

P4C **Pocketbook**

**By Barry Hymer &
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Cartoons:
Phil Hailstone

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Deep roots



P4C is a modern approach with roots in the philosophy of ancient Greece – especially the dialogues of Socrates.

Matthew Lipman conceived P4C in the late '60s, a time of political and social turbulence. He sensed that it was time to restore the ancient values of philosophy – the critical pursuit of wisdom – to education for all young people, not just an intellectual elite. He was pragmatic in his approach to this task, beginning by writing 'philosophical' stories for children. These were used to engage children in philosophy's ongoing adventure of ideas.

Socrates did much the same in his marketplace dialogues with people from all walks of life (see pages 68-9 for an example).

Aims of P4C



'The aim of a thinking skills program such as P4C is to help children become more thoughtful, more reflective, more considerate and more reasonable individuals.'

Professor Matthew Lipman

In the '70s and '80s Lipman created a teacher education programme which has formed the basis for further development in about 60 countries.

In the UK, the 1990 BBC film *Socrates for 6 year-olds* helped stimulate interest. P4C is now practised with pupils of all ages – from the early years through to adulthood. You can do it with yours! With careful facilitation, high expectations, and over time, your pupils can learn to be *reasonable* – ie able to reason and willing to be reasoned with.



The 10-step process



A typical one-hour P4C session consists of roughly ten steps, each of which can be shaped to suit the ages or needs of the group (see pages 21-112):

1	Getting set	an activity that builds either community or enquiry skills.
2	Presentation	of a stimulus to please, puzzle or provoke.
3	Thinking time	private reflection leading to small group dialogue.
4	Question-making	focusing common interests into an inviting question.
5	Question-aring	considering the thinking behind the questions.
6	Question-choosing	deciding which question to concentrate on.
7	First words	suggestions as to how to begin answering the question.
8	Building	collaborating to develop understanding of and through the question.
9	Last words	each person's resting point in regard to content of enquiry.
10	Review	reflection on community process, progress and continuing project.

An example of P4C in practice



With her Year 3 class seated in a circle, Gemma played a game of 'Chinese Whispers' with them. She then read them 'Willow's Whispers' by Lana Button - a picture book about a soft-spoken girl who struggles to find her own voice.

After 40 seconds of eyes-closed thinking time, she asked them to work with a partner - sharing their thoughts and coming up with one question that they'd like to ask. Each pair wrote their question on a tablet/slate, and then 'aired' their question to the rest of the class - reading the question and saying why they'd asked it. The class then voted for each question in turn. Everyone could vote for as many questions as they wished...



An example of P4C in practice



...The question that attracted the most interest (16 votes) was, 'Why can't Willow speak loudly?'. Gemma asked the children to share their 'first responses' to this question with their partner, before leading a whole-class enquiry.

After a flurry of many possible explanations for Willow's soft voice, a child suggested, 'Maybe she could speak loudly, but her friends and teachers heard softly'. The enquiry then shifted to explorations of how we use our senses, and of appearance and reality.

The enquiry concluded with 30 seconds' quiet reflection and a 'last words' round, where the children could offer a short final response to the question, perhaps building on ideas they'd heard from others. Or they could comment on how well they thought they'd done in that P4C session - with ideas for doing even better next time.

Core concepts



'... when you are a Bear of Very Little Brain, and Think of Things, you find sometimes that a Thing which seemed very Thingish inside you is quite different when it gets out into the open and has other people looking at it.'

A.A. Milne – House at Pooh Corner

As you can see from Gemma's implementation of the usual ten-step process, P4C is refreshingly unique as a classroom activity in that there is no 'content' to stuff into your pupils' heads. Concepts themselves are the focus of investigation. They are the elemental building blocks by which we categorise and mentally construct the world we live in. We therefore regard P4C as a helpful way of exploring key concepts, not as a set syllabus or scheme of work. Not even Lipman's resources are seen as 'sacred texts'.

In introducing P4C to your pupils your task is to help them **construct conceptual maps** to navigate their increasingly complex world. Pooh's experience of finding that his understanding of words is different from others' is not uncommon. Most concepts are very personal. Think what the concept of *even* might mean to a mathematician as compared with a joiner or a football referee!

Responsive, responsible learners



'Conceptual map' is a fine term, but what is its classroom value? Our conceptual maps are not only the web of concepts that we build up over time, but also the many ways or patterns of thinking that steadily improve that web. In a world where there is any number of belief and value systems, there is a pressing need to help our pupils to develop robust concepts and ways of thinking of their own.

P4C sets about this task by explicitly valuing:

1. **Thinking skills** (such as questioning, reasoning, speculating and reflecting).
2. **Habits of mind** (such as inquisitiveness, reasonableness, courage, consideration of others).

In short, it cultivates responsive and responsible learners.



About the authors

Barry Hymer



Barry is the Osiris professor of psychology in education at the University of Cumbria. He taught in the primary and secondary sectors before training and practising as an educational psychologist and then founding an education consultancy. He is the author or editor of seven books and numerous papers in the fields of gifted education and thinking skills, including the bestselling, radical and influential *Gifted & Talented Pocketbook*. In 2003 Barry received the biennial Award for Excellence in Interpreting Philosophy with Children from ICPIIC, the International Council for Philosophical Inquiry with Children.

Roger Sutcliffe



Roger read Philosophy at Oxford, then taught in a junior school before joining the Maths department at Christ's Hospital School, Horsham. In the early 90s he trained in Philosophy for Children with Matthew Lipman and has been a freelance trainer ever since. Roger was a founder member of SAPERE and became President in 2003, when he was also elected President of ICPIIC. He is the author of *The Philosophy Club*, and of *Newswise*, a current affairs resource. He was co-designer of the International GCSE 'Global Perspectives', and is co-director of p4c.com, the online resource and collaboration service for p4c worldwide. He is also a consultant with www.thinkingschool.co.uk