Philosophy for Children

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PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN

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. . . the mind is not a vessel that needs filling,
but wood that needs igniting.

Plutarch

Chapter overview

This chapter introduces the practice of philosophy for children. Although best practice requires undergoing professional development training, the chapter indicates how practitioners can develop techniques that are useful in the classroom. Some context is provided to understand the philosophy for children movement and from this it is emphasised that a practitioner's attitude is as important as their skill. Two case studies are provided from contrasting settings. One school in the east end of London begins philosophy for children from nursery age and sees it as vital in building a community and individual aspiration. The other school is in a rural, south of England setting and for them philosophy for children is at the heart of producing tomorrow's citizens. The chapter concludes with references and suggestions for further reading.

INTRODUCTION

During the course of her retirement year our sixth form Sociology teacher cleared out her stationery cupboard. One gift she gave me was an insubstantial book that she was turning out from her private collection. *Thinking to Some Purpose* by Susan L. Stebbing was a volume from the classic blue-covered Penguin range that covered archaeology, philosophy, politics, sociology, and the arts. The book was

not particularly startling, it does not feature on any modern-day reading list, but its influence on me was profound and its influence is to be found throughout this chapter. Professor Stebbing was concerned with what would now be called 'critical thinking skills'. These skills are promoted as forensic tools of the mind, allowing the thinker to discern assumptions, arguments and rhetorical sleights of hand embedded in texts and discourse. Applying the scalpel of critical thinking allows the thinker to cut through the unnecessary, the illustrative and the downright deceptive to get to the heart of the matter; a heart that some still refer to as 'truth'.

Why should a modern reader concern themselves with a 50-year old book filled with outdated examples, and what relevance does that have to educational practitioners facing the complexities of modern classrooms? The answer to that question derives from the key word 'purpose' in the book's title. This chapter will argue that (educational) thinking is always for some (educational) purpose and that we must be clear about our purposes and our values before we can successfully promote good thinking in others; including children, colleagues, parents and the wider community. There is an implication to this argument and it is that thinking skills are not worthwhile educational aims in themselves. To make this argument I shall describe, analyse and evaluate the practice of philosophy for and with children. Philosophy for children describes both a pedagogical technique and a pedagogical movement that began in the USA in the late 1960s. However, there is not one thing called philosophy for children, rather there is a range of practices that share what the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein called a 'family resemblance' in contrast to a tightly-agreed definition. By describing the historical and geographical growth of the movement this chapter will illustrate how philosophy for children can help practitioners develop their techniques for promoting good thinking and derive standards by which their practice may be evaluated.

Most, if not all, philosophers engaged with the various philosophy for children movements argue that it is impossible to develop your practice without significant investment in your professional development, specifically through philosophising with your peers in a structured programme. There are many such courses that facilitate and recognise your developing philosophy for children practice and these are signposted at the end of the chapter. This chapter is merely an invitation to dip your toes into the waters, and in doing so you will join a worldwide community of practice dedicated to helping children.

RESEARCH REVIEW: THE PURPOSE OF THINKING IN CLASSROOMS

How does philosophy for children help children become more active partners in the classroom? To answer that we must consider why we want children to think well and then we might think about how we can help children to think well. We can think of two categories of reasoning, that can help us make judgements. The first type of reasoning is intrinsic; by intrinsic I mean reasoning that is worthwhile for its own sake, because it is a good thing for a child or person to do, it is something that ideally we would wish everyone to do. The second type of reasoning is extrinsic; by extrinsic I mean that the value placed upon the thinking is judged by some standard outside of the thinker or the context of the thinking. An example of this is where

thinking is judged as worthwhile since it helps exam scores. Whilst acknowledging that teachers work in complicated, demanding and pragmatic circumstances, I agree with the philosopher Dewey that asking children to think better without good reasons for doing so is pointless. The ideal situation would be to engage in activity that has both benefits in the widest educational sense, and that is also a worthwhile activity in its own right. In this next section I describe how philosophy for children is one such activity. Before I go on to do this I will briefly justify why a purely instrumental attitude is not only wrong but harmful to children.

When instrumental thinking is wrong

In 1976 the then Prime Minister, James Callaghan, made his famous Ruskin College speech, where he challenged the teaching profession to give up its secret garden, a metaphor for the curriculum, and become more accountable to social and economic demands. Callaghan's demands were part of a wider movement known as neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is a movement that places its faith in the power of markets to determine good outcomes for individuals and consequently society. The rise of neoliberalism can be linked to a crisis of legitimacy in expertise and authority. In an era of increasing social liberty and cultural expression yet also of economic hardship and the breakdown of the post-war consensus, the appeal to the market offered certainty or at least solutions to otherwise seemingly intractable problems (Olssen, 2010).

