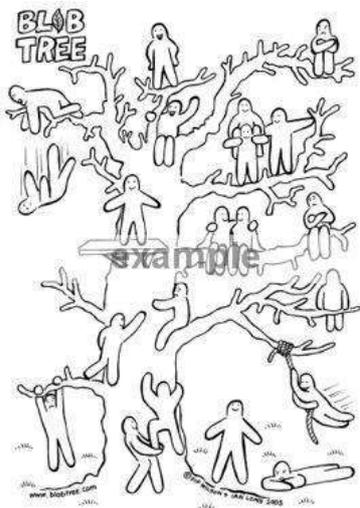


## Blobtree images and tools inspire Cumbrian teachers during Covid-19 by Jane Yates

"I think you better come up to Cumbria to run us some training. There's so much more to the Blobtrees than I ever could have imagined." I said to Ian Long, creator of the *Blobtree* at the end of a half an hour phone call last November 2019.

Mention the *Blobtree* and many people seem to have heard of them as they've been around for some 25 years in the UK. Beyond the infamous *Blobtree* however, there is a range of thousands of visual tools for effective communication used in schools, health practices, counselling work and people-focused groups from around the world.



My first introduction to the *Blobtree* was some twenty years ago during SAPERE Level One training with Geography Lecturer, Chris Rowley. It was one of the early SAPERE courses in Ambleside at what was then Charlotte Mason College, and now the University of Cumbria. Chris used the *Blobtree* as one of the evaluation tools after a P4C enquiry to prompt us to 'think about our thinking' – otherwise known as metacognition<sup>1</sup>. He did this through sharing a discussion plan he had created with questions relating to each of the *Blobtree* illustrations. Chris went on to ingeniously adapt the *Blobtree* to show pathways of thinking.

A few weeks before the Pandemic Lockdown in March 2020, [Cumbria Development Education Centre\(CDEC\)](#) was lucky to be joined by Ian from *Blobtree* to host a CPD session at [North Lakes School](#), attended by a group of P4C practitioners and trainers from across Cumbria, Edinburgh and the Isle of Man. It was an opportunity to explore creative evaluation tools for P4C, and also the connections between the methodology of P4C and *Blobtree*.

### The Blobs Which one is thinking like you? Discussion Plan

1. Can you have more than one thought at the same time? Do you have strings of connected thoughts?
2. Do other's thoughts help our thoughts?
3. Do you think in pictures?
4. Can thoughts get lost without us? Can thoughts get lost?
5. Are some people's thoughts sometimes better than other thoughts?
6. Do you sometimes give answers without thoughts? Do you sometimes say you know the answer before you have thought of the question? Can you think with your body?
7. Do you think in words and pictures or just one? Can thoughts go too fast for you?
8. Do you get confused by thoughts? Do you sometimes have too many thoughts at the same time?
9. Are you lost for thoughts? Do you have a big question which no one can help you with? Do your thoughts sometimes go in circles? Do you ask questions which you don't share?
10. Can you ever stop thinking altogether? Can you run out of thoughts?
11. Can you share thoughts? Can two people ever have the same thought? Can others get into our thoughts?
12. Can you have thoughts that help others?
13. Can you have thoughts that are completely new? Can thoughts go sideways?
14. Does having your eyes closed change the way you think?
15. Can you think about your thoughts?

N.B. 11 and 12 go together

Chris Rowley 1996

<sup>1</sup> H Flavell (1976) invented the word 'metacognition'. He describes it in these words: "Metacognition refers to one's knowledge concerning one's own cognitive processes, or anything related to them."

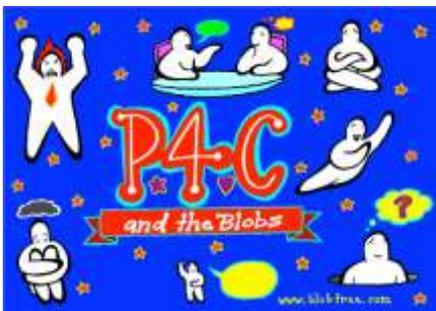
## What are Blobtrees?

Blobs are simple. They deal with deep issues using the primary languages we learn from infancy – feelings and body language. This is why they are used with children as young as 4, all the way through to the elderly. The Blobs are neither male nor female, young nor old, ancient nor modern. They are outside of culture. Blobs are the best of us and the worst of us. They don't tell us what we ought to do, or what we mustn't do...they merely show us how a variety of people feel or think.

