

Cassidy, C. (in press). *Philosophy with Children and Learning for Sustainability: Lessons for Teachers*. In A. Kizel (ed.) *Philosophy with Children and Teacher Education: Global Perspectives on Critical, Creative and Caring Thinking*. London: Routledge.

Philosophy with Children and Learning for Sustainability: Lessons for Teachers

Claire Cassidy

ORCID: 0000-0002-3088-1721

Abstract

In the context of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, this chapter explores how teachers might support children and young people in learning for sustainability. Taking as its starting point that teachers have a responsibility for supporting learning in this area, the chapter considers the ways in which teachers' practice in learning for sustainability might benefit from facilitating practical philosophy with their pupils. By way of illustrating the potential impact practical philosophy for/with children and young people may have on the learning of teachers and pupils, the chapter draws on teachers' reflections on their practice following an introductory short course on facilitating practical philosophy.

Keywords: Philosophy with Children; Learning for Sustainability; teacher learning; professional development; professional standards

Introduction

In 2015, the United Nations (UN) presented its Agenda for Sustainable Development for the next fifteen years. To meet this agenda, member nations agreed seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). With a view to eradicating poverty, reducing inequalities, improving health care and education for all, promoting economic growth, and countering

climate change and protecting the environment, the SDGs were designed to interconnect and support one another. Prior to the development of the SDGs, 1995-2004 was the Decade for Human Rights Education, with the UN calling for countries ‘to include human rights, humanitarian law, democracy and rule of law as subjects in the curricula of all learning institutions in formal and non-formal settings’. This came soon after the publication of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UN, 1989). The UNCRC presents a series of fifty-four articles that enshrine the civil, social, political, cultural and economic rights for those under the age of eighteen.

Following the Decade for Human Rights Education, the UN launched the World Programme for Human Rights Education. The Programme is split into four phases, each with a specific focus; for example, ensuring the integration of human rights education into primary and secondary schools was the focus of the first phase (2005-2009). The fourth phase is currently underway (2020-2024), and focuses on young people, with ‘a special emphasis on education and training in equality, human rights and non-discrimination, and inclusion and respect for diversity with the aim of building inclusive and peaceful societies’ (UN, 2018). The UN has been clear that this latest phase deliberately aligns with the SDGs (UN, 2016). Because of these international drivers, Learning for Sustainability has become a key feature of school curricula. Given that countries around the world are reflecting on how they might achieve the SDGs, attention turns to education and the role of teachers. This chapter considers how teachers and teacher education programs might address Learning for Sustainability through practical philosophy for/with children and young people (P4wC). To contextualise this further, reference will be made to teachers’ Professional Standards in Scotland and teachers’ feedback following professional development in P4wC.

Learning for Sustainability and Professional Standards

The Decade of Education for Sustainable Development ran between 2005-2014 and strove to ‘improve everyone’s quality of life’ (UN, 2016:3). The UN determined that this would be through education. Learning for Sustainability (LfS), sometimes referred to as Education for Sustainable Development, has several guises, including the likes of Environment Education, Outdoor Education, Education for Citizenship, Human Rights Education and Social Justice Education, with terms often being used interchangeably (Hunter and Cassidy, 2019). There is a tendency in the academic literature, and also in practice, to focus on the environmental or scientific element of LfS (see, for example, Buchanan, 2012; Green and Somerville, 2015; Evans *et al.*, 2017; Tomas *et al.*, 2017; Hunter and Cassidy, 2019).

Recently there has been a move towards a broader understanding of LfS, where the focus steps beyond environmental sustainability (Clark and Mcphie, 2016). Indeed, ‘sustainability knowingsness, attitudes, and behaviours regarding environment, society and economy’ (Kalsoom and Khanam, 2017: 1302) have drawn attention to the socio-political issues embedded within LfS. The likes of rights, democracy and social justice (Hunter and Cassidy, 2019), human rights education (Struthers, 2015), citizenship education (Reichert, 2016; Brown, 2018; Toukan, 2018) and social justice education (Thurston and Yelich Biniecki 2017; Torres-Harding *et al.*, 2018) offer just some examples of this recent shift. Given the context of advancing human rights and the broader range of SDGs, LfS might be seen to centre around the question of how we live in-relation to others and the world, or how we live well (Griffiths and Murray, 2017). The focus for us, here, is on the role of the teacher in supporting children in their pursuit of the good life or living well; in other words, how teachers might promote LfS.