The consequences of neoliberalism through education are both profound and long-lasting. The imposition of a national curriculum, the marketisation of school provision, and the involvement of the political class in not just the content of the curriculum but in the mechanisms of delivery have been well documented in education (Harris, 2007; Heilbronn, 2008; Green, 2010). Without going into the debate here, I would like to point out one effect of neoliberalism on the activity of children in the classroom. If the purposes of education are given to educators from outside of education there is a danger that all activity in the classroom becomes subordinated to ends the educators do not necessarily agree with. Colloquially this is known as teaching to the test and the effects of this teaching are felt not just in classrooms whose children are to be assessed in that year but in all classrooms throughout the school. There is a danger that thinking skills are seen merely as an end to improve performance; in other words in the production of children who can pass exams, thinking skills are a better type of machine. Yet focusing on outcomes, paradoxically can be counter-productive. There is a Zen koan which says 'the archer who aims at the prize will miss the target, whilst the archer who aims at the target will win the prize'. What this means for practice is that engaging in good educational activities will lead to good outcomes but focusing on good educational outcomes will not always lead to good educational activities.

This section has argued that thinking is not worthwhile for its own sake. What we should value are thinking persons; that is persons, and I explicitly include children in this category, with skills, dispositions and virtues who can think well to some clearly agreed purpose. Philosophy for Children (P4C) is a worthwhile practice when evaluated on the basis of the conventional educational goods it produces, such as reading scores, cognitive IQ tests, and interpersonal skills. Yet the next section

provides an account that values P4C for other, intrinsic, reasons. Value is placed on reasonableness, the quality and re-balancing of relationships, the communal commitment to inquiry, and the care shown by members of the community both in the pursuit of truth and meaning and to one another in the course of that pursuit. It values a different conception of children – as active participants in learning with a range and potential that can both surprise us and also educate us. P4C is a pedagogy that encourages us to become learners *with* children rather than leaders *of* them.

What type of thinking is P4C?

This section explores the thinking and attitude of Socrates, the Greek philosopher and gadfly who lived in the fifth century BCE. Understanding Socrates is relevant now because it is in Socrates that we find the virtues of questioning, enquiry, and active participation in the world through his search for deep meaning. It is often remarked that young children are full of questions, wondering about the world, and that they display a thirst for enquiry that becomes lost through schooling – something which is regretted by all. Philosophy for children is both a pedagogical technique and a wider pedagogical movement. At its heart is a desire to reclaim education for children, to make space for their thinking and enquiry, and to facilitate them being active participants in their own learning.

P4C began with a philosopher called Matthew Lipman. Lipman was a trained academic philosopher specialising in art and aesthetics who was greatly informed by the twentieth century philosopher John Dewey. In Lipman's biography he described the growing recognition of the need of his students to think critically about the current issues of the day – in the late 1960s in the US, those were Vietnam and civil rights issues (Lipman, 2008). Despite his students' training in academic philosophy they were unable to think critically about the issues facing them and were therefore unable to think well about how to act. At the same time, in a burst of inspiration, the first chapter of a children's philosophical novel was written by Lipman as he realised that philosophy had to start earlier rather than later in a child's schooling. It is from Socrates that Lipman derived his values of enquiry; it is from Dewey that Lipman derived his value of the importance of the community of enquiry.

It is vitally important to understand the significance of the community of enquiry in P4C practice. Unlike most models of thinking skills that treat the brain as a central processing unit and treat thinking solely as the property of individuals, P4C practitioners understand thinking as taking place in a community. It is by thinking together, exposing our thoughts and beliefs to one another, and having those thoughts and beliefs explored and sometimes challenged that we learn to think better together. Thinking together this way is not always easy and certainly takes time to build a community. It is also challenging for the classroom practitioner since their role changes from being the 'sage on the stage' to the 'guide on the side'. In other words, teachers move from being leaders of learning, or didactic experts telling children what meaning they need to understand, to being facilitators and co-enquirers. The skill lies in helping the growth of the community by modelling the type of thinking and language that is indicative of good thinking, and most importantly modelling the openness to changing one's mind in the face of good reasons that is the mark of philosophy.

The structure of P4C sessions

The first thing you may notice on entering a classroom being used for a P4C session would be the unconventional layout. Philosophy for children values the community and places great store on the individual accounting their knowledge and understanding to the community. Everyone in that community is of equal standing, including the teacher/facilitator, and it is for those reasons that a P4C enquiry is conducted in a circle. You would also notice the importance of questioning in the session, and the giving and receiving of reasons; it would also become apparent that members of the community both cared for one another, directly by attending to the person and indirectly by attending to what is being said.

It is not appropriate here to go into a lengthy description of the different stages in P4C enquiry. There are plenty of books already published, that are very well established and respected, that can give the interested, beginning practitioner a deeper insight (e.g. Fisher, 2003; Haynes, 2008; Lipman, 2003; McCall, 2009; Saran and Neisser, 2004). What I shall do here is describe what purposes may lie behind the facilitator's decisions as she guides the community in its progress towards mutually negotiated goals. Whereas an experienced classroom teacher can explain the underlying reasons justifying their actions, a novice practitioner is less able to do so without structured support to aid their reflections. Therefore it is important to have a general understanding of what a P4C facilitator is trying to achieve.

