From polite agreement to passionate uncertainty: 'turning towards difference' in Philosophy for Children Lessons (P4C)

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Introduction

We both believe in dialogic pedagogies and in enhancing opportunities for children to talk, discuss, question, theorise and bring to the fore how they experience their world. Rob Drane is a primary school teacher and an experienced Philosophy for Children (P4C) practitioner; who leads ongoing professional development around classroom dialogue at the University of Cambridge Primary School (UCPS). Rupert Higham is a former secondary school teacher, now university lecturer at University College London (UCL), who researches and trains teachers in the field of productive dialogue, student agency and democratic citizenship.

Given our professional commitment to enabling democratic principles in schools, we became curious about how far we have been able to create the context in which democracy arises in a classroom. As Biddulph and Baldacchino say in this book, democracy is a messy business; it has diverse positions and practices across the globe, it involves or should involve various and variegated ideas/ideals/visions for the world and the people who live in it; it involves inclusion, freedom and social imagination – or should do. And yet, there is typically a desire to create order in schools; the pedagogic move is towards certainty and agreement. How can *spaces of uncertainty* (Biddulph and Burnard, 2022) be created in our classrooms in which opportunities to critique, disagree, agree to disagree, face uncertainty and difference are fostered? Where are the moments when matters of race, personal life story, family, culture, language and the other diverse diversities that exist in society, rub-up uncomfortably and through this friction create a sense of passionate uncertainty and a move away from polite agreement that doesn't challenge the interests and motives of majority and privileged groups.

In this chapter, we weave together practical experience of teaching Philosophy for Children (P4C) with theoretical insights into classroom dialogue. We highlight limitations in the current P4C approach, and experiment with modifications to standard P4C practice to promote constructive disagreement and develop students' empathy and imagination as crucial dispositions for democratic citizenship.

The limits and possibilities of Philosophy for Children

Philosophy for Children (P4C), an approach to developing thinking skills through philosophical dialogue developed by Lipman and Sharp in 1974, has gained popularity worldwide, and has developed into different forms in and beyond schools in over 60 countries (Gregory et al., 2017, p. xxi). Some approaches

still use Lipman's own specially crafted novels as source material, while others use news topics as stimulus. At the heart of all, however, is the creation of a community of enquiry around rich questions, and a commitment to cultivating the skills and dispositions to listen to, respect and value the different views of others, to engage with them on the basis of argument and evidence, and to work towards agreement. In these respects, we can locate P4C within a broader tradition of dialogic teaching: an approach with diverse philosophical roots that has also increased in popularity and systematicity, with increasing research over the past two decades showing its value in developing thinking, communication and motivation (Howe & Abedin, 2013). In the case of curricular classroom dialogue, this includes recent large-scale quantitative studies demonstrating positive impact on attitude, curriculum mastery and test results (Howe et al., 2019; Alexander, 2018).

Yet there are dissenting voices. Darren Chetty, a teacher and academic with vast experience of P4C in the UK, has provided a challenging critique of P4C's inclusiveness. He highlights how P4C practitioners, the great majority of whom are White, have marginalised or avoided discussing issues around race, noting that the topic has caused discomfort or been dismissed as not philosophical (Chetty, 2018). The chapter by Baldacchino and Abdullah in this book further evidences this discomfort in responding to social inequalities to do with race. This is despite P4C being advanced as a methodology that improves the skills and dispositions to engage with others across difference, and one committed to tackling the violent effects of global inequality. He suggests that two reasons for this may be inherent to the structure of P4C. First, a focus on *reasonableness* and reaching agreement that subtly privileges majority opinion, thereby implicitly characterising the voices of those who are marginalised, disadvantaged or angered by the *status quo* as 'unreasonable'. Second, a tendency to focus on safe trusted topics, often in the form of allegorical animal stories (Chetty 2014), that insulate discussion from more immediate human inequalities.

