



Peaceful Schools Guidance Leaflet

# PEACE TALKS IN SCHOOLS

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## About the author - Christine Easom

Christine studied to become a teacher at Bishop Grosseteste College in Lincoln. Originally from south London, Chris has lived and worked in Staffordshire since 1980. She was Head of R.E. at a Specialist Humanities College until 2009 and has since worked independently offering introductory training and workshops with P4C and creative approaches to Religious Education. In this guidance leaflet she writes about her work in three schools where she used P4C as a tool to research peaceful schools. Many thanks to pupils and staff at Wolstanton High School, Richard Wakefield C. of E. Primary School and the Staffordshire Student SACRE.

## 1. Introduction

I believe that Philosophy for Children, known worldwide as P4C, can be used to stimulate thinking and discussion about peaceful schools and it can contribute to the building of peaceful schools. My aim is to encourage teachers, and others working with young people, to consider using the P4C approach as a means to achieve challenging, meaningful and purposeful dialogue that can lead to real and lasting change within a school.

My own work in schools has shown me how much young people care about the environments in which they learn and build relationships. What is more, young people are ready and able to ask questions and seek answers in complex situations. They have the courage to tackle difficult topics and we can and should learn from them and be inspired by them!

Throughout my years of teaching and indeed throughout my own education, I was convinced that classrooms should and could be places where individuals of different ages and persuasions could together enjoy the challenges and excitement of learning. Any obstacles to this always seemed to me to be surmountable, as long as individuals were able to talk together in a trusting and honest way. This of course is not easy and it is even less easy in a climate of competition, judgement and accountability, where time is at a premium and time and space to reflect is squeezed.

However, I have seen it happen and I feel privileged to have been part of a process which challenged students to be alongside each other, listening to each other and changing their attitudes, ways of thinking, beliefs and actions because they have heard other people's stories and cared.

When I came across P4C I felt that it offered an approach to teaching and learning which would be academically rigorous and challenging while at the same time, being liberating for both individuals and communities. Using philosophical enquiry to explore issues, concerns and questions of interest and relevance to individuals and communities makes learning together meaningful, truthful and purposeful. I have usually found that people of any age, learning together, respect and value this. It has the potential to reduce a sense of isolation, bring down barriers between people and encourage awareness and understanding of self, others and situations.

It was with this in mind that I was interested to see how P4C could enable students to think and talk about the specific idea of 'Peaceful Schools'. I was interested in what their thoughts and questions on the topic would be and how they would assess P4C as a process that could contribute to people and communities being or becoming peaceful.

During 2011 and 2012, I worked with a small number of students from schools in Staffordshire to enquire into the idea of 'Peaceful Schools'. What follows is a snap shot of some of the activities, questions, ideas and conclusions that emerged from these encounters and enquiries.

No definition of peace or peacefulness was given to the students, and any definitions of peace or peacefulness and ideas about the nature and value of peace or peacefulness were generated and explored through the enquiry process. Any assumptions about the nature and value of peace and peacefulness, and about peaceful schools, were explored as they arose through the dialogue.

The sessions followed whatever issues, concerns and questions arose among the students – in response to the stimulus presented. The objective of the sessions was to see what questions, ideas, experiences and concerns would arise in the dialogue and to see how the pupils assessed P4C as a process that could contribute towards promoting the attitudes, processes and relationships that might help a school to become a peaceful place or discover ways to address its own issues and dynamics.

Some of the students had experience of using P4C. Most of the students had not used P4C before.

## **2. About P4C**

At the heart of P4C is the 'Community of Enquiry'. The community of enquiry is a group of people of any age, who enquire together into a question or idea, searching for understanding and seeking truth.

In a community of enquiry, participants sit in a circle so that they look to and learn with and from, each other. The teacher becomes a facilitator whose role is not as "the sage on the stage" who has the knowledge and the answers but rather a "guide on the side", someone who "nudges" and encourages the community to notice, question and reflect on their own thinking.

As the community grows in confidence, it also grows in a sense of shared responsibility as the individuals learn to explore, review and reflect on their ideas and the relationships that are built in the process.

As a community of enquiry, participants create and enquire into philosophical questions arising from a thought-provoking stimulus. They are invited to create questions that are interesting and meaningful to them.

With time, the dialogue and the activity of the community becomes:

- **Collaborative** – As people work together in their thinking and decision- making.
- **Creative** – As they build on the ideas of others, make connections, take risks and become more imaginative in their responses.
- **Critical** – As ideas are challenged, reasoned arguments are used and people are willing to change their mind.

- **Caring** – As individuals become aware of and consider the feelings, experiences and needs of the people in the community. They also come to care about the quality and integrity of the thinking itself and the implications on actions of that thinking.

