

# Developing a policy of inclusion with differentiation using TASC: Thinking Actively in a Social Context

National Teacher Research Panel  
engaging teacher expertise



This summary was commissioned by the National Teacher Research Panel for the Teacher Research Conference 2006, which explored and celebrated teacher engagement in and with research. All conference materials are available at [www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/ntrp](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/ntrp)

## Aims of the Project

The aims of the project were to:

- improve our whole school lesson planning, classroom delivery and pupils' activities;
- personalise learning with pupils developing their skills of self-evaluation and self-monitoring; and
- focus on developing their problem-solving and thinking skills.

## Dimensions of the study

The school has a mixed catchment area of rural and urban families, with 20% of the school with Special Needs.

Currently, the number of pupils on the roll has increased to 325 (aged 4 to 11 years) and continues to rise. There is a staff of 13 teachers and learning support assistants, many of whom are parents.

## Summary of main outcomes

Since introducing a whole school, structured approach to problem solving, the school has experienced:

- increased pupil motivation, and a reduction of inappropriate behaviour;
- greater practical, hands-on involvement of parents and governors;
- increased co-ordination in lesson planning throughout the school, with more informed diagnostic awareness and discussion of pupils' strengths, and greater flexibility in approaches to lesson planning;
- an improvement in pupils' work, which has been demonstrated in exhibitions and productions, with all pupils' work being celebrated; and
- higher levels of 'inclusion' with 'differentiation', with suitable support for pupils with special needs and appropriate differentiation for more able pupils.

In a recent Ofsted report inspectors commented particularly on:

- coherent planning across the whole school;
- evidence of assessment for learning;
- a good inclusion and differentiation policy;
- positive behaviour of pupils towards learning; and
- the positive morale of pupils, teachers, governors and parents.

## Background and context

This action research project was undertaken in partnership with NACE (National Association for Able, Gifted and Talented Children). The current Headteacher has been in post for 6 years. Prior to his appointment, an Ofsted Inspection (1999) had raised the following issues:

- Unsatisfactory progress of pupils, especially the more able;
- Lack of effective management structures and communication; and
- Lack of whole school approach leading to lack of coherent planning and organisation.

Staff and governors lacked vision and felt disillusioned: they expressed a need for direction and a sense of ownership, and empowering self-esteem. Parents seldom came inside the school and played no part in school affairs.

## Teaching processes and strategies

The first priority was to create a comfortable and exciting learning environment by refurbishing the whole school, involving pupils, parents and governors. Then we began a series of regular discussion meetings with staff, governors and parents to create and share a joint vision for the future development of the school. Pupils were also involved in discussing their school aims and personal needs.

We began some sustained research on how to improve our whole school lesson planning, classroom delivery and pupils' activities. We wanted to personalise learning with pupils developing their skills of self-evaluation and self-monitoring and so decided to focus on developing their problem-solving and thinking skills. The key to doing this was the introduction of TASC. The teaching and learning objectives we were developing were:

### Gather and Organise

All projects were initially very broadly planned. We left the fine planning until we had gathered and organised what the children already knew. Then they could extend what they already knew through research, interviews and visits. We concentrated on developing the pupils' questioning, research and enquiry skills then we negotiated with them the areas of the project they would develop in small groups. We found that this 'Gather and Organise' stage was critical to personalising learning and avoiding repetition of knowledge and skills already mastered. We taught the children skills of mindmapping for rapid recording of knowledge and skills.

### Identify the task

We discussed and guided the pupils in their selection of which aspects of the project they wanted to pursue, thus giving ownership but also differentiating the levels of complexity pupils could cope with. We also discussed our learning objectives in detail and how we would evaluate the task.



## Generate

Each class generated ideas with regard to how they would tackle their particular tasks, how they would research and find out more, and what skills they needed.

## Decide and Implement

The pupils decided who they would work with and how they would share the tasks. They planned the process and the final presentation and started work.

## Evaluate and Communicate

At various stages the pupils presented their work to each other, and exchanged constructive appraisal and criticism. They also presented their work to other classes and to parents and governors.

## Learn from experience

This is a vital stage in the TASC process: it the time the children reflect on their learning, consolidate new knowledge and skills and do their forward planning.

On an INSET Training Day, we were introduced to the 'Thinking Actively in a Social Context' (TASC) Framework researched and designed by Belle Wallace. We decided to introduce the TASC Framework to learners through a series of cross-curricular projects lasting half a term, so that we could develop their skills in all areas of the National Curriculum Framework.