Chetty argues that P4Cs focus on valuing and promoting *reasonableness* as a core principle may have the effect of dismissing the voices of those who are marginalised, disadvantaged or angered by the *status quo* as 'unreasonable'. *Reasonable* is a central term to P4C practice (Gasparatou, 2016), but also a loosely defined and ambiguous one: it can mean fair, acceptable, logically sound, responsive to contrasting perspectives, or practical in the circumstances. These meanings can conflict – for example, it would be logical to respond to the climate emergency by demanding an end to all non-urgent air travel in conventional aircraft; yet this is argued to be an *unreasonable* restriction on freedoms for holiday-makers and businesses using air freight. Here *unreasonable* does not deny the logic of the argument, nor does it weigh in the freedoms of future generations to a habitable planet. Instead, it relies substantially on an implication: that it would be too disruptive, difficult or uncomfortable for the people who currently benefit, or more insidiously that 'the powers that be' would simply not allow it so it's not worth considering. In this sense, what is reasonable is what is *customary* among majority and/or powerful groups. As Chetty (2018) points out, this aspect of reasonableness puts the burden on the outsider and the dissenter to push for understanding, acceptance and change, while also marginalising as unreasonable their understandable feelings of frustration or suspicion in trying to do so.

P4C's majority agreement on trying to reach agreement is shared by many other traditions of dialogic teaching. Robin Alexander's six principles of dialogic teaching (previously five – *deliberative* is new), which have been highly influential in shaping theory and professional development, include:

> *Deliberative*: Participants discuss and seek to resolve different points of view… they work towards reasoned positions and outcomes.

> *Cumulative*: Participants build on their own and each other's contributions and chain them into coherent lines of thinking and understanding. (Alexander 2020, p. 131)

Both these terms, we suggest, subtly represent differences between positions as inherently problematic and seek to overcome them; they imply that all positions in a dialogue can be built upon and synthesised. Yet elsewhere within the dialogic tradition, Biesta argues for a 'pedagogy of interruption' that seeks to shake or dislodge participants' comfortable understandings and prompt them to construct new ones to shore up their positions. Maxine Greene talks of the teacher as stranger – that we must step into habitual spaces as if we are new to them and in so doing, look afresh. Similarly, Higham (2016) demonstrates the long-term value of conflict, even loss of temper and subsequent shame, in developing dialogic dispositions for 'responsible leadership' among teenagers in outdoor education settings: participants, unable to resolve their differences at the time, later reflected on why they were not able to engage with others' positions as humanely as they would have liked and resolved to learn from their experiences.

In this project, we both expected some conflict and abrasion of ideas rather than tidy synthesis achieved by mutual consent. Consequently, these approaches require the convener of the dialogue (and the participants to some extent) to value, enable and extend students' encounters with difference, and to take responsibility for enhancing or mitigating the impact the dialogue may have on them. This, Biesta points out, cannot be predicted in advance and must be embraced as a worthwhile risk; indeed, he characterises an educational approach based on dialogue as 'the slow way, the difficult way, the frustrating way, and, so we might say, the weak way, as the outcome of this process can neither be guaranteed nor secured' (Biesta 2014, p. 3). Yet this uncertain space of dialogue is where students can exercise some agency over their growth, recognising that valuing and abiding with contrasting perspectives is a powerful generator of new insights into others and into ideas. The success of dialogue is thus not gauged by securing agreements (although these may be valuable as interim or final outcomes) but by the continuation and deepening of humane, trusting and responsible interactions across difference, often through difficulty and continued disagreement.

