

# Philosophy for Children, the UNCRC and Children's Voice in the Context of the Climate and Biodiversity Crisis

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## **Abstract:**

This paper is written in the context of my commitment to supporting children and young people's voices in education and the importance of global education at this time of climate and biodiversity crisis. Right now, a youth movement is growing across the world that is calling on adults to listen and take action for their futures. I argue that P4C has an important role to play in supporting teachers and children to consider the moral issues facing humankind now. I report on my personal journey into P4C and argue the case for P4C to support children's voices and classroom dialogic engagement. I provide an overview of my research and work in two areas. First, working in Wales, UK, I carried out research for the Welsh Government on their policy to make the 1989 UNCRC (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) statutory in schools. This work identified barriers to the UNCRC in common discourses about children that could be summarized as "citizen in waiting" and the continued presence of historical narratives articulated by teachers that see the state of childhood as a deficit. These attitudes towards children and childhood impacted teacher capacity to support pupil voice, a central component of the UNCRC and P4C. Secondly, I report on evidence from the Philosophy for Children in Schools Project in schools in South Wales. Findings suggest P4C can be a catalyst for challenging asymmetrical relationships between teacher and student and can support pupil voice. The practice of P4C was instrumental in shifting teacher attitudes away from deficit models of the child towards positive models and valuing of pupil voice. Over 25 years engaging with P4C in classrooms has convinced me that P4C has the capacity to animate the voice of the child and in so doing can challenge deficit models of the child held by many teachers. At a time when it is the young who are leading the way in telling adults they have a moral imperative to address the existential threat of climate and ecological breakdown, our very survival may depend on our capacity to take the voice of the child seriously.

## **Introduction**

**A**s I sit to write this paper the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres is giving a major speech. He is talking about the climate crisis as the top priority for the 21st century, emphasizing how humanity's mishandling of our planet's environment has caused a collapse in biodiversity, spreading deserts, and oceans reaching record temperatures. Guterres says: "Humanity is waging war on nature. This is suicidal."

The catastrophic impact of climate change and biodiversity loss will have the most effect on future generations, and young people across the world are responding. In 2018, 15-year-old Swedish activist, Greta Thunberg sparked a global movement of school-age students when she started her school strike for climate outside the Swedish Riksdag (parliament). By March 2019, her weekly vigil had inspired a growing international movement when more than one million strikers took part in over 2,200 strikes organized in 125 countries across the globe. In the UN General Assembly last year, she spoke for youth and in the BBC Reith Lectures of 2020 Mark Carney, former Governor of the Bank of England and before that Canada, quoted Greta:

You've stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words and yet I am one of the lucky ones. People are suffering, people are dying, entire ecosystems are collapsing, we are in the beginning of a mass extinction and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you. We will not let you get away with this, right here, right now, is where we draw the line. The world's waking up and change is coming whether you like it or not.

Greta has inspired Children and Young People (CYP) to issue political and ethical challenges to adults as they raise questions around our duty to stop human-induced climate change and loss of biodiversity. They call for intergenerational justice and want us to examine concepts such as equality, human rights, collective rights and the historical responsibilities for climate change, all of which are grist to the mill for P4C practitioners. I will argue that at this time of climate and biodiversity crisis, young people need the opportunity to engage in P4C to learn how to enquire together into this most important issue for their future. I believe P4C has an important role to play in supporting CYP to consider the climate and biodiversity crisis and examine the moral issues facing humankind as a result (Lyle, 2018).

This brings me to my focus for this veteran's edition. My work in P4C since 1996 includes research that suggests there are many barriers to CYP being listened to and taken seriously which I discuss in this paper. However, there have also been important steps in the right direction since the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989). This international vision of children as human beings with rights, fully worthy of the moral and intellectual respect due persons, requires society to re-examine its responsibilities towards them and reflects the expectation that changing the legal status of this group will lead to a change in our moral attitudes towards CYP.

