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**SYMPOSIUM**

# Personal–social education: beyond the National Curriculum

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*ABSTRACT The impact of the first ten years of the National Curriculum in England and Wales upon personal–social education (PSE) is analysed. It is proposed that many indirect processes have led to PSE having a lesser place in schools. The analysis offers some broad pointers for improvement. A conception of improved PSE for 21st-century schools is identified.*

## **Introduction**

The title of this article may be discussed in three ways. First, personal–social education (PSE) is in one sense clearly beyond the present National Curriculum since it was not included in the founding legislation of 1988. Second, schools have moved beyond the first stages of impact of the legislation which included the National Curriculum, so what has been the impact on PSE? Third, if there is a National Curriculum beyond the present one, what could be the vision for an updated PSE? The first sense will not be addressed here, since a historical account is already available (Watkins, 1995).

Any attempt to analyse the impact of National Curriculum on PSE faces a number of difficulties. First, there is little evidence in this area. PSE has been low down the research priorities as well as low down politicians' priorities. Second, most studies on the impact of the introduction of the National Curriculum have focused on primary schools, and on the earlier years; there has hardly been an illuminative study of secondary schooling since the 1970s. Third, the impact of a national intervention will be different in different localities; even two schools on the same road may display different impacts.

Notwithstanding the above difficulties, it is important to attempt some form of analysis, in order to inform any proposals for improvement, and at a minimum to maintain attention on an area presently capable of being forgotten. In the 1990s it has become increasingly possible for schools and teachers to lose their collective memories of curricular provision which gave significant priority to the personal–social dimensions.

The 1988 legislation is certainly an important focus for analysis, in that its effects were likely to be more system-wide than any other education legislation since

the war. It was said that the Secretary of State for Education took more powers unto himself in that legislation than had been taken in the preceding 40 years. The first version of the National Curriculum cost half a billion pounds. This was an attempt to change the nature of the education system, and ten years later there seems to be evidence that it worked. But how?

Rather than assume that any noticeable changes in PSE since 1988 could be attributed to the existence of a National Curriculum, it is important to ask the question: 'If there has been any impact, how did the effect happen?' This necessitates the recognition that in a complex education system the mere passing of legislation does not necessarily lead to changes in practice. Centre-periphery change is more difficult than that, and needs the change to be mediated and interpreted by key players at every stage. Front-line professionals do not simply 'adopt' legislated change in some uniform or unquestioning manner. Even authors from the New Right (Marsland & Seaton, 1993) recognise that legislation is not simply implemented, although they adopt a simple conspiracy theory to explain why not.

This analysis proposes that since the three National Curricula were introduced into the schools of England, Wales and Northern Ireland in 1988, the personal-social aspects of curriculum have taken a lesser place in school life. But it also proposes that this has occurred not because of identifiable features of the National Curriculum itself, but because of contingent processes set off by other elements of the legislation, of which the National Curriculum was a fairly small part. What are termed the effects of the National Curriculum are sometimes the effects of other changes, mediated through a range of people's responses to change. In such cases, the National Curriculum is not the culprit! For example, it is often said that the National Curriculum has led to a more subject-dominated timetable in the secondary school. Yet there were explicit features of the 1988 Act (section 4, para. 3) which stated that the Act could not drive the timing or timetable of the school. So how did the effect happen? It was effected through media simplifications, the interpretation and advice of local authorities, and the decisions of individual teachers in schools. They did not make use of the flexibility which this section of the Act seemed to offer. But to explain this, reasons have to be sought elsewhere than in the National Curriculum itself.

### **Progressive impacts for a non-progressive effect**

Evidence suggests that the majority of teachers in 1991 broadly welcomed the idea of a National Curriculum as a statement of entitlement for children's learning (Pollard *et al.*, 1994; Cox & Sanders, 1994). A significant minority spoke of positive effects of the introduction of 'programmes of study' in terms of having structure and guidelines for their work (Pollard *et al.*, 1994). At the early stages, too, some analysts suggested that the non-statutory guidelines included statements in support of interactive teaching methods: in 1991, they found evidence in one school that teachers shifted or intended to shift in this direction (Kyriacou & Wilkins, 1993). However, at that time the teachers were concerned that national tests might make it difficult to sustain their approach.

