

- how they could locate sources of electricity in order to do their school homework at night. This was negotiated with the local community by offering to give Zulu and English lessons to younger students in the church hall in exchange for the use of the church building which had electricity. The parents of the younger children paid a small fee for this. Previously, the students had either tried to do their homework by candle-light or clustered under a street light, or had simply not done the work.

- how they could get school books for further study. This was resolved when students organised themselves into choirs and gave concerts at local celebrations in return for small donations. In addition, the students negotiated with the 'White' librarian in the nearby town that the library would be available for them on a Saturday morning. They were surprised at the ease with which this was negotiated once they had gathered the self-confidence to make the approach. Previously they had adopted the attitude of 'learned helplessness', feeling that they could do nothing to solve the problem.

- how they could present their grievances to their teachers about the poorly prepared lunch that was provided free. This was resolved by setting up discussion groups, recording and prioritising the most important grievances and appointing leaders to represent them in a meeting with the staff. On a previous occasion, the students had 'rioted' by locking their teachers into the staffroom, 'toy-toying', that is, dancing and chanting noisily and very exuberantly outside, and refusing to let the teachers out until their 'demands' were met.

There were many practical problems solved by the students themselves that gradually eroded their common feelings of 'learned helplessness'. During and after each completed action, they reflected on and

extrapolated the successful thinking and action strategies they had used, and discussed how they could transfer and regularly use the same strategies both in their lives and also in their formal school learning.

Figure 1. The TASC Framework *Please insert Figure 1b.*
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Figure 2 *Please insert Figures 1c, 1d as a whole figure here.*
*Label it **Figure 2***

Gradually the Framework for Thinking Actively in a Social Context evolved out of the experiences of the practical problems solved by the students, and encapsulated a wide range of teaching and learning principles for developing thinking and problem-solving skills.[4] The early formative and simplified outline of these principles is given below:

- First **Gather and Organise** what you already know about the subject, topic, problem, situation. Then decide how and where you can find out more information. All learners have a store of previous knowledge and learning: they are not empty pitchers that need filling up. They need to fully recognise this and actively draw on and use prior learning. This stage brings into the working memory a range of ideas and knowledge ready for action.

- Clearly **Identify** what the problem actually is by stating it simply as 'What am I trying to do?' (Goal[s]) and 'What is preventing me from doing it?'(Obstacle[s]). Then decide on the criteria for success and work towards that (Possible Solution[s]). Many learners in situations of disadvantage and frustration are overwhelmed by the emotions of anger and injustice which are all-consuming, debilitating, but which often renders them passive (or aggressive) against seemingly overwhelming circumstances.

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[4] The TASC Framework of skills and processes is still being refined and extended. See Wallace and Maker 2004 for the most recent developments.

Taking control over the situation needs thoughtful, planned and sustained action.

- **Generate ideas –** together with others, think of many possible ways of solving the problem without stopping any flow of thoughts by pre-judging the value of them. Hitch-hike on to other people's ideas, think laterally, allow all ideas without contradiction. All learners are creative, but many are unaware of the creative potential they have – they have been conditioned into receiving ideas and information from the teacher, believing that they need to be spoon-fed with other people's thoughts and ideas.

- **Decide** on the best ideas and outline a possible course(s) of action and plan the stages systematically: outline stages of the task clearly and discuss who is responsible for the carrying out of each stage of planning. Taking responsibility for personal decision-making and consequent action is fundamental to self-actualisation and self-efficacy.

- **Implement** the ideas by putting the decision(s) into action, monitoring progress and adjusting plans as is necessary.

- **Evaluate** progress and successes throughout the project, judged against the agreed goals, obstacles and solutions discussed at the Identify stage. If necessary, backtrack and reformulate ideas and plans previously agreed upon.

- **Communicate** and share ideas throughout the whole project, but also take time to share and celebrate the outcomes and successes. Share successes with the wider community and discuss the stages and processes of overcoming obstacles and achieving goals.

- **Reflect and Learn from Experience** – discuss the success of strategies that were used, evaluate the quality of the group interaction, reflect on how the successful strategies can be transferred to other situations including school. Discuss changes that need to be made in any future project to make the whole action more effective and sustainable.