The UNCRC provides a sound articulation of the rights of the child informed by a model of the child as agentic and competent. A key barrier to the acceptance and implementation of the UNCRC is the perceived differences between children and adults in relations of power, a topic that has grown in interest and importance in P4C in recent years. If teachers are to see children as social actors and participants whose opinions are valid and important, they need to see children as complex, socially constructed beings (Kennedy, 2006; MacNaughton et al, 2007; James, 2007; Stables, 2008; Wall, 2010). I will argue that P4C is a pedagogic practice that can support the UNCRC as it can show teachers children's capacity for rational thinking and empathic engagement, essential if we are to listen to their voices.

The discussion in this paper takes place in the context of Wales. Wales is the first country in the world to put the UNCRC at the heart of its policies, practice and ethos and involves a paradigm shift in the status of children (Freeman 2012). It presents the “citizen child” (Doek 2008) who is entitled to consideration in his or her own right despite lack of formal capacity and political influences. According to the UNCRC, adults should promote the best interests of the child and recognize that this will be different in different cultural contexts (Article 3), but that in all contexts the child’s voice must be taken into account (Article 12). Implementation will depend on how politically and socially acceptable the rights of the child are to the adult population; unless it is firmly rooted in the social policy that the adult population supports, it will remain rhetoric. Children, however, are not waiting for change as they call for adults to listen to them and take action on the climate crisis.

### **My Journey into P4C**

I first qualified to teach in 1975 and began my teaching life as a History teacher in a secondary school in the UK (age range 11-18). I have also taught in Further Education and been an Advisory Teacher for English as an Additional Language and Intercultural Education. In 1985, I established a Development Education Centre in Wales where I led a team of ten to develop curriculum materials on Global Education. In 1990, I joined the university as a teacher educator until retirement in 2012.

Throughout my career I have had two key interests. First, how to develop pedagogy capable of engaging students’ interest in serious global issues including social inequality, racism, pollution and environmental destruction. Those of us working in Global Education are not only interested in curriculum content, however, we also want students to effectively acquire the skills, attitudes and values relevant to “living responsibly in a multicultural, interdependent world” (Fisher and Hicks, 1985:8). Secondly, my interest focused on how to challenge the institutionalized asymmetrical relationship that traditionally exists between adults and children in school, where the teacher’s voice is valued over the child’s. I identify power relationships between teachers and learners as a major stumbling block to genuine dialogue in classrooms. I sought to provide opportunities for children to talk, and for their voices to be taken seriously. The pedagogy of Global Education emphasizes collaborative and cooperative learning approaches that I had incorporated into curriculum materials (See, for example, Lyle and Roberts, 1987) and I decided to research my own practice and completed a PhD in education entitled: ‘How children, aged 9-11 make meaning through talk’ (Lyle, 1998).

As I was engaged in my PhD, in 1996 I attended a workshop introducing Philosophy for Children at a World Studies Conference. I was intrigued and wanted to know more. I decided to train as a P4C practitioner with SAPERE in the UK and completed Levels 1-3 over the next 2 years whilst practicing P4C in primary classrooms. I extended my PhD data collection to include P4C.

I collected data from nine classes of children (aged 9-11) engaged in P4C. My analysis of the children’s collaborative talk in the whole class setting of the Community of Enquiry changed my understanding of whole class teaching. P4C moved dialogue in classrooms from monologic to dialogic and privileged the children’s rather than the teacher’s voice. P4C had given me access to an approach which can successfully challenge the role of teacher as sole authority in the classroom.

I was consequently drawn to Lipman's (1988) proposal that serious thought, helped by serious discussion, is the way in which children or adults can adapt to living in a pluralistic society where change is the only certainty. I relished Lipman's challenge to the notion of teaching as the work of a skilled technician required to transmit pre-packaged information, skills and values selected by someone else. I embraced the Community of Enquiry (COE) that allows Children and Young People (CYP) to subject 'knowledge' to careful scrutiny, to question why their world is as it is and consider how it could be improved.

