

**Institution: University of Sussex**

**Unit of Assessment: UoA 32 Philosophy**

**Title of case study:** Using philosophical research to improve teaching and learning in schools

### 1. Summary of the impact

This case study focuses upon the translation of academic research into the improved school teaching of philosophy. Since 2003, the Department has run an annual one-day national conference, free of charge, alternating between sixth-form teachers and pupils. The impact of these has been:

- to enhance teachers' understanding of the relevant philosophical issues, and thereby to pass on this understanding to students;
- to facilitate the production of teaching materials and other classroom resources; and
- to provide a model for at least one other similar sort of conference.

### 2. Underpinning research

The underpinning research for this study is selected by its relevance to A-Level and International Baccalaureate (IB) curricula and, as such, is thematically diverse, focusing on, political philosophy, Plato, and philosophy of mind. The strategy of the Department is to ensure that research relates to teaching interests in a way that is accessible and not too esoteric. Research which underpinned the 2012 conference for teachers is described here.

- Deligiorgi's *Kant and the Culture of Enlightenment* defends a Kantian conception of freedom of speech. In her 2012 talk, 'Autonomy and the "permanent interests of man": Kant vs Mill', she focused on freedom of expression in order to relate to the curriculum material on toleration. She explored justification for ethical questions and, in particular, Mill's use of the idea of the permanent interests of man, and Kant's notion of autonomy [see Section 3, R1].
- Morris's 'Akrasia in the Protagoras and the Republic' interprets Plato as making a decisive move in the overall argument of the *Republic* (a set text for both A-level and the IB). The move in question is achieved by the argument in *Republic IV* in which Plato distinguishes between three parts of the soul, to correspond to the three classes of the city he has already identified. This argument clearly conflicts with an argument to be found in the *Protagoras*, whose purpose is to show that akrasia is impossible. The aim of his 2012 talk 'Plato and Akrasia' was to use an analysis of the *Protagoras* argument to raise focused questions about the interpretation of the *Republic* argument [R2].
- In 'There is no viable notion of narrow content', Sawyer argues that a false equation is often made, both in the philosophical literature and in the Philosophy A-level curriculum, between two distinct positions in the philosophy of mind: materialism and physicalism. She elucidated this point in her talk 'How to be a materialist without being a physicalist', [R3].

### 3. References to the research

- R1** Deligiorgi, K. (2005) *Kant and the Culture of Enlightenment*. New York: SUNY Press, Ch. 2.
- R2** Morris, M. (2006) 'Akrasia in the "Protagoras" and the "Republic"', *Phronesis*, 51(3): 195–229.

R3 Sawyer, S. (2007) 'There is no viable notion of narrow content', in McLaughlin, B. and Cohen, J. (eds) *Contemporary Debates in the Philosophy of Mind*. London: Blackwell, 21–34.

#### 4. Details of the impact

- ***Building relationships with schools to improve teaching and learning***

Since 2003, we have alternated biannually between holding conferences for Philosophy teachers and for sixth-form Philosophy and Religious Studies students. Conferences held for students attract on average 50 to each event; those for teachers attract on average 15–25 from both East Sussex and further afield, with over 50 teachers attending in the period.

In the design of the conferences, the Department liaised closely with local schools Varndean College, Brighton Hove and Sussex Sixth Form College, and Sussex Downs, canvassing their teachers' views on the right time of year for the conference, the best format and what material would be the most useful. It also sought extensive feedback from all conference participants. Evidence of good relationships with local schools includes the fact that teachers from these schools have been registrants every year that the conference has run. In addition, teachers from each of these schools have pursued a postgraduate qualification in Philosophy at Sussex.

Focussing on 2012, 25 teachers attended from a range of types of school: independent fee-paying (for instance, Bedales; Christ's Hospital; the Norwich School), grammar (for instance, Barton Court; Sutton Grammar School; The Judd School, Kent; Tiffin School, Kingston); and further education colleges (for instance, City and Islington College; Shooter's Hill post-16 campus). It also included schools and colleges in a Widening Participation relationship with Sussex University (Bexhill College; City and Islington Sixth Form; Greenford High School, Ealing; The Regis School, Bognor Regis; Sir George Monoux College, Walthamstow; Varndean College, Brighton). As well as from all over Sussex, participants came from London, Norwich, Hampshire, and the Isle of Wight.

Impact has accrued in the REF period from each of the events we have held from 2008–2013. Evaluation of the events was formalised in 2012, and so below we use resources from that process to illustrate the sorts of effect that come from our work throughout the REF period.

- ***Enhancing understanding***

Feedback taken after the 2012 conference demonstrates the extent to which participants found their understanding of curricula-related material enhanced. To the question 'What did you find the most useful about the conference today?' there was acknowledgement of the extent to which the talks had increased comprehension, in answers such as

- '...the challenge to my own conceptions about materialism and physicalism' [see Section 5, C1];
- 'The Philosophy of Mind and Political Philosophy were particularly useful' [C1];
- 'The mind–body talk on Physicalism and Materialism will be essential to my teaching of the life-after-death topic, and it corrects my major misconception of materialism' [C1];
- 'Consideration of the anti-individualism/individualism distinction in relation to the claim (e.g. Searle's) that non-reductive monist theories need not entail property dualism [C1];
- 'Philosophy of mind – a deeper analysis of token identity theory and also other property dualist views than just the very basic, broad argument' [C1].

- ***Inspiring the production of new teaching materials***

**Impact case study (REF3b)**

Feedback also showed that the papers would make a difference to the future production of teaching resources:

- 'I will use the definitions of materialism and physicalism given to help show a distinction between views' [C1];
  - 'Lectures 4 and 5 (for example) would make an ideal pairing for two consecutive lessons on "autonomy". Lecture 1 would make a strong introductory lesson to complex distinctions in the Philosophy of Mind' [C1];
  - 'The Mill, Berlin and Plato arguments/insights can all be shared with my students';
  - 'The handouts from Prof Morris's talk we can use in Unit 4 in conjunction with the webcast of the talk' [C1];
  - 'I will use Sarah Sawyer's tree diagram in teaching the philosophy of mind and her lecture about non-reductive materialism in relation to mental causation' [C1];
  - 'Will use a version of the diagram presented to help explain to students the various positions on mind/brain debate' [C1];
  - 'I look forward to using the handouts provided by Prof. Morris next spring term ... when teaching Book IV' [C2];
  - 'The... lectures on ... free speech will be incorporated into my Oxbridge (PPE) teaching in September. The lecture on the Philosophy of Mind will find a place in the middle of that course, once the Upper Six are a little more confident' [C3];
  - 'Just to say that I will definitely be using Sarah Sawyer's structure of the theories of the philosophy of mind directly in my teaching as an overview of how the theories fit together, and that her discussion on non-reductive monism was very useful' [C3].
- ***Providing a model for similar events in other departments***

In 2012, a member of the Philosophy Department in Sheffield, contacted Kathleen Stock to ask for detailed information about the conferences run at Sussex. Since then, they have run a one-day conference for teachers with an identical format to the Sussex one, including a roundtable discussion at the end.

<http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/philosophy/events/teachersconference>

Personal correspondence from contact at Sheffield attests to the influence [C5].

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

- C1** Feedback questionnaires from conference (available for inspection upon request).
- C2** Letter from teacher at Sutton Grammar School, to Kathleen Stock, Head of Department (13 June 2012).
- C3** Email from teacher at Norwich School, to Kathleen Stock (16 June 2012).
- C4** Email from teacher at Shooters Hill Post-16 Campus, to Kathleen Stock (19 June 2012).
- C5** Email from contact at University of Sheffield (27 June 2013).