In addition to LfS in their curricula, many countries have professional standards that their student and practising teachers are expected to achieve and maintain. Only Scotland, though, has LfS embedded within its professional standards (Evans, *et al.*, 2017). In fact, the Scottish *Standard for Full Registration* (General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS), 2021a) have recently been revised, and are due to come into effect from August 2021. LfS was a feature in the previous iteration of the Standards (GTCS, 2012), but they are now even more pronounced. All teachers in Scotland must be registered with the GTCS. Thereafter, teachers must maintain their professional learning and have this reviewed every year through the Professional Review and Development process, and a professional up-date confirmation of this learning every five years (<https://www.gtcs.org.uk/professional-update/professional-update-what-do-i-need-to-know-do.aspx>).

The Standards are arranged under three headings: professional values and professional commitment; professional knowledge and understanding; and professional skills and abilities. It is the first of these that is of interest to us in the present chapter. Three elements comprise professional values: social justice, trust and respect, and integrity. Social justice is defined as ‘the view that everyone deserves equal economic, social and political rights opportunities now and in the future’ (GTCS, 2012a: 4). ‘Trust and respect are expectations of positive action that support authentic relationship building and show care for the needs and feelings of the people involved and respect for our natural world and its limited resources’ (ibid: 5). Integrity is explained to be ‘the practice of being honest and showing a consistent and uncompromising adherence to strong moral and ethical principles and values’ (ibid: 5). Each of the three headings has a series of elements that teachers are expected to enact, and several of these pertain to the promotion of LfS and supporting children to live well in the world.

The second and third headings offer additional, complementary statements, notably revolving around issues relating to the culture the teacher should create in school and the sense that they

should respect ‘individual difference and supporting learners’ understanding of themselves, others and their contribution to the development and sustainability of a diverse and inclusive society’ (ibid: 5). This element situates the teacher as supporting pupils to see themselves in-relation to the world. Importantly, too, teachers are expected, under the heading of integrity, to ‘Challeng[e] assumptions, biases and professional practice, where appropriate’ (ibid: 5). Challenging assumptions and bias is important in modelling particular behaviour one might wish children to acquire (Sharp 1984; Noddings, 1988). The Standards state that ‘This means teachers commit to living the professional values’ (GTCS, 2021a: 5). This leads to consideration of how teachers might meet the requirements for teaching in Scotland, but more specifically, for teaching LfS – in Scotland or elsewhere. What is proposed, here, is that Philosophy for/with Children may offer one approach.

Philosophy for/with Children

Practical philosophy for/with children and young people (P4wC) originated with Matthew Lipman in the USA in the 1970s (Lipman, Sharp & Oscanyan, 1980; Lipman, 2003). Subsequently, the Philosophy for Children programme he initiated has been adopted and adapted world-wide. Simply put, P4wC is a more or less tightly structured approach to collaborative, philosophical dialogue where participants are encouraged to make connections between their ideas by sharing agreements and disagreements with one another, and providing reasons for those agreements/disagreements. The focus is not on learning academic philosophy, but of identifying questions of a philosophical nature and exploring these together (Murriss, 2000).

UNESCO (2007) reported that P4wC has something worthwhile to offer children ‘...by training free, reflective minds capable of resisting various forms of propaganda, fanaticism, exclusion and intolerance, philosophical education contributes to peace and prepares

everyone to shoulder responsibilities in the face of the great challenges of the contemporary world' (p.xiii). This goal aligns well with the requirement that Scottish teachers 'engage learners in real world issues to enhance learning experiences and outcomes, and to encourage learning our way to a better future' (GTCS, 2021a: 4). In seeking ways to meet this requirement, and the other Standards, teachers would struggle to find a better approach than P4wC, particularly as teachers are also expected to 'Mak[e] a professional commitment to learning and learners that is compatible with the aspiration of achieving a sustainable and equitable world' (ibid: 5).

