

The Key to Transformation: How the Introduction of Philosophy for Children (P4C) Encouraged Empathy in Grade 9 Boys

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Further Information

This poster and further information is available at <http://www.theibsc.org/>

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Introduction

In a world where things are changing at an increasingly rapid rate, it seems obvious that the ability to adapt, to be flexible, and to generate new plans when things change are skills that children growing up in the 21st Century need to be armed with in order to be successful. Further to this, in our South African context, which is steeped in a history of racial inequality, it is paramount that we give our students, grappling with the realities and consequences of the Apartheid regime, the tools to process and adapt, not only in the fast paced world we live in, but in our country which is still challenged by the aftermath of Apartheid.

I was hopeful that this project might give the boys I teach the ability to identify their own privilege and prejudices, and in so doing, be able to develop a greater level of empathy.

Empathy and adaptability are inextricably linked, it is through being empathic, and understanding the plight of others, that we are able to adapt our own behaviour to the needs of others.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected by means of:

- A baseline questionnaire on empathy (this was done again at the end of the project)
- Field notes
- Anecdotal observations
- Focus group discussion
- Self assessment on their ability to use the 4Cs effectively

Once the data had been collated and the interviews transcribed, the information was categorised. Further categorisation into themes was made relatively easy with the use of a spreadsheet.

The Research Question

How might the introduction of Philosophy for Children (P4C) in a study of literature encourage empathy in grade 9 boys?

Research Context and Participants

St Alban's College is an independent school in Pretoria, South Africa.

My participants included 24 boys from my Grade 9 English class. The boys were all approximately 15 years of age.

THE 4CS OF P4C

CREATIVITY

connecting (relating) and **suggesting** (speculating) (e.g. providing comparisons, examples, criteria, alternative explanations or conceptions)

COLLABORATION

responding (communicating) and **supporting** (conciliating) (e.g. building on each other's ideas,

CARING

listening (concentrating) and **valuing** (appreciating) (e.g. showing interest in, and sensitivity to, others' experiences and values .

CRITICAL

questioning (interrogating) and **reasoning** (evaluating) (e.g. seeking meaning, evidence, reasons, distinctions, and good judgements)

WWW.SAPERE.ORG.UK

Key readings:

Khang, S. (2015). The dolphin parent: A guide to raising healthy, happy, and self-motivated kids. Canada. Penguin.

Sapere.org.uk. (2017). Community of Enquiry. [online] Available at: www.sapere.org.uk

Xhakaza, Y. (2017). Exactly how should we be teaching 21st century children? Huffington Post South Africa.

THE ACTION:

THE SEQUENCE OF A P4C LESSON

At the heart of P4C and any community of inquiry are four competencies known as the 4Cs.

The 4Cs are **CREATIVITY; CRITICAL THINKING; CARING** and **COLLABORATION**. These are referred to throughout an inquiry.



1 SHARE THE STIMULUS

This could be in the form of a short story; an extract from a novel, a picture or photograph, song or short video.



2 THINK TIME

I found that "think time" was imperative. It allowed the boys an opportunity to really engage with the stimulus.



3 QUESTION/STATEMENT CREATION

Initially the trickiest bit; getting the boys to come up with philosophical statements or questions individually. After a couple of inquiries, however, they were brilliant at this.



4 SHARING QUESTION/STATEMENT

This part of the inquiry gives the boys an opportunity to use their ability to reason and think critically. As the groups were no bigger than 4, it was a relatively safe space and I noticed a lot of growth in the boys during this small group time.



5 VOTING

The boys do a blind vote at this point. They are encouraged to vote for a statement that they think will really challenge the group. It appeals to the boys as they get to choose which topic they talk about and they have a sense of ownership of it.

6 DISCUSSION

The bulk of the lesson should be spent here. The boys discuss their chosen philosophical question and use it as a springboard to discussing a plethora of ideas.



7 REFLECTION

This is arguably the most important part of an inquiry. This is an ideal opportunity for the boys to engage with the 4Cs and reflect on their contribution, the contribution of their peers as well as the discussion they will have just engaged in.

What the boys had to say

Student O intimated in his interview that he felt it (P4C) was something we needed to focus on more at school, and that "we strengthen our relationships with people - even those that are not our friends."

As a result of "our youth and our privilege we don't tend to empathise with people around us - it (P4C and the community of inquiry) has almost brought out more empathy in us."

"I felt I was a lot shyer and nervous than I thought I was. I always thought that I didn't really mind what people thought of me and stuff, but when you're in that whole group, you get, like, nervous and don't say a lot of your points, but towards the end I felt more confident."

"I really tried to be precise in expressing my thoughts."



Key Findings

There were a number of emergent themes as a result of this project, these included, but were not limited to an increased:

- sense of **confidence**, especially in those deemed "quiet" or "introverted";
- level of **questioning**, both of their peers and themselves;
- ability to **collaborate**; and
- interest and **sensitivity** to others' experiences.

Conclusion

P4C is something that I have always had an interest in, but immersing myself in this action research project has made me realise what a beneficial tool it is in education. It is a pedagogy that has the ability to be used across the curriculum, and is as effective as an academic pedagogy as it is a pastoral one.

P4C offers children the opportunity to "reflect upon and question their existence and its value" (Ndofiperi, 2011), in the South African context, where transformation is one of the greatest challenges in education, it is an effective channel of transforming the boys in our care into reflective, adaptable and responsible citizens. As such, P4C has an undeniably important role to play in our whole-school curriculum.

