

# P4C in Action

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## Abstract

**Introduction and aim:** Worldwide, P4C stands for “Philosophy for Children” but it can also mean “Philosophy for Colleges” and “Philosophy for Communities”. The aim of P4C is to make more of a virtue of reasonableness, both within the educational system and within society at large. This method was introduced by Professor M. Lipman in order to encourage young people (citizens) to be more reasonable – that is ready to reason and be reasoned with. The main emphasis of the method is on the importance of questioning or enquiry in the development of reasoning. The P4C approach is very adaptable, it is easily used in adult groups as well as in schools, for recreational and educational purposes, it covers learners of all ages and all levels of language skills.

**Research methodology:** The research methodology includes the following methods: experiment, participant and non-participant observation, Delphi.

**Results and implications:** Learners develop their vocabulary, therefore they feel more confident while discussing this or that issue. This is where their description of an event or a place turns into a discussion, when they start to solve problems, express their feelings, share opinions, approve or disapprove of different ideas, agree or disagree with their opponents, etc. In other words, they start using the functions of the language they will need in future:

**Conclusion:** The main emphasis of the given method is on the importance of questioning or enquiry in the development of reasoning. It focuses on the acquisition of thinking and learning skills and requires educators to promote the development of spoken language and social development.

**Key words:** Philosophical enquiry, stimuli, reasoning, communities, questioning, logical thinking.

## 1. Matthew Lipman and Community of Inquiry

P4C for adults focuses heavily on the acquisition of thinking and learning skills and requires educators to promote the development of spoken language and social development.

The given presentation deals with the practical use of P4C. What exactly can we achieve by using this method? How effective is it? How does it serve the main purpose of education? These are the questions we will try to answer in our presentation.

Philosophy for Children (p4c) is a wonderful way of bringing teachers and children together to discuss things that matter. It has many benefits for both groups.

P4C stands for “Philosophy for Children” but it can also mean “Philosophy for Colleges” and “Philosophy for Communities”. It indicates that P4C is not only for children. The aim of P4C is to make more of a virtue of reasonableness, both within the educational system and within society at large. This method was invented by

Professor M. Lipman, who is one of the most important figures in the revival of grassroots philosophy outside of academia in the last 50 years. Although his work was entirely focused on 'philosophy for children', it has inspired others to work on Community Philosophy with adults. Lipman's work on philosophy beyond academia was prompted by the highly emotional and violent generational stand-off in 1960s America over the Vietnam War. Lipman felt, "that many Americans were having trouble presenting their views about the conflict cogently, and it distressed him".<sup>147</sup> Lipman, who was at that point a professor of philosophy at Columbia University, decided his society was sorely lacking in philosophical thinking skills, and that to teach these skills, one had to start with children. So he moved beyond the campus and, in the early 1970s, started to teach philosophy to children in the New Jersey public school system.

Philosophy for Children, or P4C, attempts to create a 'community of inquiry' in which children explore a philosophical question, guided by a teacher or facilitator.<sup>148</sup> They typically begin from a 'stimulus', which is often a philosophical story. The P4C approach is very adaptable – which is why it is easily used in adult groups as well as in schools, for recreational and educational purposes. The choice of the material is also flexible which, means that we don't have to use only the materials offered by M. Lipman himself. The material can be anything: a small paragraph, a story, a poem, a photograph, a drawing, a song, even a quotation, etc. The children are encouraged to participate, to give reasons for their moral positions, and to consider other children's view-points. The aim of the dialogue is not to indoctrinate specific values in children, "it is rather an open-ended, sustained consideration of the values, standards and practices by which we live, discussed openly and publicly so as to take all points of view all facts into account. It is the assumption of ethical inquiry that such discussion and reflection, taking place in an atmosphere of mutual trust, confidence and impartiality, can do more to foster moral responsibility and moral intelligence in children than any system which merely acquaints them with 'the rules' and then insists that they 'do their duty'".<sup>149</sup> The community, meanwhile, becomes 'converted' into a "reflective community" that thinks about the world "and about its thinking about the world".

The given presentation deals with the practical use of P4C. What exactly can we achieve by using this method? How effective is it? How does it serve the main purpose of education? These are the questions we will try to answer in our presentation.

