

# Philosophical Teaching & Learning

## A Pedagogy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

### Introduction for Teachers



<https://dialogueworks.co.uk/philosophical-teaching-and-learning/>

## What is philosophical teaching?

Philosophical Teaching is an approach to teaching and learning developed from the 50-year-old practice of P4C (Philosophy for Children) - which has been shown in repeated studies to improve student understanding, skills and values beyond the levels normally achievable through traditional teaching.

Philosophical Teaching reframes P4C so as to render it suitable for any subject or curriculum, and for whatever age of student. It does not add more content to the already heavy load that teachers must deal with; rather it provides a new and refreshing way for them to think about, and advance, their own vision and skills for the 21st century.

It consists of 6 interweaving strands, all philosophical in essence, which can be summed up as:

1. **Inspired by inquiry** – with a special emphasis on nurturing student **interest** and **curiosity**
2. **Constructive of concepts** – that make learning more **coherent** and **meaningful**
3. **Driven by dialogue** – which develops **openness** as well as **communication**
4. **Respectful of reason** – the foundation of **critical thinking** and **reasonableness**
5. **Refined by reflection** – which **deepens** learning, as well as **widening** it
6. **Valuing of virtues** – which play a vital role in **cognitive** as well as **character** education

## How can it benefit schools?

Philosophical Teaching complements most 21st century curriculum strategies that schools are adopting, especially **inquiry-based learning** and **dialogic teaching**, whilst providing strong practical support, through its **valuing virtues** approach, for most school value systems or mission statements. It allows schools to turn their stated values from mere slogans into personal and purposive guidelines for improving behaviour and learning dispositions across the school.

In IB schools particularly, whether that be in primary years, middle years or diploma level, Philosophical Teaching is an ideal way to interrogate and internalise the Learner Profile. It extends and deepens inquiry-based learning, encouraging the practice of Socratic - connective - questioning that both challenges and supports student concept-construction. It is just as valuable, of course, for teachers and students in schools that are aspiring for entry into the IB program, or indeed for non-IB schools with higher aspirations of their own.

Because philosophy as a discipline is properly associated with high-order, critical, thinking, it can only enhance the academic standards of any school. But Philosophical Teaching broadens the scope of thinking beyond the merely critical, because its strands are closely aligned to the '4C' modes of thinking that are central to P4C: Caring, Collaborative, Creative – as well as Critical. This broad framework for thinking influences the ethos and culture of the whole school.

## How can Philosophical Teaching benefit teachers?

In a perfectly good sense of the word, everyone has a (more or less thought out) philosophy of life; and every teacher has, or should have, a philosophy of education. Typically, this focusses on the ends or goals of life or learning, but philosophy properly attends, as well, to the best means to those ends. In effect, it raises and answers the classic questions:

- **What** (... are we saying)?
- **Why** (... does it matter)?
- **How** (... should we proceed)?

By attending to the 6 core strands, teachers discover a simple but powerful model for self-monitoring and self-development as teachers – thus making the experience more purposeful and rewarding. As they become more experienced in conducting *respectful, constructive inquiry* and conducting *reflective, reasonable dialogue*, they find the traditional demarcation lines between teachers and students diminish. They show more interest in the students' own interests and ideas, informing themselves more about their individual needs and capacities - thereby learning how to motivate and guide them better on their learning journeys. In effect, they model good learning themselves, promoting knowledge for its own sake as well as for its instrumental value.

## How can Philosophical Teaching benefit students?

Students, for their part, '*learn the skills of teaching themselves – to self-regulate their learning*', as John Hattie advocates in *Visible Learning* (p. 245). They develop, like good philosophers, the strengths of character and the intellectual habits to deal with challenges, and to make the most of opportunities, throughout their lives.

The Valuing Virtues strand brings these strengths and habits together under the headline of Personal, Social and Intellectual Qualities (PSIQs). The first set includes **self-respect, optimism, courage and enterprise**. The second set includes **respect for others, open-mindedness, trustworthiness, and team-mindedness**. The third set is based on the 26 thinking skills identified in a comprehensive framework, **Thinking Moves A – Z**, developed over the past 8 years, which provides a rich but accessible vocabulary for metacognition.

Students already have and practise most of these virtues to some extent, but what they lack is precisely the ability to label, and therefore to examine, each of them individually, and the opportunity to build them altogether into their sense of self, as a student and as a citizen.

## How does a school go about implementing Philosophical Teaching?

Whilst the aim is for Philosophical Teaching ultimately to permeate all aspects of teaching and learning, it is helpful for teachers and students to follow a structured pathway as they build up their familiarity and skills with the approach. For teachers, the starting point is typically two days of Foundation training, based on the well-established P4C methodology, but appropriately titled, 'P4C Plus', because of the wider scope of this pedagogy, and the innovative **Thinking Moves A - Z** scheme (<https://dialogueworks.co.uk/thinking-moves/>). This training equips teachers to start conducting philosophical inquiry sessions with their students in a forum known as a Community of Inquiry – a safe and managed space where students and teachers can begin to develop 4C thinking, especially questioning, reasoning and reflecting together.

The Foundation training is followed up with a minimum of 3 one-day courses to advance practice in the 6 strands, typically with a focus on 2 strands each day. Schools, however, may 'dig' even deeper with a single focus on one day, e.g. on **concept-construction**, or **reasoning**, or values and **virtues**. Attendance at 3 such days, together with simple evidence of reflective practice, results in an Advanced Facilitator Certificate. DialogueWorks also offers a 3-day

'Trainer Training' course for those who might wish to become DW accredited Trainers. N.B. Any of the post-foundation courses can also be offered directly to groups of students in 'drop-down' day or half-day sessions.

## Roger Sutcliffe, originator of Philosophical Teaching and Learning

Roger Sutcliffe is an educational philosopher (but prefers to be called a philosophical educator) with over 45 years of teaching and training experience. He has worked in all sectors of education, beginning as a Junior School teacher. At secondary level he taught Maths, English and Critical Thinking at different times, as well as PSHE. Latterly, he lectured in Teaching Philosophy at Heythrop College, London.

He was one of the co-founders of SAPERE, the UK charity for advancing P4C - Philosophy for Children / Communities - and has played a significant role in teacher education ever since. He helped design SAPERE's teacher education programme, and the charity has trained over 30,000 teachers since it was founded.

Roger authored the CIE Global Perspectives IGCSE and advised the IBO on the development of its Theory of Knowledge course. He wrote a handbook on Inquiry-based Learning for the Open Futures project, funded by the Helen Hamlyn Trust, and was an evaluator of two innovative projects for the Geography Association.

He has worked extensively overseas, and recently helped set up P4C China ([www.p4c.org.cn](http://www.p4c.org.cn)) with colleagues in [www.dialogueworks.co.uk](http://www.dialogueworks.co.uk). DialogueWorks is also currently engaged in a project piloting P4C in 100 schools for a government in the Middle East, for which Roger wrote a 24-unit curriculum for the first year of whole school implementation, at both primary and secondary level.

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