

Closing the achievement gap with P4C

Philosophy for Children reaps remarkable results for all pupils, but it does seem to work particularly well for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Now, an exciting new project seeks to harness that power to raise achievement and build resilience, confidence and self-esteem in some of the most deprived regions of the country. **Bob House** shares the story so far.

Philosophy for Children (P4C) is an enquiry-based pedagogy, where students take the lead and the teaching style is facilitative. Its aim is to drive questioning, reasoning and independent learning skills, and although its transformational effects on the entire student body are clearly evident, it does seem to work especially well for the children who are most disadvantaged.



As a recent trial by the Education Endowment Fund (EEF) and Durham University discovered, when involved in just one period of P4C a week over 16 months, children eligible for free school meals (FSM) made four months' more progress in reading than expected, as well as an additional three months' in maths and two months' in writing.¹ Feedback from the teachers involved suggests that P4C also had a beneficial impact on wider outcomes such as confidence, patience and self-esteem.

Our aim at SAPERE is to promote P4C across the UK, especially in communities that need it, and will benefit from it, the most. With this in mind, we launched 'Going for Gold', a three-year project to train teachers in areas of high deprivation to do P4C with their pupils.

The pilot project began in East London, and involved 400 teachers in the London Boroughs of Tower Hamlets and Newham, where schools have between two and four times the average number of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. Now, more than 40 schools are taking part across the country. Training for most began in the summer term last year, with regular philosophical enquiries in classes beginning last September (2015).

We'll find out more about how they're getting on later, but first: What is P4C, and why is it so effective for our most disadvantaged and troubled children?

Why it works

P4C is an approach to teaching and learning that drives better thinking, communication and collaboration. It is built on three principles:

- Pupils tackle profound philosophical questions.
- Pupils take leadership of the lesson.
- Pupils learn respect and resilience to challenge.

P4C was originally developed in New York and first came to the UK in the 1990s via the BBC programme *Socrates for Six Year Olds*. It is applicable to children and young people from the ages of three to 18 years. SAPERE's experience over 20 years in the UK, backed up by worldwide academic research, has shown that there are numerous benefits from P4C, including increased self-esteem, increased motivation to learn and substantial gains in oral communication skills, literacy and numeracy.

The dominant style of teaching in the UK is didactic where the teacher's role is to impart knowledge. This favours students who already

know the 'right' answer – usually those from advantaged backgrounds. By contrast, P4C uses a facilitative pedagogical model where the teacher's role is to encourage questioning and thinking. It deals with topics where there is no single 'right' answer. All students have an equal voice and, provided they give sound reasons, all views can be expressed. Students from less advantaged backgrounds find their voice and build confidence, with benefits for their engagement with learning, attainment and school contribution.

'For children living in difficult and often chaotic family settings', says Paul Jackson, a headteacher in East London. 'P4C may be the only time they will be given the space to talk about important issues.'

The EEF report cited earlier found that P4C had the biggest positive impact on achievement among disadvantaged pupils (those eligible for FSM). Other reports over the years have indicated P4C:

- increases cognitive ability (especially for students on the lower end of the ability range)²
- enhances mental health and wellbeing (increasing confidence, self-esteem, reflection, respect for others and feelings of inclusion)³
- improves social skills (including listening and speaking skills, being able to disagree respectfully and strengthened relationships)⁴
- develops critical thinking skills (demonstrated through pupils' increased questioning and discussion, and expressing a range of perspectives)⁵
- helps build resilience to extremism (enabling pupils to learn how to listen to other people's opinions and respond respectfully and non-aggressively when these differ to their own. P4C also gives pupils a safe environment to discuss challenging topics).⁶

Going for gold: Making a difference in difficult circumstances

Our Going for Gold programme offers a planned and structured approach to P4C training and support, usually over a three year period, in order to help schools develop and sustain P4C in the longer term.

The aim of the Going for Gold programme is to enhance the educational attainment and personal and social development of primary and secondary school students. It is open to all schools, with preferential terms available



for schools in areas of high deprivation (where more than 25 per cent of students are eligible for pupil premium). For a typical school with 20 to 25 staff being trained, the cost is £4,500-£5,000 per year.

The programme is based on SAPERE's established training and support, and begins with a two-day foundation training course, enabling teachers to start facilitating regular P4C enquiries. Next, a P4C leader is nominated to champion P4C throughout the school. In-school demonstrations and observations help teachers build confidence and skills, while advanced training deepens the skills of the P4C leader and other selected teachers. Throughout the entire programme, teachers gain access to SAPERE's online training materials, practice tips and research evidence.

