



## Personal and Social Philosophy

**Roger Sutcliffe** suggests a wiser approach to PLTS, SEAL, PSHE, Citizenship, and Cross-curriculum Dimensions.

The word 'curriculum' was originally Latin and meant 'a running (course)'. Extending this analogy, one might say that SMSC (Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development) was an early runner in the (England and Wales) National Curriculum Stakes, but was soon overshadowed by PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education) and Citizenship.

Joining the race more recently have been SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning), presented as a 'framework' for PSHE, and PLTS (Personal, Learning and Thinking Skills), not to mention the following Cross-curriculum Dimensions, launched in March 2009:

- Identity and cultural diversity
- Healthy lifestyles
- Community participation
- Enterprise
- Global Dimension and Sustainable Development
- Technology and the Media
- Creativity and Critical Thinking

Despite the sense of overlap, if not overkill, suggested by this list, it should be emphasized, at once, that *in their various ways they are drawing attention to absolutely vital elements in good educational provision*. An education system that did not place a high value on most, if not all, these elements would hardly be worthy of the name 'education'; and the best teachers, and some whole schools, manage to keep them in balance with the pursuit of academic excellence.

The time has come, however, to simplify the task – and timetables – of schools, by condensing the elements into a single compound that provides not only more coherence, but also a much greater prospect of permanence amidst continual change. This, then, is the first manifesto on behalf of PSP – Personal and Social Philosophy.

To anyone who has a sense of what 'philosophy' has meant to the human spirit and species since the word was invented by the Greeks, it is perfectly obvious that this is the discipline that can, and should, bring together all the vital elements listed above.

From the time that Socrates said he was concerned, above all, with the best possible state of people's 'psyche' (spirit/soul/mind) Philosophy was set on the journey to living a/the 'good' life; and, from the same time, it has always carried the notion that the good life for a person can scarcely be constructed without regard to the good life for society – and vice-versa.

One might argue, then, that the slot in the timetable for PSHCE *etc.*, should be given the simple (but respectably old) title of Philosophy itself.

## p4c.com news

THIS IS THE SIXTH EDITION of our newsletter to subscribers but the first in our new, printable format. This, and future newsletters, will bring you new articles and news of resources, events and discussion from the p4c.com website.

**Personal and Social Philosophy.** Our feature article in this issue is the starting point of what we hope will be a campaign for secondary schools to adopt the practices of p4c under the curriculum banner of PSP or Personal and Social Philosophy.

Last term, p4c.com brought together a small group of subscribers to discuss how such an initiative might evolve. We begin here with an argument by Roger Sutcliffe in favour of PSP. We have also set up a web forum where subscribers can read, and contribute to, ongoing developmental work. This initiative is in the early stages but we are working towards having both a sound argument and useful resources to offer to schools in the new year. See our list of forums on the website to view our starting points and leave your own 'first thoughts' about the idea.

**Materials for Primary SEAL.** In line with our aim to provide 'pathways' or collections of resources and schemes of work suited to particular age ranges or curriculum areas, we have posted new materials for Primary SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning). These are the first in a series of postings in this area. Look in our list of pathways.

**Role-plays and thought experiments.** We've created a new section of the library to store role-plays as separate items and a new pathway collection to bring together role-plays and thought experiments because they share the common technique of creating a imaginary scenario with a philosophical purpose. The collection makes it easy for people to find such resources.

**Recommended!** In the p4c.com library, we have a section called 'Recommended' where we can share resources that we have used and like, or that had good results. One of our new contributors, Nick Chandley, has just recommended a news item from the BBC website. If you have any recommendations, please tell us about them in the 'Recommendations' forum. If we like them we will transfer them to the library. Please let us a little about how you used the resource and what you think is good about it for p4c.



## p4c.com news continued

But below are a few more detailed arguments for preferring the title, 'Personal and Social Philosophy'.

**Personal Education.** The first argument is that this makes the bridge from Personal Education (as in PSE) clear for all to see. Personal education proper – that is, educating a 'person' – is based on an understanding of the person as an autonomous being who makes up their own mind, and particularly makes up their own mind about their self.

Thinking philosophically about oneself embraces all possible aspects of a human being/person. It thus relates not only to Personal Skills: P(LT)S, and Spiritual and Moral development: SM(SC), but also to Emotional Health: (S)EAL and (PS)H(CE).

