

Why do you need a certificate to show that you can teach thinking? Well of course, you don't. There are many colleagues successfully teaching pupils to think up and down the land. However, the popularity of the *Teaching Thinking Certificate* does suggest that many colleagues welcome the opportunity to engage in guided action research and to accredit their skill in an aspect of their craft that is attracting increasing national attention.

The Certificate's origins go back to the Northumberland Thinking Through Humanities group set up by Mel Rockett in the 90s. Members of that group had an enthusiasm for trying out the thinking strategies developed by David Leat, Steve Higgins and Vivienne Baumfield at the University of Newcastle's School of Education. The members – teachers and LEA colleagues – represented many subjects and all phases, a mix which heightened their awareness of the flexible nature of these infused strategies, and led them to experiment outside the area of Humanities.

The idea for a Certificate grew out of the realisation that, if the processes undertaken by the group during their research could be formalised, this could offer a helpful way forward for other colleagues. Mel Rockett, Vivienne Baumfield and James Nottingham (now Director of our sister organisation NRAIS) created a draft course which involved modelling the strategies and asking teachers to try them out in their classrooms. The following session would begin with a reflective activity where teachers could share their experiences and learn from each other (see Figure 1).

Training for thinking

Robert Peers introduces a new training initiative from Northumberland and the University of Newcastle: the Northumberland Teaching Thinking Certificate