P4wC is built upon critical, creative and caring thinking (Lipman, 2003). Critical thinking is writ large in the literature on LfS. In advancing human rights, for example, following the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the definition of human rights education made strong references to empathy and critical thinking skills (Zembylas, 2016). Sandri (2013), Jónsdóttir (2015) and Bürgener and Barth (2018) all stress that to foster LfS critical thinking skills are required, with the latter authors emphasising this as a requirement for children, but also for teachers. The Standards, referred to above, require that teachers challenge their own and others' assumptions and bias. In proposing critical thinking in teaching for and learning about LfS, an awareness of the interdependence and connectedness between people and the world in which they live is emphasised. This sits comfortably with Lipman's view of critical thinking as applied thinking, where its key characteristic is good judgement. He would argue that this judgement should 'bring about reasonable change' (Lipman, 2003: 211), and to effect change, one must care.

Caring thinking aligns the cognitive with the affective. The notion of empathy, as suggested by Zembylas (2016) is necessary in caring thinking, but it is not sufficient to effect change. Caring thinking requires that we reflect critically on our thinking (Bleazby, 2011) and that we care about the object of our thought as much as the manner in which we think (Lipman,

2003). To ensure that judgement is not immune to human suffering compassion is required (Nussbaum, 1996). This compassion is what, arguably, leads to action (Cassidy, forthcoming). Compassionate action not only prompts the move from deliberation to action, it marries the emotional with the rational and should lead to positive change (Gibson and Cook-Sather, 2020). P4wC offers the space for ethical inquiry (Sharp, 1987; Lipman, 2003), which is necessary if we wish to consider how we live in the world, as LfS would suggest.

The triumvirate of Lipman's critical, caring and creative thinking would not be complete without brief consideration of caring thinking. Lipman (2003) takes creativity beyond the production of art to suggest that it is about 'discovery and invention' (p.248). It is, he states, about individuality and it expresses one's self. Taken together with critical thinking and caring thinking, creative thinking moves one to search for new and novel ways of thinking, to identify problems and work towards solutions. Adding caring thinking to this mix ensures that we are concerned enough about our thinking and the topic under examination that we seek to act.

Teachers' professional learning

It is easy to make connections between P4wC and children's learning generally, and, as shown above, to make links between P4wC and LfS, with the focus on effecting change and thinking about how best we live our lives. What is less well-documented is the way in which teachers' practice in LfS might benefit from P4wC. The claim that professional learning in P4wC helps teachers to create an inclusive environment, to support their pupils' thinking about and expressing their views on how they wish to live their lives, and how they, as teachers, can demonstrate their professional values and commitment will be evidenced in what follows.

Teachers in Scotland must undertake annual professional learning, often called Career-long Professional Learning (CLPL). Some teachers subscribe to short, uncredited courses from the universities offering teacher education. The evidence presented here comes from evaluations and interviews with teachers following a short introduction to P4wC course. The course ran for five half-days over a period of five weeks (approximately fifteen hours), with twenty teachers from early years, primary and secondary school settings participating. It should be noted that although this was not a research project, the teachers gave permission for their evaluations and comments to be used in talking and writing about the short course and P4wC generally. The group's responses were representative of the other cohorts of teachers engaged in the same sessions.

Andersson *et al.* (2013) stress that approaches to training in LfS cannot be indoctrinatory. An open approach, such as that afforded by P4wC would be appropriate, one that might avoid teachers as spectators (Jónsdóttir, 2015). This would allow teachers the space to think for themselves in the way the GTCS (2021a) Standards suggest. Offering teachers opportunities to engage in dialogue that is open, yet critical, was taken by the teachers into their practice. They recognised that the approach allowed them to be creative in their thinking about learning and this influenced their practice, such as when they said 'you think something works, you continue to do it that way without thinking if there is actually a better way to do it, or a more exciting way, or more engaging way... I've changed the way I've been planning certain things'. This led the teachers to discuss their more open and inclusive approaches adopted because of the CLPL sessions. They highlighted that they were 'more hands-off, not being stuck to a rigid timetable and that if something does come up in the class, giving the children the freedom to discuss it'. This openness is important in exploring LfS as often teachers try to avoid controversial issues (Cassidy, *et al.*, 2014; Evans, *et al.*, 2017; Jerome, *et al.*, 2021). P4wC as a way to explore controversial issues is one that Chetty and Suissa (2017)

address directly. Indeed, one teacher noted that she had used P4wC to support a child in exploring the decision that her asylum-seeking family were not granted leave to remain in the country.

