



## **Using Philosophy for Children as an approach to help build a school community in Burnley and Pendle**

Marsden Heights Community College (MHCC) approached Lancashire Global Education Centre (LGEC) to run a series of Philosophy for Children (P4C) workshops with Year 7 because we had previously worked in partnership with MHCC and developed a learning package to support community cohesion as part of their PHSCE programme. P4C was seen as an effective methodology to explore issues related to the Transition process i.e. Coping with Change for year 7 students in a safe environment and to develop vital life skills such as listening, critical thinking, questioning and collaboration; enabling them to take ownership of and promote a positive ethos in their 'new' learning environment.

The workshops were held over 5 days in the Burnley and Pendle Faith Centre, a neutral venue. Each day a different group of about 28 students and relevant staff were brought by mini-bus from their school, with LGEC staff facilitating the sessions.

Throughout the day, a variety of participatory games were played in order to help re-energise and switch on the more kinaesthetic learners. The overall focus in the morning was to stimulate the students' thoughts on issues of their identity. A member of staff spoke about significant events in his life, which had all contributed to making him the person he is today. The students then filled in the outline of a head with words and statements, which helped represent who they are. Some examples are, '*I have 2 sisters,*' '*footballer,*' '*joker*' and '*I have visited Pakistan*'. They then shared similarities and differences with their neighbours.

After a session teaching questioning skills (closed, open, philosophical) pairs of students generated questions for the first enquiry. Students voted on which question they wanted the group to discuss. Some examples of questions, are, '*Would you break the school rules to help a friend?*' '*Why do children respect the adult who disrespects us?*' '*Why is it important to be different?*' and '*What benefits do people get from smoking?*'

In the afternoon the students worked in two small groups to help them to contribute. They were encouraged to focus on issues they felt were important in their school, local and global communities. They identified issues in each area, which the facilitator used to focus on linkage e.g.

litter at their school and global warming. Students then generated philosophical questions for the second enquiry. Some of the questions discussed were, *'How can we change the bad issues into good?' 'Do all these things happen because people don't respect each other?'*

At the end of each enquiry simple visual evaluations were carried out with the students. A final daily evaluation asked a series of questions about the venue, food, games, enquiries and any useful skills they had developed. This feedback was very positive, the main highlights they noted were the games, the opportunity to work with different pupils in group work and being involved in a discussion on issues of importance to them. Pupils said that they used listening, speaking, thinking, writing, teamwork, leadership and confidence skills during the group discussions, comments which were echoed by the their teachers,

#### Quotes

*'you can get help from another people's opinions and ideas'*

*'we got to experience working with other kids'*

*'everyone listened to me'*

*'one person at a time had to speak so we all got a chance'*

*'they let me speak'*

*'you learn more if you listen to other people's answer to your own question'*

*'if you have something bottled inside you , you could get it out'*

*'it made me feel not left out and find out the answer to any question I did not know the answer to'*

Changes were also noted by staff. Pupils who are not normally engaged in lessons were seen to be significantly more involved in the day; *'some students who normally have difficulty focusing and are easily distracted far surpassed our expectations, were fantastic, involved and made valuable contributions, got their heads down and enjoyed it'* (Y7 consultant). A learning mentor noticed that as a result of the P4C sessions a particular boy increased in confidence and was able to speak up in class where he had not felt comfortable doing so before; *'P4C sessions gave an ideal opportunity for children to work with children they would not normally work with and gave children the opportunity to speak out and discuss things in an open forum where they weren't judged and people didn't laugh at them and they could say exactly what they were thinking; successful because of the initial boundary setting activity.*

They also felt that pupils benefited from working alongside others they did not normally relate to and that they had also got to know their pupils better as a consequence of the P4C sessions; *'noticeable changes ... have been relationships between staff and students themselves... now I know the students a lot more than I did before'* (Head KS3).

One object of these sessions was to create a better sense of community within the year group, the head of KS3 commented '*P4C helped to get them together, get them to work together and help them to start thinking and understanding other people*'. Another staff member thought '*that the way that the rules were established and used on the P4C days are rules (agreed boundaries in the classroom) that should be used all the time in schools – that would be helpful*'.

There were some sensitive issues were raised during the enquiries and it was not always appropriate or possible for these to be dealt with thoroughly – it was crucial that these were followed up by the appropriate staff back at the College.

Nearly all the participating children would like to do some more P4C sessions, and the staff were enthusiastic to introduce it more widely. Children would be better able to contribute once they are more familiar with the process so a programme of sessions is planned for next year.