Lipman (2003) proclaimed that mastery of basic skills and acquisition of information is not enough: children need to understand concepts and develop the ability to analyze and apply ideas and principles. He recognized that this requires an effort which is emotional as well as cognitive. The affective and the rational therefore have important parts to play during enquiry. I was already committed to dialogue as an instrument of instruction; through dialogue, children learn how to argue rationally as they try to deepen their understanding of issues that they themselves raise through their own enquiry. Like Lipman, I was also committed to stories as starting points for enquiry and had used exercises to develop critical, creative and collaborative thinking similar to those found in the Lipman manuals to accompany his philosophical stories. My research with small collaborative groups of children had identified narrative understanding as the primary meaning-making tool (Lyle, 2000) and its power to reflect the structure of human lives and help us enter into the lives and experiences of others. I already knew the power of stories to generate imaginative thinking and empathy. I was excited by Lipman's views about the kind of thinking which goes on in the community of enquiry. His emphasis on the exploration of values and therefore children's moral development resonated with my own interest in global education and the role of dialogue as a means to approach the truth. I had been exploring the roots of dialogic meaning-making as a concept in classroom practices and making the case for dialogic classroom practices as an approach to classroom interaction. I found P4C to be a dialogic approach with transformative potential for children's learning. Its approach to pedagogy enables teachers to value pupil voice and promote reflective learning amongst practitioners (Lyle, 2008a).

As I delved into the theory and practice of P4C, I realized I had found a way to explore moral values, so important in the context of Global Education, with children. As Ann Sharp (1995) co-founder with Lipman of the P4C movement, suggests, an additional aim of P4C is to improve the world. She claims that its pedagogical tools can be used to help teachers educate for "global ethical consciousness."

Sharp's (1995) own investigations led her to highlight the importance of 'empathetic imagination'; being able to imagine oneself in different situations and conditions now, in the past and in the future, and the ability to empathize with others. Sharp claims that empathetic imagination can help us call our ideas and values into question. In Sharp's (2007) work, I could see the crux of the P4C approach: the creative use of imagination requires emotional understanding, whilst the exercise of critical reflection involves the exercise of rational understanding (for a review of Sharp's work see Gregory and Laverty, 2017). Following Lipman (2003) philosophers have called for 'moral imagination' (Fletcher, 2016:141): the capacity to "visualise contexts they have not encountered and broaden the moral lens through which they approach and assess their lived experience." Through the

global climate movement, young people are already working together to develop an ethical consciousness, to articulate the kind of world they want to live in, and identify moral issues that affect us all.

As I embarked on my PhD, I identified a dearth of research on imagination. One explanation for this may be that imagination is clearly associated with the non-cognitive and therefore not regarded as relevant to serious learning. I found the work of philosopher Kieran Egan inspirational as he seeks to place imagination as central to our understanding of children's learning. Egan (1991) argues that the key strategy for developing the imagination is narrative. He claims that any event or behavior only becomes intelligible by finding its place in story. In sum, we are a storying animal; we make sense of things commonly in story forms; ours is a largely story-shaped world (ibid). Egan also points out that our manner of making sense of our experience is profoundly mediated by our emotions. How we feel about, and feel during, the sequences of our lives are of central importance. So, the affective connection is also the story connection. Whenever our emotions are involved, so too is a narrative, a story, or story fragment, that sets the context and the meaning. So, like Lipman, Egan sees the role of the story as fundamental to our sense-making (Egan, 1992).

Furthermore, Egan believes imagination to be a necessary and neglected component of rational, cognitive activity; for Egan, "cognitive activity" that lacks imagination and affective components is, "desiccated and inadequate" (1992). Egan (1983; 1991) explores the distinction made between reason and imagination in education, pointing out how they are erroneously seen as discrete entities. This division is reflected in a curriculum in which science and mathematics are commonly taken to deal mainly with reason, and the arts with imagination, to the neglect of the latter. Egan argues passionately against this position and calls upon educators to take imagination seriously. It would be a mistake to assume that Egan does not value knowledge, rather he wants us to recognize that there are a number of ways of 'knowing' the world. In schools, knowledge is most often presented as secure, certain, and therefore fails to encourage open-mindedness and understanding of other views. Like Lipman and Sharp, Egan wants children to learn to reason and become reasonable, emphasizing cognitive development and emotional intelligence.