The first stage is to bring the community together with some type of activity or game whose purpose is to encourage group ethos and togetherness and possibly activate certain types of thinking. From there the facilitator may well introduce a thought-provoking or emotionally stimulating resource, for example a picture book, film, or activity. Initial responses will be aired and shared either to the community as a whole or in small pairs or groups, eventually leading to the formulation of questions. These questions are invitations or candidates offered to the whole group so that the group can focus their attention through choosing one question to pursue further. Once the question has been chosen the community pursues the question, trying to get at the underlying meaning or truth. Before the session concludes a facilitator will often choose to finish with a final round where everyone has a chance to offer their closing thoughts and hopefully indicate how they think they may have changed their position over the course of the enquiry.

Although this is an outline of how an enquiry may precede, P4C methodology is not rigid prescription. Facilitators are wise practitioners in the sense that Aristotle means when he talks of practitioners' 'practical wisdom'. Someone with practical wisdom is not just a technician or rule follower but someone who is able to judge what type of situation this is and how one ought to act in this situation. Thus the practically wise teacher may respond differently from a novice practitioner owing to the depth and profundity of their understanding. It is the case that a huge amount of variation might be found in the facilitation of an inquiry. It is for these reasons that I urge and reiterate my earlier point that the only way to develop genuine expertise in philosophy for children is to take part in P4C professional development courses. The following section explores certain techniques and practices that are worthwhile in their own right and which might contribute to practitioners' emerging understanding of P4C.

CASE STUDIES

These case studies present an illustration of how P4C is implemented by two schools in the south of England. This is not educational research and the interrogation of the data is neither rigorous nor systematic but is, I believe, a fair representation of the voices of children and staff during short visits to the schools. Sceptics might claim that the perceived benefits actually derive from good schooling and teaching in general rather than from P4C in particular. That claim could be explored empirically through educational research. Here, I make no claim to truth that is generalisable or universal. What I do is illustrate how the ideas about purposeful activity and active engagement from earlier in the chapter are promoted in these schools' use of P4C.

Case study I: Fordingbridge School

School context

According to OFSTED, Fordingbridge Junior School 'is a junior school of average size. Almost all pupils are from a White British background, with few from minority ethnic backgrounds or who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. While the proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average, the proportion who have a statement of educational needs is slightly above that seen nationally. There are currently more boys than girls in the school although this varies between year groups'.

Whilst OFSTED's description tells us very little of vital interest about Fordingbridge Junior, it is clear that P4C is integral to the purposes of the school. The school has a clear statement of its vision that derived from a communal consultation many years ago. The school's aspirations are supported by three strategies that act as effective means. The first strategy is a well-articulated set of key skills and values that allow children to understand their development as characters and citizens. The second strategy is the use of coaching across the school as a way of distributing authority and responsibility. The third strategy is the regular use of P4C in the classroom, during staff meetings, and its dissemination as a practice across the local school cluster. These three strategies are deeply integrated so that P4C sessions form the spine of strategic, medium-term and weekly planning.

Whilst being taken for a tour of the school I had the fortune to witness an episode that for me typifies the impact of P4C across the school. In a Year 6 class the children were completing a paired co-operative task as a numeracy warm-up. Matching equivalent measures such as 1.5 litres equalling 1500 millilitres, the children were reporting their results back to the class. The focus of the class teacher was not on the correctness of maths but on the underlying *reasons* and explanations for the match. The children displayed resilience as they were happy to accept challenges to their reasoning and emotionally lost no 'face' in such challenges. The focus was on gaining understanding in the sense of Dewey's 'warranted generalisation'. Furthermore, children displayed emotional resilience and maturity using phrases such as 'I struggled with . . .' yet showing a concern to understand rather than alleviate their anxiety. As the class teacher engaged with the misconception, about multiplying by one thousand and what happens to the digits and the decimal point,

she made a highly philosophical move: using the phrase 'What are you actually *doing*?' she moved the discussion away from the means (erroneously moving the decimal) to a consideration of ends (multiplying by one thousand) and in this way the child could see how to go on. This is one example of how language structure developed in P4C enquiries is impacting across the school.

What the head says

The head's involvement with P4C stemmed from visiting a school in the same authority. Seeing an example of good practice he notes that he was 'blown away' by the maturity and articulacy of the host school, which they attributed in part to their use of philosophy for children. He resolved to bring P4C back to his school and saw it as central to his plans for school improvement.

Initially the adoption was piecemeal and fragmentary, spread more through demonstration and exemplification rather than systematic professional development and based upon the head's expertise that derived from his level 1 training with the Society for Advancing Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education (SAPERE, 2010). P4C sessions were sporadic and not integrated into the school's customs and practices. From the perspective of the headteacher, the development of Fordingbridge Junior School reflects the growth of his own expertise. By moving through levels one, two and three of the SAPERE scheme, he systematically developed the capacity of others in the school. As things stand at the time of writing all members of staff are trained to level one, two members are trained at level two, with the head a fully qualified SAPERE trainer in his own right. (In a later section exploring teachers' reflections on their practice I elaborate upon what the different levels mean to teacher practitioners.) As the expertise of the staff has developed so also has the level of embeddedness of P4C in the school's implementation of the National Curriculum.