The original iteration of P4C, using Lipman's specially crafted novels, exemplifies Chetty's (2018) further point about safe contained topics: that these implicitly represent philosophical topics as unrooted in space and time. While there is much value in exploring universal themes, a failure to situate the discussion can limit the debate and exclude participants. For example, Aristotle's discussion of virtues in the Nicomachean Ethics is a fascinating enquiry. His argument that emotions such as anger are only justified when directed "… towards the right object, to the right degree, for the sake of the right end, and in the right way" (*NE* 1109a28) is hugely valuable not only in helping understand righteous anger, but also a very practical tool for helping us manage, channel and evaluate our own. And yet, when this is presented as a general principle – the Golden Mean – it implicitly assumes that anger is a temporary response to an injustice that interrupts the status quo of justice; it gives us little insight into how to respond appropriately to systemic injustice. It further subtly assumes that the actor has some agency – that their righteous anger will influence the unjust situation. It is thus a more useful insight for the patrician scholars of ancient Greece than for the women and slaves who were bound to provide for them. Mills (2005) argues that such forms of 'ideal theory' in philosophical ethics, which propose a generalisable model of good conduct, often fail to factor in these real-life systemic inequalities that may disrupt their harmonious operation; when this disruption is significant, the models become effectively worthless. Ethicists are thus obliged to start by the critiquing the social context instead. The discomfort over issues of race that Chetty observes in the P4C community may reflect these tensions: a comfortable bubble created in the classroom for

timeless discussions of ideal virtues is threatened by the possible existence of systemic inequalities that are reflected in its conventions, focus, power dynamics and membership – as is the perception of the community as an unbiased space in which problems be resolved dispassionately.

We propose these challenges can be addressed within the P4C tradition itself. Ann Sharp, who co-founded P4C with Matthew Lipman, led the translation of the philosophical idea of 'community of inquiry' into a dialogic classroom pedagogy that she refined and mastered, training thousands of teachers in it from the 1970s until her death in 2010 (Gregory & Laverty, 2019, p. 1). For her, reasonableness was only one dimension alongside two others. Firstly, "…doing philosophy well involves more than conceptual clarity. It also involves moral imagination and insight. It requires a sharpened eye to distinguish what *is* from what *ought* to be" (Sharp, 2019, p. 110. Italics in original). *Imagination* is thus critical to ethics because we must be able to create, share and refine better possible futures if we are to have goals for improvement. Second, "…blindness [to others' needs] is something we must overcome through a development of empathy and sensitivity… by means of communal philosophical dialogue" (ibid, p. 118). *Empathy* is thus not primarily perceiving and mirroring the feelings of others, but rather the activity of trying to understand, and adapt responsively to, others' different perspectives on a topic of mutual interest through dialogue. For Sharp, imagination and empathy are habits developed through shared practice rather than qualities of individual minds. This reflects her commitment to the Pragmatist philosophy of John Dewey, which advocates the importance of learning processes rather than products, and on the mutual formation of the self and society through interaction (Dewey, 1966).

Conceived in this way, the community of enquiry must connect through dialogue to the perspectives, needs and lived challenges of diverse participants present, and through empathy to those relevant but not present. Rather than a refined and protected space for timeless philosophical thinking, Sharp's community is 'the process of sharing moral beliefs, perspectives and commitments an inquiring together into the way we think we all *ought to live*' (Sharp 2019, p. 118. Italics in original). Further, if this is to be more than isolated speculation, it should be supported with opportunities for students to take shared action in response to their discussions (Higham & Djohari, 2018). Without opportunities for meaningful response, anyone emerging as oppressed or disadvantaged through the dialogue must, by default, get back in their box when it ends. If resolution is to be sought in such cases, it is through addressing real-life challenges in the wider community rather than through a unifying turn of phrase. Participants must develop the habit of *turning towards difference*, less in fear than in excitement, as a source of challenge, learning and deepening of relationships with others and the world.

P4C sessions

In this section, Robert describes a number of P4C sessions that he planned and conducted with his class. The children were ten and eleven years old and were used to these types of session. In order to explore the idea of *turning towards difference*, I planned two different P4C sessions and continued discussion with my co-author, Rupert. I was curious about the productivity of dialogue when the implicit (or explicit) aim is to reach an agreement, which has often been the case in the context of dialogue in schools. A reflective moment prompted the classroom exploration which we describe in this section.

