

**Philosophical Inquiry: Combining the Tools of Philosophy with Inquiry-Based Teaching and Learning**, by Philip Cam (2020). Rowman & Littlefield Publishers'

In the world of Philosophy for Schools (P4C), Dr Phil Cam requires no introduction. As stated in a recent edition of *Journal of Philosophy in Schools* (Volume 5, Issue 2) that was dedicated to celebrating his work, 'Philip Cam is an international authority on philosophy in schools who has been a pioneer in introducing philosophy and ethics into schools in Australia' (D'Olimpio & Peterson 2018, p. 1)

Very simply, when Cam talks about P4C, people listen. As a result, I was hugely excited to receive a copy of his latest book *Philosophical Inquiry: Combining the Tools of Philosophy with Inquiry-Based Teaching and Learning*. The book forms part of a new series of philosophical books entitled *Big Ideas for Young Thinkers*, published by Rowman and Littlefield. The series is edited by Thomas E Wartenburg, who himself is a hugely significant figure in P4C.

*Philosophical Inquiry* contains four chapters entitled 'Getting Started', 'Questioning', 'Conceptual exploration' and 'Reasoning', each further subdivided into related sections. In his foreword to Cam's book, Wartenburg states that 'the book provides teachers with everything they need to know about teaching philosophy to young children' (p. vii), which is a very bold claim for a book that only contains 156 pages. However, I think that Cam comes very close to validating Wartenburg's claim, as the subsequent 156 pages are crammed with the process, theory and examples to support the teaching of philosophy to young people.

Cam's book starts with the basics; the very basics about the 'what' and the 'why' of teaching P4C. I was pleased to see this justification as, all too often, it is assumed that someone who has picked up a book about teaching philosophy must already be a 'convert' to the discipline—yet the sub-title of this book, 'combining the tools of philosophy with inquiry-based teaching and learning', may entice a new audience to the pedagogy. 'Inquiry-based learning' is very much a 'buzz word' in modern education circles as schools start to move towards an approach to teaching and learning that engages students' curiosity and enables them to go 'deeper' into an area of interest. As such, Cam offers his long-standing inquiry approach to this new area, which is a vital tool in any teacher's kit bag. The compelling case that Cam makes as to why philosophy should be taught in schools—namely that the teaching of philosophy equips students with the skills of collaboration and inquiry that they need to thrive in the twenty-first century—would not be out of place in any school boardroom or public policy committee. This case entices the reader to see right from

the offset how this versatile subject that encompasses rigorous thinking, technical skill and social cohesion can be taught effectively to ensure significant benefits.

The second 'basic' that Cam addresses in his opening chapter is another key component in P4C, that of the room layout and the rules. Those familiar with the process will be on solid ground here, but this section provides a vital introduction to those beginning their journey. Philosophical discussion can be exciting, but also disjointed if it is not properly structured. As Cam says 'Class discussion needs to be orderly' (p. 5). One of the most eye-catching features of philosophical inquiry when it is delivered using the P4C approach is the lack of desks. For the uninitiated, this simple feature is liberating and changes the whole dynamic of the classroom. Cam provides a very simple yet effective justification for doing so: 'We are talking about face-to-face verbal communication and that requires the participants to face one another. In order that each member of the class can see the face of every other member, you ideally need to form the class into a circle' (p. 5).

With that established, Cam moves onto the rules, providing some guidance on those that are most conducive to good discussion. Here Cam does not provide a prescriptive set of rules that lead to a formulaic style of lesson, but rather he provides guidelines as to what sort of rules could be used. In so doing, Cam shows the weight of experience in setting these 'basic points'. Like many aspects of the P4C approach, rules work most effectively when they are owned and developed by the teacher—rules can be adapted to fit each class with its particular needs and students. Some techniques for maintaining the rules—such as displaying the rules; the use of a 'talking ball' or a set of playing cards are also referred to. A very basic structure is then provided for what a lesson might look like, which consists of a warm-up, stimulus and question raising, discussion, activities or exercises and then closure. This reinforces the basic principles that effective discussion is 'orderly' and it is this attention to detail at the start that fosters both an effective classroom environment and sets the ground work for the book.

Once the basics are in place, the book then moves to its central purpose—the development of the philosophical toolkit. This is the fundamental ethos of the pedagogy—to identify and improve the principles of critical and philosophical thinking. As Cam states, 'Much like learning a trade, students need to be taught how to think things through by inquiring into them. Tradespeople would be worse than useless if they turned up to the job without the necessary tools, or if they had the tools but lacked proficiency in their use' (p. 8). Cam briefly introduces 'questioning' and

'reasoning' here, which are attended to in whole chapters later in the book, but he also makes brief mention of the tools of 'examples', 'classification and division', 'criteria' 'thought experiments', and 'inferences'. The chapter concludes with a list of Learning Outcomes achieved by implementing of the pedagogy. These are important in the fact that it is outcomes that many lessons are driven by and that lesson observers look for. The strength and power of the P4C pedagogy is that this list of outcomes goes on for a page and a half—there are not many comparable disciplines that can say that. Like many subjects, philosophy is fighting for curriculum time in the classroom, and this list provides a significant justification to merit its inclusion both as a 'stand alone subject' that is studied for its own sake, and also as one that is able to support other learning areas to enrich and deepen understanding. Cam needs to be applauded for celebrating and emphasising this point.

