



# Philosophical Teaching

## What is Philosophical Teaching?

Philosophical Teaching is an inquiry-led pedagogy that develops student understanding and appreciation beyond the levels normally achievable through traditional teaching. It brings together 6 strands of good teaching - whatever the curriculum or subject, and whatever the age of the students - in what is justly described as a *philosophical approach* to teaching. It does not, then, add more content to the already heavy load that teachers must deal with. Rather it provides a new and refreshing way for educators to think about, and advance, their skills in the 21st century. It consists of 6 complementary strands, which can be summed up as follows:

- inspired by *inquiry*
- driven by *dialogue*
- connecting of *concepts*
- reliant on *reflection*
- respectful of *reason*
- valuing of *virtues*

## How does it benefit teachers?

By building skills in these six core strands, teachers discover a simple but powerful model for self-development and self-monitoring – and enjoy a more rewarding teaching experience. As they become more experienced in stimulating *reflective inquiry* and managing *constructive dialogue*, they find the traditional demarcation lines between teachers and students diminish. Students take more responsibility for their own learning – indeed, teaching themselves as well as each other. The teacher, meanwhile, becomes a better listener, thereby learning more about the students' capacities to reason and understand, and about their personal interests and needs.

## How does it benefit students?

Philosophical Teaching equips students with the intellectual skills and strengths of character to exploit opportunities and deal with challenges throughout their lives. This is not only because of its healthy emphasis on student questioning and reasoning. It is also because its Thinking Moves taxonomy provides a rich but accessible vocabulary for metacognition, whilst its emphasis on, and explanation of, carefully chosen *personal and social virtues* encourages students to focus on those that will help them most in their learning and their lives. Examples of the personal virtues include *self-confidence, optimism, resilience and enterprise*. Examples of the social virtues include *respectfulness, trustworthiness, open-mindedness and empathy*.

## How does 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 concrete guidelines for 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 develop the Learner Profile. It extends and deepens inquiry-



based learning, encouraging the practice of Socratic and connective questioning that both challenges and supports student conceptualisation. It is just as valuable, of course, for preparing students from non-IB or aspiring IB schools for entry into the Diploma program.

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' because its strands are closely aligned to the caring, collaborative, creative and critical styles of thinking that are central to Philosophy for Children (P4C). This type of broader 'thinking' influences the ethos and culture of the whole school, as can be seen in the [prospectus for Broadwater Secondary School](#) in southern England.

### How does a school go about implementing philosophical teaching?

Whilst the idea 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 two days of Foundation training, based on the well-established P4C methodology. This training equips teachers to start conducting philosophical inquiry sessions with their students in a forum known as a Community of Inquiry. This is a safe space where students and teachers can start to explore philosophical concepts and develop their skills of Philosophical Teaching and learning.

The Foundation training is followed up after 6 – 12 months by two days of advanced training in Philosophical Teaching, with different versions for primary and secondary teachers. This training helps teachers develop specific skills for taking Philosophical Teaching into all areas of the curriculum. The third step in the Philosophical Teaching pathway is then a one-day course on Thinking Moves, showing teachers how to build student skills in this metacognitive framework.

### About the author

Roger Sutcliffe is an educational philosopher with over 45 years of teaching and training experience. He has worked as a primary and secondary teacher and has taught English, Maths and Critical Thinking. He has been an advisor to the International Baccalaureate Organisation on developing the Theory of Knowledge course in the IB Diploma program. He has been a globally recognised P4C thought-leader since the early 1990s, when he was one of the small group of people who founded the charity, SAPERE, in the UK. SAPERE has subsequently gone on to train over 30,000 teachers over the last 25 years. Building on his experience of teacher training in P4C, much of which has been with international schools, Roger has gone on to develop a comprehensive pedagogy for Philosophical Teaching. He sees this as much more than just a programme of thinking skills, but rather as a wider vision for of education for the 21st-century across the world. He hopes that it will appeal on one hand to educators who valued inquiry-based learning, and on the other hand to all those who see community values as central to a healthy learning environment.



For more information, including details of training packages, please visit [www.dialogueworks.co.uk](http://www.dialogueworks.co.uk)