Professional Reflection: a teacher's questioning

Since exploring dialogue in my practice, I have started to feel that niggle that something isn't completely authentic. For example, we cannot always agree with one another in society and yet as we

talk in our 'communities of inquiry,' we seem to be striving towards some kind of shared truth. We seem to start with lots of ideas and quickly the children seem to guess that agreement is the goal. They seem to have worked out what the social capital of school is – to be well behaved and agreeable! In P4C teachers talk about there being 'no right answer,' and I know I had said this to them on numerous occasions, but I wondered if the format that the sessions followed genuinely encouraged this openness to difference. Through my questioning, I experimented with the format. Could this bring about more contestation and a new social capital of disagreeableness…or was I heading into chaos?

There are a number of different approaches a P4C session can take. To answer our questions around agreement and the productivity of difference within dialogue we used the SAPERE, ten-stage enquiry, standard at the University of Cambridge Primary school. There were two sessions, both of which used this approach – but in the second children were encouraged to value and explore the differences between their individual perspectives. Firstly, children were asked to take part in a thought experiment before the enquiry using the question: "When a friend of yours disagrees with you, how does it feel?". This drew attention to the discomfort/tension around disagreement – but also the inherent potential for productivity that lies within difference. Next, the sentence stems that ordinarily frame students' arguments were altered to prompt further exploration of alternative viewpoints rather than working towards a consensus or "answer". For example, in the place of 'I agree/I disagree with...,' children were asked to say instead: 'You see it differently, tell me more...'

The following section will explore a selection of episodes from these enquiries in order to provoke further thinking around the productivity of dialogue in our classrooms. With the permission of their parents, children recorded each other taking part in the enquiries. These recordings were then transcribed. Names have been changed and the dialogue has been coded using the T-SEDA framework (Vrikki et al., 2018), which identifies a range of talk 'moves' proven to improve educational dialogue in classrooms. The key for these moves can be found below:

Key dialogue categories	
B	Build on ideas – *elaborate, clarify or comment on own or others' ideas*
IB	Invite to build on ideas
CH	Challenge - questioning, disagreeing with or challenging an idea
R	Make reasoning explicit – *Explain, justify and/or use possibility thinking*
IRE	Invite reasoning

Table 1: T-SEDA coding scheme main categories (Vrikki et al. 2017)

Image 1: Monkey 'selfie'

In the first enquiry, the stimulus was a photograph captured by a monkey (of itself) as it set off a camera trigger. The photograph had sparked controversy because it was being freely used. I found out that works by non-human animals cannot currently be subject to copyright and that animal rights organisations had taken up the case on the monkey's behalf. This raised contestable, central and common questions around the concepts of 'owning' something and the relative rights of humans and animals. The conversation between Alice, Charlotte, Oliver, Ben and me that took place in this community of enquiry, illustrates the agreeableness that I found to happen in P4C sessions.

> *Mary: I think that all animals should have some rights but I don't get how a photo has anything that a monkey wants. If anyone wants to share photo on the Internet, I'm not sure why the monkey would be bothered. It's not like he's going to start taking photos of animals himself – he's just a monkey. [R + CH]*
>
> *Mr Drane: People pay thousands of pounds for photos shared online, just because he's a monkey it's different, is it? [IRE]*
>
> *Charlotte: The monkey wouldn't do anything with the money. I think the photographer, the person who set up the equipment, should be the copyright holder. […]The monkey accidentally came across that, whereas the photographer did it on purpose. [R]*
>
> *Mr Drane: So, there's something about intention? [IRE]*
>
> *Ali: I'm kind of in the middle. I think that both the photographer and the monkey should have some credit. Without the monkey, the photo would not be there, but without the photographer's equipment, the monkey couldn't have taken the photo. [R]*
>
> *Mr Drane: How are they going to give him the credit? Name the monkey ourselves and list him as the source? [IRE]*
>
> *Ben: Yes.*