As the name 'Going for Gold' suggests, the goal is for participating schools to move through SAPERE's Bronze and Silver Awards, finally reaching SAPERE's Gold Award after three years. To achieve this, P4C must be firmly embedded in the school's teaching and learning strategy, so that it can continue to use high quality P4C in the classroom without further external support. P4C will also need to be embedded in the school's overall ethos. It's a worthy goal, and one that will foster a pleasant culture to learn and work in – as Joan Deslandes, headteacher of a large secondary school in East London, said, 'P4C creates the environment for students to raise questions, share opinions and, importantly, learn to see other people's points of views, which in turn

will build positive relationships.'

Gallions Primary School in Beckton became our first Gold Award in 2013. They serve a highly deprived catchment area, with 38 per cent of their pupils eligible for the pupil premium and 61 per cent with English as an additional language (EAL). Admittedly, they did have a bit of a head start on the schools now starting our Going for Gold programme – they have been practising P4C for ten years now, having originally introduced it to address chronic behaviour problems. All teachers are trained in P4C and conduct weekly enquiries across all year groups.

Gallions now outperform national averages for disadvantaged students in reading, writing and maths, and have decided to use P4C to give something back to the community, supporting its development in other schools in the area and running an active parents' P4C group to help bridge traditional ethnic boundaries.

Letting learners take the lead

Another of our early Gold Awards was Rokeby Secondary School in Newham, a boys' school with an inner city catchment area. An enormous 66 per cent of their boys are eligible for the pupil premium and 82 per cent are EAL. They are now in the top 20 per cent of similar schools for progress in maths and English, having launched P4C in English and humanities in 2009 and subsequently rolling it out across the entire curriculum. On introducing P4C, Rokeby saw a rapid improvement in pupils' attitudes to learning and their respect for others.

Rokeby are particularly innovative in the way they deliver their P4C sessions. Usually, enquiry sessions are facilitated by an experienced teacher who has undergone two days of special training; Rokeby School has developed the idea of putting promising pupils through this same training and then letting them facilitate enquiries in classes lower down the school. Pupils also develop most of their P4C resources and lesson plans.

One pupil who has benefited particularly from this is Tamunotanye Dakoru-Whyte (also known as Emmanuel), who was one of the school's P4C champions until he left in 2015.

Emmanuel comes from a highly disadvantaged background. He came to the UK from Nigeria as a mid-phase admission with limited experience of the English education system. He has grown up without a father figure from a very young age, and is also an active young carer for his autistic younger brother.

Although only 15 years old when he began, he is Level 1 trained, and spent his final two years at the school delivering P4C at a level many trained teachers would aspire to achieve. In fact, after watching him lead an enquiry with a Year 7 class, one English teacher at the school said: 'Emmanuel was a star today! Watching him deliver P4C was no different to watching a teacher deliver a fantastic lesson... He has made my day.'

As well as his involvement in P4C, Emmanuel created his own radio station, set up and led a

Rokeby News Team working closely with the BBC, served as a member of the student council and acted as a school events ambassador. His self-assurance and communication abilities are extraordinary for someone of his age, and he says that it is P4C that has helped him develop these skills in an area of social deprivation, where such skills are in short supply. As a P4C Champion, he was able to continue building his own abilities by passing them on to others.

P4C is an approach that asks the teacher to let some control go back to the pupils as they shape their own learning. What better way to do that than to put someone like Emmanuel in the centre of the group and facilitate on behalf of the teacher?

P4C and special educational needs

Another demographic of the school population P4C can work wonders for is children with special educational needs (SEN), whose articulacy and confidence benefit from the opportunity to have their say among their peers.

Take, for example, a certain P4C session at Coleridge Primary School in Rotherham. It's nine o'clock in the morning and SAPERE trainer Nick Chandley is sat in a circle of 14 children. On either side of him sit two five-year-olds, Ewan and Kayleigh. Everyone is sitting cross legged on the floor.

'Imagine I have 14 sweets,' begins Nick.



'What am I going to do? There are 15 of us.'

'Give us all one,' is the first response. Nick explains that there aren't enough. 'Maybe I should have them all,' he muses. 'That's not fair,' says Ewan. 'Why not?' counters Nick. 'They're my sweets. It's fair on me if I have them all.'