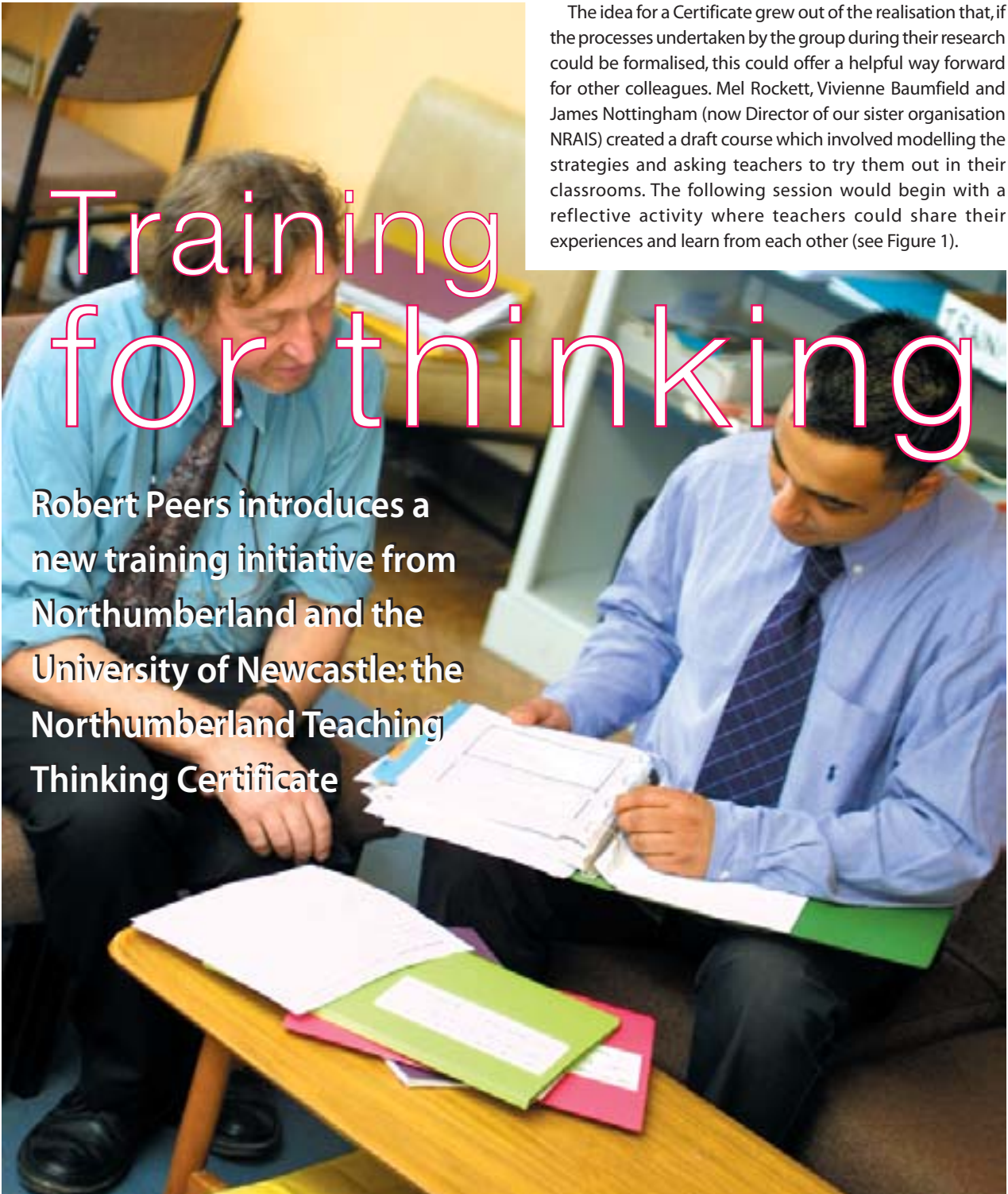
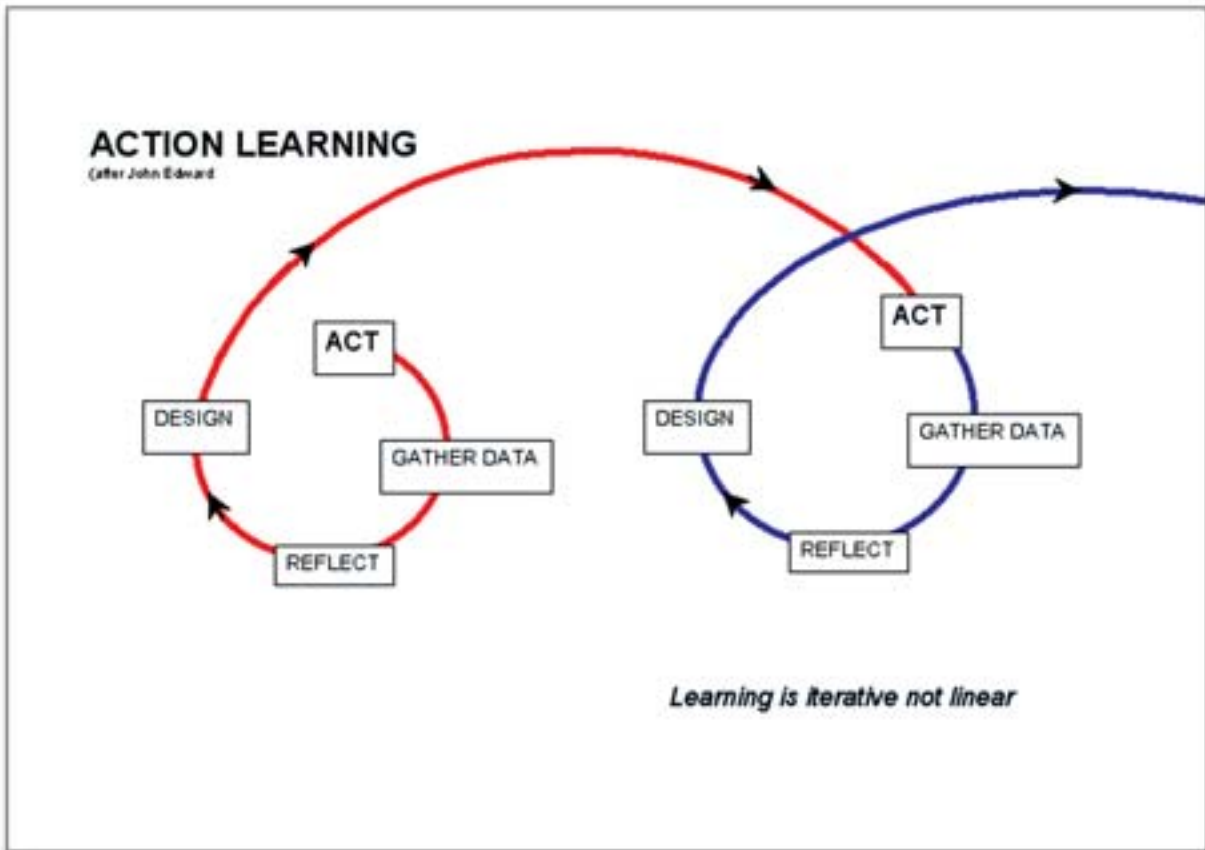