P4C is best used regularly so that over time participants can develop the skills, confidence and understanding that enable real and meaningful dialogue to take place. It also becomes possible for the thinking to have a practical impact on the actions of the individuals and the wider community within which it exists. It can become an agent of real and lasting change.

In a community of enquiry individuals have the space to wait, to think, to imagine, to ask questions, to express their ideas, to listen to and learn with others, to experience the challenge of uncertainty and be creative and bold in their approach to finding possible answers to things that are puzzling and perplexing in life.

### **3. This is how an enquiry works**

**Warm up/ preparation** – this is space to calm, focus or improve participants' awareness of each other. Simple stilling exercises or games which get people thinking and mixing together work well.

**Agreeing ground rules** – the community agrees (together!) some basic guidelines which will secure a full and fair experience for everyone. This may not be appropriate before every enquiry and the community can choose to review, change or dispose of them if they are no longer helpful.

**Presentation/stimulus** - a story, picture, poem, object or other stimulus is presented to the pupils. It may be chosen for its conceptual richness, topicality or relevance to the topic to be considered.

**Thinking time/ reflection** – this is space for individuals to think and respond to the stimulus. Pupils can record in words or images their thoughts, feelings, questions or concerns.

**Conversation/sharing** – this is space to share private responses in two's or three's. Ideas can be shared and gathered together by the facilitator for the whole community to see.

**Formulation** - of the philosophical questions which arise from the stimulus. Individual pupils can create their own questions or they can be generated by a small group.

**Airing** - questions are shared with the community and the ideas clarified if necessary. During this stage any connections between the questions can be noted and questions can be combined if the community chooses.

**Selection/voting** - the community chooses the question they want to talk about. Voting methods include: vote once only, vote for as many questions as you like, voting with eyes closed and voting by standing by the question you like.



**First words** - first responses to the question are shared. In pairs or groups, individuals share their initial thoughts about the question chosen. Those who created the chosen question can explain their views to begin the shared dialogue.

**Building** – this is the heart of the dialogue as the members of the community build on each others' ideas and lines of enquiry open up. The community moves towards possible answers to their question.

**Last words** – everyone shares a last thought about the question, an idea they found interesting or a thought about the process.

**Review** – this is an opportunity to reflect on how the session went, what worked well and what could be done differently next time.

#### **4. My Staffordshire schools enquiries**

These are the main activities and stimuli that I used:

**Questions and interviews** – I used an opening activity to get the students talking to each other, asking and answering lots of different questions with philosophical potential.

The responses were shared as a group (sitting in a circle) and some interesting lines of enquiry were followed. The students reviewed the activity, talking about the value of asking questions, asking philosophical questions, sitting in a circle, listening to others, taking turns and participating.

**My peaceful place** – using a stilling activity, students were invited to imagine themselves in a peaceful place of their own. They were invited to draw or write about this place, commenting on where it was, what it felt like to be there, if there were people there and what they could see or hear.

Students shared their responses in small groups and identified the qualities of experiences, circumstances and places that they associated with peace or peacefulness. Concepts and ideas were identified and chosen for exploration through enquiry.

**Is school a peaceful place?** – students took an imaginary walk around their school, identifying the places that felt peaceful or didn't feel peaceful.

The students shared their ideas in small groups and talked about their experiences and ideas about activities, times of day, behaviours and places that had qualities of peace or peacefulness. Concepts and ideas were identified and chosen for exploration through enquiry.

In one school, the activity above developed into an active learning session using role play to explore issues around safety and bullying. This was followed by an enquiry.

**The School of Shangri La** – in groups the students explored through conversation, images and words, what an imaginary peaceful school would look like.

**Stone Soup** – the story was read and performed by the students as a role play. This was presented as a stimulus for the final enquiry with year 5. See the very end of this leaflet (Appendix One) for the story!

## 5. These questions were created by the students during the sessions

### Questions about peace

What is peace like?  
Is there any such thing as peace?  
Is peace a good thing?

### Questions about peacefulness

To be peaceful do you need friends?  
Do you have to feel comfortable to be relaxed and peaceful?  
What is peaceful?  
Do you think this is peaceful?

### Questions about peaceful places

What are peaceful places like?  
Where is my peaceful place?  
Why is my peaceful place like this?  
Is it always quiet in a peaceful place?  
Are peaceful places possible?  
What is a peaceful place?  
Are peaceful places happy places?  
Can peaceful places be noisy places?

### Questions about peaceful schools

Is school a peaceful place?  
Why would you want a peaceful school?  
What would a peaceful school be like?  
Is it possible for school to be peaceful?  
Would a peaceful school be boring?  
Why isn't school peaceful?  
Would everyone be happy in a peaceful school?  
If we made a peaceful school would it make people happy?  
What would make a school peaceful?  
What would a peaceful subject be?

### Questions about other related ideas

Can you feel emotions when you aren't born?  
Why are we talking about this?  
Where can you be really relaxed?  
Why do we have rules if we have human rights?  
How important are acceptance and friendship?

