
Types of Activities in the personal-social curriculum

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In this paper I aim to raise issues concerning two areas which are important to the delivery of personal-social curricula - choice of "locations" and choice of "activities".

I use the word "curriculum" to signify in a general sense the learning offer which a school sets out to create rather than to signify the particular timetable, subjects, syllabus etc. Thus "personal-social curriculum" refers to the learning offer which deliberately focuses on the pupil's learning about self rather than the particular way of delivering this offer (e.g. through tutorials, subject lessons etc.).

Why adopt this broad starting point? Because a focus on merely tutorial programmes, for example, is unlikely to be productive in the medium and long term. In the medium term the positive effects from tutorial programmes are unlikely to arise easily without complementary learnings in other places and without a complementary climate elsewhere in the school day. (HMI have remarked how peculiar it is that some schools expect to "do" personal and social development in twenty minutes a day). And in the long term a narrow focus could serve to maintain the marginalisation of pastoral care, by separating off a small personal-social curriculum and thereby stifling the pastoral voice on the whole curriculum.

The first issue, therefore, is how to *locate* the curriculum, in other words to decide at what times, in what contexts, and with which teaching teams may these various learnings best be encouraged.

Possible locations for the personal-social curriculum

- tutorial programmes
- specialist guidance lessons
- subject lessons (some, specified/all)
- extra-timetable activities
- residential experience, work experience
- para-curriculum of classroom and school
- links to community

Each single location has its advantages but it is necessary to work towards use of all the possible locations in a planned and coordinated way. For any of the following:

Areas of the personal-social curriculum

- bodily self
- sexual self
- social self
- vocational self
- moral/political self
- self as a learner
- self in the organisation

It is proper to ask which aspect of these themes should be raised in which locations. The question is occasionally asked about sex education or study skills. It is unlikely that there will be one answer which works for all schools, staffs, neighbourhoods, ages of pupils, etc. But what considerations could be entertained when making a decision? With notable exceptions (Marland 1981, Bulman 1984, CCC 1984) the literature of pastoral care offers little guidance.

Considerations when distributing the personal-social curriculum across the possible locations:

(1) *concerning the aims:*

- do some aims require pupil-centred teaching and knowledge?
- do some aims address general issues across the whole curriculum, which may not be addressed in the various parts?
- do some aims focus on general issues emanating from membership of the organisation, not from content of curriculum?
- do some aims require the teacher to have cross-curricular and/or familial knowledge of the pupil?
- what is the context to which learning is intended to transfer? - is the learning location sufficiently close to aid transfer?

are the aims for all pupils?

(2) *concerning the locations and the teacher team which are associated:*

do some locations require particular skills not demanded elsewhere?

what teaching and learning styles are employed in the various locations?

what knowledge of the pupils do the teachers in the locations have?

are different resources available in each?

how do pupils perceive the credibility of the locations?

(3) *concerning the school's development*

what is the present degree of curricular integration?

how developed is the tutor role, skills, knowledge?

how developed are the roles, skills in other teams?

how shared are pastoral aims among teacher teams?

how are resources (including time) presently distributed?

where is there room to change?

what is the history of this type of work and innovations concerning it?

Answers under (1) may lead us to an ideal design: answers under (2) sometimes lead to identification of INSET needs: answers under (3) sometimes lead to policy change.

Implications so far?

On some occasions there is insufficient attention paid to what each location offers. This is especially true of tutorial time in some of the debates about PSE as a timetabled subject or cluster of subjects. There also exists insufficient recognition that some aspects of the personal-social curriculum need to be built on pastoral casework done by the tutor. This is because some learning needs to be handled in a pupil-centred fashion which is cumulative and which engages cross-curricular and familial knowledge. Further attention needs to be given to the mechanisms through which the locations and the teacher teams are coordinated: whole-school mechanisms which relate the work of all teams are needed.

In a somewhat parallel way there is insufficient attention paid to what particular *activities* offer and

how they may be coordinated. This brings me to the second section of this paper.

Issues in choice of activities:

Although not all the locations discussed above are characterised by the use of what can be called activity methods of the style now to be considered, many are, and the planned use of activities deserves attention. Some present practice contains grandiose statements of aims, and there are exaggerated expectations for what is achievable by single activities. As tutorial and other programmes develop and tutors in school extend their expertise in writing their own activities, there will no doubt be a more differentiated use of activities for realistically achievable ends.

What follows is an attempt to draw together a variety of threads and models and to make some general remarks about activities. I hope it will serve as a contribution to extended effective use of activity-based methods in the personal-social curriculum (and elsewhere?).