Throughout this excerpt and the whole enquiry, the large majority of codes I identified were 'reasoning': student explaining their arguments and position. This is only a very small extract of one enquiry, but it serves to illustrate a pattern within P4C and in dialogue more widely when the aim, either explicitly or implicitly, is to reach some sort of answer or agreement. In P4C, the group, as a community of enquiry, are used to aim towards a consensus. Here, the class are striving to answer a moral question around rights and fairness, but in a class of 30 children over the course of 30 minutes there are only three examples of the challenge code [Ch]. It seemed that the children had already made up their minds and sharing their thoughts back and forth, with the teacher attempting to elicit further reasoning. The children either do not commit to a stance ('I'm kind of in the middle') or agree with what has been said already. They play with the idea in a polite way, seemingly self-conscious of their talk moves.

In practice, a sense of accomplishment at the end of a P4C session – a general consensus around the question or concept – seems productive; the community of enquiry have shared and made reasonable judgements and reflections. However, here it is only a performative success. Whilst the key features of a P4C enquiry have taken place and an agreement reached, the dialogue hasn't really mattered. Children have offered their reasoning, but their shared identification of an injustice in the animal kingdom will not serve to change anything meaningful to them. There are plenty of more significant injustices that deserve attention. The excerpt demonstrates what happens when there is a lack of a sense of urgency that is experienced when one is pulled by a dilemma or challenge in the encounter with the other. The stimulus about the monkey might be ideal for a formal debate, providing opportunities for the technical deployment of arguments. But it's hard to imagine this dialogue deepening students' empathy, understanding, or reasoning. We suggest that the topic must be more relevant and contentious to achieve this.

Before the second session took place, children were asked to consider the thought experiment: 'How do you feel when one of your friends disagrees with you?' Through this metacognitive approach, we drew attention to the productivity of difference. Children's responses reflected this:

> *Catharine: I could gain their knowledge and ask why they thought that.*
>
> *William: […] disagreements can help you learn things […] I would learn the right answer because she'd explain her thinking and I'd be learning something from that disagreement.*
>
> *Susanna: Well, it sort of depends … if you look at someone else point of view you could see … they could be right … you don't actually know until you've taken into context what other people are saying.*

In the second session, the stimulus was a script that the children enacted and focused on the theme of personal responsibility and agency.

> JOHN *Lockdown sucks. I can't play football. I can't see my cousins. It's like I'm a prisoner.*
>
> *BARRY That's a bit over the top. It's not great but being in prison is worse.*
>
> LUCY *That doesn't help, though, does it? I mean, you can't be happier about your life just because someone else's is worse.*

MARIE *I don't know. Whenever I don't want dinner, dad says, "Think about the starving people."*

JOHN *Does that work?*

MARIE *No. It puts me off eating. But he thinks it should make me feel lucky I'm eating at all.*

JOHN *We've got family in New Zealand. Everything's back to normal out there. I'm so jealous.*

BARRY *Well, if you can be jealous of them, you can be glad you're not in prison.*

JOHN *But I haven't done anything! Why would I be in prison?*

BARRY *Well, why would you be in New Zealand either? If you can feel sad because you're not in New Zealand, you can feel glad because you're not in prison.*

LUCY *I don't think it makes any difference whether you think about New Zealand, or prison, or starving people, or nothing at all. Lockdown just sucks. It's a fact.*

TIM *I think it sucks more if you think about how much it sucks. There were some good things about last lockdown. My dad learned to cook, for a start. You can look for the good things in any situation.*

MARIE *I don't think I want to be in lockdown long enough for my dad to learn to cook. I want to leave home when I'm 18.*

LUCY *I think it's easy for you to say you can look for the good things. You've got good things to look for. If you've got no money, no job, no family and you're stuck on your own, you can't just look for the good things. Where would you even start?*

TIM *You're always in charge of yourself. So, it's up to you how you think.*

LUCY *But you're not in charge of what happens to you. Some things are bad whatever you think.*

MARIE I don't think it's up to you how you think, either. What if you're really depressed? Or really anxious? People don't choose to think that way. I think the people in charge need to change things, not tell people to change how they think.