## 6. These questions were chosen by the students for their enquiries

- Do you feel peaceful in a peaceful place?
- What is possible in my peaceful place?
- Who is in charge in a peaceful school?
- Is a peaceful school a place where you don't get judged by your appearance or personality?
- Can you ever feel completely safe?
- Would being peaceful make us better learners or people?

## 7. Some of the things that students (in Years 5, 6 and 7) associated with peaceful places

Nature  
 Seeing something different  
 Being with people I love  
 Being free to do what I want  
 Being quiet  
 Thinking about people I love  
 Feeling my cat breathe on my face  
 Being alone and no one can be mean to me  
 There is calm music playing  
 Playing a game  
 There are no distractions  
 No one can bother me  
 It can feel calm even when there is a lot of noise around  
 It is big and there is a lot of room to think  
 I have a friend that I feel peaceful with  
 The beach because there are things to explore  
 Being safe  
 Family meals  
 Not being judged  
 I shut the door and I am by myself  
 Where I can think about my thoughts  
 Where I can sit and do something in my own time  
 Where you can wipe the slate clean and start a new life  
 Just me and my thoughts

## 8. Year 5 pupils talking about peaceful places

- Places can feel peaceful or not peaceful depending on how you feel inside.
- You can feel peaceful anywhere if you feel peaceful inside.
- Some places feel different to different people.
- It depends what mood you are in and what has happened to you.
- A peaceful place could feel scary.

## **9. Year 5 pupils taking about peaceful schools**

The students said that safety is important because if you don't feel safe then you can't relax and enjoy being at school. The students said that people running down the corridors and pushing into people could be an example of not being safe.

Girl 1 suggested that 'being friends' was most important because if people were friendly with each other then they would be careful and look out for each other. She suggested that this would mean that people wouldn't hurt each other or would help if someone did get hurt.

Boy 1 suggested that 'being accepted' was the most important thing because if people accepted each other then they would be friends and have more friends. It would also mean that people would be less likely to hurt each other accidentally.

Girl 2 said that if people were more able to do this, then they might 'find something inside themselves that they didn't know was there'.

Girl 3, Girl 4 and Girl 5 discussed how a school that was too peaceful might be boring and that people would not be acting normally. They acted out two scenarios with a teacher and pupils interacting in a way that was peaceful but artificial and a way that was disrespectful. They said that a really peaceful school would be somewhere between these two examples.

Boy 2 and Boy 3 drew and commented on a picture of positive things that would be visible in the school. These included people learning happily, having fun, teachers and pupils laughing together and people helping each other. They thought that such a school would have older pupils helping younger pupils.

Girl 6, Girl 7 and Girl 8 performed a drama sketch showing how students might help each other when they were hurt. This showed the pupils forgiving each other and the teacher showing acceptance. They said that a teacher could show the students how to be accepting and forgiving.

## **10. Some questions raised about peaceful schools by Year 7 students**

How do different subjects encourage peace or peaceful atmospheres?

What is the relationship between happiness and peace?

What do we mean by happiness at school? Is it different from outside school?

Is a peaceful school where you don't get judged by your appearance or personality?

Is it possible for everyone to agree/ have their needs and wants met at school?

Would there be winners and losers?

What is the relationship between being peaceful and learning?

What is the relationship between being peaceful and being a human being?

## **11. A Year 7 enquiry into what makes a school peaceful**

The following question was chosen by the students for the main enquiry.

Is a peaceful school where you don't get judged by your appearance or personality?

The dialogue focussed on the following ideas.

- If you don't judge you don't know who to be friends with.
- Everyone judges others but you don't have to do it in a negative way.
- You shouldn't judge on the basis of what others say.
- You should find out things for yourself before you make a judgement about others.
- If you don't judge, you won't feel safe.
- You need to judge others in order to be safe.
- It is human nature to judge others on their appearance and personality.
- Everyone does it ( ie judges others) but not everyone admits to it!
- You are judged all the time at school because there is a lot of competition.

## **12. The Year 7 enquiry was followed up with an active learning lesson that used drama and role play to explore questions around safety in school.**

During this session:

- The students identified relationships with teachers and other students as the main focus of their feelings and experiences of being safe or unsafe.
- Some students said that it was easier and more effective to work through their feelings of being unsafe by doing role play.
- Some students said that the community of enquiry was a good place to share their feelings and questions about being unsafe. They said that if students talked together like this more often, they would learn to trust each other.
- They said that teachers should be participants in the enquiry and then they could understand what it felt like for the students.