Not only did P4wC allow teachers to find space to explore the types of issues one might expect to encounter in LfS, the openness in their outlook and subsequent planning demonstrated trust and respect for their pupils. This led to more inclusive practice generally, with trust, respect and inclusivity being key requirements of Scottish teachers, of LfS and the SDGs. Trust and respect were manifest through teachers' 'big step in changing [their] practice'. One teacher reported 'that was the first time that I'd actually taken a step back and gone off timetable and allowed the children to have a go at it', and she was rewarded in this with greater engagement. The inclusive approach adopted by teachers following the CLPL was evident in several comments. Typical amongst these was the teacher who said, in speaking about children 'you wouldn't usually expect' to participate, noted that 'the fact that Jim [pseudonym] had actually been able to express his awareness of having to think, it made me think that these children, that you maybe wouldn't expect, can be challenged as much'.

Not only were the teachers more awake to the possibility of all children being able to engage in thinking together, they all commented on the positive impact on the children who might be described as having challenging behaviour. This is exemplified by the teacher who said that she had been impressed by the impact on the behaviour of her Primary seven class (aged 11-12). She recorded that she had been 'really apprehensive about doing anything like this with this particular group because there was the risk of a screaming match and violence'. The children had responded positively. Another teacher spoke about a boy with challenging behaviour, saying, 'He went to the headteacher a couple of weeks ago and knocked on her door and asked where I was and when was I coming back to do philosophy, to the point that the class teacher is re-writing his report' because his behaviour has been so affected. Not

only do we see in these examples that the teachers were more aware of the impact on their own ethical behaviour in the classroom, they saw the positive benefits for the children with whom they work.

Further, aligned with the UNCRC and the Professional Standards, introducing P4wC to the teachers enabled them to recognise the importance of and place for children's voice within their classrooms. One of the teachers was typical in her comments about her changed practice in relation to children's voice. Noting that she had always considered herself to be an advocate of children's voice, she commented that

until doing this [P4wC], really taking a step back... I wasn't giving them enough credit for the sort of stuff that they could pull out of nowhere and the quality of their vocabulary and their consideration of others in discussion and their debating skills, and I could go on. There's genuinely such a positive impact on all those skills and more, just because I shut up and took a step back. I can't believe it. It really has made a difference.

By reflecting on her practice, this teacher started to 'Build and foster positive relationships in the learning community which are respectful of individuals' (GTCS, 2021a: 4), and this, will, it is hoped, facilitate respect amongst the pupils, another element of LfS. This was seen by one teacher who spoke about one child for whom it was 'ground-breaking... because on a daily basis he goes round telling people what they think', while another noted that 'suddenly the children were all sitting round the table and this was quite civilised... and they were actually saying, well, I take your point'. The teacher described it 'as nothing short of revolutionary for that particular group'.

Oikonomidou *et al.* (2013) stress the importance of teacher learning transferring beyond the confines of the school. One of the teachers recognised that practising P4wC led to them

‘challenging our role as teachers’, while another saw this transfer of learning in the children, saying ‘even outwith the philosophy, if you’re doing something else; they’re thinking along those lines, that there’s an alternative, that it doesn’t have to be a foregone conclusion’. This search for alternatives is central not only to P4wC but to LfS, and that the teachers recognised this is important in developing LfS pedagogy.