Thinking about oneself, moreover, is not the same as thinking of oneself. The latter is limited by one's own (self) interest, whilst the former is open to the interests of others, and to the relationship between one's self and others. Philosophy pays due respect to this relationship, through its traditional sub-disciplines of Ethics and Politics.

**Social Education.** The second argument is that the explicit reference to Social, as well as Personal, Philosophy in PSP thus makes clear the links with Social and Cultural development: S(MS)C, and Social Aspects of Learning: S(E)AL, and the Social and Citizenship parts of (P)S(H)C(E).

**Learning and Thinking Skills.** Next, the headlining of Philosophy itself, of course, provides a perfect platform for the addressing of the Learning and Thinking Skills in (P)LTS.

No other discipline focuses as much on thinking as does Philosophy – which is, indeed, sometimes characterised as 'Thinking about Thinking' – and no other discipline examines and evaluates knowledge and learning as does Philosophy. For sure, it is good to learn about learning, but it is even better to learn to think *about* learning, and about the role of thinking *in* learning.

**Cross-curriculum Dimensions.** So, almost all the bases have been covered. It remains only to note that the first 5 of the 7 Cross-curriculum Dimensions, can, and should, be easy to address within a well-designed Personal and Social Philosophy course:

- Identity and cultural diversity
- Healthy lifestyles
- Community participation
- Enterprise
- Global Dimension and Sustainable Development
- Technology and the Media
- Creativity and Critical Thinking

As to Technology and the Media, they are quite likely to feature within already timetabled subjects (D&T, Art, Drama, *etc*). But a good case can be made for them to be subject to a healthy dose of 'independent' scrutiny, if not scepticism. Given the influence that technology and the media have on both individuals and society in general, it would be fitting for this scrutiny to take place in PSP sessions.

**New 'initial practice' forum.** If you are in the early stages of trying out p4c, then we have set up a special forum where you can ask questions and get advice. If your lessons go well, let us know and, if they don't, maybe we can help. See forum list.

**Keeping track of interesting forums.** If you contribute to forum topics, you receive email updates when other people post new messages. Even if you don't contribute yourself, you can receive the updates by clicking on 'Add to my briefcase' at the top of any forum topic. You can cancel this at any time too. So, if you are interested tracking what people put in the new 'Initial Practice' topic, then add it to your briefcase. Some forum topics you might want to keep track of in this way are:

- **'Starting p4c in a primary school.'** This topic, in the 'Questions and Answers' forum is the place to discuss teaching children in the 4–11 age group. Read the comments and advice already there and feel free to ask questions of your own or report on your progress.
- **'Warm up games.'** This is an ever-popular topic and is also in the 'Questions and Answers' forum. By adding this forum to your briefcase, you will be emailed notice of every new game and idea suggested by our subscribers.
- **'Recommendations summary.'** In the recommendations forum, each topic is a recommendation and you can't add a whole forum to your briefcase. However, we have just started a topic called 'Recommendations summary' in the Recommendations forum. If you add that to your briefcase, you will be notified of every new recommendation.

**Finding resources on p4c.com.** Two useful ways of finding resources, apart from using the menus in the left column, are to look in the right column at the two links directly under the 'Help' graphic. They are 'Recent content' and 'Browse by category'. The first gives you the latest site additions, the second allows you to search by concept, age range of pupils, or curriculum subject.

**Writing workshop for subscribers.** One of our subscribers has suggested the idea of p4c.com running a writing workshop to help adults write dialogues, narratives and role-plays suitable for using to stimulate inquiry. Others have shown an interest in writing exercises such as inquiry builders and concept stretchers. In response we have set up a questionnaire to find out the level of interest. For more details: [www.p4c.com/writing-workshop](http://www.p4c.com/writing-workshop)



**p4c.com news**  
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**Practicalities.** The intellectual case, then, for adopting PSP into the timetable (instead of, not in addition to, the various headlines under which schools address PLTS) is comprehensive. But would such a move be practicable? Are enough teachers ready to teach PSP?