Figure 1



Principles

The pattern of an interactive session followed by action research was based around a fundamental design feature – that the course should be episodic, and not a single event. The much quoted research of Joyce and Showers (Joyce & Showers 1988) showed us that ‘parachute’ type INSET events where a so-called expert arrives, dispenses wisdom and then is never seen again, are unlikely to do more than raise awareness of an issue (and that’s on a good day!). By deliberately creating reflection time and sharing activities as part of the course, teachers could experience for themselves the constructivist, Vygotskian approach underpinning teaching thinking. And there was another reason – we wished to show that teaching thinking should not be a bolt-on activity, either for teachers or for pupils.

When Professor John Edwards shared his ‘Action Learning’ cycle at the Harrogate International Thinking Conference in 2002, the rationale of the course found a helpful expression (see Figure 2). What is unique about this cycle is that, unlike other learning cycles that are usually drawn as closed circles, this is drawn as a series of linked loops. What makes this attractive is that it replicates our

real life learning where, according to Edwards, we have to experience a piece of learning eight or nine times before we become proficient. In other words, learning is neither circular (characterised either as ‘going in ever-decreasing circles’ or as ‘disappearing up one’s own ...’) nor is it linear (carrying on regardless of the evidence or one’s prior learning), but iterative.

The action learning model is particularly helpful in this instance because the full implications of thinking for learning often take time to sink in. On initial acquaintance, many teachers tend to use the thinking strategies as novel activities to extend their repertoire with little or no time set aside for reflection on the process. There is nothing wrong with this, and the lesson may prove to be very successful by Ofsted measures, but it is not developing thinking for learning. Our experience is that, in order to teach infused thinking effectively, many related aspects of pedagogy come into play. Carol McGuiness helpfully reminds us that the process of infusion can be highly transforming:

To infuse – *to introduce into one thing a second thing which gives it extra life, vigour and a new significance.* (Webster’s Dictionary). The teaching of curricular content

Figure 2



is infused with the explicit instruction of thinking skills.

So teachers used to teaching in a familiar way year after year suddenly find themselves looking excitedly at the arrangement of the classroom furniture, the range and style of questions they ask, the amount of whole class teaching they use, the type of activities they create, the nature and length of the plenary session and so on. In other words, the introduction of the thinking strategies re-invigorates both the subject content and the teacher whilst providing pupils with the skills to become more effective learners. The action learning cycle confirms that this shift in pedagogy doesn't usually happen overnight.

The Certificate come of age

Using the fledging course they had helped devise, Mel Rockett and James Nottingham began training teachers from several interested schools in Northumberland and as part of the Berwick RAIS project. By the time the Thinking for Learning Unit was formed in 2002, the amount of work involved had increased. Not only were there more Northumberland schools wanting the course carried out within their schools, rather than centrally (a welcome trend), but schools, EAZs and LEAs outside the county were also showing an interest.

Taking what had already been a successful model and moving it on to the next stage was one of the Unit's first major pieces of work. We needed to meet the rising demand for professional qualifications in the area of thinking for learning and to continue the LEA's drive towards higher standards. It was then that our association the University of Newcastle, already strong, became even stronger.

Working with Vivienne Baumfield, we clarified the course requirements and integrated them with those of the

university's Teaching Thinking Masters degree which was being revised at the same time. The outcome of this work is that the *Teaching Thinking Certificate* now sits within a nationally accredited framework and allows teachers and learning support assistants to plan their own pathway of professional development according to their circumstances (see the progression below).