I could see that P4C was a way to harness children's imagination to increase their understanding of the world, combining critical (rational) and creative (affective) thinking. In a COE (Community of Enquiry), participants should actively seek to understand each other's points of view. Concepts such as trust and respect for the democratic principles on which the community is based are actively practiced through the pedagogical processes built into the P4C program. Teachers are required to treat the children's views with respect. Children have to take turns, listen to each other, ask questions, ask for reasons, challenge each other's beliefs and ideas and be prepared to self-correct. In this way they learn how to live with pluralism and to see issues from a variety of perspectives present within the community. In considering what to do in an imaginary or real situation they come to understand the importance of exploring reasons for their ideas. Over time, they become better at distinguishing good reasons from poor and, in the process, learn how to justify how they think and feel. P4C seemed to offer a powerful tool for helping children develop a greater understanding of themselves and their own world, as well as the global community.

## Children's Voice

Having argued the case for the pedagogic approaches of P4C to support a curriculum that wishes to include the climate and biodiversity crisis, I now consider the status of children's voice in school settings.

As part of its commitment to the UNCRC, the Welsh Government (WG) commissioned a review of the research literature on learner voice and with colleagues I produced a briefing paper for educators (Lyle, Hendley and Newcombe, 2010) as part of the Teaching and Learning Research Programme in Wales. We concluded that when genuine opportunities for participating in learning are provided, there are many benefits for children and young people and their teachers.

However, as Rudduck and Flutter (2007:1) point out, the traditional exclusion of young people from the processes of dialogue and decision-making is founded upon an outdated view of childhood that "fails to acknowledge young people's capacity to take initiatives and reflect on issues affecting their lives." State school has bound into its structures a thick set of class-based assumptions about power and control which is deep-rooted and will be difficult to eradicate as they are part of the "taken-for-grantedness" of institutional life (ibid:10). Therefore, although the benefits of pupil participation are well researched, making this a reality will require major change in policy and practice which the Welsh Government has set out to address (See Lyle, 2014 for discussion of these policies). In sum, Welsh national policy provides a framework for teachers and schools who wish to promote learner voice that should make the implementation of P4C easier.

A key barrier to the acceptance and implementation of the UNCRC however, is the perceived differences between children and adults in terms of relations of power. Children's position as dependent on adults makes it easy to impose the culture of adults on them. Measures introduced by the Welsh Government will be meaningless unless adults accept their obligation to children and young people. Teachers form part of the interpretive community who have the power to subvert meaning to their own priorities (Torbin, 2010), and Aspinwall and Croke (2013) found baseline knowledge and understanding of the UNCRC to be low. Fitzpatrick (2013) argues that we cannot legislate for the removal of injustice—saying it should happen, does not make it so.

This raises many questions about what is at stake in this call for recognition of children's rights and how it is to be balanced with adult authority. Answers depend on how one defines children and can be fraught with anxiety for teachers. Recently philosophers have begun to problematize the concept of childhood that underlies traditional approaches to childhood education (Kennedy and Kohan, 2017). The ethical climate prevalent in schools impacts children; we therefore need to understand the network of rules or norms that sustain current attitudes and values (Campbell 2003).

## Research into Pupil Voice

I was employed by the Welsh Government (WG) to train key education stakeholders in Pupil Participation to ensure that the UNCRC, in particular Article 12 (the child who is capable of forming his or her own views has the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child) is

understood and taken seriously by schools. During that training, it became evident that there was widespread skepticism about the WG's policy and resistance to its implementation in schools.

Barriers to the implementation of the UNCRC were identified during 12, one-day training programs with teachers, head teachers, local authority advisors, providers of Continuing Professional Development, Initial Teacher Educators and school governors. Data were collected during the training for the purpose of evaluating the training program and included field notes by the trainers, documentary evidence generated during training activities and questionnaires completed at the end of the training. All the data were collated for reporting to WG and were examined to identify key barriers to the UNCRC to help inform future training. It is worth taking a look at those barriers as they are also barriers to the adoption of P4C in classrooms.

#### *Barrier 1: Immaturity*

A key barrier is the view that rights for children are not appropriate. Participants expressed the view that adults are in a better position than the child to assess the interests of the child. Narratives that cast children as incompetent and too immature to be involved in decisions about their lives were sometimes legitimated by reference to Article 3 of the UNCRC, "the best interests of the child" to justify adult decision-making in children's lives. This was seen to override Article 12, which seeks to prioritize children's voices.