Since the 1988 Act defined the National Curriculum in terms of subjects with attainment targets, programmes of study and assessment arrangements, it was soon clear that it was not about a broad entitlement. The subject folders followed and the ensuing circulars focused on the testing arrangements. Teachers experienced the National Assessment System as increasing their administration and increasing their workloads (Campbell & Neill, 1994). By 1992, the introduction of SATs in secondary-school English was associated with evidence of abandoning interactive teaching methods and teaching the standard texts (Cooper & Davies, 1993).

However, the introduction of national testing alone is an insufficient explanation for schools narrowing their curriculum and teaching to the test. The key element of the 1988 legislation which explains the overall changes is to be found in the element which was so positively titled 'Local Management of Schools'. Here the notion of 'open' rather than LEA-controlled enrolment in schools was introduced, under the rhetoric of increased parental choice and other aspects of marketisation. Here too was the key extra element: league tables of schools' performance, for which it was necessary to distort the original purposes of the national assessment scheme (Black, 1995). This element created the necessary climate for the overall impact of the testing regime, and explains how legislated changes have been mediated by the schools. League tables have made the difference between a shared approach to assessment and what is now euphemistically called 'high stakes testing', where the view that much hinges on the outcome from assessment creates a climate of increased fear. Survival of schools and of teachers is at stake.

Evidence of the impact of the 1988 legislation has focused on many aspects, which may be seen in this light as being connected.

Teaching methods have changed. The possibility of straitjacketing had been seen at an early stage: the proportion who felt that the National Curriculum restricted the capacity to adapt teaching to children's needs rose from 17% in 1990 to 51% in 1992 (Pollard *et al.*, 1994). By 1995, evidence in primary schools suggested there was more silent working and whole-class teaching, less listening to children reading, and less teacher intervention and support (Clarke, 1996). There was also more teaching to the test (ATL, 1996).

The view of the curriculum has changed. Subject categorisation has become stronger at all levels, even in Year 1 which teachers described by 1990 as being more like junior school. By 1991, there had been a move away from topic work in primary schools (Cox & Sanders, 1994). Within subjects there has been a prioritising of the core subjects of English, maths and science. This reflects public rhetoric about 'basics' in education, from the New Right and New Labour alike. In 1993, when teacher overload was recognised and the Dearing review relaxed the assessment demands, the core became more pronounced. The message was 'more of the same, but less of it'. Similarly, in the 1998 relaxation of inspection demands to support the New Labour focus on literacy and numeracy, the arts and humanities were the obvious casualties.

Teachers' roles have changed. By 1992, teachers saw more administration, more priorities imposed from outside, and increased stress and anxiety. They

predicted that more of this would happen and that there would be less personal fulfilment in the job (Pollard *et al.*, 1994). Head teachers' roles, too, have changed. They not only work more hours (School Teachers' Pay Review Body, 1994), but work more on finance, buildings, cleaning contracts, and fund-raising, and less on educational and curriculum leadership (Evetts, 1994). Their working culture with colleagues has changed (Webb, 1994). Teachers' morale has changed. In 1992, 50% of infant teachers felt that their strengths had been eroded by the National Curriculum (Pollard *et al.*, 1994).

There have been negative and divisive effects on children. There is evidence of pupil distress in the primary school (Clarke, 1996), and of new pressures in the secondary school (Rudduck & Harris, 1993) leading to less enjoyment of learning. Teachers have reported more adverse effects than benefits on the teaching of slower-learning children (Cox & Sanders, 1994). There has been evidence of the 'raising of standards' for those achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A to C being associated with the falling of standards for those at the 'bottom' end of the range (Bell, 1995).

In ten years, through these changes, the legislation which included the National Curriculum has had an effect on the psychological climate of schools, the view of schools as organisations, and the view of teachers' roles. It is these which in turn mediate the impact on provision for personal-social development, of pupils and of teachers.

The psychological climate of many schools is now more akin to frightened organisations. In such organisations, people work hard, try many initiatives and have many meetings, but do not really take a risk because of the pervasive climate of fear. In our schools, the current fear is of being punished in public. As a result, non-learning protectionism has grown up.