The list should not be taken as a set of rigid categories: it will soon be obvious that examples can overlap the types described. Nor should this classification be viewed as exhaustive: there will hopefully be new methods which develop.

Although the examples given here are presented in written form this should not be taken to imply that they can only be presented in written form to pupils. Indeed I would hope that many other modes will be used, not only because pupils have a variety of preferred modes, but also because the personal-social curriculum should not become "death by 1,000 worksheets"!

All the examples given here are of course partial and serve only to illustrate one or two points.

I have chosen not to give lengthy descriptions of each type of activity, but instead have chosen to make remarks under headings which are often omitted. These are:

Aim - the point of this is not to commit ourselves to narrow objectives we feel controlled by, but to help clarify our own thinking of what we can and hope to achieve (and thus the rationale we give)

This links to:

The Pupil's Question we hope to address - this is included in order to remind us that the personal-social curriculum will be pupil-centred, and that if we cannot stimulate or connect with pupils' agendas our activities can fall flat.

Pitfalls in Use - this is not meant to put newcomers off! Rather it aims to identify some relatively minor but important reasons for activities going wrong, when aim and choice were sound.

Transfer of Learning - this element is crucial for activities not to be mere time-fillers. It generally needs a specific focus of attention with pupils. Here I remark on types, and on what may encourage transfer.

One last point: activities rarely generate lasting and transferrable learnings on their own -
DISCUSSION OF THE PROCESSES IS VITAL TO ALL ACTIVITY METHODS. I have focused on this elsewhere (Watkins 1981).

A. CASE STUDIES

Aim: to initiate consideration of an issue and start raising awareness of aspects, but in a non-threatening way through use of a hypothetical third person.

Pupil's question: What's going on in this story?

Pitfalls: the case study is written in a way which allows little alternative interpretation; the issue is not one pupils are concerned about

Transfer: little is aimed for all this stage, but use of new concepts may transfer especially if survey/investigation tasks are set up.

Example:

About two months ago Sandra started going to the youth centre near where she lives. She soon joined up with a couple of girls she knew at school, and really began to enjoy some of the activities and spending time talking with people. Sandra's parents didn't like it when she also went to the Friday disco until 11. After a short while some of the boys a few years older than Sandra started to take an extra interest in her and she felt a bit uncomfortable about this. One month ago one of their friends left the area and the other decided to give youth centre a miss for a while.

That week Sandra didn't go, and the next week some relatives came to visit so her parents asked her to stay in. Now it's got to the point that Sandra feels out of the habit of attending, can't quite make up her mind if she wants to return, and feels fed up about the friends and the older boys.

"Maybe" thinks Sandra "it's best to stay in - at least I won't get disappointed again".

What's the most important part of this story?

Who's most responsible for how Sandra feels?

B. SELF ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS

Aim: to record, structure and elaborate the pupil's already existing self-knowledge, to encourage self-monitoring, and to lead to the possibility of goal-setting rather than self-labelling.

Pupil's question: What do I know about myself and?

Pitfalls: threatening items which lead to defensive responding, loaded items which hide moral judgements and which lead to responses chosen for social desirability, categorising people ("the sort of person who ..."), lack of good introduction including rationale.

Transfer: unclear except where new concepts have been learned or where effective goal-setting has been achieved.

Example:

"Communicating with others around us"

What's the point of this? - to look at the different things we communicate with different people, and to spot some where we'd like to be a little better.

Write in each of the columns those topics you feel OK about communicating with the people listed, and then the topics you'd like to communicate better with them.

| | OK | better |
|-----------------------------|----|--------|
| Mum/Dad/adult you live with | | |
| Sisters and brothers | | |
| Friends at school | | |
| Teachers | | |
| Adults in shops | | |
| (add your own) | | |

Now look back at the things you wanted to improve. Which do you believe will be hardest and which will be easiest?

Write down two of the easiest things you'd like to improve, and something you could try out to make the improvement.

We'll go on to explore this in more detail next time.

C. DECISION-MAKING EXERCISES

Aim: to give practice in recognizing need for decisions, analyzing alternatives, and choosing strategies to try out.

Pupil's question: What would I do if?

Pitfalls: can be over-used, and are sometimes "loaded" to suggest one method of making decisions or one "correct" decision: must incorporate situations which feel real to pupils.

Transfer: can be quite direct, depending very much on whether pupils are given responsibility to make real decisions elsewhere, and whether the discussion following the exercise has led to effective goal-setting.

Example:

You're trying to find a good space to do your homework.

At home there's space in the front room but your Dad will be watching TV. There's space in the living room but your two younger sisters usually play in there.