Course structure

The course consists of 15 hours taught time plus approximately 10 hours of planning and teaching time in school (see Figure 2), structured as follows:

1. A full day introducing several thinking strategies and looking at the background to teaching thinking, as well as providing a resume of current research on how the brain works and the impact that this might have on teaching and learning.
2. Three half days, or four twilight sessions, are interspersed with work in school. Each session includes an opportunity for teachers to reflect upon their practice in school and introduces further thinking strategies.
3. Between each taught session teachers try out the strategies. By the end of the course they must have planned and delivered at least three of the thinking strategies that are modelled on the course. Each is recorded on a simple form.
4. At least one of the three lessons is observed either by a senior colleague, a colleague with experience of teaching thinking, or the course tutor.

For a small amount of additional work, teachers can upgrade their *Teaching Thinking Certificate* to the *Thinking*

for *Learning Certificate* which is worth 20 credits on the University of Newcastle's Masters course.

In running the course, we try to model good learning in the classroom, so the venue, the amount of movement, the variety of activity, the food and music are all important considerations. So too are the interactions between the course leaders and the teachers, paying attention to aspects such as the wait time after asking a question, the use of pair and group work to reveal ambiguity or misconceptions and providing sufficient time for colleagues to self-construct their understanding.

By the end of the course, we will have explored about fifteen strategies and pointed teachers to sources which describe many more. However, the crucial learning on the course is not, as we have come to realise, the acquisition of a number of thinking strategies ('I know five more thinking strategies than the next teacher!') but an appreciation of a way of teaching. The strategies are simply vehicles. This way of teaching puts the learner first (so we prepare *their* learning, not *our* teaching), it mediates understanding rather than instructs, it makes explicit the underlying subject principles and thinking skills and it is comfortable with ambiguity and incompleteness. This last feature often sets up a healthy tension for some teachers brought up to believe that all teaching should be sequential, formulaic and highly structured – you can't be creative or innovative if all you need to know can be prescribed into a box of pre-defined size!

Feedback

We have found that the challenge presented to colleagues using whichever style of teaching is that the *Teaching Thinking Certificate* always creates professional development. The over-riding response is one of invigoration and refreshment, together with a realisation that teaching thinking is not just another initiative, just something else to be fitted into a busy schedule. Participants learn of the increasing body of evidence showing that, because teaching thinking makes learning more effective, it also improves test and examination results. But what colleagues on the course also come to appreciate is that its real power lies in the development of the whole child. They return from trying out the strategies in their classrooms commenting on the pupils' involvement in learning and their increased motivation and self-esteem. They notice pupils becoming more aware of other people's points of view, wanting to give themselves time to think and being more confident about expressing themselves.

An interesting and unexpected aspect of the Certificate is noticing that the changes in teacher behaviour and

attitude are just as, if not more, marked than the changes in the pupils. We often hear comments which speak of people recapturing the initial flush of enthusiasm that they felt on coming into teaching!

The Future

The interaction with so many teachers and their pupils from all phases and situations means that we receive a constant stream of new ideas as people use their creativity to apply the course to their context. This fresh material creates a healthy feedback loop so that the termly meeting of the moderation panel now spends as much time considering teacher-generated ideas as it does verifying the evidence for accreditation.

The Certificate has now run in the majority of Northumberland schools and appears to have had a significant impact on standards and pupils' dispositions (Jones 2004, unpublished research). We have successfully run the Certificate in Scunthorpe, Liverpool, Preston, Burnley, Northern Ireland and South Tyneside and are now considering accrediting colleagues to run the course in more distant locations to cope with demand.

Increasing numbers of colleagues are now using the Certificate as a stepping stone to a Masters module or a full Masters course. It is encouraging to know that there are so many colleagues who not only want to teach thinking but who are prepared to spend some of their time engaging in action research so that our schools may more fully educate pupils for their lives. It is a welcome antidote to John Abbott's rather depressing analysis 'Our present system produces pupils who are over-schooled and under-educated!'

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This is the second in a series of articles about the development of Thinking for Learning (T4L) in Northumberland. The first article 'Gardening in Northumberland' appeared in the Spring 04 edition and outlined the history of T4L and the formation of the Thinking for Learning Unit.

References

Jones, H. (2004) *The Impact of Training in Thinking for Learning in Northumberland* research available autumn 2004

Joyce and Showers (1988) *Student Achievement Through Staff Development*, New York: Longman

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