### 1.1. Community Philosophy Aims:

- To support the practice of Community Philosophy through developing self-determining and self-sustaining democratic communities of philosophical enquiry and action.
- To help individuals and communities develop philosophical enquiry as a practical tool for engagement and action in community and cultural life.
- To promote the creative, collaborative and caring aspects of philosophical enquiry, whilst developing critical, independent and reflective thinking.
- To make philosophy an accessible, purposeful and pleasurable means to the promotion of personal and community well-being.

The P4C movement has started, over the last decade, to build up a body of research and evidence that suggests it improves children's cognitive ability, improves their academic performance, improves their communication skills and ability to manage their emotions, challenges their ideas and finds new ways of thinking; teaches about philosophy; finds answers to the big questions of life. The most important reason is that students get a chance to think intelligently about their beliefs and the beliefs of others. And there's a strong social motive: people want intelligent conversation because it's fun, and introduces them to new people.

Community Philosophy is theory in practice. It is conversational and yet emphasises thinking and inquiring; it is collaborative and enables a more reasonable analysis of controversial issues. Its democratic nature breaks the mould of representative and often adversarial politics. It offers a new paradigm of decision-making where each can represent their own views but within a culture where listening, questioning and changing one's mind is valued.

P4C for adults focuses heavily on the acquisition of thinking and learning skills and requires educators to promote the development of spoken language and social development. The six areas of learning within the curriculum identify early learning goals for students to achieve:

1. Maintains attention and concentrates.
2. Initiates new ideas and speaks in a familiar group.
3. Takes into account the ideas of others.
4. Uses talk to organize, sequence and clarify thinking, ideas, feelings and events, exploring the meanings of new words.
5. Asks questions about why things happen and how things work.
6. Expresses and communicates ideas, thoughts and feelings.

## **1.2. Philosophy as a teaching tool.**

The use of Philosophy as a teaching tool is an appropriate and effective way to help students achieve many of the Learning Goals. By adapting the approach, even the youngest pupils can begin to develop the skills needed to later take part in a 'traditional' community of enquiry. Students don't always conform to their level expectations and so it will be necessary for the group teacher to decide what the students' needs are and to apply the most appropriate strategies.

The given method covers learners of all ages and all levels of language skills. However, their needs change dramatically over this period. Some of them have never been away from their families before they start university education and find the social situation of being away from their home and with a large group of other students very difficult to handle. Some learners have very little active vocabulary and are learning the meaning of words for the first time. Some learners are quite proficient linguists and can recall past events, sequence their ideas and make simple hypotheses about what might happen in certain circumstances.

At first, the teacher should help learners to concentrate, keep the discussion open-ended with no one right answer and a lot of possibilities. They soon develop the confidence to talk about how they feel and can begin to relate their own experiences to that of others. The skills that are needed later for a community of enquiry can be gently fostered in this relaxed setting, e.g. asking if they can remember what another student said earlier, asking the original student to repeat it if they can't, there giving value to each learner's contribution.

Some students may concentrate on very simple, everyday things, others may focus on more 'philosophical' issues. The skill of the facilitator is not to expect specific answers but to help learners give their own ideas and respond to those of others.

Once given the opportunity to discuss ideas and listen to the views of others learners should be encouraged to ask questions. At first they will probably come up with statements and will need help to identify and use question words such as why, when and how. Explain that a question is something we want to know or find out and practice turning statements in questions. More proficient learners can be introduced to the idea that there are special kinds of questions called philosophical questions. Explain that these have no one correct answer but that we can all have an opinion as to the answer. Giving comparisons between different types of question may help e.g. a question with a right answer 'is Lucy a boy?', one where we can have an opinion – 'are there such things as ghosts?'

## **1.3. Discourse vocabulary**

There is a list of skills that need to be developed by learners and appropriate strategies through which they could be fostered:

- Listen to others
- Discussion
- Tell us what you think
- What did... say or think?
- Different or not the same wonder why
- Ideas
- Know, opinion
- Answer

- Think
- Question
- Agree, disagree
- Right, wrong
- True, not true
- Philosophical question

Once learners develop this vocabulary, they feel more confident while discussing this or that issue. This is where their description of an event or a place turns into a discussion, when they start to solve problems, express their feelings, share opinions, approve or disapprove of different ideas, agree or disagree with their opponents, etc. In other words, they start using the functions of the language they will need in future.

