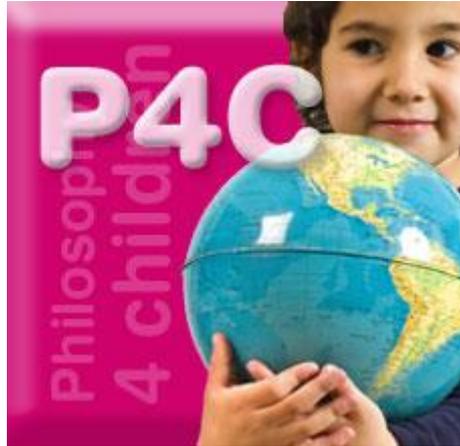


History of P4C

A brief history of philosophy for Children



PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN, or P4C for short, was the title Professor Matthew Lipman gave to his project of using the discipline of philosophy as resource to help children become more intellectually energetic, curious, critical, creative and reasonable.



Matthew Lipman

He conceived the project in the late sixties when he was teaching philosophy at Columbia University, New York. It was a time of social conflict when reasonableness in all senses of the word seemed in short supply. At that time, there was a growing interest in education programmes to develop 'thinking skills' and a feeling that people ought to be able to 'think for themselves' in the face of competing values, authorities and 'solutions'. Educationalists, then as now, were concerned that schools were making pupils into passive learners who expected to be told what to think. They feared that the school system was providing poor preparation for further learning and for life itself.

Why philosophy?

A crucial question is: 'Why was Lipman so convinced that philosophy was, potentially, such a rich resource for education and for self-sustainable thinking and learning?' Here, in summary, and not in his own words, are the kinds of responses he has given in books and articles.

- If teachers want to teach 'thinking skills', then why start from scratch with a couple of days spent brainstorming a curriculum or buying a package from one of the many educational entrepreneurs? Why not start with a discipline, philosophy, that has been developed over centuries and in which questioning and critical thinking are central concerns?
- Philosophers have developed tools of logic and argument that are necessary for critical thinking.
- Philosophy promotes questioning, open mindedness, clarity in language and precision in thinking.
- Philosophy can make the curriculum that many pupils experience as disconnected seem more coherent, and therefore meaningful. It provides a means to explore and link the conceptual foundations and assumptions of all subjects.
- Philosophy enables thinking about the relationships between facts and values; means and ends. It sets learning in the context of experience as a whole and against a horizon of questions that matter -- questions about central human concerns such as fairness, justice, truth, freedom, responsibility, right and wrong.
- Philosophy has developed the practice of dialogue as a method of inquiry that sharpens thinking and social skills, draws on diverse perspectives, and makes individual thinking accountable to a community of peers.

Children's capabilities

Lipman also had a strong conviction that children were not only capable of talking about matters of significance but also that they were naturally disposed to question and wonder. They were hungry for nourishing intellectual food. While serving in France during World War 2, he noticed 'greater intellectual camaraderie' between adults and children in sharing and discussing literature through 'thoughtful dialogue'.

The philosophical novels

He decided to devote himself to making the resources of philosophy accessible to children through thoughtful dialogue stimulated by the sharing of literature. He was inspired by writers of dialogues such as Plato and Diderot (and by the 'Charlie Brown' cartoons) to create philosophical dialogues (Lipman calls them novels) in which reasoning, questioning and conceptual exploration were revealed to be important in the lives of a group of pupils,

friends and teachers. His first philosophical novel for children -- 'Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery' -- was completed in 1969. Others followed as documented on the [timeline](#) page of the [website of the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children \(IAPC\)](#), the organisation for P4C established by Lipman and his collaborators at Montclair State College (now University), New Jersey.

Support for teachers

Lipman realised that teachers and philosophers who were to discuss the novels with children needed some induction into the aims of the project, the connections with the discipline of philosophy and the means by which adults and children would be able to have thoughtful dialogues together. Influenced by the American pragmatist philosophers Pierce and Dewey, he envisaged the 'community of inquiry' -- a caring yet critical and creative group of collaborators in dialogue. Together, in their community of inquiry, adults and children would raise questions and carefully examine suggestions for answers.

Lipman and colleagues such as Ann Sharp and Fred Oscanyon produced 'manuals' for adults, which were rich in ways and means of 'doing' philosophy. He also tutored adults directly, in courses organised by the IAPC. The IAPC also acquired several grants to test its materials and methods in urban and suburban New Jersey schools. These studies provided empirical evidence early on to support Lipman's insights that children are capable of engaging with philosophical questions, and that doing so improves their cognitive and social skills, and makes their educational experience more meaningful.