I have repeated often in this chapter that P4C and its techniques are not necessarily educational aims in themselves. For those who do not perceive themselves as philosophers there need to be clearly defined and perceivable benefits to practising P4C. Yet, paradoxically, without an initial commitment to P4C, as a practice sustained by regular time and implementation with children in the classroom, those benefits may never manifest themselves. Fordingbridge Junior's implementation of P4C in the classroom reflects the head's growing understanding of the necessary commitment. Initially P4C in the school was less systematic and embedded than current practices. The second stage of implementation committed to making P4C a regular part of the school timetable. On a fortnightly basis P4C was practised in every class across the entirety of Key Stage 2 and now P4C is central to each class's weekly timetable with an inquiry often split over two weeks in order to value each stage of the process. The first week is spent exploring a stimulus or provocation that is tightly integrated into the school's topic-based medium-term planning cycle. After initial thoughts have been aired and questions raised the question for the following week is then arrived at.

The influence of the head's commitment to P4C has been felt well beyond the confines of Fordingbridge Junior School. The head has worked with the National College of School Leadership (NCSL), and his local authority, where he is well-

supported by his local authority advisor, and his local cluster of schools. It is clear that from his experience with working with keen but isolated practitioners and whole school staffs in other contexts that there are lessons for any manager wishing to develop P4C as a means to promoting children's active participation in their own learning.

- School development ideally starts with systematic mass participation.

- The more integrated P4C is to the curriculum, the more successful is its adoption and impact on school improvement.

- The ethos of P4C will only embed when it is congruent with the school's values and vision.

- The head needs to be fully committed and ideally trained in P4C.

- P4C provides high quality accredited whole school CPD.

What the children say

In the course of researching this case study I spoke to children across the age range (7–11) from all year groups and asked them to talk to me about their experiences of P4C. Their responses could be organised into two main categories: first, the interest in the methods and means of P4C and second, the impact on their life in school and beyond.

The children welcomed the affordances to participate that P4C provided. Throughout the key stage they saw P4C as something different, interesting and quite fun where they sat in a circle and discussed philosophical questions. They valued ('We really like . . .') hearing other peoples' thinking and that others' thinking helped them think. They noted that hearing other people's thinking, whilst not necessarily changing their own minds, made their own thinking clearer and made it easier to be clearer with others about what they themselves meant. It was generally agreed that P4C had a significant impact on language. Children commented that in sports it helped them to think more quickly and more strategically, and in maths and literacy it gave them better words and access to them more quickly. For literacy there were specific skills of empathy developed that were enormously helpful for comprehension and creating stories. Outside of the classroom it was noted that it helped with friendship problems by distinguishing between persons and their opinions and by helping children to 'calm down'. One respondent noted that as they got older P4C helped them to think about what is important and why. Going beyond the school walls, P4C was perceived to help with homework and being more respectful in general. The eldest children observed the following: that without the group or class they could not do P4C; they could not do P4C on their own, yet the benefits are accrued to each individual; and that it helped their own individuation or development as a person. For the younger children it was particularly important that the mechanisms of choosing the next speaker were just and openly fair and like the older children they noted how in P4C 'teachers speak less' and children do the ideas, which was regarded as an unqualified good outcome! Notably the younger children were as adamant as the eldest in emphasising the importance of reasons

and using sentence scaffolds such as 'I agree/disagree . . . because . . .' and 'I think . . . because . . .'. The youngest children placed a little more value on how P4C fostered imagination and memory, especially in writing.

What the teachers say

The following composite account is derived from four teachers at Fordingbridge Junior School. Two of the teachers were at the school at the outset of the P4C project and are now level 2 trained according to the SAPERE scheme. One teacher arrived at the school as a newly qualified teacher (NQT) and was quickly inducted into the practice at level 1. The deputy has been at the school for a long time and is also a level 1 practitioner of P4C. When interviewing the teachers I asked them to reflect on how P4C related to their practice as professionals employed in state schooling.

In general the teachers noticed that attending level 1 made a difference by transforming isolated techniques into a rigorous practice that gained from its deeper coherence and accordingly had more impact. As formal training at level 1 provided rigour and coherence so level 2 training provided a genuine understanding of both philosophical ideas and the theory and practice of facilitation. One might see that formal training gives insight into the norms and methods of the practice and it is by understanding the wider purposes of the practice that individual techniques (outlined in the Try this section) become increasingly effective and have impact on children's learning.