The way in which the school as an organisation is viewed has noticeably shifted. Morgan's (1986) major review shows there are many metaphors available in making sense of organisations. Of these, the mechanical way of thinking is only one, but it may be ingrained in everyday conceptions of organisation and order. It has certainly become prevalent in the pronouncements of policy-makers and their related agencies. The idea that 'line-management' will improve schooling is prevalent, despite it being an outdated concept stemming from the 1920s; target-setting is used as a ubiquitous device for change, despite what is known about how human systems subvert imposed targets; a reductionist version of competences is used to describe the performance of teachers, despite the latter's complex professional nature. The machine view is particularly inappropriate in this post-industrial era: it omits the contextual, developmental, cultural and learning aspects of the organisation. It also influences teachers' self-perceptions: they now express their development and training needs in narrower mechanical ways (Bottery & Wright, 1996). Following the 1992 Act, OFSTED inspections imposed on the education system a closed quality-control system rather than a professional quality-assurance system. Prevalent public views of teachers are less that they are competent, trusted and fairly autonomous professionals, and more that they are semi-professionals who may not be doing a good job.

TABLE 1. Conceptions of learning and of teaching (from Biggs &amp; Moore, 1993)

Conceptions of learning	Conceptions of teaching
1. <i>Quantitative</i> concerned with 'how much', essential facts/skills	<i>Transmission of knowledge</i> communicate the knowledge (from an external source) fluently
2. <i>Institutional</i> concerned with knowledge which may be validated by institutions	<i>Efficient orchestration of teaching skills</i> focus on own techniques, management (teachers plan in terms of their activities)
3. <i>Qualitative</i> active construction of meaning and interpretation	<i>Facilitation of learning</i> get students engaged in appropriate learning activities (what the student does most determines learning)

Schools now have a performance orientation rather than a learning orientation. This distinction was first proposed by Dweck (1986) when examining the motivational style of individual learners. But the contexts in which learning happens may also display and consequently promote these differences. The 'learning orientation' is characterised by a belief that effort leads to success and in one's ability to improve and learn. There is a preference for challenging tasks, and satisfaction is derived from one's personal view of success at difficult tasks. The 'performance orientation', by contrast, is characterised by a belief that ability leads to success, and an associated concern to be judged as able, and especially to perform well in the eyes of significant others. Satisfaction is gained from doing better than others or succeeding with little effort, and there is an emphasis on interpersonal competition, normative standards, public evaluation. When it comes to learning, the difference is crucial: faced with difficult tasks, the person with a learning orientation engages in problem-solving and self-instructions—they talk themselves through the difficulty—whereas the person with performance orientation evaluates themselves negatively and shows helplessness—'I can't do it'.

This links to prevalent conceptions of teaching. These are characterised by the phrase 'delivering the curriculum', with echoes of the security vans delivering the assessment tests. Biggs & Moore (1993) identified three conceptions of learning and their related conceptions of teaching (Table 1). School and classroom practice is made up of a balance of these three, but since 1988 the quantitative view has taken a stronger position in the balance. The machine view of organisations has also permeated the curriculum: schools have 'schemes of work' which in some cases are detailed to the level of timed lesson plans for the whole year. The idea that learning is linear and predictable is embedded in such an approach.

### Effects on the personal-social curriculum

I take PSE to mean the intentional promotion of the personal and social development of pupils through the whole curriculum and the whole school experience. This

clearly includes the timetabled courses labelled as personal and social education, but also recognises the broader importance of the whole-school context.

The first effect of the National Curriculum has been at the broad level, where teachers have re-prioritised their educational aims. For the range of reasons analysed above, the National Curriculum priorities squeeze out the personal-social: 'It is particularly striking that by 1992, almost one third of teachers mentioned no non-academic priorities (30% in 1992 compared with 18% in 1990)' (Pollard *et al.*, 1994, p. 107).

The second effect comes from the strengthening of subject categorisation and the concomitant reduction in cross-subject communication. This has had an adverse effect both on the co-ordination of learning across subjects, and on the co-ordination of personal-social matters in learning. Some research suggests that there is increased collegiality between teachers, especially in the primary school, but this is more a de-privatisation of teachers' practice, and any increases in co-ordination have been mechanical rather than professional in nature. They have been the co-ordination of teachers' plans in relation to National Curriculum categories, rather than concerned with broader goals and professional exchange. For these reasons, attempts to promote whole-school approaches to PSE (Watkins, 1992) have not met with great success, since they depended on a degree of in-school co-ordination which has not generally materialised. So any increased sense of accountability towards colleagues and headteacher remains fragmented and individualised rather than collaborative.