Adults commonly assumed children are incapable of forming their own views because they are not old enough; therefore, age is a key objection to the UNCRC in schools, especially in the early years and infant classroom (age 4-7). Children are seen as 'developing' suggesting that developmental psychology has a powerful influence on educationalists, which limits their expectations of children. The assumption that children should be taught in a developmentally appropriate way that is assumed to fit the majority of children appears to constitute a major barrier to the UNCRC. There is considerable evidence that under the sway of developmentally appropriate practice, teachers frequently assume children cannot exercise their rights as they are developmentally inappropriate (James 2007). Furthermore, the notion that childhood is an apprenticeship for adulthood with the assumption that there will be "an arrival", "an age of majority", when the rights and status of citizenship will be conferred is commonly held (James, Jenks, and Prout, 1998). MacNaughton (2005) likens the discourse of developmental psychology to a "regime of truth", which was widely accepted by adults in our training. The dominant discourse of child as "citizen-in-waiting" is an attitude that works against the UNCRC and by implication, P4C.

#### *Barrier 2: Narratives of Childhood*

As well as a developmental approach to childhood, there was evidence that historical narratives about children were present in educators' thinking and informed arguments about immaturity. The view of children as 'innocent' was expressed and used in argument for the withholding of knowledge from children under the guise of protecting them. Adults were seen as gatekeepers who should protect children from information that they consider too difficult for them to deal with.

In contrast, some children were seen as unruly and needed to learn ‘how to behave’ and be taught ‘how to be good.’ Such children were regarded as potentially disruptive and subversive to the process of participation. Both views of children as ‘innocent’ and ‘unruly’ can support the notion of adults as protectors of children and knowledge gatekeepers. This has the effect of shielding children from participation as active citizens and impacts on the provision made for them.

A third objection to the UNCRC was the existence of a given curriculum that ‘had to be covered.’ This revealed a *tabula rasa* approach to children, believing that it was the teacher who had to ‘deliver’ a fixed curriculum to children who would remain ignorant if this was not done. The requirement that children should have choice over topics to be discussed or that teachers should follow the children’s interests was felt to be in conflict with teaching a set curriculum.

These expressed views suggest that many aspects of the Welsh curriculum that prioritizes children’s voice will be seen as inappropriate by many teachers. It also raises the question of how we imagine, construct, or understand the ‘C’ in P4C and what this might indicate about society’s values and adult-child power relationships (John, 2003: 201).

### *Barrier 3: Power Relations*

Teachers’ positions of power, authority and responsibility for children emerged as a concept in discussion of the UNCRC. A key barrier to the implementation of the UNCRC is the dominance of the teacher’s voice at the expense of students’ own meaning-making voices. The power relationship between teachers and learners is likely to be a stumbling block to participatory practices in classroom settings.

The implementation of the UNCRC was seen as a threat to traditional boundaries between adults and children. A key objection came from those who saw teachers as authority figures that should not be challenged. Similar to Lundy’s findings (2007) when investigating children’s participation in decision-making, training participants frequently made statements that made it clear that ‘adults know best’ and deserve to have their views and authority respected. Participants expressed the view that many teachers are used to occupying a position of authority that has traditionally been exercised in an authoritarian manner and often find it difficult to imagine, let alone implement, an alternative approach. The asymmetrical valuation of adults and children and teachers’ conceptions of what is due to them as adults clearly influences how they respond to the UNCRC.

The Children’s Commissioner for Wales also found evidence of this barrier:

It is clear that some adults are confusing respect with fear and obedience, perhaps hankering after some bygone age when children were fearful of adults. It seems equally clear that many more adults are unwilling to think about how they might earn the respect of the young. They seem to expect automatic respect in a way that they do not from fellow adults. (CCfW, 2004–5)

Such attitudes do not bode well when children are pleading with adults to listen to them and take action to stop the climate crisis.

*Assumptions and Implications of Findings from Pupil Voice Training*

Narratives of children as ‘innocent’, ‘unruly’, ‘blank slate’ or ‘developing’ limit children’s participation in society and are deficit models of the child and therefore unsupportive of the UNCRC and by implication the practice of P4C. The implications of such views are wide-ranging, as Dahlberg and Moss (2005) point out, by protecting children from the world in which they exist or providing a pre-determined developmental curriculum, adults deny children their right to seriously engage in that world.