Conclusion

As the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals are addressed, LfS has increased prominence in school curricula. To meet the requirements of the SDGs teachers need to engage with pedagogies that facilitate children’s learning in this area. Indeed, they have to ensure that their practice enables children ‘to form their own, well-founded views about how to live...to work out how to contribute to remaking the world in order to lead worthwhile lives now and in the future’ (Griffiths and Murray, 2017: 45). This chapter has proposed that P4wC is a pedagogy that supports LfS, and which could usefully and meaningfully be included in teacher education courses, including initial teacher education programs. In making this point, it has been important to show what the requirements are for teachers in advancing LfS. Teachers’ accounts of their experiences of learning to facilitate P4wC have demonstrated the impact the course had on their own learning, and that of children. They explain how P4wC opened their eyes to the assumptions and biases they had about learning, about specific pupils, and about their own practice. To support children’s critical thinking, it could be argued that teachers themselves need to be critical thinkers. If the learning from P4wC bled into the children’s lives outwith the school, as the teachers suggested, and as Oikonomidou, *et al.* (2013) hope, then P4wC and LfS are useful bedfellows in advancing teachers’ thinking and practice in this area.

References

- Andersson, K. Jagers, S.C., Lindskog, A. and Martinsson, J. (2013) Learning for the Future? Effects of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) on Teacher Education Students. *Sustainability***5**, pp.5135-5152.
- Bleazby, J. (2011) Overcoming Relativism and Absolutism: Dewey's Ideals of Truth and Meaning in Philosophy for Children. *Educational Philosophy and Theory***43**(5), pp.453-466.
- Brown, E.J. (2018) Practitioner Perspectives on Learning for Social Change Through Non-formal Global Citizenship Education. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice***13**(1), pp.81–97.
- Buchanan, J. (2012) Sustainability Education and Teacher Education: Finding a Natural Habitat? *Australian Journal of Environmental Education***28**(2), pp.108–124.
- Bürgener, L. and Barth, M. (2018) Sustainability Competencies in Teacher Education: Making Teacher Education Count in Everyday School Practice. *Journal of Cleaner Production***174**, pp.821-826.
- Cassidy, C. (forthcoming) Philosophy with Children as and for Moral Education. In In F.F. Figueiredo and D. Mendonça, (Eds.) *Conceptions of Childhood and Moral Education in Philosophy for Children*. Springer.
- Cassidy, C., Bruner, R. and Webster, E. (2014). Teaching Human Rights? 'All Hell Will Break Loose!' *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice***9**(1), pp.19-33.
- Clarke, D.A.G. and Mcphie, J. (2016) From Places to Paths: Learning for Sustainability, Teacher Education and a Philosophy of Becoming. *Environmental Education Research***22**(7), pp.1002-1024.

Chetty, D. and Suissa, J. (2017) 'No Go Areas': Racism and Discomfort in the Community of Inquiry. In M.R. Gregory, J. Haynes and K.Murris, (Eds.) *The Routledge International Handbook of Philosophy for Children*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Evans, N(S)., Stevenson, R.B., Lasen, M., Ferreira, J-A. and Davis, J. (2017) Approaches to Embedding Sustainability in Teacher Education: A Synthesis of the Literature. *Teaching and Teacher Education***63**, pp.405-417.

General Teaching Council for Scotland. (2012) *Standards for Registration*. Edinburgh:

General Teaching Council for Scotland. <http://www.gtcs.org.uk/professional-standards/professional-standards.aspx>

General Teaching Council for Scotland. (2021a) *The Standard for Full Registration*.

Edinburgh: General Teaching Council for Scotland.

<http://www.gtcs.org.uk/web/FILES/Professional-Standards-2021/2021-Standard-for-Full-Registration.pdf>

General Teaching Council for Scotland. (2021b) *The Standard for Provisional Registration*.

Edinburgh: General Teaching Council for Scotland.

Green, M. and Somerville, M. (2015) Sustainability Education: Researching Practice in Primary Schools. *Environmental Education Research***21**(6), pp.832-845.

Griffiths, M. and Murray, R. (2017) Love and Social Justice in Learning for Sustainability.

*Ethics and Education***12**(1), pp.39-50.

Hunter, S. and Cassidy, C. (2019) Teachers and Learning for Sustainability: Rights,

Democracy and Social Justice. *Scottish Educational Review***51**(1), pp.7-16.