On his other side, Kayleigh says something about fairness. It's hard to understand, but then, she is often hard to understand so weak are her verbal skills. At least she is speaking.

The conversation goes on for 30 minutes, delving into questions of fairness and occasionally straying into issues of Nick's gluttony. It's not a free-for-all. If a child wants to speak, they have to sit quietly with their hand held out on their knee and wait till Nick calls on them to speak. That's really hard for Ewan who normally can't sit still for more than five minutes at a time, but there he is, in his brother's too big shirt, waiting patiently for his turn.

It's even harder for Daniel who is on the autistic spectrum. He won't look Nick in the eye when he speaks, but again, at least he's speaking. The week before, Nick got a letter from Daniel's mum, who hardly ever writes a letter. What she wanted to say was that Daniel had come home and told her what he'd been doing in 'flossfee'. That's remarkable because Daniel almost never says anything about school. That mattered to his mum – so much so that she went to the effort of putting it into writing.

Thirty-five per cent of the pupils on roll at Coleridge School in Rotherham have SEN, compared to the national average of 17.1 per cent. They also have 63 per cent of students on FSM, 63 per cent EAL, and a mobility rate of 27 per cent (many pupils are recent immigrants). In fact, on a recent Ofsted visit, the inspector said that Coleridge was one of the most difficult environments she had ever come across. Despite this difficult situation, however, the school is thriving. How? Headteacher Jane White attributes much of their success to P4C. The approach forms a major part of the school's ethos and is playing an important role in maximising student engagement with learning and opportunities for future success.

'It lays the critical foundations for our children to achieve,' said Jane. 'The last three years have seen us double our number of Year 6 pupils achieving at [the expected level] in all three areas of reading, writing and maths, and, in all year groups, our reading progress is now outstanding.'

Supporting our most troubled and disadvantaged children

At Park Campus Academy in South Norwood – a secondary Alternative Provision (AP) academy with about 80 students, almost all permanently excluded, almost all from difficult and disturbed family backgrounds – Lucas is telling his story.

At his previous school and at just 13, he made a big mistake – he brought a knife into school. In his mind, it was just a defensive move to ward off the constant bullying that left him physically and emotionally battered every single school day. His school took the view that he had to be excluded, and he was – permanently.

He is now at Park Campus Academy, and he tells his story in a P4C class without anger or rancour. He acknowledges that he did a stupid thing, but feels that he was given no chance to explain the situation. He was told that he would have the chance to put his case to the school authorities, but the decision was made before he could do that.

Lucas's teacher, Kate, is focusing on rights in this week's P4C session. She starts with a role play in which one of the teaching assistants plays a disobedient student. The 'student' tells Kate to leave her alone. Kate loses her temper and throws the student out of the class. She then asks the boys: 'Did I have the right to do that?'

A discussion ensues in which Kate leads the students to qualify different rights in terms of whether they apply always, sometimes or never. Lots of ideas quickly emerge. Lucas comes up with: 1) the right to feel safe, and 2) the right to speak up for oneself.

Kate asks: 'What about the right to take revenge for an injustice?' 'You never have the right to take revenge, but you sometimes have the right to challenge an injustice,' is Lucas's response.

'What type of challenge do you mean,' Kate asks. 'A challenge with the fists or a challenge with a reasoned argument?'

Lucas concludes: 'You always have the right to challenge an injustice as long as you do it respectfully.'

In philosophical terms, he is drawing a distinction between taking revenge and challenging an injustice, identifying the right to respond, and making the moral decision that challenge is a more appropriate response than revenge. He qualifies this by asserting that the right to challenge injustice is always justified if you do it respectfully.

Park Campus Academy deals with a tiny

minority of the most difficult students in the country. These are students with whom mainstream schools can no longer cope. Almost all come from highly disadvantaged backgrounds; many have to cope with drug dependency, abuse and crime in the home.

In mainstream schools, P4C is conducted in classes of 20 to 30 students. Here, as in most AP settings, P4C takes place in small groups of three to six students. The issues discussed are thorny and real. Students' comments are frequently insightful and sometimes shocking. Disagreements are common but there is an underlying sense of respect for other points of view.

The teachers at Park Campus Academy say that P4C has given them a new set of strategies to help students discuss and reason through the issues that they face – and the mistakes that they have made. The local police liaison unit has noted a difference in the way in which they can reason with Park Campus students since they have been doing P4C. The students seem to enjoy the sessions and their comments reveal considerable subtlety and sophistication in their thinking.

