

A conversation with Diane Swift ...



Photo: Chris Fournier - The Times of Malta

Diane Swift is currently a teacher educator and advisor with [Keele and North Staffordshire Teacher Education](#), a partnership of over 120 primary, middle, and special schools in Stoke and Staffordshire. She also works with the Primary Education team at the Open University and is a trainer with [Dialogue Works](#).

Diane has been involved with several Tide~ projects, not least [GeoVisions - create the future ... don't let it just happen](#). She chaired the group as it moved from being a Tide~ project to a GA [Geographical Association] strategy group.

We had a conversation with Diane about the education implications of climate change as she sees them. Here are some key points

We have listed links to some of the organisations mentioned. See page 18

Congratulations Diane on your recent PhD



Most climate change issues feature political division - what's your advice?

Engage learners with a variety of perspectives and so they develop the skills to assess the quality of the reasoning underpinning those perspectives.

In broad terms, how do you see the educational implications of climate change?

This goes back to basic questions ... such as "What do we see schools being for?" "What is special about what schools offer?"

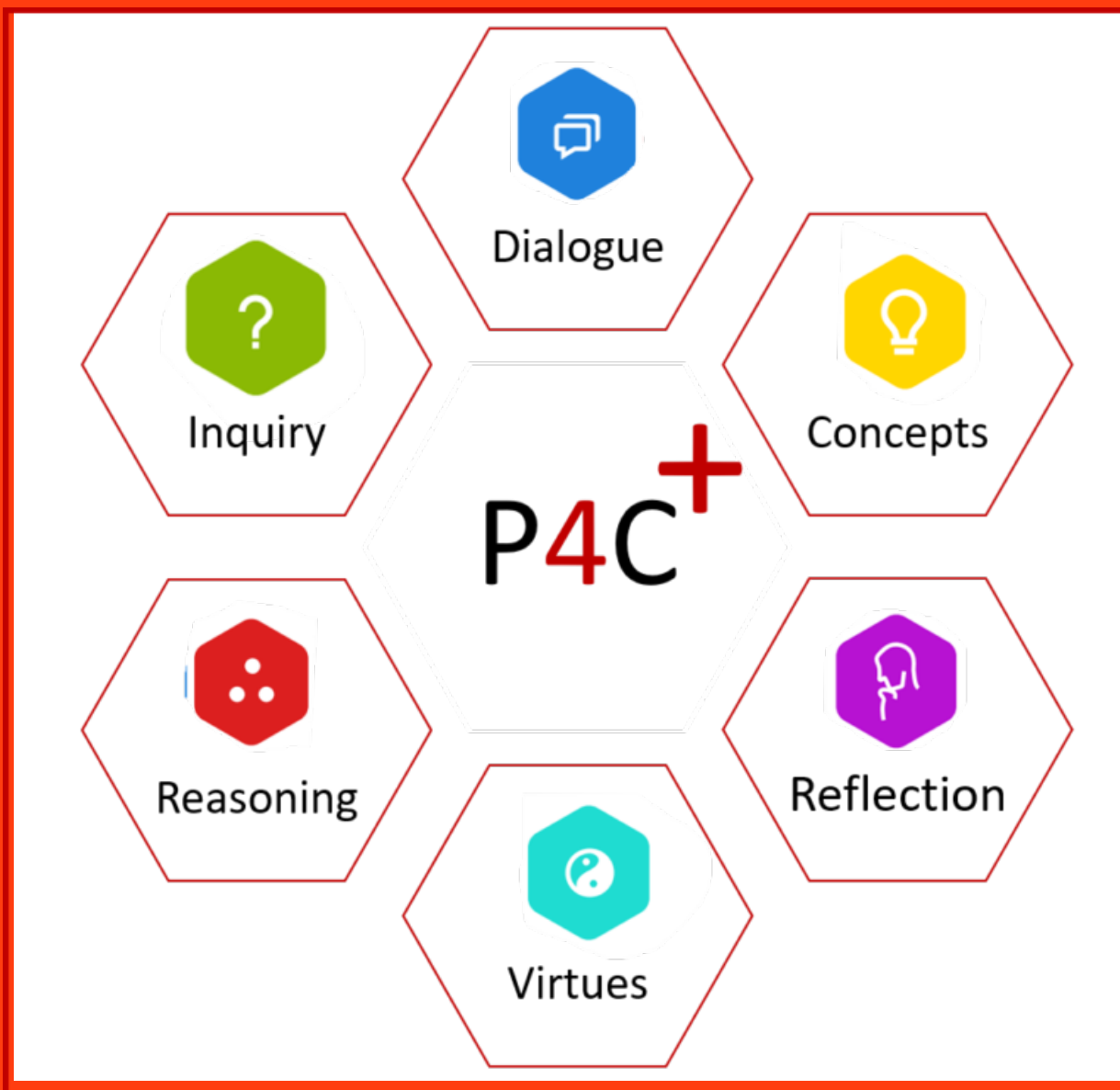
Schools can, and should, make young people's experiences educative, and for me that's about **critical engagement with information in ways that develop reasoning and judgement**. This should result in them being able to participate and have agency in society's 'Big Debates', one of which is the climate crisis.