## Blob images as a stimulus for P4C

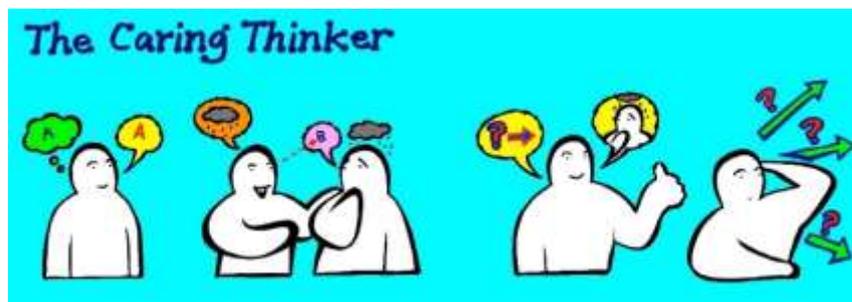
Click on the [Blobtree Facebook page](#) and you will find 100s of FREE *Blobtree* images that are perfect as a stimulus for a P4C enquiry. Ex-primary teacher Ian works full time for *Blobtree* with Pip Wilson who was the originator of the *Blobtree*. In between illustrating for book commissions, Ian produces *Blobtree* images relating to current issues such as the climate or refugee crisis, and Brexit. Not surprisingly he has been busy most of this year creating images relating to the issues of the Pandemic from social distancing to bereavement.

During the morning of the training day, I led an a diamond nine ranking activity with *Blobtree* images according to the criteria of their effectiveness as a P4C stimulus. We then used the most popular images as a stimulus for an enquiry. We selected two linked questions for enquiry: *Is thinking meant to be messy?* and *Do we think better when in calm and time?* This was a chance for Ian to have his first experience of P4C and has been vital for on-going discussions about developing P4C related tools. It's clear the *Blobtree* approach really complements well with the caring and collaborative ethos underpinning P4C. What it also proved to me is that despite so many enquiries about thinking, the appetite to enquire into the concept of thinking, never seems to diminish!



## Blob images as an evaluation tool for P4C

Ian spent the afternoon introducing a number of the [Blobtree evaluation tools](#). Those teachers in a PSHE role particularly liked resources with a focus on emotions, and everyone was excited to hear about upcoming resources linking to the UN Convention on Children's Rights. The evaluation tool that provoked the most interest in relation to P4C was the [Visual Assessment Tool](#). This is a simple visual scale from 1 – 5 for every curriculum subject and other learning areas such as speaking, listening and thinking. Instead of writing, the pupils simply use a circle, underline or tick or cross to answer questions about their progress. It's a perfect tool for dialoguing with pupils about their learning. When Ian was a primary school teacher, he originally developed this tool to involve pupils in their own report writing. Everyone on the training immediately saw the potential for a set of visual scales for the 4Cs (caring, collaborative, critical and creative thinking) and Ian was quick to come up with some initial ideas.



A Blobtree visual scale for Religious Education (RE) has also been used in Cumbria as an assessment tool for a new Unit of Work for RE for KS2/KS3 titled: *What can we learn from religious texts?* This Unit of Work has been produced as an outcome from the Cumbria SACRE Buried Treasure Project funded by the NASACRE Westhill Award. It has an enquiry based and conceptual approach. You can download a copy of this Unit from the Cumbria SACRE [website](#).

### What's new?

I have certainly gained a wonderful new friendship in collaborating with Ian from the *Blobtree* and it's been lovely for him to 'pop' into some of the virtual P4C meetings hosted by for Cumbrian P4C practitioners during the Pandemic. Many of the teachers who attended the training used the *Blobtree* images as part of their home school learning provision and will be using as part of activities on return to school. CDEC has also been using the images as part of the new [CARE \(Compassionate and Restorative Education\)](#) programme to provoke discussion about mental health and wellbeing. Blob images have also been used at part of online [Philosofun](#) sessions with [Little Chatters](#) and myself.



We are looking forward to welcoming Ian back to Cumbria to provide a one-hour online session on the Visual Assessment Tool, and other aspects of the *Blobtree* resources. Keep an eye on the CDEC [website](#) for more details.

And finally...and mostly excitingly... as part of the celebrations for Cumbria P4C is 25, a group of practitioners from the early days of P4C in Cumbria joined together to reflect on the original Blobtree tool. As a result of this collaboration, Ian has created a new Blobtree for Thinking which can be purchased from the Blobtree [website](#) for £5.

