

Armathwaite Primary

Using P4C to improve writing



Philosophy for Children (P4C) is a proven enquiry based pedagogy, where students take the lead and the teaching style is facilitative. The foundations of P4C are creative, critical, caring, and collaborative thinking. Armathwaite Primary School in Cumbria, a SAPERE Gold Award school, has used P4C to drive impressive progress in writing

How Armathwaite links P4C to writing

Armathwaite is a small village school in the Eden Valley, in Cumbria. In 2013, the school changed its status from being a first school (up to Year 3) to a full primary school. When Jane Yates became subject leader for English, she recognised the need for the older pupils to develop the ability to write more formally in order to attain higher standards.

Jane, a writer herself and an experienced P4C trainer, felt there was potential for pupils to take ideas from P4C enquiries into their writing. Prompted by a CPD course, given by Steve Williams, a senior SAPERE trainer, she has developed an approach that links the two areas. Its essential elements are:

- Model **language** in the enquiry: pupils develop a more sophisticated and formal speaking style which they naturally apply in their writing
- Build **word and sentence games** into enquiries – encouraging grammatical accuracy and wider vocabulary
- Link stimulus to **wider curriculum focus** so pupils blend ideas and opinions with facts
- Pupils **capture ideas** immediately after a P4C enquiry. Avoid constraints of sentence structure: use bullet points, speech bubbles, concept maps, whatever works for the individual pupil
- Later, use **ideas with expression** to write more formally in paragraphs, letters and extended pieces of discussion, explanation or persuasive writing genres
- Use laptops or computers, to **draft, edit and review** writing, just as adults would

“It’s a key value of our school that the children follow their interests in learning. By using P4C as a stimulus for writing, it enables the children to write about the ideas that interest them most. This is hugely empowering”

-Mrs Hepworth, Headteacher, Armathwaite Primary

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The results have been impressive:

- 1 Pupils are writing with greater depth.** The depth of thinking in P4C enquiries is ideal preparation for persuasive, discursive and explanation writing genres.
- 2 P4C helps pupils write more formally.** Through discourse, pupils improve their spoken English which naturally impacts on more formal genres of writing. It has also positively impacted on Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling SAT scores.
- 3 The effects are being seen as pupils transition into secondary.** Feeder secondary schools have commented that Armathwaite students are articulate and well prepared for formal writing which bodes well for essay writing
- 4 Other schools are taking up the approach.** Armathwaite is working with English subject leaders in other schools in a cross-school trial to drive exceptional progress with higher ability children

Principles of writing in P4C

- Writing is an essential tool for thinking
- Writing is a continuum that includes: writing for ideas (short lists, improvised paragraphs), and writing for ideas plus expression (extended writing)
- Writing for ideas can enhance the quality of classroom dialogue
- There is often too little writing for ideas and too much writing for assessment
- Writing for ideas is a tool for 'inclusion'
- Writing helps develop critical, creative, caring and collaborative thinking

Source: Steve Williams, P4C trainer and former English teacher

“Doing P4C helps me organise my written ideas into a logical order”

Maisy, Year 6

“I wrote my first Level 6 piece of writing following a P4C enquiry”

Rosalind, Year 6

If you would like to know more

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