Actually, there are *probably more teachers ready to teach PSP than there are teachers ready to teach PLTS*, which has no base in a discipline. Not only is there a growing number of Philosophy specialists teaching the successful A/S level Philosophy course, but also there is a healthy group of RE teachers who already teach Ethics in the Sixth Form. Add to these the quietly growing number of teachers who have trained in the equally successful Philosophy for Children (P4C) initiative, and the human resource base for PSP looks encouraging.

P4C, indeed, provides more than just personnel: it provides the most suitable pedagogy for this vital part of education, namely, 'communities of enquiry' – which deliberately and precisely cultivate the disposition to ask questions that are socially as well as personally constructive. (Less coyly, and more concisely, they aim to cultivate practical wisdom.)

The community of enquiry approach, in fact, with its emphasis on thinking better together in order to think better for yourself, is perfectly suited to the practice of the six PLTS skills: *independent enquirers, creative thinkers, reflective learners, team workers, self-managers and effective participants*.

More and more children are already practising P4C (or one of its close cousins: Philosophy *with* Children, or Communities of Philosophical Inquiry) in UK primary schools, and many are disappointed to find that there is no opportunity to continue this practice in their transition year.

The development of PSP in the years between primary and sixth form education would bridge this gap, with considerable impact, but minimal disruption.

Not only would those already teaching Philosophy (and/or RE) at the top end welcome the chance to develop students' philosophical skills earlier, but teachers of other disciplines, such as History or Science, can fairly easily be inducted into the community of enquiry approach. The essential qualification is to want students to think 'deeper and wider' – more about themselves, and more about others.

There are also plenty of materials to resource such an initiative, and many more could be developed quickly and organically through a PSP network.

So, we have the people, the pedagogy and the primers. It would seem prudent, if not wise, to pull all these together into a programme in the timetable that has real credibility. Philosophy will always be around as a discipline, but how long a shelf life have SEAL, PLTS and the rest of them?

HEADTEACHERS, curriculum designers and secondary teachers who are interested in taking this philosophical ('pursuit of wisdom') approach to dealing with acronym overload should **contact roger@p4c.com**.

**Writing initiative.** In the last emailed newsletter we suggested a writing initiative. We like the idea, so we repeat it here.

We sometimes read about schools in America that have a routine called 'the class letter'. The letter might include a story, memory, reflection, poem or opinion piece with an introduction (like a letter) speaking directly to readers. The whole piece of writing would be read aloud to the class and often discussed.

Teachers might write for their pupils and pupils would write for each other.

We think it would be interesting to collect together some writing like this – but leaning towards philosophical themes and based in everyday situations experienced by teachers and pupils. So how about trying out some writing yourself in the form of reflections on episodes from life or little dialogues with an introduction, or just a series of questions with a lead-in letter about why you find them important? You could ask your pupils to write these sorts of things too. Then you could send them in and we would choose a selection to publish in the p4c.com library. We might even record some and put the sound files on the website.

The national story project in America used a similar procedure but for the kinds of writing they wanted to promote. You can check out their initiative at: <http://tinyurl.com/storyproject>

A resource on p4c.com like the one we suggest would be very interesting. People could use the work to stimulate classroom dialogues and provide models of philosophical writing for pupils.

How about it? Send stuff written by you and your pupils to [steve@p4c.com](mailto:steve@p4c.com). We can share and compare to get things going.

**The art of questioning.** On the next page, we have a short feature by Steve Williams on an approach to creating and choosing questions to start and inquiry. A slightly longer version is now in the 'p4c craft' section of the website.

We'd like to hear about your own experiences in this area, so we've opened the article up to comments. You can give your reaction to Steve's ideas and share some of your own.

This is a feature of our website that facilitates comments, both critical and creative, on the practice of philosophy for children.

If you would like to send us an article about how your own children have progressed with their question-asking and choosing, send it to [steve@p4c.com](mailto:steve@p4c.com). A word file will do.



## A question checklist

By Steve Williams

It is generally accepted that the nature of the starting questions has a big influence on the quality of the inquiry that follows. Various attempts have been made to devise systems with which to categorise questions with labels such as 'factual', 'open' or 'philosophical'. The aim is to help children to become aware of the kinds of questions that would be most likely to lead to philosophical dialogue.