## **2. How P4C works.**

### **2.1. The structure of a Community of Enquiry**

Community of Enquiry has the following structure:

**Preparation** - The class, group or community should sit in a circle. The room should be large enough to arrange the chairs in a circle so that all the members of the 'community' can see each other and achieve eye contact with whoever is speaking. The group should also be able to hear each other clearly; therefore the acoustics of the environment need to be considered as well. The teacher should be part of the group and all participants should be views as equally important to the success of the "community".

**Presentation** (stimulus) - The stimulus at the start of an Enquiry is used to provide the community with a shred topic to consider and discuss, so that key concepts may be identified and questions generated. The stimulus could be a story read or told to the group, a picture book, a work of art, a poem, a piece of music, a video clip... in fact, almost anything that will stimulate thoughts or questions in the participants' minds.

**Thinking time** (private reflection) - Provide individuals within the group with the opportunity to privately reflect upon the shared stimulus, allowing sufficient time for them to investigate their thoughts about it. Pupils could be encouraged to think about their feelings regarding the stimulus, about things that interested them or confused them, or provoked a reaction within them. They may wish to record this reflection in the form of a cartoon, speech bubble, mind map, concept map, or simply by listing some key words.

**Conversation** (shared reflection) - This can involve individuals sharing their private reflections with the whole group or within smaller groups. They can do this by passing around their recorded reflection without discussion, or by presenting it to the large or small group and talking the others through their thinking. Alternatively, it could be a timed activity where each person is given the opportunity to speak for one minute while the rest of the group listens to them. This should be a voluntary activity and individuals should be given the opportunity to pass if they do not wish to contribute publicly.

**Formulation** (generating questions) - The group should be given sufficient time to think about the stimulus as individuals, pairs, or groups in order to raise questions, issues, problems or ideas stimulated by the story. The questions should be written up with the name of the author(s) next to it. The group should be able to see all the questions clearly so that they can consider each one as a possible subject for enquiry.

**Airing of the questions** - The questions may be reflected upon, discussed or critiqued before selection begins. Each group, pair or author could be invited to explain or clarify their question for a minute or so, followed by an opportunity for the rest of the community to ask for any queries they may have about the question to be explained. During the airing process, pupils may categorise types of question, identify issues or concepts involved within the question, and look for possible links between questions. Linking questions can help bring other ideas into the dialogue and also raises awareness of the range of ideas that have to be incorporated into a discussion.

**Selection** (voting for the question) - The group should vote for the question they would like to go forward to the discussion. This helps to give the 'community' a sense of democracy as well as allowing all contribution to be considered in a fair way. Many different types of voting systems can be used.

**First words** - The person or people who formulated the chosen question are invited to open the discussion by sharing their initial thoughts, ideas and opinions about it. They may also give a brief explanation of how or why that specific question was the one they formulated or decided upon, and describe the thinking behind this. Another possibility is for everyone to write a personal 'gut reaction' to the question, possibly comparing it at the end to a final sentence on how they would respond after the enquiry.

**Building** - The first words are followed by an invitation of responses from other members of the group. It is important that all participants are given the opportunity to express their opinions, feelings and views about the question or concept being discussed, and that each person must listen to others and consider their points of view and ideas respectfully. The teacher should refrain from giving an opinion, and their role should be that of a facilitator of the enquiry.

**Final words** - It is important that the groups is given time at the end of the discussion to reflect upon what has been said, what they have heard and upon their own thoughts, views and opinions about the question or issue that has been discussed. After a period of reflection each person should be allowed the opportunity to share their final thoughts about the question with the rest of the group, possibly writing a sentence to compare to that which they may have written in response to the question before the enquiry.

## **2.2. Role of the Facilitator**

The title 'facilitator' is used to try to differentiate the role from the traditional one of the teacher as the fount of knowledge. Although it will always be some part of a teacher's role to impart knowledge, it will increasingly be their responsibility to assist others in processing the information they receive. The role of 'facilitator' has the literal sense of easing others into appropriate practices such as questioning, reasoning, evaluating and generating alternative interpretations.