The IAPC collection of novels and manuals eventually catered for pupils aged from 4-16 years, and constitute the 'Philosophy for Children' curriculum. They are available from the [IAPC](#), and remain an inspiration to all those who share Lipman's aspiration to bring philosophy to more, and younger, people. There will, indeed, be echoes of them in many of the resources to be found on this website.

In the 1970s Lipman and Sharp also began a masters degree program in Philosophy for Children at Montclair, and a doctoral program in the 1990s. Today, university courses in P4C are on offer through organisations and universities around the world.

Philosophy for Children gets noticed

As the Lipman curriculum was put into practice and evaluated, it became clear that it was a significant educational intervention. Controlled studies showed that it had a positive impact on young people's reading and reasoning skills, and on their interpersonal relationships.

Not surprisingly, therefore, interest in the curriculum and practice of 'Philosophy for Children' arose in other countries. From early on, the IAPC welcomed teachers and philosophy professors from around the world to its courses and workshops, and began offering workshops beyond the USA. The IAPC curriculum was translated and adapted, culturally, in scores of countries. Following a P4C workshop in Denmark in 1983, the

International Council for Philosophical Inquiry with Children (ICPIC) was formed, and since then the practice of thoughtful dialogue in communities of enquiry has been taken forward in over 60 countries.

Widening the range of materials

As the value of philosophical thinking in communities of inquiry became apparent and a wider range of people started to experiment with the approach, some found that other materials, apart from Lipman's original novels, were also effective at stimulating children's interest in philosophical problems and concepts. For example, almost simultaneously in the late eighties, Karin Murriss in the UK and Tim Sprod in Australia produced materials (and arguments) that supported the use of picture books to this end. Also in Australia, Philip Cam edited a series of books called 'Thinking Stories', including purpose-written materials from several countries.

Indeed, educators in many countries have tried to develop curriculum materials to suit their own national cultures, or at least educational systems. These range from Per Jespersen, who has built on the tradition of story-telling in Denmark, to Catherine McCall, who prefers a particular approach, partly inspired by Scottish Enlightenment thinking, that she characterises as PI (Philosophical Inquiry). Other remarkable projects in Europe have been based on art and museum visits, and on the theme of ecology, which resulted in a CD funded by the European Union called 'Ecodialogo'.

Vigorous movements of P4C have also developed in Canada, both French-speaking and English-speaking, and in Latin American countries, not least (in rough order of development) Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Brazil and Venezuela. And, after quite early 'take-up' in Taiwan, there have also been proponents of P4C in other Asian countries, such as the Philippines, Singapore, and S. Korea, where the practice is being thoughtfully influenced by traditions of Eastern philosophy.

We regret not having space here to mention all the countries where P4C is practised, but a good list can be found on the IAPC webpage, [World of Philosophy for Children](#)

Overall, it would seem fair to say that the basic aim of 'communities of philosophical inquiry', which we would characterise as 'learning to think for yourself through thinking with others', is one which unites everyone who is happy to align themselves with the educational project that Lipman initiated.

Research

Over the past four decades a body of philosophical and empirical research on philosophy for, of and with children and adolescents has built up, amounting to thousands of academic books, articles, and doctoral dissertations, from scores of countries. Pre-college philosophy is the topic of dozens of academic conferences or special conference sessions every year, in

every part of the world, and is the primary thematic focus of four academic journals, as well as a frequent focus of numerous other journals in philosophy and education.

P4C.COM as part of the tradition

Matthew Lipman has been very generous in his support for and engagement with all those people who have shared his vision of making the resources of philosophy available to children and young people. Neither he, nor the IAPC, have tried to restrict development of p4c by insisting that it is an exclusive commercial brand name. On this site we differentiate the IAPC program and other developments by the use of capitals: Philosophy for Children (P4C) for the IAPC materials and philosophy for children (p4c) for the tradition in general and in all its variety.

We see p4c.com as part of the p4c tradition and as a support for people who want to experiment and collaborate with a range of materials and ideas, including those of the IAPC.

We have designated major areas of our website to 'Inquiry Building', focussing on the skills and dispositions each of us needs to be excellent thinkers and inquirers, and to 'P4C Craft', meaning the art of developing communities of inquiry. Another major focus is on concepts that are either traditionally philosophical or worth exploring philosophically. These can be found in the section, 'Concept Stretchers'. We also aim to build up a rich range of stimuli, increasingly representing those that contributors have found effective in different contexts.

And, finally, we shall hope to be supplementing this brief history with articles and other contributions to the P4C Library that enlarge and deepen people's appreciation of the countless thoughts and actions that have brought P4C to where it is now.

It might be worth ending this history, then, with the striking note that, when Lipman embarked on his project in the late 60s, there was no such thing as the internet. It would be a dream fulfilled if the technology that brings this site to you enables practitioners across the world not only to share their vision and develop their practice, but also to appreciate their common roots and celebrate their sense of community.

