

# P4C evaluation in your classroom

Here are some ideas for formative evaluation you can do with pupils as part of P4C. Many of the activities are useful in their own right and will enhance the quality of your P4C lessons.

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**I. ASKING CHILDREN:** Ask the whole group to evaluate a dialogue, their role within it and their attitudes to it.

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## I.1 Marks out of five

You can get an impression of children's attitudes to the practice of P4C and the community of enquiry by using a scale of responses from 1 to 5. This is convenient as it corresponds to the number of fingers on a hand. Choose a list of items you want to monitor and ask the children to raise their hands to give a score of one to five. Take a tally of numbers of each score for each item. How many fives were shown, how many fours and so on? Here is a suggested list. Some items focus on the group and some on the individual. They point to the types of thinking and acting that are particularly valued in P4C: critical, creative, caring and collaborative

- We help each other to think well.
- We give reasons and examples.
- I am happy to be questioned about what I think.
- We ask others what they think and why.
- I notice some of the 'big ideas' in our discussions.
- We disagree without quarrelling.
- I feel I can speak if I want to.
- I feel safe in this community.
- I think people in this community care about me.
- I am getting to know people better through listening to what they say.

*Benefits:* You gain some feedback about what the children think about the sessions and their part in them. The feedback gives you things to talk about to individuals and groups. For example, if they don't think the questions are well chosen, do they have any better ideas? If they are not happy to be questioned, why not? Is it possible for others to help? Could some things be changed?

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**2. Observing Dialogue.** This includes ideas for observing small- and large-group dialogue. 'Pupil-researchers' could have a role to play.

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## 2.1 Talk tally

Keep a tally of the number of times children speak in whole-class discussions. You could involve children in this activity as 'pupil researchers'. Do a tally perhaps once a term but over three consecutive lessons. This could help you to identify two kinds of patterns: one when children speak to a greater and lesser extent depending on the questions chosen in a session, the other when some children contribute a lot and others not at all, regardless of topic. You could involve children in keeping a tally of who speaks and also in doing the maths in identifying patterns. They could do bar graphs of boys and girls, for instance. Some teachers give the children 'Unifix' pieces and ask them to add one when they speak. The children add up the pieces in their Unifix chains at the end of the session and record the totals on a sheet.

*Benefits:* The tally informs you about the 'progress', or otherwise, of individuals in their willingness to contribute. It will show you patterns. It could be used in different situations (for example, small group sessions and whole-class sessions). You could compare the two tallies, providing a talking point for the group and prompting questions like: 'Can we make it easier for people to talk? Can we draw others into the dialogue?' and so on. We would welcome reports on the results of your tallying.

*Caution:* You wouldn't want to give pupils any reasons to criticise others for not talking. And you wouldn't want to make the simple act of saying things (no matter what) the supreme goal of the sessions. Listening, being interested and trying to understand are important too. And, of course, the quality of the talk each pupil contributes is important, not just the quantity of contributions.

## 2.1 Question tally

You could also keep a tally of questions from time to time. During dialogues, you are asking children to wonder out loud, question each other and question you. You want them to take more responsibility for asking the questions that will influence the direction of the dialogue. Use a tally chart or the Unifix blocks to register the number of questions children ask in a philosophy session. You could do the same in other lessons too. Are the children asking more questions in P4C and across the curriculum?

*Benefits:* You are able to collect useful information about the frequency of questioning in the class. Over time, you want the children to ask more and better questions.

## 2.2 Guided philosophizing

Teachers often use guided reading and similar activities in which they set most of the class an individual task while they give more focused support and attention to a small group. You can do this for philosophy too.

Ask a group of children to choose a question from the growing archive created by class members. They could choose a question from their Question Book or, alternatively, bring a short piece of writing expressing their ideas on a topic or question of choice.

Use one of the questions or a piece of writing to start a conversation and continue as you would with any discussion in P4C. During your talk, check on the children's understanding of basic concepts such as example, reason and alternative. Monitor their willingness to discuss philosophical questions and problems. Do they choose questions that have philosophical potential? Ask them what other answers might be possible apart from their own and what reasons could be given for those.

If any of the children are reluctant talkers in a large group but seem engaged and capable in a small group, you might talk to them individually about why they are reluctant to speak in front of the class.

Make brief notes during these sessions. We would be interested to receive any summaries of your observations.

*Benefits:* You get the chance for more intensive interactions with the children. Sometimes work with small groups can be revealing.

## 2.3 Unguided philosophizing

On some occasions, send a small group to a quiet place with a digital audio recorder. Ask them to discuss the question chosen by the whole group. When they have finished, sample parts of their discussion to see what they made of the task. How did they interact? How did they reason? Were they appropriating the ways of discussing you have been promoting? We would be interested in summaries of your observations.

*Benefits:* You will learn what the pupils can do without your supervision. Are they becoming self-reliant thinkers? You might also find that some children are more willing to talk without supervision in a small group of children they trust. On their return, a further step would be to ask members of the small group to summarise their findings to the class or vice versa.

## 2.4 Recordings of sessions

Early on in the project, make an audio or video recording of a session in which you discuss a question with children. Near the end of the project, make another recording. Listen to the recordings just after you have made them. They will give you a lot to reflect on. Your support trainer will be able to help you make the best use of the recordings for your own professional development in P4C and to summarise points of interest and significance.

