

5 steps to ...

# Understanding P4C



- ① P4C is based on **dialogue** – particularly a dialogue of question and answer. Teachers and children try to find the best answers they can to questions they create together. The practices of questioning, reasoning and evaluating should extend out from P4C sessions across the curriculum to influence all lessons.
- ② The central notion of P4C is the **Community of Enquiry**: a group of people used to thinking together with a view to increasing their understanding and appreciation of the world around them and of each other. Teachers guide pupils towards becoming a ‘Community of Enquiry’. Each part of the term is important. ‘Community’ emphasises safety and a basic respect for others; ‘Enquiry’ emphasises careful and systematic reasoning to achieve the best answers to questions that require the exercise of judgement.
- ③ Questions requiring **judgement** often lead to answers that involve ‘**big ideas**’ such as duty, fact, fairness, friendship, evidence, knowledge, respect, and truth. Pupils will have heard and used these terms. P4C enables them to be understood more fully and used with intelligence.
- ④ When people enquire together, they make common intellectual ‘moves’ in order to make progress. They will, for example, draw attention to similarities and differences, give examples, suggest consequences, question assumptions, provide reasons, and build the reasons into arguments. The terms they use in making these moves constitute a **language of reasoning**. P4C develops, systematically, the children’s abilities to use such language in order to ‘think for themselves’. Study the *Language of Reasoning* document and the article *Thinking with Concepts* in the handbook for more ideas.
- ⑤ P4C aims to develop a culture of **intellectual encouragement**. Teachers help pupils to view themselves as a group of thinkers that can tackle interesting and important questions involving big ideas. Teachers are the helpers and guides, posing questions to bring more depth to their pupils’ thinking, presenting points of view they might not have thought of, encouraging them to respond to each others’ ideas and helping them persist with their enquiries.

## 5 steps to ... Starting P4C



Here are some recommendations for your first few sessions.  
See the webpage: [www.p4c.com/articles/getting-started-p4c](http://www.p4c.com/articles/getting-started-p4c)

- ① Try out some **exercises** to introduce the language of reasoning to pupils and the 'moves' you expect them to make in discussions. Consult the *Using Exercises* document to get practical ideas. Use your classroom skills and your knowledge of pupils to find the best ways to make the exercises work with your class.
- ② Negotiate some **guidelines** for discussion that you will use together in your philosophy sessions. Display the guidelines in your classroom. When you start P4C, the guidelines will tend towards establishing a sense of **community**. There will be items on paying due attention to speakers and not down putting others. As pupils become more familiar with the practice of P4C, you should suggest that guidelines include items that support **enquiry** such as giving reasons and examples, temporarily suspending judgement and helping others develop to their arguments.
- ③ During your training, the tutor introduced the **Stages of Enquiry** as a basis for planning P4C sessions. To begin with, choose a stimulus and work through the stages at a comfortable pace. You don't have to complete all the stages in one go. Getting to the question in one session and discussing it in another is often a good option. It gives everyone time to prepare for the discussion. Study the *Stages of Enquiry* document for more detailed guidance and find out what work best for your class.
- ④ From the very first lesson, start a **class book** (like a scrap book) to record guidelines you adopt, new vocabulary you establish, and questions you and the pupils create. Later you can add your own short summaries of the content of class discussions and invite pupils to contribute some writing themselves. Give them their own writing books called something like *Thinking Journals* or *QI Books* (Questions and Ideas).
- ⑤ **Evaluate** a P4C session with pupils. Use it to draw their attention to those things you are trying to achieve with them. It can be summed up in a word: **reasonableness**. Reasonableness is being willing and able to reason and be reasoned with. Reasoning involves being systematic in thinking. Language provides the tools of reasoning.