As teachers became more secure in the practice of P4C they noticed and valued the following in both themselves and in the children:

- experience of deeper thinking – going beyond the surface;

- uncertainty – getting away from right/wrong;

- living their thinking;

- thinking for themselves;

- going beyond the orthodox or conventional;

- having time/space to deliberate and change;

- length of response time;

- greater reflection and pausing;

- confidence to work something out in other contexts;

- speaking and listening skills;

- children's reading and writing attainment;

- changed expectations;

- increased use of justifications, reasoning and resilience and accounting for themselves;

- 'the children are active participants in their own learning';

- the children often surprised themselves;

- increased confidence;

- greater sense of belonging;

- increased care – for each other, and for the words spoken to one another both inside and outside the P4C setup;

- a quality of thoughtfulness;

- greater engagement – more children feeling safe to engage;

- less dependence on others, i.e. more autonomous and less likely to follow the lead of opinion-formers.

Most notably it was reported that P4C had changed perceptions and that somehow they were a 'wiser teacher' and that P4C needed to be 'at the heart of what we do' and that it 'related to all parts of the curriculum'. I would suggest that the development of this self-concept of wiser teacher derives explicitly from the statement by one teacher that they now 'explore concepts at the heart of learning'. The idea of the wise teacher is an old one; Aristotle referred to the practically wise person as someone who could go beyond technique and method to genuine expert understanding. One teacher called this 'weaving technique into deeper understanding'. It was interesting to record that teachers were keenly aware of when and when not to make a judgement. Also one person initially felt challenged as the group started to run itself but soon welcomed the increased opportunities this afforded her to listen, observe and think. Another commented that when the (questioning) genie was let out of the bottle there was no putting it back; P4C is a way of empowering children that cuts across everything they and we do.

Reflecting on the case study

- What value is placed upon P4C by
  - children;
  - teachers;
  - management; and
  - other interested parties?

- To what extent is the experience of Fordingbridge transferable to other contexts?

- What techniques and practices to you think are
  - most effective;
  - least effective.

- Does the previous answer change if you contrast a child-centred with a subject-centred ethos?

- How might you act differently having considered the Fordingbridge case study?

Case study 2: Gallions Primary School

According to OFSTED, Gallions Primary 'is larger than the average primary school and the number of pupils is increasing as the school moves from having two classes in each year group to having three. The school is in an area of very high economic disadvantage and a high proportion of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals. Pupils come from a wide variety of ethnic origins, the largest group being of Bangladeshi heritage. The next largest groups are White British and Black African. A very high number of pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is higher than the national average. Most of these difficulties relate to autistic spectrum disorder, speech and language difficulties and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. There are also pupils with physical difficulties. The school has the Artsmark Gold award.'

The key word that helps us understand Gallions is *engagement*. Seventy-five per cent of children arriving at the school's nursery do not or cannot speak. The children's attitude to learning is poor and if left unaddressed can lead to 'dysfunctional classrooms'. However, by creating a rich language environment, rooted in a creative arts curriculum where every child learns an instrument and there is an artist in residence, and where P4C is introduced from nursery onwards, children flourish and become part of a community.

For one member of staff the story began in the late 1990s. The school had just opened and the class teacher was despairing about the Year 4 children's behaviour to one another. She contacted an education charity who suggested using P4C. Initially sceptical, this teacher noted how behaviour began to change within three weeks. Children were beginning to listen to one another and in another two weeks were responding to one another. The children were able to contribute and engage and the class teacher attributed this to P4C giving children a voice that was validated by their peers.

Talking to current staff and children in the school it was noticeable to me that the language and philosophy of Aristotle is now deeply embedded in the school. An earlier section of this chapter discusses the idea of practical wisdom – a way of understanding that goes beyond the simple following of rules and procedures. Everyone I spoke to embodied certain key features of practical wisdom. There was evidence of *deliberation*, of *choice-making*, and of *discrimination*. The latter is often seen as a negative characteristic of modern living but in its positive sense it means making distinctions, between courses of actions or things, and choosing according to some scale of values. Children of all ages pointed out how P4C makes them think more, go beyond the surface and reason and question. Most importantly it helps them see people differently. Parents I spoke to told me of the impact of the school running P4C sessions for them as parents. One described a stop-and-search carried out by a policeman outside the family home. Before P4C the child's simplistic labelling of the person being searched as 'a bad man' would not have been challenged by the parent. Now, the parent reported, they had the courage to converse in a deep way with their child about choices and that it was possible to look deeper into issues that would normally be pushed to one side. This engagement was not only felt between parent and child but between children and the wider world.

Now aspirations are raised and children are able to see themselves in different ways. Seven-year-olds now believe that they might become engineers and architects; that they might transcend the mundane.

Reflecting on the case study

- What value is placed upon P4C by
  - children;
  - teachers;
  - management; and
  - other interested parties?

- To what extent is the experience of St Gallions transferable to other contexts?

- What techniques and practices do you think are
  - most effective;
  - least effective.

- How might the form of schooling (integrated 2–11 provision) impact on change management in your context?

- How might you act differently having considered the St Gallions case study?