Here is a different approach with the same aim and with the additional ones of helping teachers and pupils prepare to inquire into them. It is based on a simple checklist that teachers and pupils can apply together. The explanation of the checklist can become more sophisticated as time goes by through a process of dialogue. The basic criteria suggest that questions leading to inquiry should be: *understandable*, *answerable*, *significant*, and *stimulating*. Here are some of the considerations for each criterion that you could discuss with pupils, depending on their age and experience with p4c.

**Understandable.** The question should make sense and be understood by everyone. This is sometimes not the case when pupils have been asked to come up with questions by teachers. They want to fulfil the task but the results don't always make sense. Ask pupils to suggest any questions that don't seem make sense to them. Should they be excluded or can they be explained or improved?

**Answerable.** Can the question be answered by this community? Does it rely entirely on specialist knowledge that would have to be researched or can we exercise our own judgement in response to it? Is it answerable now or should we do anything to prepare to answer it?

**Significant.** Does the question raise themes (or concepts) we could all be interested in? Is it interesting to me? Is it important in some way? Is likely to lead to philosophical dialogue? (The last question could be introduced after the class has some experience of the kinds of dialogues that could illustrate the concept 'philosophical' in some way.)

**Stimulating.** Does the question stimulate you to inquire into it, to commit yourself to enquiring with others? Does the question stimulate interesting 'questions in waiting'? 'Questions in waiting' is a phrase I like to use to refer to those questions that are likely to arise on the way to answering the starting question. They are often of the sort: 'What do we mean by x?' 'Is y an assumption?' 'What is important about z?' and so on. If a question stimulates lots of interesting questions in waiting, it is likely to be a good questions to discuss.

Such a checklist of criteria provides a broad structure for analysing, choosing and preparing to answer questions. It also lends itself to a progression from the teacher choosing the starting questions and explaining the criteria for her choice to children choosing questions, informed by the criteria they have become familiar with.

## Events and courses

Advance notice

**SAPERE conference.** *Learning to give an inch: dealing with controversial, contested and taboo subjects.* In partnership with the NUT in London.

**Speaker** Shami Chakrabarti: Director, Liberty. Plus a choice of workshops - led by exemplar schools and expert practitioners - focusing on the skills and approaches that enable teachers and young people to consider 'difficult' questions and ideas. See the p4c.com events page under 'UK Events' [www.p4c.com/events/term/237](http://www.p4c.com/events/term/237)

**Level 1, 2 and 3 courses.** There are SAPERE-validated level 2 and 3 courses running in:

- Swansea (Wales) in January with Sue Lyle and Ishmael Lewis. *Level 1*
- Northumberland in February with James Nottingham. *Level 1*
- Swansea (Wales) starting in November with Karin Murriss and Sue Lyle. *Level 2*
- Northumberland (England) in February with James Nottingham and Steve Williams. *Level 2*
- Swansea (Wales) starting in November with Karin Murriss and Joanna Haynes. *Level 3*

For details about these courses see the p4c.com events page under 'UK Events'. [www.p4c.com/events/term/237](http://www.p4c.com/events/term/237)

SAPERE is also running courses. For those, see: [www.sapere.org.uk/courses/search.aspx](http://www.sapere.org.uk/courses/search.aspx)

**SOPHIA events.** SOPHIA is the European Network for doing Philosophy with Children. SOPHIA organises meetings, courses and conferences. Upcoming events include:

- Introduction to CoPI course in Ghent, Belgium Aug 19-20 2009 with Catherine McCall. CoPI stands for Community of Philosophical Inquiry.
- International Conference "Creativity - Thinking - Philosophy" October 15-18, 2009 in Graz/Austria

For details about these courses see the SOPHIA website: <http://sophia.eu.org>

**The Battle of Ideas.** P4C is being discussed in one session on Sunday November 1st of a major event in London organised by the Institute of Ideas. According to the introductory text to the P4C 'conversation salon': 'Various training schemes present philosophy for children as a way of introducing them to rigorous thinking, but some critics see it as another example of the therapeutic turn in education - a recent trend towards prioritising self-esteem and emotional well-being rather than traditional subject-teaching.' Joanna Haynes, a p4c.com contributor, is speaking in the session with Stephen Law and James Gledhill Read more at: <http://tinyurl.com/p4cbattle>.