The implications for my work as a teacher-educator revolves around **curriculum coherence and sequencing in relation to big societal ideas**. If teachers and learners only engage with disconnected elements, it results in an atomised and partial knowledge.



Coherence will enhance learners' reasoning and agency, and an appreciation of nuance and difference so they are able to build that more complex picture. However, **to do that teachers need support to design the curriculum - and not simply to design lessons**.

Dialogue Works ~ six-strand framework of philosophical teaching and learning
extend P4C Plus into a pedagogy which works across the entire curriculum.



Philosophy for Children [P4C]

Tide~ is highlighting dialogue skills. Can you highlight what you see as good practice?

In a number of projects we have used **Philosophy for Children [P4C]** as both a dialogic and a pedagogic approach. The interrelated concepts of caring thinking, critical thinking, creative thinking, and collaborative thinking “hold each other to account”. This helps mitigate against, say, being too collaborative in one’s approach or displaying an “anything goes” attitude.

Through the identification of the Big Ideas or concepts in a key or philosophical question, learners can relate their knowledge and experience to those Big Ideas, and in that collaborative space develop new understandings.

Teachers need the time and space to consider and be explicit about the dilemmas involved and about their education ethos, for example about the role of the teacher. What is key is relational thinking. Thinking in relation to people, other information, other subjects, other places. How does that relational thinking become a resource for the teacher’s and the learners’ own learning and agency?

It is worth considering the difference between dialogic and didactic practices, and how genuinely the teacher **embraces co-construction and being genuinely surprised by learners’ responses**, as opposed to “listening out” for **particular responses** that the teacher wishes to emphasise. In P4C one doesn’t look for a single solution or agreement, but the shared thinking and discussion becomes a resource for all.

There will always be an asymmetry in the relationship between teacher and learner which needs to be acknowledged and I, for one, am comfortable with that, because that is part of what makes schools special. However, the nature of that asymmetry will be different in a dialogic classroom compared to that in a didactic classroom.

It is important that we do not shy away from disciplinary knowledge because there are myths about the very **dangerous misconception that by employing a dialogic pedagogy one is not engaging with a knowledge-rich curriculum.**

A list of key organisations from our discussion

Philosophy for Children [p4c]

p4c process – stimulus – generate questions – vote on questions re. most productive (so modelling democracy as part of the process) – establish ground rules - exercise speaking and listening protocols – concluding stage (e.g. reflect on learners' first thoughts re. different opinion, understanding, contentment).

Dialogue Works

Offers “Thinking Works” as an A to Z framework for making thinking explicit – Thinking Ahead, Thinking Back, Thinking Connect, Thinking Divide ... – allowing a shared language that will facilitate dialogue.

School 21 is a pioneering 4 to 18 school in Stratford, East London, for children from all backgrounds. It operates with the conviction that schools need to ensure a focus on Head (academic success), Heart (character and well-being) and Hand (generating ideas, problem solving, making a difference), and is committed to empowering young people to take on the world, and to the development of innovative practices to change the shape of education in the UK.

Voice 21

Aims to ensure every child in the UK receives high-quality oracy education. [See ET article by Tim Boyes](#)

Rethinking Education

Specialises in three areas, delivering a range of online, remote and face-to-face training programmes for teachers, school leaders and support staff.