There is also the responsibility, especially with children, to guide the group towards better ways of thinking together. This may involve such interventions as calling for clarification of examples, or for reasons or conclusions etc. It may also, occasionally involve putting a question to the group that is designed to deepen or widen their thinking. It does not, however, give a facilitator license to push the enquiry into a particular direction just because it suits their own particular interest. Sometimes a problem arises in the discussion and here it is important to ask the group how best to overcome that problem, thus gradually moving them to self-facilitation.

## **2.3. Questioning techniques**

Talking about questions, we should encourage students to put all kinds of questions, not only closed and factual ones. As we know, there are different kinds of questions. We will mention just a few of them. Closed questions which have a clear and non-negotiable answer. Factual questions where the answers are contained in the stimulus itself, or they could be ones that the students could research or ask someone to explain, e.g. with questions about scientific or historical facts. The answer will definitely be factual. Open-ended questions are those for which various points of view or opinion can be presented and discussed. These questions are useful for working with in the enquiry and have the potential to lead on to philosophical discussion. Philosophical questions are those which explicitly raise awareness of a profound concept about which there is potential for enquiry. As the students become more familiar with the ideas used in philosophy sessions, they will be able to ask increasingly philosophical questions.

Despite this classification of questions, they are sometimes very difficult to classify as there is some overlap between the categories, and what category a question falls into may not always be clear-cut.

## 2.4. Voting

As for the voting, it is better to use one of the following simple procedures of voting in order to expose and resolve differences of interest.

- Omnivote (literally, 'vote for all'). Perhaps the most popular system. Participants can vote for any, or all, of the questions. The facilitator reads each question in turn and asks people to vote for it if they would be happy to discuss it.
- Multivote (literally, 'vote for more than one'). Perhaps second most popular. The facilitator normally specifies a number of votes – say, three or four – with participants allocating their votes between their favourite questions. It may be only one questions and participants are free to put all their votes on this particular question, or they can distribute their votes to different questions.
- '3/2/1' A special form of multivote which invites participants to decide on their (three) favourite questions, and rank them, giving one vote to their third favourite, two to their second, and three for their third.
- OPOV ('One Person, One Vote'). The 'traditional' system of voting. It is simple to administer, but often no single question emerges with enough votes to make it seem the 'obvious' choice.

For the most effective practice of P4C, facilitators need to distinguish between 'philosophical dialogue' and 'interesting chat'.

Philosophical dialogue (PD) differs from everyday discourse in at least two crucial ways. First of all, PD is hallmarked by a search for truth and understanding which may not feature in classroom chat. There's a sense of investigation at play; the search for refined, challenged, and extended views or concepts. Everyday discourse – talking about the pleasures of a holiday or the weather in Tibet, for example – does not necessarily include such a search.

Secondly, PD required a degree of structure and rigour to work well. A search for something is usually much more effective when it's organized. We can all wonder about things, but in PD this wonder needs to lead to some sort of progression. Different ideas can be aired and shared, but at some point participants need to engage with and develop them further.

After the philosophical dialogue, pupils should be able to reflect and identify an advance of some sort: a developed idea, a new question, another perspective, or simply an appreciation of complexity perhaps. It doesn't have to be an Earth shaking revelation, but it's important that progress is recognized in some way.

Philosophy for Children brings people together, gives them a chance to access practical, transformational philosophy, develop a thoughtful, purposeful voice, and take pleasure in these purposeful, collaborative activities.

Community Philosophy challenges critics who say philosophy is 'all talk and no action'. Indeed, it celebrates talking and thinking as forms of action, and 'looking before you leap'. Community Philosophy goes a step further by taking respect to a new level: the things participants say are both listened to and generate further questions: 'what might this mean in practice; what might we do?' Hence, the process necessarily involves enquiry into the possibility of social and community action, and is supportive of this action if it is chosen.

## Resources:

1. Steve Bramall [www.philosophyineducation.com](http://www.philosophyineducation.com) and Graeme Tiffany [www.graemetiffany.co.uk](http://www.graemetiffany.co.uk)
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4. Matthew Lipman & A.M Sharp, *Ethical Inquiry* (Montclair: Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children, 1985) introduction
5. SAPERE Level 1 Handbook, P4C Philosophy for Children/Communities, 2007