There was unanimous agreement by students and teachers that the Euro-centred curriculum needed to be completely rewritten to make it Afro-centred: however, students realised that this needed a long process of change. Importantly, teachers and students would need to be involved in any discussions about a new curriculum with the resultant writing of new school texts; and also closely involved in discussions of appropriate pedagogy.[5] Meanwhile, there was an urgent and pragmatic need to embed the problem-solving and thinking skills into the current curriculum so that learners and teachers could not only survive within the Euro-centred curriculum, but use appropriate thinking strategies to surmount the obstacles presented by turgid and lifeless content. Students wanted to break through the barriers of segregation caused by 'failing' the matriculation examination and obtain higher levels of learning so that they could access opportunities that would enable them to become leaders of change.

The 28 students in the first pilot TASC Project all gained the highest matriculation results ever achieved amongst Black students in KwaZulu/Natal in their Senior School Certificate. All students entered universities with scholarships to pay their fees and support their studies. In a follow-up meeting, all 28 students said that the first thing they had done on arriving at university was to set up a TASC club so that they could teach fellow students the problem-solving and thinking strategies they had used to master their studies. Very poignantly, one student said, 'I now believe that I belong in my own country, and that I can lead change.' At that, the group of now young adults burst into the wonderful close harmony of Zulus singing a round of 'Communication! Oh yes, Communication!'. All of these particular 28 pilot students, now adults, are in positions of leadership in education, commerce, business and industry.

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[5] See the series of language and thinking texts written within the TASC Framework for pupils from 6 to 18 years of age: *Language in My World* and *Reading in My World.* Juta Educational Publishers, Cape Town, SA.

<u>Conclusion</u>

The 15 years I lived and worked in KwaZulu/Natal taught me a great deal about joy and laughter despite crippling disadvantage; about love, friendship and sharing although there were few resources to share; about resilience and determination to succeed, surmounting all obstacles; about the rich quality of communication and striving towards a common goal.

However, I would not like to end my personal narrative without adding a postscript.

Since returning to England and working as a consultant in schools nationally from 1999, I have witnessed the mechanisation of the teaching and learning processes in schools, and also in other areas of public life, brought about by the insistence of the government on 'measurable' achievement targets and 'universal' standards. I am certainly not against learners and teachers striving to reach goals; but not every learning goal can be quantified and measured, organised statistically and then compared and contrasted in what has come to be labelled 'the shame and blame culture'. Teachers generally are reporting that they are treated as mechanical technicians delivering set content, rather than as educators interacting with learners. They report that increasing numbers of pupils are de-motivated and disaffected with school; increasing numbers of pupils are manifesting disruptive and anti-social behaviour.

Further Reading on the practical development of the TASC Framework

Wallace B (1996 - 2000) *Reading in My World*
Cape Town, South Africa: Nasou Via Africa Publishers

Wallace B (1996 - 2007) *Language in My World*
Cape Town, South Africa: Nasou Via Africa Publishers

Wallace B (2002) *Teaching Thinking Skills Across the Early Years*
London: David Fulton Publishers (A NACE-Fulton Pub)

Wallace B (2001) *Teaching Thinking Skills Across the Primary Curriculum*
London: David Fulton Publishers (A NACE-Fulton Pub)

Wallace B (2002) *Teaching Thinking Skills Across the Middle Years*
London: David Fulton Publishers (A NACE-Fulton Pub)

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Belle Wallace initially worked in an advisory capacity (UK) with the brief for developing Curriculum Enrichment and Extension for pupils across all phases of education; she was Co-Director of the Curriculum Development Unit (University of Natal, SA) developing Assessment Strategies and Curriculum Enrichment and Extension for very able, disadvantaged learners, and training Curriculum Planners; she designed and was senior author of a school series of 48 language and thinking skills texts to enhance cognitive development in pupils from 6 to 17+ years. She now works as a national and international consultant on Problem-solving and Thinking Skills Curricula.

Belle has served on the Executive Committee of the World Council for Gifted and Talented Children; she has been editor of *Gifted Education International.* (AB Academic Publishers) since 1981; and is immediate past President of NACE, UK (National Association for Able Children in Education).

Her publications are many: most recently, she has published a series of 5 Problem-solving and Thinking Skills books extending topics taken from the National Curriculum Framework, UK (published by NACE/Fulton), and <u>Diversity in Gifted Education: International perspectives on global issues</u> (London,UK: Routledge) was published in 2006.

Recently, Belle has been a made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, in recognition of her service to education.

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