🖻 TRY THIS

Try this 1: Building the ethos

Working together in a group and for the group lies at the heart of community of inquiry approaches. Activities and games can build group ethos by making and rehearsing protected speaking turns as well as being worthwhile educational activities in their own right.

Activity 1: The name game

The group stands in a circle. The facilitator starts by saying 'My name is . . . and I like . . .'choosing something alliterative and illustrating with an action, e.g. 'My name is Darren and I like dogs', whilst making a patting action (from experience I can guarantee that someone will like either lollipops or kites!). The next person in the circle must state all the previous names and likes and conclude with their own contribution. Continue around the circle and encouraging actions only for prompts.

Should the facilitator go last to demonstrate their willingness to be considered as a peer in the community?

Activity 2: Creative naming

The group stands in a circle. Start by taking a mundane object, such as a scarf, and placing it in the middle of the circle. Model stepping out into the middle of the circle and using this sentence scaffold, 'This is not a . . . , it is a . . .' (skipping rope, fairy hammock, dried up rainbow and so on). Each contribution must build on the previous invention by using the sentence scaffold.

Did you notice the temptation to label or evaluate the children's responses? When might celebration be substituted for evaluation?

Activity 3: Sorting and naming

Place nine random objects at the centre of a circle. Children take turns to select three objects from the nine. The child must state a rule whereby of the three objects two are categorised as similar and one is different from the other two. As a variation allow the rest of the children to guess the rule before it is explained.

This is an excellent activity for rehearsing higher order thinking moves. Be sensitive to opportunities to acknowledge such thinking moves in subsequent discourse.

Activity 4: Stilling

Stilling is an exercise in mindfulness. Although very much an individual activity, shared discussion of children's experiences of stilling and guided visualisation can be very affirming. Start by sitting together in a circle. Make sure everyone is sitting comfortably and is relaxed with feet on the floor and hands in laps. Get the children to concentrate on noticing their breathing. Focus attention on diaphragm breathing where the breath enters deep into the lungs, pushing the diaphragm down and tummies out. Once inhaling and exhaling in a relaxed comfortable manner, start to draw attention to the body – starting from toes and feet, building up through the torso to the head. Finish by slowly coming back into the room, making eye contact and smiling.

In a world that arguably values extroversion, developing and appreciating introverted private activities may be a year-long project. How might you manage the situation when someone 'spoils' the activity for everyone else?

Try this 2: Responding to a stimulus

At the heart of a community of inquiry is a commitment to creating meaning together. The key process underpinning the inquiry is an intellectual curiosity, a predisposition to understand, query, consider and question. After a while children learn to go beyond the surface appearance of things and realise that

there are certain types of questions that are rich grounds for discussion. These are philosophical questions and a good stimulus will provide opportunities to generate not one but many of these questions.

Activity 1: Generating questions

Present an interesting object, read a story, show a video clip, consider a painting, listen to some music. Neither discuss the stimulus as a group nor try to establish some definitive interpretation. Instead, in small groups get children to generate as many questions as possible about the stimulus. Each group is then to pass these questions on to another group. Next, each group works with the new questions they have been given and classifies them into sets or categories. Examples of categories might be questions involving senses, questions that can be answered using science, questions with 'easy' answers or questions that seem impossible to answer. Get groups to explain how they classified their questions.

Is there a 'best' way to order and classify questions?

Activity 2: Carousel questioning

Split class into two equal-sized groups. One group forms an inner ring (facing outwards) and the other group faces them, forming an outer ring facing inwards. Each pair generates a question (e.g. about a stimulus or the current topic). The outer ring then rotates one space clockwise. In these new pairings repeat the questioning process, this time generating a new question different from that generated before by either member of the pairing. Repeat until a variety of questions have been generated.

In what way does it matter if the inner ring rotates rather than the outer?

Activity 3: Question conversations

In pairs conduct a conversation where only questions count as a valid utterance. Any non-questions uttered count as a point against the speaker. After three points pairs split and winners play winners, losers play losers. Make children aware that rising intonation may not necessarily indicate that a question has been asked!

This will need modelling as the degree of self-reflection is considerable. It is worth considering what grammatical features of a question to look out for.

Activity 4: Diamond nine

In pairs or small groups generate nine questions in response to a stimulus. Write questions on separate cards or pieces of paper. Order questions in a diamond

(five rows of 1, 2, 3, 2, 1 cards in a row). For younger children give an organising principle, e.g. top row = hardest to answer; bottom row = easiest to answer. Older children can create their own principle.

Are some organising principles better than others?

Activity 5: Fishbowl

The class decides on a list of questions, and then one group discusses and chooses the 'best' question whilst the remaining children sit around the group and watch. Comments can be offered at the end about the reasons used for choosing questions.

How might a 'philosophical' question differ from an 'empirical' one?

Activity 6: Snowballing

Starting in pairs decide on a question. Pairs form groups of four and choose one of the two questions giving reasons for rejecting one pair's question. The groups of four then double into groups of eight. Once consensus is reached the groups report back together in plenary.

