

## A Search for a Thinking School

**I discovered I wanted to be a teacher many years ago whilst travelling in South America.**

I started working for a language institute in Paraguay, the owner of which was full of ideas and saw teaching going beyond simple English tuition and teaching the whole person. It was, in this amazingly creative environment, that I was introduced to Bloom's Taxonomy, De Bono Thinking Hats and Mind Mapping; and many other areas that explored thinking skills. I was challenged to create lessons to facilitate higher order thinking and encourage creative responses from the pupils. This was a wonderful start to my career - being encouraged to take informed risks in the classroom and explore my creativity as a teacher.



So, full of enthusiasm, I came back to the UK in order to get my degree in teaching and continue to explore my creativity. My first placement, however, gave me a script and I was told I would be timed on each section of the lesson. Do you remember the early days of the literacy hour? Three minutes are up - move on. The observer would sit there with a stop watch! Throughout my initial degree, I was never asked to think about Bloom's, never challenged to study the psychology of learning and I was most certainly not a facilitator, I was asked to become a - 'chalk and talk' teacher.

I continued my teaching career and while there were moments of joy and creativity, I was weighed down by the increasing approach of rote learning and teaching to the tests. Disillusioned, I eventually took a break from teaching. However, once teaching gets in your blood, it's difficult to not be in education and I soon found a yearning to return to the classroom.

As a supply teacher one morning I walked into a school in West London - Wellington Primary. I became immediately aware that this school was very different to many of the other schools I had taught in. I soon discovered why, it was a Thinking School. A school that placed the whole child front and centre in their educational approach. A school that treasured the same metacognitive strategies that I had worked with all those years ago.



I remember seeing they had a range of amazing mind maps on the walls of each classroom, labelled thinking maps. There were thinking hats (real hats!) pinned to the wall in every classroom. I heard staff discussing Bloom's Taxonomy or Habits of Mind. In every classroom I visited across KS1 and KS2 metacognitive strategies were being used. I asked pupils about the maps and the hats, and they were able to tell me about them. I remember talking to a year three child who informed me: 'they help us to think'.

I was lucky enough to be offered a full time position at this amazing school, and it was here, I met Richard Cummins. I discovered the important work of Thinking Schools International and their partnership with Exeter University. TSI's work with schools in this country and many schools around the world is inspiring many educators to place at the heart of their systems the thinking child - a child equipped to deal with the complex changing world that they will face.

OK, so there are still a lot of Government hoops to jump through (data charts to fill in and exams to prepare students for, etc.) but I am back in an environment that has metacognition at the heart of the education process. Somewhere I can take informed risks in the classroom and explore my creativity as a teacher - again - after all those years.

Thank you Wellington and thank you TSI.



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