Your parents tell you to take it upstairs to your bedroom but that's cold and feels lonely. Your teachers tell you to find somewhere warm, quiet, and comfortable, but nowhere seems to be like that.

What will you do?

Write three possible decisions here:

Now explain them to your neighbour and compare your strategies.

D. GAMES

Aim: to set up a pattern of transactions which will develop identified skills of thinking and behaving, analyzed from the needs of a real situation.

Pupil's question: Can I "play at" a new strategy on this issue (in safety)?

Pitfalls: forgetting that the most important part is discussion; designing a game where the "hidden curriculum" undoes the aims (e.g. when progress depends on the throw of a dice, i.e. luck rather than skill); making one person's winning dependent on another's losing.

Transfer: short term transfer is unlikely other than towards the other players; long term transfer depends on the quality of the discussion.

Example:

(to focus on non-verbal signals, and to act as a "warm-up" exercise)

Groups of about ten sit in a circle and cards bearing the numbers 1 to 10 are distributed so that

only each player knows their number. A volunteer in the centre of the circle chooses and announces two numbers: these players have to make contact with each other non-verbally without letting the centre person know. After a couple of minutes the leader will say "change", at which point the two have to change seats, but if the person in the centre has identified either of them s/he will try to get to one of the seats first! (With small groups shuffle the numbers after a few rounds)

E. ROLE-PLAY

Aim: to increase understanding of a critical episode of interaction, especially the various perspectives of different actors (via role-reversal), and to practise a way of handling the interaction.

Pupils' question: how shall I think about and behave in this situation?

Pitfalls: allowing enactment to go on too long, dry up, degenerate into stereotype: discussion not focusing on processes and ability to see others' perspectives: giving too much/too little information for role-enactment to take off. *Transfer:* behavioural learnings can transfer, depending on how closely the interaction is replicated next time, and how well practised the new strategy is.

Example:

Person A. You are late to school for the third time this week - you are just finding it difficult to wake and you've slept through the alarms and your family calling you. Your tutor said yesterday that there would be trouble if it happened again. You quite like your tutor, but don't quite know how to approach this situation.

Person B. You are A's tutor and have recently had to issue two warnings for lateness. You can't see there is much reason for the lateness and it is not A's usual behaviour. You quite like A but are starting to feel that you are being taken for a ride, and this could make you feel angry.

Roleplay for three minutes

Notice how A and B handle the situation and the point it reaches.

Reverse roles and play the same situation for three minutes.

Look for similarities and differences in what happened.

What would you now do if you were A and if you were B?

F. SIMULATION

Aim: to represent a particular new social situation so that the rules of the situation can be learned in a safe way and to practice a way of handling the situation.

Pupil's question: how does this situation work (for me)?

Pitfalls: choosing a situation which is not important, real, and challenging to pupils; not spending enough time in discussion to extract principles etc.

Transfer: behavioural learnings may be reasonably likely to transfer to the real situation, especially if the conceptual learning has been good, and possible variants in the situation have been anticipated.

Example:

In groups of five pupils examine a set of job advertisements which have been collected from the local newspaper. They each then write a letter to the employer of their choice, responding to the advert. Now the five pupils simulate a team at the personnel office of each of the employers to whom letters have been written. On each occasion they share any knowledge they have of the firm and the job and then respond to each of the letters, finally making a group decision whether or not to interview the letter-writer. Pupils try to extract any principles which apply to the judgement of letters and look for similarities and differences across the employers/jobs. They then make any modifications they choose to the letters they have written.

G. MODELLING

Aim: to provide a credible and live example of someone coping with a difficult situation, especially when it is necessary to introduce a new strategy to pupils.

Pupil's question: can someone like me handle this well?

Pitfalls: attempting to create teacher's ideal or exemplary performance rather than something credible to pupils; expecting one model to work for more than a subgroup of pupils.

Transfer: can be reasonably direct: the most effective models are same age and sex as learner, are seen as similar by learner, are seen to be competent and are rewarded for their competence, and whose performance feels matchable to learners.

Example:

Any situation which has been or can be role-played provides a possible example. The difference is that when using modelling exercises, members of a small group first choose one of their members who they feel will handle the situation well. Following this person's role-play other members of the small group enact the situation adopting any of the model's strategies they feel are effective.

Now that these various activities have been described, what follows?

I hope it is clear that *different types address different aims*. Thus it follows that we should avoid using one type for a major proportion of the time, and that a balance should be struck.

I also hope that a *progression* of activities can be envisaged. When planning activities across a string of sessions (say for a four week-module of the tutorial programme) it might be possible to order activities in a manner similar to that here, i.e. moving from the introductory, self-assessment and goal-setting to the more applied and transferable types later.

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