TIM *OK, maybe not. But if you can think it's up to you how you think, maybe that's better for you than thinking you can't.*

JOHN *I think I'll have to think about that.*

(Jason Buckley www.thephilosophyman.com 2021)

The concept of who is 'in charge' of decision making was particularly pertinent as both the fictional dialogue and the real-life enquiry were actually happening within the context of the global Covid-19 pandemic. This made the stimulus – and therefore the discussions – both relevant and important to their personal stories and experiences. This provided more of an urgent and relatable dilemma and, in contrast to the first enquiry, there were double the amount of challenge [Ch] codes; but more than this, there was a greater variety of codes all round. There were far more coordination of ideas [CA] (Co-

ordinating ideas) and inviting others to build on ideas [IB] codes. Could this invitation to accept difference translate into different types of dialogic interaction? Reflecting on session 2, there was also more evidence of Biesta's (2014) 'pedagogy of interruption,' and participants having their comfortable understandings challenged. For example, in this exchange around the agency of the disabled, Susanna and Emily challenge and build on each other's ideas:

> *Isabel: What about if you have a condition and if you just thought you didn't have that? You might have some disabilities but what about if you just think: "I'm just normal" – other people may have more advantages, but I'm just normal." Your thoughts can control who you are. [CH + IB]*
>
> *Emily: That could be true, but even if you do think you don't have [a disability] – it's the truth, so you'll still have the disability or disadvantage, even though you might not think that you do. And, adding on to J and A – if someone keeps on telling you that you can't do something, then your mind hears it every day […] that's what it thinks. But also, if you have someone telling you that you can do it every day, you might just try a little harder. [CH + B]*
>
> *Susanna: I don't mean that the person with the condition […]. They will know. And try to advance from that, not just say "Oh well, I have a disability, I'm just going to stay here and act as if I can't do anything." You still have the potential to do it, you just need another set of hands to work your way up. [R]*
>
> *Emily: So, like you were saying, the person needs another set of hands; they'd need someone to change their thoughts. That other set of hands brings another set of thoughts and makes things easier for them to learn etc. [C + R]*
>
> *Susanna: OK, that makes a lot of sense. But what I still don't understand is that the person might influence you, but you, yourself were the first person to think "I'm not going to accept that disability means I'm limited in my life." For example, people may want to send the person to a special school, but the person might want to go to another school – it is their thoughts telling them what they want to do, rather than the thoughts of others'. It's their thoughts that start the process and then they get someone else to build on this. [CA + CH + IRE]*

The children put forward their ideas, but also questioned and invited reasons from one another. This led to one child acknowledging they didn't completely understand. What I found is that in contrast to the first session, where positions were seemingly firm and unchanging, in the second session, following the metacognitive thought experiment prior to the session, the children adjusted their responses in light of others' and acknowledged difference, disagreement and admitted where they simply did not know due to lack of experience. In the example above, we can see the intersection of reason, imagination and empathy in exploring an issue more deeply. When Susanna says, "But what I still don't understand..."she is explicitly turning towards difference: trying to see from Emily's perspective, and valuing her contrasting position as a source of learning rather than seeking to close the gap because it is uncomfortable. Susanna's restless desire to engage further is fuelled by the emotional weight of the dialogue – it *matters to her.* This disposition, we suggest, is crucial to active democratic citizenship because it makes the needs and desires of others central to our own thinking, feelings and actions, and promotes the development of shared goals and actions.