The presence of deficit narratives of childhood is also widely discussed in the literature (for example in philosophy, Kennedy 2006; Stables 2008; Wall 2010; in anthropology, James 2007 and sociology, James, Jenks, and Prout 1998; Dahlberg and Moss 2005). Although the existence of the barriers discussed above is thought by the senior educators consulted to be widespread, they by no means represent the only views expressed (there were indications of different narratives of childhood that adults hold that could support the UNCRC).

The WG is aware of these deficit attitudes towards children:

They [children] are not a species apart, to be alternatively demonised [unruly/disruptive/evil] and sentimentalised, [innocent] not trainee adults [citizens-in-waiting] who do not yet have a full place in society ... Children and young People should be seen as young citizens, with rights and opinions to be taken into account now. WAG (2004:4)

Attitudes towards children impact on classroom practice. The evidence from classroom observational research from the mid-1970s onward in countries all over the world has produced a consistent picture: schools and classrooms are full of talk, but little collaborative talk between learners (Alexander 2005; Lyle 2008b). It is generally accepted that what is now seen as a monologic style of discourse structure between teacher and pupils known as the IRF (Initiation/Response/Feedback) (Sinclair and Coulthard 1975) is a fundamental feature of all official talk in classrooms, constituting around 60% of the teaching/learning process. There is widespread agreement, based on a large number of studies, that the IRF still provides the basis of teaching by direct instruction and enables teachers to stay in control of events and ideas in lessons. Its effect is to emphasize the asymmetrical nature of relationships between teachers and students and the epistemological dominance of the teacher, something the UNCRC and P4C seeks to challenge.

The IRF supports the traditional power relationships of the classroom which tend to reproduce a pedagogy based on the transmission of pre-packaged knowledge. Dialogic discourse styles favored by P4C have to compete against this dominant form of classroom interaction. It follows that implementing a change from the traditional classroom to one that values dialogue is not a simple matter (Lyle 2008a). Against this background, I led the Philosophy for Children in Schools Project (P4CISP) in 64 schools and monitored teacher and pupil responses to P4C. I turn now to evidence from that research that illustrates the power of P4C to challenge asymmetrical relationships in classrooms.

### Philosophy for Children in Schools Project

The University-led P4CISP (2006-2012) involved training all staff in 64 primary schools to introduce P4C into their classrooms by following the SAPERE Level 1 training course (for information see: <https://www.sapere.org.uk/>). The primary schools are located in a range of different socio-economic contexts. In Wales, schools are judged to be poor or affluent by the number of pupils receiving free school meals. Schools in this study ranged from 6-48% free school meals and therefore were representative of schools as a whole. Research into the impact of P4C was carried out by teachers enrolled on post-graduate degrees, either as part of their action research assignments (MA), their MA dissertation or PhD thesis (Munro- Murriss, 2017). Other research studies were carried out by seven teachers seconded from school to take up posts as research fellows for six-week periods and by one teacher who was seconded to the university for a year. Each of these teachers engaged in collecting data from a total of 26 schools on the impact of P4C. In addition, an independent evaluator was employed for six weeks to visit eight schools to observe P4C in action and interview children (Boyce, 2008). As the lead researcher, I also collected case study data from one school over one year and took responsibility for carrying out a thematic review of all the data collected.

Data collection techniques are mainly qualitative and include interviews with head teachers, teachers, teaching assistants and local education authority advisors; non-participant observations of P4C enquiries in schools; focus group interviews with children and pre- and post-testing of children using standardized tests. The entire data-set is therefore large and specific aspects of the research have been examined for the purpose of preparing papers. Publications include a theoretical paper arguing that P4C is a dialogic pedagogy (Lyle 2008a); investigation of leadership approaches in seven schools who have successfully embedded P4C across the school (Lyle and Thomas-Williams 2011); a case study investigation into the impact of P4C on children who were under-attaining in literacy in one school (Lyle and Jenkins 2010), the impact of P4C on the development of pupil voice and participation (Casey 2011), the impact of the UNCRC and attitudes to childhood (Lyle, 2014), the impact of P4C on a Year 7 (aged 11-12) class and their teacher over one year (Munro-Murriss, 2017) and a DVD to illustrate practice (*Journey into Children's Minds*, 2009).