Ministry of Eco-Education

See articles on pages 25 and 29.

A collaboration of teachers working together to place sustainability at the heart of education.

Cambridge Educational Dialogue Research

Based at the Faculty of Education, Cambridge, CEDiR has four inter-connected research strands - Dialogue, professional change and leadership; Cultural, religious and philosophical traditions in educational dialogue; Digital technology and dialogue; Classroom dialogue.

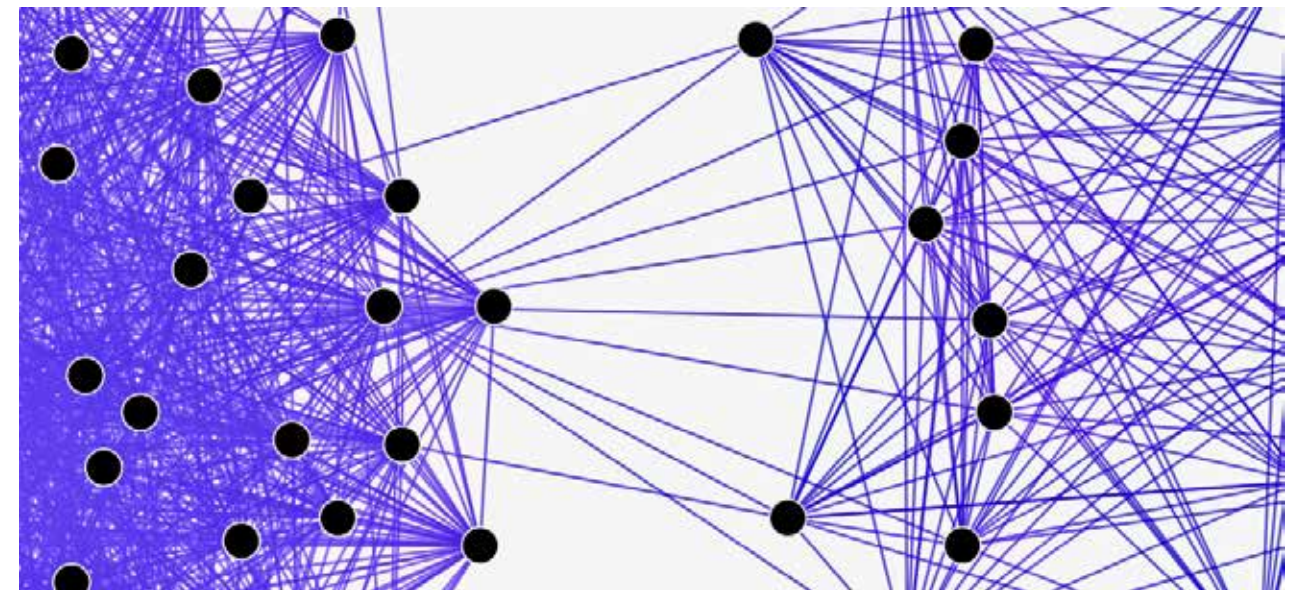
Big Education

A multi-academy trust of schools that believe that the UK curriculum is narrow, outdated, and over-indexed on academics. It argues that “another way is not only possible, but essential”.

When we identify the key concepts underlying, for instance, climate change or sustainability, upon which to base the enquiry, we will find out what learners know. In the process we will identify misconceptions, and gain insight about learner motivation to know and understand more.

Learners are stimulated to seek out and evaluate information, becoming more informed and better prepared to engage in agency, should they wish. This is one way that schools are special places in that they have the subject, knowledge-based organisation that goes well with a dialogic pedagogy.

This allows learners to approach, say, climate change, through different disciplinary lenses and, assuming the sequencing and coherence is correct, **artists, musicians and linguists will have a valued role to play alongside scientists and geographers.**



It is essential that the school works as a community to ensure that the curriculum is coherent and to identify which Big Ideas are to be addressed, allowing learners to engage with different subject disciplines in a structured and reasoned manner. Learners need to employ the different subject lenses to develop their knowledge and understanding.

Underpinning this is dialogue between teachers, departments, and schools **if teachers are to have agency in curriculum development.**