Reflection from Mr Drane

I suppose that I assumed the talking was deepening ideas and bringing diversity out. But looking at those two interactions, inclusion is not about every one talking and having their voice – this is important – but bringing diversity out is about bringing the difference and disagreement out. It surprised me that the most interesting thing about what we explored is not the actual theme, but the interest in the difference of opinion. As teachers we like agreement – none of us want a class of chaos. I realised that I gave the freedom to discuss a tangential theme – they took the discussion away from the original point of the session. That was the most powerful thing. The children had agency. The stimuli was also a surprise – we tend to go for an open stimulus but having a narrow focus actually led to more productive dialogue, in this example. I think this is a way to bring out more contentious issues and things that matter to children – they lead the session to their meaning making. P4C says you can talk about anything…but when you really think about the possibilities of a stimulus, it can really surprise you. I didn't seem to need to give so much provocation, as facilitator, because they led the provocation…because it meant something to them. Their ideas flowed.

Looking forward: Spaces for democratic practice

John Dewey, in *Democracy and Education*, described democracy not so much as a system of governance, but as "a form of associated living, a conjoint, communicated experience" (1916, p. 93). This is a dialogic vision because it privileges the quality of relationships – equal, diverse, engaged, humane – over structures. Ann Sharp's approach was rooted in Dewey's work; for her, P4C was not just a pedagogy for developing critical thinking but a practical philosophy for living together well as a society.

Our analysis of the first enquiry above illustrates the challenge when P4C, either explicitly or implicitly, focuses on seeking agreement: here challenge and disagreeing are implicitly discouraged and positions are set out formally and in turn. And yet, if one were to switch on the television on a Wednesday in the United Kingdom, one would see our members of parliament seeking to personally discredit and diminish their opponents rather than understand their arguments. . How could P4C pedagogy prepare children for active participation in such democracy? The second enquiry shows how, by tweaking some of the P4C protocols and by encouraging students to turn towards difference, practitioners can open up spaces for more humane engagement with difficult issues and build dispositions for democratic citizenship.

The following section will outline some practical changes we can make in our communities of enquiry, as well as in our classrooms and wider school communities to place greater value on productive, difficult and uncertain exchanges.

In P4C, the choice of stimulus is important. In the first enquiry, the class ultimately reached agreement – the royalties from the photo should go towards conservation. This was a unanimous decision, but also a neat solution that avoided disagreement. In this case, the stimulus and its subject matter lacked the productive tension, found in issues of greater urgency and relevance that is necessary for fruitful dialogue to occur. As a result, the students had little emotional or intellectual investment in the dialogue – it exercised their reasoning but didn't challenge their beliefs or draw them into trying to understand those of others. The more formal forms of argument offered here lacked the emotional drive and imaginative stretch required to seek to bridge entrenched divides around important issues in our society. To truly open up a dialogic space of restless but respectful 'not-knowing,' children need to be drawn into spaces of productive discomfort relating to issues that genuinely matter, and where understanding the other is

vital. In P4C, children often vote on the question, but it is our responsibility to ensure that the stimulus itself has the potential for difference and uncertainty to be explored. Otherwise, children end up giving reason after reason, often with few connections and limited moments of disagreement and the exercise that is designed to hone their critical thinking skills – the enquiry itself – either only serves to confirm their preconceptions or operates only on a shallow, performative level that doesn't provoke deeper questioning. Stimuli should be relatable, urgent, humane and difficult in students' eyes. This demands more from children by exposing them to real-world challenges rather than insulating them.

When children discuss subjects that are immediately relevant to them, things that they can act upon rather than simply reflecting upon, not only does productive dialogue occur, but so does a space for democratic action. In the case of the second enquiry, children were living through an experience – a global pandemic – where people were making lots of decisions without their consent, such as being denied in-school education or socialising with their friends. By encouraging them to discuss agency within this context, children's dispositions for active citizenship are more readily activated.

