Philosophy for Children (P4C)

A guide for parents



What is P4C? A (very) short history:

PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN (P4C) is a worldwide educational movement that began in 1972 with the work of Professor Matthew Lipman and colleagues. Lipman wrote special 'philosophical novels' for use with children and comprehensive 'manuals' of accompanying resources. He also suggested the 'community of inquiry' as an appropriate method and aim of P4C. Now Philosophy for Children is practiced in more than thirty countries around the world using a wide variety of materials to instigate questioning and inquiry. Though the materials vary, the basic model of the community of inquiry and the methods Lipman introduced have remained remarkably robust and popular with teachers and pupils alike.

The Principles of P4C

Here are some of the principles that underlie philosophy for children and help children and young people become thoughtful, curious and reasonable.

- Good thinking is learned from dialogue with others.
- To think well is to be creative as well as critical. Creative thinkers make connections, speculate and explore alternatives.
- Good thinking depends on attitudes as well as abilities. Children should be encouraged to be reasonable in the fullest sense of the word.
- People make sense of the world though a web of concepts. We should talk with children about significant concepts.
- It is good for children and adults to talk together about philosophical questions- questions that matter and that link thinking about one area of experience to thinking about experience as a whole.

How does it work? Dialogue, inquiry, philosophy

THE BASICS of philosophy for children are straightforward. The teacher (or facilitator in P4C 'speak') chooses something as a starting point. This could be a story, an object, a picture or even a piece of music. The children take some thinking time to devise their own questions based on this stimulus. They choose a question that interests them and, with the teacher's

help, discuss it together. The process involves the children in questioning assumptions, developing opinions with supporting reasons, analysing significant concepts and generally applying the best reasoning and judgement they are capable of to the question they have chosen.

In the longer term, the teacher aims to build the children's skills and concepts through appropriate follow-up activities, thinking games and the orchestration of connections between philosophical discussions, life and the rest of the school curriculum.

At St Meryl School we teach philosophy as a subject in its own right but we also use it to enhance learning in all areas of the curriculum.

All of the teaching staff at St Meryl are trained to teach philosophy (level 1 SAPERE).

The community of inquiry

A central concept of philosophy for children is that of the 'community of inquiry', which may be defined as a reflective approach to classroom discussion built up over time with a single group of learners. The 'community' is the class and embodies co-operation, care, respect and safety. Through the 'inquiry' children express their ideas and listen to and question others'. As a community of inquiry develops over time, the children's questions get deeper and more thoughtful. Their discussions are disciplined and focused, yet, at the same time imaginative. They care about what others say but don't accept easy answers. A community of inquiry combines critical, creative, caring and collaborative thinking.

Why use P4C in schools? What are the benefits?

Learning to be reasonable

P4C has been proven to improve outcomes in all areas of learning. P4C improves children's abilities to listen and to articulate themselves which in turn leads to improved writing. It is praised for its effects on emotional awareness and thinking skills. Philosophy calls on imagination and reasoning and puts these capacities to work exploring values, assumptions and vital concepts like justice, truth, knowledge and beauty. A philosophical community of enquiry provides a forum where adults and children can search for meaning together. Children become reasonable in both senses of the word-they are adept at reasoning and they are open to the reasoning of others.