More generally, the research carried out by teacher-researchers set out to investigate the impact of P4C on children's engagement in learning from the perspective of adults and children. Data were collected using observation, interviews and focus groups. Each set of data was analyzed by the teacher-researchers carrying out the research and reports were prepared. I carried out a thematic review of the total data corpus which informs the discussion that follows.

My goal in carrying out an interpretative analysis of the wider data-set was to theorize the significance of the patterns emerging in relation to P4C practice. The research took place in schools that had embraced P4C as a pedagogic tool and were sympathetic to the UNCRC. Most teachers saw P4C as a practical way of implementing the WG requirement to promote pupil voice in the classroom. I report on just two themes that emerged from the data analysis as most relevant to the importance of listening to young people protesting on climate change: narratives of childhood and power relationships. Both themes illustrate how the adoption of P4C can successfully challenge deficit

narratives of children and asymmetrical power relationships between adults and children identified earlier (Lyle, 2014).

### *Theme 1: Narratives of Childhood*

Many teachers who had implemented P4C embraced a participatory narrative of children as competent and agentic; they saw children as active citizens and wanted to support children's practice as citizens of today rather than 'citizens-in-waiting.' A competency narrative has its roots in sociology that defines children as, "social actors who shape their identities, create and communicate valid views about the social world and have a right to participate in it" (MacNaughton, Hughes, and Smith, 2007). Teachers who articulated this view of the child are more likely to embrace P4C as a practice because it seeks to promote children's democratic involvement in Communities of Enquiry. They wanted to consult children about curriculum and saw their views as both valid and important. Findings from an independent evaluation of eight schools indicate that P4C can also be a catalyst for attitudinal change, for example, "Involvement in P4C enquiries has helped me re-evaluate the way I see the children"; "[P4C provides] an insight into their [children's] world and what it means to be young now"; overall, "teachers of the oldest and youngest pupils said that the experience had enabled them to see into their pupils' worlds and to understand what it means to be a child or young person at this time" (Boyce 2008). This was also found in a study of one teacher and her Year 7 (age 11-12) class over one year (Munro-Murris, 2017).

Our research suggests the participatory practice of P4C has the power to shift teachers' narratives of childhood away from the deficit narratives of 'immature', 'incompetent', 'innocent', 'unruly', 'blank slate' or 'developing' identified during training for the UNCRC as discussed above, towards a competency model, which suggests it is an important pedagogical tool that can support the UNCRC. Teachers who accepted children as social actors and participants generally found P4C a supportive pedagogic tool. The actual process of implementing P4C in their classrooms was a major factor in supporting this model of childhood and reinforcing it; in interviews many teachers spontaneously expressed their "surprise and amazement of what small children are capable of" (Boyce 2008). "My teachers have been surprised at the depth of thought of young children" (Head Teacher, James and Watts, 2009).

### *Theme 2: Power Relations*

We found that teachers' attitudes and relationships to authority were relative to their engagement with P4C. Schools that had successfully embedded P4C over a period of a year or more held a different attitude to authority than that identified during the UNCRC training. Following Mathews (1994), the concept of rational authority rather than authoritarian approaches to teacher/child relationships is seen as an essential aspect of behavior management in some P4C schools. For Matthews (1994:123) children are, "People, fully worthy of both the moral and the intellectual respect due persons"; therefore, rational authority is based on respectful relationships between all adults and children in the classroom and school. It acknowledges a teacher's responsibility for the well-being of the children in their care, acknowledging that sometimes they will make decisions on behalf of the child, but expect such decisions to be justifiable, as teacher-researcher Brindley (2013)

found, “Actions taken must be based on good reasons, which the children can understand and will benefit from”. Extracts from head teacher and teacher interviews support this, for example, “We used to have a lot of behaviour problems; we don’t now. Philosophy is part of the definitive drive to address the culture of the school” (James and Watts, 2009).