Jerome, L., Liddel, A. and Young, H. (2021) Talking About Rights Without Talking About Rights: On the Absence of Knowledge in Classroom Discussions. *Human Rights Education Review***4**(1), pp.8-26.

Jónsdóttir, Á. (2015) Teaching and Learning for Sustainability: An Icelandic Practice-based Research. *International Journal of Education Through Art***11**(3), pp.391-406.

Lipman, M. (2003) *Thinking in Education (2nd edition)*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Lipman, M., Sharop, A.M. and Oscanyan, F.S. (1980) *Philosophy in the Classroom (2nd edition)*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

McCall, C.C. (2009) *Transforming Thinking. Philosophical Inquiry in the Primary and Secondary Classroom*. London: Routledge.

Murris, K. (2000) Can Children do Philosophy? *Journal of Philosophy of Education***34**(2), pp.261-279.

Noddings, N. (1988) An Ethics of Caring and its Implications for Instructional Arrangements. *American Journal of Education***96**(2), pp.215-230.

Nussbaum, M. (1996) Compassion: The Basic Social Emotion. *Social Philosophy and Policy***13**(1), pp.27-58.

Oikonomidou, E.M., Brock, C.H., Obenchain, K.M. and Pennington, J.L. (2013). Demos as an Explanatory Lens in Teacher Educators' Elusive Search for Social Justice. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice***8**(3), pp.231–241.

Sharp, A.M. (1984) Philosophical Teaching as Moral Education. *Journal of Moral Education***13**(1), pp.3-8.

Reichert, F. (2016) Learning for Active Citizenship: Are Australian Youths Discovering Democracy at School? *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice***11**(2), pp.130–144.

Sandri, O.J. (2013) Threshold Concepts, Systems and Learning for Sustainability. *Environmental Education Research***19**(6), pp.810-822.

Sharp, A.M. (1987) Pedagogical Practice and Philosophy: The Case of Ethical Inquiry. *Analytic Teaching***7**(2), pp.4-7.

Struthers, A.E.C. (2015) Human Rights Education: Educating About, Through and For Human Rights. *The International Journal of Human Rights***19**(1), pp.53-73.

Thurston, L.P. and Yelich Biniecki, S.M. (2017) A Co-created Journey: Designing a College-Wide Graduate Certificate Program in Social Justice Education. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice***12**(3), pp.252–263.

Tomas, L., Girgenti, S. and Jackson, C. (2017) Pre-service Teachers' Attitudes Toward Education for Sustainability and its Relevance to Their Learning: Implications for Pedagogical Practice. *Environmental Education Research***23**(3), pp.324-347.

Torres-Harding, S., Baber, A., Hilvers, J., Hobbs, N. and Maly, M. (2018) Children as Agents of Social and Community Change: Enhancing Youth Empowerment Through Participation in a School-Based Social Activism Project. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice***13**(1), pp.3–18.

Toukan, E. (2018) Educating Citizens of 'the Global': Mapping Textual Constructs of UNESCO's Global Citizenship Education 2012–2015. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice***13**(1), pp.51–64.

UNESCO. (2007) *Philosophy. A School of Freedom*. Paris: UNESCO.

United Nations (2016) *Sustainable Development Goals*.

<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/> Accessed 19th

June 2021

United Nations (2018) *World Programme for Human Rights Education, Fourth Phase*.

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/Training/WPHRE/Fourthphase/Pages/FourthPhaseIndex.aspx> Accessed 19th June 2021

Zembylas, M. (2016) Foucault and Human Rights: Seeking the Renewal of Human Rights Education. *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 50(3), pp.384-397.

Biography

Claire Cassidy is a Reader in the School of Education at the University of Strathclyde, Scotland. Her research interests articulate around the themes of practical philosophy with children and young people, children's human rights and human rights education, and children and childhood. Claire is the course leader of the Postgraduate Certificate in Philosophy with Children at the University of Strathclyde. A former primary school teacher, she has practised practical philosophy with children, young people and adults for thirty years and has been training people in facilitation of practical philosophy for twenty. Claire also hosts the biennial Contemporary Childhood Conference.