The non-statutory guidance (National Curriculum Council, 1990) and its successors suffered a similar fate. The original 'cross-curricular' themes, dimensions and skills (analysed elsewhere: Watkins, 1995) had little impact on school practice because of the climate in which they were sown. A national survey (Whitty *et al.*, 1994) suggested that only 11% of schools had adopted these themes. It also showed that in management terms the five different themes were handled in different ways by schools (Whitty & Rowe, 1993). Those with a history and tradition, such as careers education and health education, were often found in a timetabled PSE course. Environmental education was shared out between geography and science; education for industrial understanding was the most widely 'permeated' through a number of subjects; while citizenship was hard to find at all. This study was important because the survey results were followed up by observation and interview: here evidence for the themes being addressed through subjects was weak and the authors concluded that the idea this was adequate was a pretence. Evidence also emerged that even the well-supported themes were suffering a setback (Institute of Careers Guidance *et al.*, 1993, p. 84; Health Education Authority, 1993). Perhaps schools were reflecting the same low priority as the central government: in 1989, advised by civil servants, the Minister wrote a letter to the Chairman and Chief Executive of the National Curriculum Council telling the Council to abandon work on 'the whole curriculum' (Graham & Tytler, 1993, p. 20).

Local mediators and interpreters of central messages were reduced as support to teachers on PSE was reduced. The number of LEA advisers for PSE fell as LMS reduced funds in LEAs. Fewer support and training courses in PSE were to be

found: attendance at courses run by professional associations in the field dropped significantly. Award-bearing courses at Diploma and Master's level in PSE have now closed. And at the initial training level, a recent survey showed that the combined constraints of time and DfEE regulations led to less time being spent on such areas than was felt appropriate (Cleave *et al.*, 1997). The indirect support from publishers of PSE materials also diminished, as many of them turned their attentions to label everything in terms of the National Curriculum.

The overall picture has been that the personal-social curriculum now takes a limited place in the overall curriculum. In secondary schools, the most common form is the timetabled PSE course, and this is more regularly under question in schools given the present climate. An embattled and fragmented feeling about PSE is not uncommon. This picture should not necessarily be a surprise: if PSE was in some sense person-centred, the National Curriculum would likely leave it in a less healthy state. Teachers who adopted child-centred approaches recognised that they had the most to lose (Pollard *et al.*, 1994).

Within such provision, the style also reflects the climate. It is broadly teacher dominated, so that when teachers are asked to talk about pupils' development needs, they tend to talk about teachers' provision. The content all too often reflects adults' anxieties, current moral panics, or the latest set of resources from an interest group: this is reflected in what I call 'the sex and drugs and litter curriculum'. The exception has been the development of some peer-counselling provision (Cowie, 1995; Cowie & Sharp, 1992). Despite the liveliness and impact of these initiatives, they are often vulnerable, especially if dependent on the enthusiasm of a few staff.

The impact of OFSTED on PSE might have been balanced, highlighting both good and bad practice. But the inspection framework used SMSC, an acronym introduced by the then Minister John Patten to placate some of the religious enthusiasts of the New Right. It is deeply unmemorable—spiritual, moral, social and cultural. Papers from OFSTED and conferences of academics have discussed the terms ever since, but the extent to which it has entered the parlance of teachers is limited. The vagueness of terms had the effect of obfuscating attention on PSE. This is shown, for example, in the review of issues arising from inspections in 1994/95, where PSE is referred to in a single sentence: 'Cross-curricular elements such as information technology and PSE are less well co-ordinated' (Office for Standards in Education, 1996, p. 30). Most recently, the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority constituted a 'Values Forum' which produced further vague statements, which it then attempted to link to SMSC and to PSE. The rushed outcome from a weekend consultation was yet another empty matrix to circulate to schools, with the by now very low credibility which such exercises are afforded.

The most recent review confirms the picture: 'Cross-curricular issues and personal and social development do not have coherence of purpose or a high profile in the curriculum at the present time, despite schools' abiding interest in these matters. The requirements of the National Curriculum, assessment pressures and accountability weaken the place of cross-curricular issues' (Ford *et al.*, 1998, p. 77).



**Beyond this sorry state?**

From many perspectives, the present state is a sorry one. Achievement is not rising for the very groups who need it most; pupils' legal entitlement and personal-social needs are not being met; the curriculum offers poor preparation for real life, even poorer for the future.

The evidence that standards have been falling for pupils who are not within the GCSE range is very worrying. These are the same pupils who are most likely to become long-term unemployed, with its negative impacts all round. This shows the divisive impact of standardisation. The focus on external assessment also reduces those forms of classroom assessment which can lead to higher gains in achievement for all pupils, and to less polarisation between pupils (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Outside the classroom, the healthy personal-social climate in a school which contributes to academic performance as well as personal-social development is under strain. Outside the school, young people are not benefiting from school-community connections.