Over the course of three sizeable chapters, Cam then explores the core of his book—how can you use the philosophical Community of Inquiry model to develop Inquiry based skills? The first of these core chapters is entitled 'Questioning' and Cam leads the teacher through a definitive guide of the 'what' and the 'how' of this often misunderstood aspect of the inquiry process. Questioning is of paramount importance in defining how the inquiry process will work. As Cam says, in order to inquire effectively, children need to be taught skills of questioning. He begins from the basics of early years by identifying what a question is, to understanding different types of questions, and then thinking about the types of responses that are expected. Here Cam uses his now famous 'question quadrant', which for the uninitiated, provides a valuable tool for helping students to write and distinguish between different types of questions, and to be able to identify those which are most useful for the inquiry process. The use of this quadrant is illustrated by a sample activity based on *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* that can be adapted for any age group using any stimulus material, all the way up to adult learning.

The key aspects of a philosophical inquiry are being able to 'unpack' the problems and the issues that the questions allude to. Here Cam also provides guidance for the teacher as the 'Procedural Questioner' that empowers them to 'draw out' and build the student understanding of the aspects of the philosophical toolkit. This leads on to a discussion of the key characteristics of a philosophical question which, when identified and understood can, as Cam illustrates, be used throughout the curriculum range. This again is one of the strengths of the pedagogy as it is versatile enough to be used in any subject area. Cam highlights this point with clear examples from English, science, social studies, maths, history and art—but this merely scratches the surface.

In my view, this versatility needs to be highlighted further, as these subjects are where philosophical inquiry is most likely to be taught. In a busy curriculum, it is only the lucky few who can teach philosophical inquiry as a 'stand-alone' subject. Cam provides a page and a half of suggestions about how to use the pedagogy in areas such as English, science and social sciences—but to solidify the merits and value of the inquiry based approach, I believe the use of philosophy in these areas could have been reinforced further—perhaps in a stand-alone chapter? A difficulty I am often met with from colleagues is, 'I get the process. I see the value. But I just don't know how to use it in the curriculum'. This would have been an ideal opportunity to develop this theme further. I would be interested to hear from colleagues in other countries as to their thoughts on this issue.

Building on his earlier points of an 'ordered' inquiry, Cam then discusses the merits of a 'discussion plan' to aid the facilitation and development of the philosophical toolkit. Cam points out that the development of a plan enables 'the teachers and students to examine a topic, issue or problem in a systematic way' (p. 41). I am a recent convert to the value of a 'discussion plan' and following Cam's model, I can testify to the improvement in the discussions I lead. It enables the students to see the direction of the discussion, enables a 'growth' in understanding as the questions move from a basic 'fact based' response to a deeper and richer philosophical inquiry-based discussion. Cam then proceeds to illustrate how this might look with examples on the issues of poverty, fairness and existence. These examples are further supported with classroom activities and exercises that incorporate the question quadrant, the different types of questions, and the use of procedural questioning to unpack the philosophical questions.

It is important at this point to note that Cam's book is not designed as a collection of teaching resources in the style of books such as Pete Worley's *If Machine* (2012) that can be used as a 'stimulus' for a Community of Inquiry discussion—readers who are looking for this sort of work by Phil Cam should instead turn their attention to Cam's previous works of *Thinking Together* (1995), *Sophia's Question* (2011) or *Philosophy Park* (2013) However this latest book does contain numerous examples and sample activities to illustrate Cam's pedagogy. Whilst evident throughout the book, the examples are particularly prevalent in the 'Questioning', 'Conceptual exploration' and 'Reasoning' chapters, and they serve to illustrate how to deliver these very complex areas. The examples can be delivered in the classroom exactly as they are presented, or they can easily be adapted to the context and points of reference that are familiar to the class without losing any of their effectiveness.