Is it necessary to reach consensus on the substance of the question or is it acceptable to agree to disagree?

Activity 7: Surveying

In small groups use questions to create an interview schedule. Conduct surveys and discuss in plenary what types of question (e.g. open/closed) produce what types of response.

Even at a young age the ethics and etiquette of asking questions ought to be considered from the outset. What is private and what is public, and what may be asked about each, and how?

Activity 8: Election posters

Use questions to create visual information in the form of a poster. The children elect which question is to be discussed. These are then displayed on walls and then children tour the room viewing all the contributions.

What are the success criteria by which a question is judged?

Try this 3: Facilitating enquiries

The art of facilitation is not easy. It requires thinking and acting differently from conventional classroom practice, yet when incorporated into practice practitioners notice a transformation in classroom relationships. I have mentioned already the necessity of some form of training in order to create a holistic understanding of P4C. Nevertheless, the following activities are useful techniques to begin fostering understanding.

Activity 1: Sentence scaffolds

Using simple sentence scaffolds that emphasise relationships between participants can help children take ownership of the inquiry. Examples include, 'I agree/disagree with X because . . .' and 'I think/feel X and my reasons are . . .'

Does a scaffolded sentence promote critical thinking at the expense of creative collaborative, caring or other forms of thinking?

Activity 2: Turn-taking

When discussing together in the circle, children indicate they want to speak by a thumbs-up sign resting their hand on their knee. This stops any frantic hand-waving and primal 'ooks' whilst helping concentration by preventing tired arms. Similarly a talking object such as a shell can be passed around. Turn cards can be provided. These indicate how many more speaking turns you have left. A ball of wool can be passed from speaker to speaker to build a physical web describing the pattern of speaking turns. Alternatively speakers may be given the right to choose the next speaker whether they are indicating they want to be chosen or not. At any point the inquiry may wish to conduct a 'meta-discussion' about how the inquiry is being conducted.

Research is clear that it is easy to overlook certain groups of children despite the best will in the world. How does this activity help you and the children monitor (un) conscious patterns of discrimination?

Activity 3: Active listening techniques

How do you and the children know they are being listened to? Maintaining eye-contact, mirroring the speaker's body language, using paraphrase and summary, acknowledgement by nods and 'uh-huh' can all encourage speakers to elaborate upon their original contribution. Repeating the last few words of the speaker's previous sentence allows thought time and a fresh set of utterances:

'. . . so I think that all animals have minds because my cat knows how I am feeling'

'knows how you are feeling?' [Rising intonation mirroring how questions sound]

'Yes, because when I am sad she always comes over for stroking and this cheers me up.'

Are active listening techniques manipulative?

Activity 4: The power of silence

Silence is a rare commodity in the classroom, particularly the rich powerful silence that can occur in an inquiry. Often silence is associated with dominance and power; the teacher has enforced silence for no good reason except maintaining order or their sanity. Yet silence can be warm, comforting and profound. Where no-one is compelled to speak, or where a contribution has been offered that provokes thought and deliberation, then the facilitator needs to hold back from inviting more speech and show that they are comfortable with silence.

How much silence is enough? Should there be a signal to indicate that the silence is unhelpful and the facilitator ought to step in or should this be left to practical judgement?

SUMMARY

This chapter has explored what it means to think philosophically, and how philosophical thinking can be facilitated through the development of techniques described in this and other chapters. This is a practice that requires training and work with others in order for matters 'to come together' but it is possible to start using some of the suggestions from the Try this section. Philosophy for Children is a pedagogical programme that is participatory to its very core. The community of inquiry changes the relationships between teachers and children and demands different attitudes as well as skills and techniques. At its best, as we have seen in the two schools, it engages children, changes their behaviour and makes them think differently about the world. Not only that but it provides a sense of agency and a belief in the power of reason to make better worlds now and in the future.

FURTHER READING

The power of games and group activities to build ethos and group harmony cannot be underestimated. All the following provide a rich source and variety of activities that can build the group's effectiveness.

Brandes, D. and Phillips, H. (1979) *Gamesters' Handbook*. London: Hutchinson.
    The *Gamesters* series provide a whole raft of classroom suitable games.

Fisher, R. (1997) *Games for Thinking*. Oxford: Nash Pollock.
   Fisher has produced a whole raft of supporting books using stories, games, and poems for thinking.

Rawlins, G. and Rich, J. (1985) *Look, Listen and Trust*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Education.
   This resource is a set of drama-based activities that can help children become more accustomed to one another, more trusting whilst still being fun.

Stone, M. K. (1995) *Don't Just Do Something, Sit There: Developing Children's Spiritual Awareness*. Norwich: Religious and Moral Education Press.
   This is an invaluable resource, often available from diocesan educational offices. It offers a programme of stilling and guided visualisation activities.