The evidence also shows that, in legislative terms, the picture does not satisfy Section 1 of the 1988 Act. This stated that pupils are to be offered 'a balanced and broadly-based curriculum which: (a) promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society; and (b) prepares such pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life'. Although Kenneth Baker protested that he listened carefully to the Confederation of British Industry in the construction of the National Curriculum (Baker, 1997), he did not seem to hear them when they stated that subject-based study does not suit school-leavers well (CBI, 1989, para, 57). The use of the arbitrary categorisation called 'school subjects', whose justification had been that of reflecting long-standing bodies of knowledge and modes of generating knowledge, was exploded by the construction of the National Curriculum, where selectively appointed groups of people decided what each subject comprised.

The evidence also means that the benefits which PSE aims to provide are less likely to be found. In specific health areas, there is evidence that PSE can be effective. For example, Balding & Bish (1992) reported that they had 'unearthed a number of results which seem to indicate that drinking rates are lower in schools where alcohol education is delivered through PSE' (p. 34); while Eiser *et al.* (1988) reported that smoking rates were significantly lower where the school gave a relatively high profile to social/health education as a firm, separate and important curriculum area (p. 24). The changes towards 'delivery' teaching methods reduce effectiveness in these areas. Drug prevention education in schools can be ineffective or counterproductive if it is only information-based, but shows most promise if programmes help adolescents to identify and resist specific pressures (Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, 1993; Dorn & Murji, 1992). In broader careers areas, the need for provision is borne out by research: 'There is compelling evidence from our research that many young people and their parents are at sea with respect to what needs to be done to ensure their futures. The essential antidote is to give career and personal counselling a much higher status ... in the jobs of teaching and

training' (Banks *et al.*, 1992, p. 188). Students leaving school recognise this: they see employers as most highly valuing personal skills, and they value these skills themselves, but they do not consider they are gaining them at school. They see employers as valuing teamwork skills, but do not rate highly the advancement of such skills within schools (CBI, 1992).

What is noticeable about the current shortcomings of school and of PSE is that they reflect a common theme—lack of connectedness. For schools to be optimally effective, they require a connected rather than a fragmented view of schooling goals and processes. This is what has been damaged at all levels in the last decade. Not only do schools currently have a curriculum which could be a good one for the 1950s, but they also have goals and practices to match.

The ensuing decades demand something better. Young people are growing into a world where they will need to forge an identity in ways which earlier generations may not understand. They need to be prepared to learn about the unknown rather than the known, and to create an identity in a more fragmented world. Yet just at the time when the need is clear, a range of pressures seems to have led schools to downgrade their role in identity development for young people.

### Conceptualising the personal–social curriculum

It is important to ensure that conceptions of the personal–social curriculum keep up with the changes in our world. The following broad metaphors, developed from Schlechty (1990), may illuminate influences which have existed, and some trends which need to be addressed:

- *Community curriculum.* This derives from a focus on the school promoting morality and civic good, a feature since schools were invented. It may still be seen in some approaches to 'citizenship' and in programmes for learning through service in the community. More recently its focus has incorporated the community inside the school walls, so that learning about membership in groups is included.
- *Factory curriculum.* From influences since the 1920s, schools may have a focus on economic purposes, on producing and consuming. The personal–social curriculum may aim to identify 'key skills' which are important for employability, and perhaps a focus on economic and industrial understanding. There may also be a focus on selection, and on assessment through such devices as tests in life skills.
- *Hospital curriculum.* Post-war intentions of schools reducing the divisive impact of industrial society can be seen in a focus on pupils 'at risk', the 'needs' of children, and so on. Preventive and compensatory approaches to life and social skills for health and many other areas would reflect these intentions, and would emphasise the identification of children's needs;
- *Knowledge–work curriculum.* Current and future changes in our world are helping us to see that the knowledge base in society doubles every four years, and that school knowledge forms a much smaller proportion of the knowledge required

to compose and manage a life. Thus, the personal–social curriculum focuses on learning to be a learner in a knowledge–work world, processing and forming one’s own knowledge. This is a key personal–social domain, as it relates to so many aspects of self and relations with others. Knowledge of oneself as a learner include how one’s learning relates to purposes, strategy, effects, feelings, and context (Watkins *et al.*, 1998). Being an effective learner demands action learning, co-operative learning, and responsibility in learning (Watkins *et al.*, 1996).

