

## **PSP (Personal and Social Philosophy)**

- an initiative to enhance PSE, learning across the curriculum, and learning for life

### **PSE – growing in importance**

During the first decade of the new millennium there was a range of initiatives in the broad field of Personal and Social Education: HE (Health and Economic education), PLTS (Personal, Learning and Thinking Skills), and SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) - not to mention Citizenship and the Global Dimension.

All of these represented a proper concern for educating young people to meet the demands of a complex and fast-changing world – demands which continue to grow.

In its White Paper published in November 2010, the new government acknowledged that “*Children can benefit enormously from high-quality Personal Social Health and Economic (PSHE) education.*” But it also announced “*an internal review to determine how we can support schools to improve the quality of all PSHE teaching, including giving teachers the flexibility to use their judgement about how best to deliver PSHE education.*”

### **PSP – a coherent curriculum and a professional approach**

The re-thinking of PS(H)E that is proposed under the title of PSP promises (a) to unify its disparate elements within a simple framework, and (b) to encourage a more suitable, dialogical, approach that would enable pupils, as well as teachers, to make better judgements in regard to learning and life.

The approach recommended is that of the ‘community of enquiry’, as practised in over 60 countries under the name of Philosophy for Children, and as promoted in the UK for the last 20 years by the charity SAPERE ([www.sapere.org.uk](http://www.sapere.org.uk)).

As to the framework, this draws on the ancient conception of philosophy as, literally, ‘love of wisdom’ or, in modern terms, the pursuit of **wellbeing**. It proposes 6 structuring questions, developed from Kant’s ‘4 basic questions of philosophy’. Each focuses on either personal or social development, but together they encompass the various elements mentioned above. Each question could provide the focus for half a term.

#### **1. What can I know about myself?** (the personal, including SEAL)

*especially, What different sorts of experiences build up our knowledge and awareness of ourselves?*

#### **2. What is it to be human?** (the social, including the Global Dimension)

*especially, What makes humans different from other animals? and What makes humans different from each other?*

#### **3. What may I hope of my society?** (the social, including Citizenship)

*A. Groups: Of how many communities am I a member?*

*B. Power: Who makes decisions that affect me?*

*C. Systems: How does my society help protect me?*

*D. Wealth: How does society provide food & goods?*

*E. Trends: What are the trends in my society?*

*F. Threat(s): What are the threats to my future?*

#### **4. What may I hope of myself?** (the personal, including Health and Economic wellbeing)

*What are my aims and aspirations? and What are the challenges I face?*

#### **5. How can I become such a person?** (the personal, including PLTS)

*How can I make good decisions about learning and life? and How can I develop good personal qualities?*

#### **6. How prepared are we for the future?** (the social, reviewing elements of all)

These questions correlate very well with the 3 broad categories or orientations of curriculum aims expressed in the Cambridge Primary Review:

- **The Individual** (1, 4, 5)
- **(Self,) Others and the Wider World** (2, 3, 6)
- **Learning, Knowing and Doing** (all, but especially 5 and 6)

## Planning the curriculum

Of course, there may be certain concepts that curriculum planners feel have to be dealt with in PSE/P at some stage, such as *health*, *work*, and *relationships*. But the spirit of PSP is, as the government would wish, to give teachers as much autonomy as possible, consistent with their social responsibility.

Accordingly, PSP recommends a menu of 'central' concepts related to the framework questions, from which schools can make their own selection. These concepts are rich in their connections, both with each other and with people's everyday experiences, but the encouragement would be to explore *fewer* concepts *in depth*, rather than more content *superficially*. 3 central concepts per half term could be quite sufficient, especially if scope were allowed for pupils to shape and develop the way they are explored as the term or year goes on.

A bank of resources will be available on the internet, e.g. [www.p4c.com](http://www.p4c.com), supporting enquiry into the full range of central concepts from which schools would construct their ongoing PSP curriculum.

## Simple templates for implementation

### 1. Minimalist – existing provision rendered more philosophical

This would require no timetable change, and minimal alteration to existing 'content' of PSE lessons – though it could be hoped that the content would develop over time.

'More philosophical' in this context would mean (a) more 'big picture' thinking in the design and presentation of the PSE/P curriculum, and (b) more openness and readiness for philosophical enquiry in all PSE/P lessons.

(a) could be achieved by emphasizing aspects of question 1 – perhaps even starting each year with the question:

- *What do we know more about ourselves now that we did not know this time last year?*

(b) could be achieved by recognising that most concepts addressed in PSE/P have ethical dimensions, and many have (small 'p') political dimensions, which can be explored through more open questioning and dialogue. The main criterion of success in a lesson should be 'how much did it make them think?' (But, of course, in stimulating pupils to think and enquire for themselves, the teacher is nurturing their own will to knowledge.)

### 2. More adventurous – template 1 + harnessing the passions of teachers across the curriculum

This would begin to build the sense that PSP is everybody's business: it is what the whole school is about.

It would require all teachers to designate at least one of their lessons per half-term explicitly to PSP, choosing one aspect of their subject that is NOT on the syllabus, but which they feel is worthy of attention and enquiry.

The guiding question for this development would be question 2 (*What is it to be human?* – relevant to all fields of enquiry, but particularly connected with Biology, Technology, the Arts and Humanities) and/or question 3 (*What can I hope of my society?* – an opportunity to explore the social/citizenship dimensions of each and every subject.)

Departments could find it stimulating to work out what each member might be ready to offer in these directions, but individual teachers could be encouraged to express their professional (or even personal) passions.

### 3. Most ambitious – templates 1 and 2, plus one or two dedicated PSP lessons per week fitting into a reshaped curriculum for one or more Key Stages.

Such a curriculum would value transdisciplinary links (e.g. across and between the Humanities and the Sciences, with perhaps a particular interest in biology and psychology as the **sciences of humanity**). The guiding questions for this development would be question 4 (*What may I hope of myself?* – with its focus on **wellbeing**) and question 5 (*What should I do?* – with its focus on **wellthinking** and **welldoing**).

Such a curriculum might also place more explicit value on developing good learning dispositions. These could well be grounded in the regular practice of philosophical enquiry, but with links, therefore, to any or all of: **Aristotle's** Intellectual and Social Virtues, **Claxton's** 8 Character Strengths and Virtues, **Seligman's** Personal Qualities, and **Costa's** Habits of Mind.

For further advice about any of these aspects, email: [roger@dialogueworks.co.uk](mailto:roger@dialogueworks.co.uk).