There are plenty of examples of scripts for stilling on the web, e.g. www.ely.anglican.org/education/schools/collective_worship/pdf/StillingExercises.pdf

For good general introductions to P4C in all its varieties see:

Fisher, R. (2003) *Teaching Thinking: Philosophical Enquiry in the Classroom*, 2nd edn. London: Continuum.
   Fisher gives a rounded perspective on P4C and how it might be incorporated into practice.

Haynes, J. (2008) *Children as Philosophers: Learning Through Enquiry and Dialogue in the Primary Classroom*, 2nd edn. London: Routledge.
   Haynes is long-established practitioner in P4C. She is well-known for her ground-breaking work with Karin Murris on the worth and validity of children's picture books as richly philosophical stimuli for inquiry.

Lipman, M. (2003) *Thinking in Education*, 2nd edn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
   Lipman wrote many books about P4C. *Thinking in Education* is a good examination of some of the deeper tensions and issues in education that P4C attempts to address and redress.

McCall, C. C. (2009) *Transforming Thinking: Philosophical Inquiry in the Primary and Secondary Classroom*. London: Routledge.
   Of particular worth in McCall's account is her critical examination in Chapter six of the differences between different forms of enquiry with children.

Saran, R. and Neisser, B. (2004) *Enquiring Minds: Socratic Dialogue in Education*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.
   Socratic Dialogue tends to be more popular on continental Europe than in the UK. There is much of interest in the approach that stands in useful counterpoint to contemporary UK practice.

Splitter, L. J. and Sharp, A. M. (1995) *Teaching for Better Thinking: The Classroom Community of Inquiry*. Melbourne: ACER.
   Ann Sharp joined with Matthew Lipman early in the development of P4C. Arguably she changed in significant ways certain emphases on how thinking and conduct in enquiry might be valued. The book she co-wrote with Lawrence Splitter is full of rich, practical material.

For books that relate philosophy for children to wider issues in thinking skills and childhood education see:

Kennedy, D. (2006) *The Well of Being: Childhood, Subjectivity and Education*. New York: SUNY.
David Kennedy's book is notable for urging us to think more radically about the ethical implications for how we are to be with children. This is a more general book but fantastic for stimulating thinking about the ethos of our schools and our classrooms.

Johnson, S. and Siegel, H. (2010) *Teaching Thinking Skills*, 2nd edn. Key Debates in Educational Policy, edited by Christopher Winch. London: Continuum.
Deriving from the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain's policy series, this book is a serious and sustained critique of current psychologistic models of thinking.

Quinn, V. (1997) *Critical Thinking in Young Minds*. London: David Fulton.
Although not specifically concerned with P4C, Quinn's book is an excellent perspective on critical thinking from a holistic perspective.

Stables, A. (2008) *Childhood and the Philosophy of Education: An Anti-Aristotelian Perspective*. London: Continuum.
The notion of what it is to be a child varies across time and space. In modern western cultures we have not always thought of children the way we do now. Nor are children viewed the same in all places of the world. Stables' book is an enormously important analysis of why it is that we view children the way we do in contemporary times.

SAPERE (2010) Society for Advancing Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education, www.sapere.org.uk/ (accessed 27 April 2012).
SAPERE have been active in UK education for over 20 years. Catherine McCall featured in a BBC documentary called *Socrates for Six-year-olds* highlighting the work she had been doing in America and Scotland. As a result of that programme a group of educators set up SAPERE, whose influence can be seen in the case studies mentioned earlier in the chapter.

Gallions Primary School's website is at www.gallions.newham.sch.uk/ The school has produced a DVD, *Thinking Allowed*, that is a step-by-step guide to the P4C approach.

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Green, J. (2010) *Education, Professionalism and the Quest for Accountability: Hitting the Target but Missing the Point*. London: Routledge.
Harris, S. (2007) *The Governance of Education: How Neo-Liberalism is Transforming Policy and Practice*. London: Continuum.
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Lipman, M. (2008) *A Life Teaching Thinking*. Montclair, NJ: Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children.

McCall, C. C. (2009) *Transforming Thinking: Philosophical Inquiry in the Primary and Secondary Classroom*. London: Routledge.

Olssen, M. (2010) *Liberalism, Neoliberalism, Social Democracy: Thin Communitarian Perspectives on Political Philosophy and Education*. London: Routledge.

Quinn, V. (1997) *Critical Thinking in Young Minds*. London: David Fulton.

Rawlins, G. and Rich, J. (1985) *Look, Listen and Trust*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Education.

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Saran, R. and Neisser, B. (2004) *Enquiring Minds: Socratic Dialogue in Education*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.

Splitter, L. J. and Sharp, A. M. (1995) The Practice of Philosophy in the Classroom, in *Teaching for Better Thinking: The Classroom Community of Inquiry*. Melbourne: ACER.

Stables, A. (2008) *Childhood and the Philosophy of Education: An Anti-Aristotelian Perspective*. London: Continuum.

Stone, M. K. (1995) *Don't Just Do Something, Sit There: Developing Children's Spiritual Awareness*. Norwich: Religious and Moral Education Press.