



thinking space

COMMUNITY OF ENQUIRY

WHAT IS IT?

A Community of Enquiry is a group of people who use a framework for group dialogue to engage with their own philosophical questions. A Community of Enquiry approach (sometimes called a Philosophy for Children or P4C approach) aims to encourage learners to think critically, caringly, creatively and collaboratively.

Constructive dialogue (as opposed to chatting) involves sharing views, identifying intuitions, clarifying concepts, examining reasons, suggesting alternatives, testing intuitions and considering criticisms.

Dialogues not only give people the opportunity to engage with some of the most puzzling and intriguing questions around, they also develop essential thinking and communication skills whilst making these skills explicit to learners in order that they might learn to learn more effectively.

RECIPE

- **No. of participants:** 5 – 30
- **Age of participants:** Suitable for any age
- **Preparation time:** 10 minutes
- **Delivery time:** 10 minutes – 1 hour
- **Materials:** A source of stimulus e.g. article, story, music.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

- 1. Preparation:** An enquiry typically begins with an activity to focus the group such as a game, a meditation, a period of silence or a cup of tea (see 'Games to Focus' Tool).
- 2. Stimulus:** Next the group is exposed to a rich source of interest, intrigue or puzzlement or a new experience (see 'Thinking in Role' Tool and 'Taking Enquiry Further' Tool).
- 3. Absorption:** Before anyone responds to the stimulus, everyone has an opportunity to think, absorb and reflect in silence.

HOW DOES IT WORK? (cont.)

4. Conversation: In pairs, the participants share their first thoughts and feelings about the stimulus.

5. Formulation Of Questions: In pairs or in small groups, students compose philosophical questions which probe some aspect of the stimulus they found interesting.

6. Airing Of Suggestions: Once each pair has agreed on a philosophical question, the questions are shared with the rest of the group. Sometimes there might be an opportunity to explore the range of questions considering common themes, key differences, or presumptions.

7. Selection / Voting: The central enquiry question is voted for by the students. As the community develops they should explore and make explicit the criteria by which they are making their decision. E.g. A good enquiry question should be open; it should invite lots of different views; it should address an issue people think is very important; it should be a question that can't be decisively answered by asking an expert, doing an experiment or searching the internet.

8. First Words: The discussion begins with an opportunity for the person who composed the question to explain why it interested him or her.

9. Building Through Dialogue: Next participants are invited to build on what others have said by taking turns to comment on the question and the contributions of others. The person currently speaking (not the teacher!) chooses who speaks next.

10. Final Words: Finally everyone in the group is invited to reflect on the discussion and, if they like, to offer a final comment.

TIPS

- Each person who wants to contribute should signal (e.g. Show an open palm).
- A useful way to ensure your comments build on what has already been said is to prefix your contribution with: 'I agree or disagree because...'
- If the discussion is losing focus, ask for a volunteer to summarise key points so far.
- To promote turn-taking the facilitator should set a good example by signalling if they would like to contribute to the discussion, rather than jumping in.
- However, when the facilitator needs to use their role for management of the discussion they don't need to wait to be asked.
- Why not let a student choose the stimulus next time?

FIND OUT MORE

- 'Philosophy for Children' by Matthew Lipman
- Visit SAPERE's website <http://www.sapere.org.uk/>
- See 'Games To Focus' Tool
- See 'Taking Enquiry Further' Tool
- See 'Thinking In Role' Tool



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