It is these examples of classroom activities that drive the final two chapters of Cam's book, 'Conceptual exploration' and 'Reasoning'—and they provide valuable support to the teaching of arguably these most difficult aspects of philosophical inquiry. These two aspects of the inquiry process are also the most difficult for teachers to teach and for students to grasp, yet Cam uses a plethora of activities and examples to enable their understanding for both the teacher and, subsequently, the students. In the 'Conceptual exploration' aspect of his methodology, Cam embeds his theory in Piaget and, in particular, the principle of 'reversible operations'—principles that work 'both ways'; for example, in maths,  $3 \times 5 = 15$  can be 'reversed' by dividing 15 by 3, which returns us to 5 again. Cam develops this model into what he calls 'reciprocal operations', principles that work in relationship to each other, such as 'greater than' and 'less than'. This provides the tools required for categorical judgements—whether concepts are 'the same as' or 'different to' each other—tools vital for conceptual understanding to take place. Through this technique, Cam effortlessly explains and demonstrates what conceptual exploration is and how it can be used and developed in the classroom in a fun and engaging manner, no matter what the age of the student.

This rich vein is continued in the 'Reasoning' section, which attends to the fundamental pillars of any philosophy-based approach. Without the ability to reason, we simply do not have philosophy. It is here that the strength of Cam's book is really demonstrated. As he eloquently states, 'There is no better way of developing students' powers of reasoning than engaging them in collaborative inquiry-based learning' (p. 103). Cam justifies this claim with reference to the nature of philosophical inquiry forcing students to work together to draw out the implications of their suggestions and then to evaluate them. Through more classroom-based exercises and activities, but this time with added diagrams—in particular Venn diagrams—Cam demonstrates how to use the language of reasoning to teach the skills of inference making, conditional reasoning, deductive and inductive reasoning and provides a short introduction to analysing reasoning. Of particular note here is the nature of progression as Cam moves from the relatively simple aspects of reason and conclusion indicators, to the more complex issues of necessary and sufficient conditions. These are supported by a large set of classroom-based activities and exercises that ensure the skills are clearly understood. My one criticism of this section is that there are no answers provided for the activities—so it relies on the teacher having a degree of understanding of the concepts to enable the activities to be used. This understanding is not always the case and cannot be assumed to be present, especially in a book that

is designed to bring the tools of philosophical inquiry to inexperienced practitioners. As a result, the lack of answers seems to be a strange oversight.

The book finishes abruptly at the end of the 'Reasoning' section—which again seems strange. It is common practice for any philosophical argument to finish with a conclusion and without one the book feels unfinished. The sample exercises come to an end, and the book closes. As previously indicated, the title of the book is 'combining the tools of Philosophy with inquiry-based teaching and learning'. The first two chapters of the book, 'Getting started' and 'Questioning', dealt well with the set up of the inquiry process; and the last two chapters, 'Conceptual exploration' and 'Reasoning', dealt with the tools of critical thinking and reasoning in a philosophical inquiry but it would have been worthwhile to engage in some synthesis with a chapter that brings the two aspects together. For example, it would have been a neat end to bring together the philosophical tools that have been meticulously developed and illustrate how they can be used in an inquiry in order for the reader to see the process unfold and the tools link together. The inclusion of some 'sample' dialogue transcripts from a lesson so the inexperienced practitioner can understand how they work in practice would be a good way to illustrate the 'big picture'. The synthesis of the inquiry in practice model could also fit perfectly with the existing aspects of inquiry-based learning that already exist in many classrooms, and it could have been further supported with some inquiry-based learning models from other subject areas. I would have liked to have seen some more of Cam's valuable insight as to the whole inquiry process and how this philosophical approach can provide a unique and powerful role in the curriculum and in classroom practice.

Cam's latest book has many strengths for both the inexperienced practitioner who is new to the pedagogy and also to those more familiar with the philosophical inquiry process whose skills need refinement or polishing. The book would make a fantastic accompaniment to any teacher training course in P4C pedagogy and should be required reading for all those who have any experience or interest in developing or reinforcing their existing skill sets. For these teachers, the book is invaluable. However, as the 'Reasoning' section assumes that the teacher has some existing knowledge of philosophical reasoning, it may prove to be disabling for the complete beginner without some formalised training to support the understanding. The lack of synthesis in the two aspects of 'philosophy' and 'inquiry', as discussed above, is a noted absence, which could be resolved in a second edition.

Despite this, the book would make a valuable resource for any school library where P4C is practiced and has a welcome place on my bookshelf as I develop my growing skills in delivering philosophical inquiry-based learning. As previously mentioned, the series editor Tom Wartenberg declares 'the book provides teachers with everything they need to know about teaching philosophy to young children' (p. vii). Whilst *Philosophical Inquiry* meets a welcome need in the market place for a basic skill-based introduction to the pedagogy, I feel this bold claim by Wartenberg is in need of modifying to read 'the book provides teachers with *almost* everything they need to know about teaching philosophy to young children'. But that is still extremely high praise, and the book deserves high accolade and a very wide audience. In its publication, Cam retains his place in the pantheon of the leadership and practice of P4C, and it will undoubtedly inspire many of us mere mortals into improving our classroom practice.

## References

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