### **13. Students' thoughts on whether the 'Community of Enquiry' can help to build a peaceful school?**

- It helps people to work together in a calm way.
- We learnt to take turns, show respect and listen to other opinions.
- We supported and encouraged each other.
- Being able to talk about difficult things.
- Listening carefully to others.
- Being able to explain what we mean without rushing.
- It helped people to make friends.
- It could make people more confident.
- It let you speak.
- Knowing that people have their own opinions.
- Learning to be a peaceful class.
- Knowing that we could talk about difficult things without anyone laughing at us or telling us we were wrong.
- It made me feel like I was as important as everyone else.
- I thought about things I have never thought about before.
- I learnt to not be afraid of saying my thoughts and opinions.
- It was really nice to be able to work calmly and quietly with people listening to each other.

### **14. My thoughts on how the 'Community of Enquiry' might contribute to the building of a peaceful school**

It helps individuals to:

- Listen to and learn to appreciate the experiences, thoughts, feelings and perspectives of others.
- Develop appreciation of a range of different experiences.
- Learn how to challenge and trust themselves, others and the thinking process.
- Challenge their own and other people's expectations and assumptions in a supportive community.
- Talk about issues, questions and experiences to do with power, control, equality and fairness.
- Learn to talk about difficult, controversial, challenging and uncomfortable ideas in a supportive environment.
- Develop understanding and appreciation of differences between people as well as the things people have in common.
- Talk openly about the things that matter to them.
- Explore what it means to be in a safe space with others.
- Build relationships with others that are based on trust and equality.
- Offer their own thoughts, experiences, feelings and views.
- Learn to sit with uncertainty and non-judgement.
- Develop confidence in themselves and others.

- Participate in dialogue and activity that is meaningful and relevant to specific circumstances and experiences.
- Reflect on, become aware of and change their habits of mind and ways of responding.
- Be willing to change their opinions in the light of discussion and evidence.
- Engage in thinking that can have a radical and practical impact on individuals, actions, situations, and organisations.

## 15. Finally...

I hope that teachers and others working with young people will find some inspiration in the questions, responses and conclusions drawn from this work. For those who took part, the experience of working with P4C to ask questions about 'Peaceful Schools', allowed them to share their fears and anxieties about being at school as well as their hopes for their own education and that of others. It showed us all that asking philosophical questions in the community of enquiry can open up ideas and experiences, challenge expectations and assumptions, in ways that develop excellent learning, build positive relationships and transform the classroom.

Many thanks to pupils and staff at Wolstanton High School, Richard Wakefield C. of E. Primary School and the Staffordshire Student SACRE.

**For further information about P4C, its origins, its use in a variety of contexts and P4C training courses go to <http://www.sapere.org.uk/>**

The following final words were given by members of the Staffordshire Student SACRE 2010 after an enquiry into Peaceful Schools. These words express their ideas about what could be at the heart of such a place.





## Appendix 1 - Stone Soup

This is a traditional folk tale in which a hungry stranger persuades local people to share their food. In different traditions the stone has been replaced with other everyday inedible objects. Other versions that exist include button soup, wood soup, nail soup, and axe soup.

There was once a man who had been travelling for a long time.

Having run out of food, he was weary and hungry from his journey.

When he came upon a small village, he thought, "Maybe someone will share some food with me."

When the man knocked at the first house, he asked the woman, "Could you spare a bit of food? I've travelled a long way and am very hungry."

"I'm sorry, but I have nothing to give you," the woman replied.

So the traveller went to the next door and asked again. The answer was the same.

He went from door to door and each time he was turned away.

Not one of the villagers was willing to give the traveller any food, as no one had much to spare.

But then one villager said, "All I have is some water."

"Thank you," the traveller said smiling gratefully, "I can make some soup from that water. I can make stone soup."

He asked the man for a cooking pot and started building a small fire. As the water started to boil, a passing villager stopped and asked him what he was doing. "I'm making stone soup," the traveller replied. "Would you like to join me?" The curious villager agreed.

"First, we must add a special stone," said the traveller. He reached into his knapsack and carefully unwrapped a special stone he'd been carrying with him for many years. Then he put it in the simmering pot.

Soon people from the village heard about this strange man who was making soup from a stone. They started gathering around the fire, asking questions. "What does your stone soup taste like?" asked one of the villagers.

"Well, it would be better with a few onions," the traveller admitted.

"Oh, I have some onions," he replied.

Another villager said, "I could bring a few carrots."

Someone else offered, "We still have some potatoes in our garden. I'll go and get them."

One by one, each villager brought something to add to the pot.

What had begun as just water and a magic stone had now become a delicious soup, enough to feed the whole village.

The traveller and the villagers sat down together to enjoy the feast they'd helped to create.

Thanks to Peaceful Schools International for this version of the story.

For more ideas to inspire go to:

[http://peacefulschoolsinternational.org/wp-content/uploads/Ideas\\_to\\_Inspire.pdf](http://peacefulschoolsinternational.org/wp-content/uploads/Ideas_to_Inspire.pdf)