Pupils worked to the Framework of TASC: some examples of projects are listed below.

- At Foundation Phase – pupils designed and created both real and model foods for their café. This dovetailed into our school programme for Healthy Eating. They also designed and created moving figures and shapes, which focussed particularly on developing their numeracy skills.
- At Key Stage 1 - pupils designed a town with roads and buildings, and then explored directions and angles using Roma technology.  
They also designed and implemented playground games which integrated well with our focus on constructive physical activity and play.  
To address literacy underdevelopment, the pupils designed and made puppets, then created plays with scripts and characters.
- Key Stage 2 pupils created and trialled their own Maths games focussing on the four rules of number. They designed and made 3D shapes to use for calculations and angles, and explored local archaeology, local history and geography.

Children, parents and governors were involved in all projects. The Head held a meeting for parents and governors in which he explained the rationale and purpose of using the TASC Framework. Parents and governors were also invited to the children's celebrations, presentations and explanations of their work. All classrooms had a TASC Problem-solving Wheel. Projects were spread over 5/6 weeks, thus giving time for pupils to work in greater depth and breadth.

## Outcomes

- We gathered evidence of pupils' work showing high levels of achievement, especially with regard to our more able pupils. However, the level of all pupils' work provided tangible evidence of improvement.
- The pupils had acquired and were using skills of independent enquiry. Increased motivation was evident in their sustained levels of attention and perseverance. Pupils were pursuing projects in their own time and also involving their parents.
- Pupils' self-esteem was evident in the pride they took in their work, and willingness to present it to others.
- Parent and governor participation increased.
- Every presentation of their work was a celebration of individual and team effort.

All this was recognised by the recent Ofsted report which reported the progress in the school as excellent with a united and supportive staff team, and well motivated and achieving pupils.

The school has repeatedly won awards for the following, including:

- Basic Skills Quality Award
- Active Mark Gold Award
- School Achievement Award
- A Healthy School

The staff have commented on their increased enthusiasm, their joy in team work for planning and practice and their professional satisfaction with their work.

The pupils have commented on their enthusiasm to develop their own ideas, the time given for them to work in depth and breadth and their pride and satisfaction in their work.

Parents and governors have commented on the happiness and excitement of the children, their willingness to work at a task and the warmth of the welcome they receive whenever they go into school.

## Research methods

The action research is ongoing through a cycle of discussion with pupils, parents and governors, followed by trialling, evaluating and reflecting on progress as a whole school effort to lift self-esteem, achievement and consequently standards. Teachers have collected case study evidence of increased motivation and attention, and reduction of challenging behaviour. They have also collected portfolio evidence of the improved quality of pupils' work.

## Conclusion

The initial success of the TASC Projects resulted in us applying the TASC process across the curriculum, and combining the problem-solving skills and strategies with a range of teaching skills, such as whole class teaching, practice activities, demonstration and the provision of a greater variety of individual and group activities. As a staff, we are more confident in deciding how much support and intervention pupils need. We are also more confident in personalising learning and allowing pupils to develop greater ownership of their learning.

Pupils now exhibit greater confidence in undertaking individual and small group work, demonstrating greater responsibility for deciding aspects of a topic they wish to explore. Many pupils are using the TASC Framework for independent projects that explore curriculum topics in greater depth and breadth. Overall standards throughout the school have been raised (Ofsted 2004).

We have also taken the opportunities presented by the recent DfES Strategy Documents to be more flexible in our teaching and learning activities; to mix and match our Learning Objectives across the curriculum and to extend the learning opportunities for our more able pupils by auditing what the pupils already know.

## Further reading

Wallace B (2001) *Teaching Thinking Skills Across the Primary Curriculum* London: David Fulton Publishers (A NACE-Fulton Pub) ISBN 1 85346 766 9

Wallace B (2002) *Teaching Thinking Skills Across the Early Years* London: David Fulton Publishers (A NACE-Fulton Pub) ISBN 1 85346 842 8

Wallace B (2002) *Teaching Thinking Skills Across the Middle Years* London: David Fulton Publishers (A NACE-Fulton Pub) ISBN 1 85346 767 7

Wallace B (2003) *Using History to Develop Thinking Skills at Key Stage 2* London: David Fulton Publishers (A NACE-Fulton Pub) ISBN 1 85346 928 9

Wallace B and Maker J, et al (2004) *Thinking Skills and Problem-Solving: An Inclusive Approach* London: David Fulton Publishers (A NACE-Fulton Pub) ISBN 1 84312 107 7

## Authors and Contact Details

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