

# UK OUTDOOR LEARNING & P4C

## Philosophy for Children (P4C) 'in', 'through', 'about' and 'using' the outdoors Gina Parker (Mullarkey)

There are lots of studies into the effectiveness of P4C, including evidence to show that it boosts results in reading, writing and maths but, for me, the real benefit is teaching pupils to think for themselves and articulate those thoughts clearly. At the same time, research has consistently shown that there is huge value in getting children to spend time and to learn outdoors.

Bringing these two complementary approaches together is a great way to really develop the skills we seek to foster in both, and can take learning to a deeper, more reflective, level. There is a huge variety of ways in which these two extremely beneficial areas of learning can come together for the greatest impact. Working with a huge range of schools and partners, I have done P4C with children on beaches, in woodlands, in quarries, and on farms. I have run P4C sessions in beautiful and extensive school grounds, on tarmac playgrounds, and even in the snow. P4C in the outdoors can take so many forms, with my favourite concepts to explore being 'change', 'beauty' and 'value'.



Looking for beauty from another perspective (in the sky).  
Image: Gina Parker (Mullarkey)



Imposing change. Image: Gina Parker (Mullarkey)

Children can be supported to develop philosophical questions and explore concepts in greater depth through specially-designed outdoor sessions or activities, and/or in addition to traditional outdoor learning activities. Take the old favourite of building a den. The den itself can be used as a stimulus for philosophical thinking, with students invited to consider the difference between a den and a home. This could lead to an enquiry focusing on 'What makes a home?' A nice end to the session could be labelling the shelter, with the linked

concepts or qualities it provides. The shelter can also link with Global Learning through a 'would you rather' activity: would you rather live in your shelter or a home? Even through these simple activities, students are practising oracy skills such as justification and reasoning.

Other activities include collecting items from the environment and ordering them from most to least beautiful to explore the concept of beauty, or sorting things that do or don't 'belong' in an environment. What does it mean to belong?



Collecting items from the environment.  
Image: Gina Parker (Mullarkey)

I particularly enjoy sessions that are led by the group where they develop a stimulus for enquiry. Here is a lovely example – what questions does this make you ask, I wonder?



Collecting items on the beach. Image: Gina Parker (Mullarkey)

For me, seeing the reactions of children and hearing their feedback says it all. There is no better measure than seeing the smiles and enjoyment of learning on pupils' faces and hearing feedback such as "I feel less stressed" from a Year 4 pupil. 🌱

**Gina Parker (Mullarkey)** has been running P4C courses across the UK for over 20 years.

**Contact:** [gina@littlechatters.co.uk](mailto:gina@littlechatters.co.uk)

**More information:** [littlechatters.co.uk](http://littlechatters.co.uk)

## Philosopher's Backpack: an ethical tool for ethical thinking

Jane Yates

As someone with a lifetime of working in the outdoors, it seemed natural to keep my P4C resources in a backpack. I'm certainly not the first person to consider a backpack as a metaphor for educational purposes, but a few years ago I was fortunate to gain a grant from the GLP (Global Learning Programme)'s Innovation Fund for an action research project to reflect on this. The metaphor behind the Philosopher's Backpack is simple. It's a metaphor for the notion that P4C or practical life philosophy (as opposed to academic philosophy) can be facilitated anywhere in the world, inside or outside the classroom, by anyone.

It's more than a backpack, of course. In my research, I set out with a hunch that the objects inside the Philosopher's Backpack could serve as a visual memory aid for teachers for questioning. When teachers are trained in P4C, they learn about Socratic questioning, which is important when facilitating dialogue in P4C to help students examine and test out their ideas – co-constructing knowledge as a shared community. However, many teachers find it hard to remember the range of Socratic questions when they first start, so my hope was the questions visually linked to the 'kit' metaphors would help with this. My research proved this to be the case.



Metaphors for Socratic Questions. Image: Jane Yates

As well as helping to develop better Socratic questioning skills, I found that the backpack 'kit' was useful as a review and evaluation tool. As part of the P4C process, students are encouraged to reflect on how they are progressing with caring, collaborative, critical and creative thinking as an individual or class – we call this the 4Cs of P4C. It helped students to think about their thinking. I call these [#metaphors4metacognition](#).

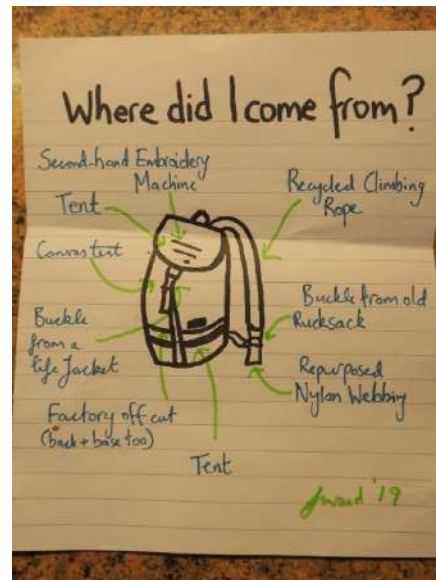


The Philosopher's Backpack. Image: Jane Yates


Recently I've been collaborating with Dirtbags Climbing in Kendal on a bespoke Philosopher's Backpack. This business recycles and reuses outdoor equipment from

climbers and outdoor centres, repurposing it into beautiful products such as climbing chalk bags. This fits well with the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 17 for Responsible Consumption and Production. When I'm running P4C training or workshops, I now have an ethical dimension to my Philosopher's Backpack, which is a great talking point.

I'm firmly of the belief the outdoor environment offers a rich stimulus and location for people to examine their thinking about the things that really matter. So, if you're ever walking in the Lake District, as I regularly do, look out for my Philosopher's Backpack and join me for some practical life philosophy!



The Philosopher's Backpack is made from discarded outdoor equipment. Image: Jane Yates

After leading her school to become the first SAPERE Gold P4C school in the North, **Jane Yates** now spends most of her time running P4C training and supporting schools nationally and internationally. 

**Contact:** [janeyatesp4c@outlook.com](mailto:janeyatesp4c@outlook.com)

**More information:** [janeyates.net](http://janeyates.net)

**Gina Parker (Mullarkey)** and **Jane Yates** are registered trainers for SAPERE P4C, the UK's national charity supporting Philosophy for Children.

**Contact:** [enquiries@sapere.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@sapere.org.uk)

**More information:** [sapere.org.uk](http://sapere.org.uk)



### What is Philosophy for Children?

"Philosophy for Children, or P4C, is an approach to teaching and learning, in which children take part in philosophical enquiry. It enhances thinking and communication skills, boosts confidence and self-esteem, and improves behaviour and academic attainment.

"In P4C, a stimulus, such as a story, video clip or image, is shared with a group of children. The children are encouraged by a trained facilitator, such as a teacher, to come up with the kind of big, engaging philosophical questions about the stimulus which are at the heart of P4C."

[sapere.org.uk](http://sapere.org.uk)