The message of the factory age was that working hard in school subjects would lead to success afterwards. It is more appropriate to the information age that schools should encourage all learners to ‘work smart’. Such learning is likely to be trans-disciplinary. Indeed, Reich (1991) has argued that global marketisation will increasingly demand four key human skills that drive high-value enterprises. These are the skills of ‘symbolic analysis’:

- abstraction—the capacity to order and make meaning of the massive flow of information, to shape raw data into workable patterns;
- system thinking—the capacity to see the parts in relation to the whole, to see why problems arise;
- experimental enquiry—the capacity to set up procedures to test and evaluate alternative ideas;
- collaboration—the capacity to engage in active communication and dialogue to get a variety of perspectives and to create consensus when that is necessary.

The social aspects will demand further development if forecasts of more fragmented social relations are correct. PSE would need to include:

- practising co-operation and connectedness;
- coping with the negative aspects of fragmentation;
- coping with and embracing personal change and uncertainty;
- choosing the option which enhances complexity (Watkins, 1996).

In this way, the role of schools changes from focusing on privileged content knowledge in a linear fashion, and applying it from school to elsewhere, to a role of adding variation and complexity to learners’ repertoire, with an additional element of developing reflexivity—the ability to see how self and context interact. This change is supported by a clear focus on the future.

### **Is there a future beyond the present National Curriculum?**

An optimistic view might suggest that schools are now raising their heads after the pressure of legislation, performance tables and targets. Many more are beginning to adopt an explicit focus on learning, which integrates their concern for academic performance with their concern for wider personal–social development. They have realised that a focus on performance can depress performance, whereas a focus on learning can enhance performance. This informs their approach to various school

practices, and they have interpreted student review and target-setting as empowering processes which focus on personal goals, self-assessment, and so on. In this way, they go beyond the mechanical interpretation with its messages of control and compliance. The optimistic view suggests that schools can learn to re-capture the control they have not generally used, and can generate creative approaches for achieving both National Curriculum goals and wider ones. Their PSE provision could still be whole-school (Watkins, 1998) and would be likely to include a focus on learning, identification of student needs, and peer provision.

A pessimistic view might suggest that the public/political climate and pressures will not change, because the macro influences which create them will not reverse. National governments clearly have less and less impact on international economics and the global fortunes of a nation, so they become even more controlling over domestic matters. The management of public services in Western economies will continue to treat education in a mechanical fashion, with its associated approaches to accountability. This will lead to an increasingly narrow role for school, for teaching, and for teachers. In this view, PSE withers even further. Increasing numbers of schools remove PSE courses from the timetable, or only keep them in some reduced form in order to comply with statutory requirements in religious education and careers education.

Given the analysis above, significant change in the fortunes of PSE would depend on a change in the overall climate which is influencing schools—for example, through modifying the current approach to performance tables, and allowing a more creative freedom in managing the education system. This would require politicians to relax their present controls: a line of action which they seem unlikely to adopt. In the communication age, politicians stay in position by focusing on popularity rather than policy, and will continue to advance populist views on such matters as education. There will be continuing tension with professional views.

While it is not yet clear whether the optimistic or pessimistic view will prevail, it is possible to draw out some lessons for the present context. Any initiative to improve PSE which does not take account of the context will fail. For example, a broad-ranging review of the curriculum has been initiated (School Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 1997). Although the New Labour focus on literacy and numeracy could eclipse such a review, it has stimulated numerous interest groups to make submissions, including those representing areas of PSE: health education, careers, citizenship, emotional education, and so on. Any submissions which do not explicitly address the climate which has led to the decline of PSE are likely to be impotent, more so if they only mount arguments which could have been mounted in the 1970s. The issue of performance tables is crucial, but must be handled without appearing to downgrade achievement. Any attempt to promote a co-ordinated approach to personal-social themes will fail if it does not address the co-ordination of the subjects (Boersma & Hooghoff, 1993). For this reason it is especially important that separate pressure groups act together—something they have been poor at in the past. Strategically, the above analysis would also advise against attempts to use the very ingredients which have led to the problem, such as the OFSTED inspection framework or the system of national assessment. Despite

there being recent examples of non-statutory assessment in PSE (Higher Still Development Unit, 1997), such strategies are likely to support the increased divisiveness and greater inequality which has grown up during the 1980s and 1990s. What is needed is some special resourcing for disadvantaged groups in the context of improved PSE and a modular curriculum for 21st-century schools.

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