Shaun Dodds, the Principal, says simply: 'P4C has made a big difference for us.'

Where next?

The aim of all our P4C projects is to enhance the education attainment and personal and social development of pupils in primary and secondary schools across the country. As you can see, it takes many different forms and can give many different benefits for all children, no matter the difficulties they face or have faced at home and in their life so far.

In Tower Hamlets and Newham, as expected, schools are moving at different speeds. The first school to start our Going for Gold programme, Manorfield Primary, has already achieved the Silver Award, about 12 months ahead of expectations. Bow Secondary is not far behind, having recently achieved the Bronze Award. Other schools only started their teacher training last summer term and have introduced regular P4C sessions from September 2015.

The schools are all coming together as an 'East London P4C Hub', which will run until at least 2018. Half of the funding for the project is coming from city firm, M&G Investments, with the schools paying the other half. It is only early days, but the project has exceeded SAPERE's expectations in terms of take-up and in the enthusiasm with which schools have taken to the Going for Gold programme, with many

Bow and Manorfield's P4C celebration day



schools willing to invest in the programme substantially beyond the half amount they are required to provide. Two schools have even joined the hub on a self-funding basis, building on the local momentum created by the project.

With financial support from M&G Investments, Manorfield and Bow are also running a parallel project, using P4C to help students cope with the transition from primary to secondary. This transition is recognised to be a key challenge in the educational journey, particularly for those coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, of whom there are many in Tower Hamlets.

So far, the project has been a success. Manorfield's former head, Wendy Hick, said: 'The joint Year 6 and Year 7 enquiries really build confidence for our students. Were it not for the uniforms, it would be hard to tell which students were primary and which secondary!' Headteacher at Bow Secondary, Cath Smith, added: 'I have been delighted by the success of this project so far, and it is only in its early days. We are planning to extend it to more of our feeder schools who are practising P4C.

We are also looking to expand into Year 8 and incorporate P4C into a number of different subject areas.

'As the model develops, we plan to extend it across the East London P4C hub schools and beyond. In time, we hope that it will provide a template for P4C in the primary to secondary transition that SAPERE can recommend to P4C schools across the country.'

And that's not all that's spreading. SAPERE is now promoting the P4C hub model in other regions. Other hubs have started in Sheffield, Liverpool and Bexley, and further multi-school P4C partnerships have been launched in West London and Leicestershire. SAPERE is also in discussions to launch further P4C hubs in Oldham, Abergavenny and North London.

On behalf of the schools involved, we would like to thank M&G Investments for supporting this work. For more information or to arrange a visit to one of the schools, please contact Bob House, SAPERE Chief Executive, at bobhouse@sapere.org.uk or visit www.sapere.org.uk.



References

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2. Colom, R., Moriyó, F.G., Magro, C. and Morilla, E. (2014) The Long-term Impact of Philosophy for Children: A longitudinal study (Preliminary Results), *Analytic Teaching and Philosophical Praxis*, vol. 35(1), pp.50-56.
3. Liverpool Healthy Schools (2013) Philosophy for Children – Pilot Programme Evaluation Final Report.
4. Council for Education in World Citizenship (2012) *Wiser Wales: Developing philosophy for children in different school contexts in Wales 2009-2012*. Final evaluation report.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Bonnell, J., Copestake, P., Kerr, D., Passy, R., Reed, C., Salter, R., Sarwar, S. and Sheikh, S. (2011) Teaching approaches that help to build resilience to extremism among young people. Department for Education. [online] Available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/teaching-approaches-that-help-to-build-resilience-to-extremism-among-young-people [Accessed 26 January 2016].

Knowledge trails

1. **Creating a P4C-inspired curriculum** – P4C is well known as a worthwhile activity in primary schools. But it could be so much more! Gavin White makes the case for the reconstruction of the whole curriculum around philosophy. library.teachingtimes.com/articles/creating-p4c-curriculum
2. **Letting the passengers drive the bus** – Students can improve their thinking skills if they are allowed to lead P4C enquiries. Steven Brammell reports on a successful initiative. library.teachingtimes.com/articles/letting-the-passengers-drive-the-bus
3. **Closing the achievement gap in Ulster** – Kate O'Hanlon reports on another creative approach to raising the academic attainment of our most disadvantaged children – Reuven Feuerstein's Instrumental Enrichment. library.teachingtimes.com/articles/closingtheachievementgapinulster