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**3. USING WRITING.** This section includes teacher and pupil journals, case studies, pupil responses to sessions and class collections of children's ideas.

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### **3.1 A P4C journal for teachers**

Keep a simple record of what you have done in your P4C sessions. What stimulus or resource was used? What questions and discussions emerged? What were your thoughts about how it went?

### **3.2 Stories and case studies**

The story of one pupil or a group can reveal something significant about P4C that other kinds of reports can't. Has anything surprised you? Has it had an impact you didn't expect? Has it had an impact on confidence, relationships, behaviour or involvement in learning?

### **3.3 Thinking journals or QI (question and idea) books**

Give pupils books in which to write questions and ideas. Here is one example: ask pupils to write the discussion question in their book. Ask them to give a mark out of ten and explain why, then write one thought they had about the question. This could lead on to a discussion about what makes a good question. You might introduce concepts like: *satisfying, informative, interesting, important, puzzling, challenging* and so on.

### **3.4 Children's session reports**

One way to end a session is to have pupils write some final thoughts after the discussion (e.g. in their thinking journals). You could ask them to write freely or you could give them prompts such as:

- One idea I have now is ...
- One question I still have is ...
- One thing I agreed with was .... (because ...)
- One thing I disagreed with was .... (because ...)
- One thing I'd like to *know* more about is ...
- One thing I'd like to *think* more about is ...
- One thing I liked about this discussion was ...
- One thing I didn't like about this discussion was ...

*Benefits:* You find out something about what quieter pupils have been thinking. You find out how all pupils are responding to each other and to P4C sessions without time-consuming oral report-backs.

*Caution:* The responses depend on pupils' writing abilities so some will need assistance and encouragement. The writing should be considered 'low risk' – the primary aim being to open up possibilities to further dialogue rather than to demonstrate and test pupils' writing abilities.

### **3.5 The Children's Big Ideas Book**

Create a book in which pupils can write a short entry each week with their name attached. They would complete the prompt 'This week my big idea is ...'. You can monitor the things they put in the book. Some might relate to topics you have covered in school, things they have seen on TV or talked about with their parents. Some might relate to topics they have covered in their P4C sessions. You would need to talk about the notion of a 'big idea' with pupils. It might be something important or very interesting for them, something they want to think about or 'get straight', or something they feel strongly about. They might illustrate their big ideas graphically. They might elaborate on them with further explanations and suggestions. We would be interested in reports from you (with examples) on the things pupils write in the book, the proportion of them that could be related to P4C sessions, and the level of elaboration of their entries.

*Benefits:* The activity encourages pupils to think they can have big ideas and that others might be interested in them. You will see whether their range of big ideas is widening. Are the children's concerns more outward-looking? Does P4C seem to be having an impact on what they choose for their big ideas? Do they seem more willing as time goes by to elaborate on their ideas? If they are, it might indicate they are becoming more reflective. The book also gives you a talking point with your pupils and you will have something extra to think about when choosing the stimuli for your sessions. Perhaps you can negotiate some of the stimuli with pupils (based on a selection from their big ideas book). That might lead on to involving pupils in preparing the initial presentation to the class.

### **3.6 The Children's Question Book**

Keep a record of questions that arose in response to the stimuli indicating the date, which question was chosen and the method of choosing (e.g. by voting, by the teacher and so on). Keep the book up to date. Later, near the end of the project, you can look back to see if any patterns emerge. Do questions become more 'philosophical'? How might you categorise the questions that you find in the book?

You might get the children involved in doing a bar graph on types of questions. Each bar would be a question category; each question a unit on one of the bars. Unifix blocks of different colours make good bars. Create a cumulative bar graph over half a term and record the results.

*Benefits:* The question book gives you a valuable resource. You can monitor the nature of questions; you can draw pupils' attention to some you think are interesting but that were not chosen; you can select some for a question categorisation activity. These can all be valuable activities in their own right.

### 3.7 Children's writing in response to questions and discussions

Ask children to write down their thoughts about some of the questions (possibly some of those not chosen). Simply ask them to write for a set time without worrying about it. You might give them a few prompting phrases to get them going, or provide a structure such as writing a dialogue between two people with different ideas. Try making the writing tasks more concrete. For example, if you have been discussing a 'big idea' such as bravery, ask them to write a letter nominating someone for a bravery award and giving their reasons. Use your imagination to set the task.

*Benefits:* This can provide some insights into children's levels of interest and their uses of language to reason with. Are there changes over time? We would be interested in the results of your experiments with writing.

*Caution:* You want to keep enthusiasm high. There is a danger that by insisting the children write, philosophizing becomes a chore for them – like having to do a book report every time they read a book. Use writing with discrimination and good judgement.

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**4. Hypothesis testing.** The schools creates a hypothesis and devises indicators to confirm or contradict it.

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### 4.1 Devising and testing hypotheses

This is a good idea if the school is particularly interested in one area of development and you think P4C might make a contribution to bringing about good outcomes. For example, you might hypothesise that P4C will affect behaviour for the better. How could you find out? On the other hand, you might be interested in those things that you think are distinctive about P4C – for instance its encouragement for children to notice inconsistencies in answers to questions and then ask further questions to explore them. Many of the ideas in this document could help you test your hypotheses. The value of having a hypothesis in the first place is to focus your in-school research to reflect your own priorities.