"One thing a person cannot do, no matter how rigorous his analysis or heroic his imagination," Nobel laureate Thomas Schelling once observed, "is to draw up a list of things that would never occur to him." (Schelling, 1987) This is why difference is so important in dialogue to seek out and explore the uncertain or unknown in order to better understand it. Communities of enquiry can set out to explore different viewpoints, but merely list different ideas before reverting to orthodoxy. This is, in part due to –P4C's ground rules and talk moves that can marginalise difference by seeking a shared definition or resolution to a question. As Chetty has explored, this risks creating a 'pedagogy of politeness' which "only goes so far before it degrades into the paradox of liberal feel-good solidarity absent of dissent" and ultimately a 'democracy of empty forms'" (Chetty, 2017). At the end of one of our samples of dialogue one child simply replies 'Yes' – in all dialogue, it is far easier to agree as it superficially diffuses any discomfort caused by allowing conflicting positions to endure. This becomes a dangerous reflex when tackling discourse around subjects such as race where the perspectives of the marginalised are rarely voiced, and even more rarely understood. Too strong a steer towards reaching agreement risks minimising the difference between positions, while voting, which is often seen as a quintessential democratic activity, in practice often ends discussion by negating minority positions entirely (Higham and Djohari 2018). Similarly, a focus on politeness and reasonableness risks reducing the space for genuine democratic practice by limiting the range of emotional, experiential and intellectual responses to contentious issues, especially those who have been marginalised themselves.

Sharp's solution was to focus on developing imagination and empathy alongside reason. One practical example is using thought experiments and sentence stems similar to those used in our second enquiry. Asking 'How do you feel when your friend disagrees with you?' is useful both within the context of a P4C enquiry and the wider classroom community to draw attention to the value of uncertainty. It invokes imagination to better prepare them for productive disagreement. To develop empathy, instead of well-used, formalised sentence stems such as: 'I agree/disagree,' we can ask children to use such terms as 'Can you tell me more?' or 'Great, you disagree with me – can you help me understand…' This small change in phrasing, as Chetty has suggested, 'signals a willingness to be a listener' and 'is not a restatement of one's own position […] It signals interest, and a willingness to 'stay' with the subject and, by extension, the speaker. Unlike 'why?', 'can you tell me more?' is not a demand for justification.'

It is far easier to agree and to try and reach a polite and reasonable conclusion and thus school leaders or philosophical practitioners reading this may be reluctant in their teachers and children turning towards difference. Because this approach might seem daunting, we have distilled our arguments into a few changes that teachers can make to their communities of enquiry:

- **Stimuli**: Choose topics that really *matter* to children – where different perspectives will challenge beliefs and assumptions that are woven into the fabric of their lives.
- **Culture**: Encourage a culture of 'turning towards difference' by showing how dwelling in spaces of compassionate disagreement, rather than seeing disagreement as a threat, generates new understandings and promotes personal growth. Start a thought experiment with your class with a question like, "what would happen if everyone agreed?" The following sentence stems may help:
    - *I see it differently, tell me more.*
    - *I really want to understand why you feel differently about this.*
    - *How did you come to believe that?*

- **Teacher's Role**: do not be afraid to allow heated disagreement in your class while ensuring that children understand that it is a conflict of ideas, not personalities, and that you protect them against potential harm. Celebrate people changing their minds, expressing sympathy with multiple positions, and sharing fears and frustrations honestly. Consider videoing a dialogue on a contentious issue with a colleague as a talking point for students.
- **Agency**: consider how your P4C sessions might draw on areas of children's existing active interests, and support them to subsequently take action that reflects their developing understandings. What further discussion around policies, practices and cultures would this promote in the wider school and community?

This chapter has sought to reaffirm Sharp's believe in P4C as a valuable end-in-itself in education, and as a philosophy for living together. By building the habit of *turning towards difference* - to be as the stranger, as Maxine Greene says - we can reorient children and adults to see disagreement as a precious source of learning, and an opportunity to build new bonds of understanding across diversity. In so doing, we suggest that the difference deepens relationships with others and the world and is essentially democratic.

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