The practice of P4C challenges many of the assumptions that underpin traditional power relationships between adults and children and, by implication, requires that such relationships change. Evidence of the capacity of P4C to challenge authoritarian attitudes and promote rational authority comes from the teacher and student interviews: “[in P4C] we respect each other’s views, and children know that the teacher has not got the answers – ‘cos we are very bossy aren’t we, as teachers – but not in P4C” (Teacher, James and Watts 2009). “In P4C I can express my opinion and the teacher doesn’t argue back” (Student, James and Watts 2009).

This has implications for the quality of pupil/teacher relationships in schools. Summarizing her independent evaluation of eight schools, Boyce (2008) claims: “Pupil teacher relationships were excellent, with warm, professional teachers and respectful, confident pupils ... It would appear that P4C will flourish where the overall school ethos supports its values.” Many teachers were aware of the importance of being responsive to children through listening to them (Biesta, 2004) and recognized the learning that comes from the practices engaged in, for example: “P4C has given me a framework, ‘cos I wasn’t doing it before, and I didn’t really like class discussions or group discussions. I didn’t, I always seemed to end up telling them off. But this way we follow the procedure and it just seems to work. It is quite, quite miraculous really. You just follow the rules and you, you won’t go wrong.”

Students also frequently made comments to show how much they valued P4C where they listened to others and were listened to. The following quotations from pupils are typical of their comments and are replicated time and again in our data:

“The teacher gets to know me better in P4C.”

“You can hear other people’s side.”

”[P4C] helps you to be more open-minded. [you] need to see someone else’s point of view.”

“We get to know each other better”

Pupils talking, James and Watts (2009)

The research data strongly suggests that P4C provides a model that supports pupil voice which is valued by students and teachers alike and can be a catalyst for challenging asymmetrical relationships between teachers and those taught.

### Conclusion

CYP are calling on adults to take their fears for the future of our planet seriously. When adults fail to recognize the importance of young people’s lived experiences and concern for the future, they are unlikely to do this when children give testimony about climate change. Work by Fricker (2007) discusses the impact on people when they are not heard and argues they are harmed as a person and

experience epistemic injustice. Therefore, despite the UNCRC becoming, “the benchmark and rallying call” for young people to be validated as full human persons (Wall, 2017:62), the reality is that young people continue to be understood through deficit discourses in much of society, including in many schools (Lansdown, 2001). Consequently, rather than being recognized as rights-holders with agency, young people continue to be understood as other and less than adults (Lundy, 2007; Freeman, 2012; Fitzpatrick, 2013; Munro-Morris, 2017). Consequently, the ideas and experiences of young people continue to be generally overlooked in a society that values adult over child (Murriss, 2013a).

Hope lies in the considerable evidence that: “the P4C movement is a way for adults and educators to act as allies and combat prejudices against young people” (Vitale and Miller, 2020:9). Murriss’ (2013b) work with P4C calls on teachers to develop ‘epistemic trust’ in their students. Munro-Morris’ (2017) study found that the practice of P4C in the classroom offered a good opportunity to track changes in the epistemic lives of teachers and students. Munro-Morris (ibid) also found engaging in P4C supported teacher critique of their practice and beliefs about the child. P4C could therefore provide a real opportunity for teacher continuing professional development to support pupil voice. How we view the concept of child is an important concept to explore for adults and children alike (Lyle, 2017).

Global climate change will seriously reduce the quality of life of future generations and threatens a mass sixth extinction of plants and animals. The environment has finally become one of the main issues of global concern as the world has experienced extreme fires and massive flooding. A major shift in public opinion has occurred (for example, in the EU, 60% think climate change is one of the most serious problems facing the world, Stamford News, 2018) and this new awareness has undoubtedly been influenced by the ‘Fridays for Future’ movement led by Greta Thunberg that inspired an estimated 9.6 million school students in 261 countries to participate in school strikes. Young people are crying out for public discussion of ethical issues that include what the duty of human beings are to other forms of life, our duties to future generations and to those in poverty, what has been called ‘climate justice.’ Fridays for Future called for “justice for all past, current and future victims of the climate crisis” (The Guardian, 2019). If we fail to take their call for climate justice and equity seriously as Greta Thunberg says, “We will never forgive you.” P4C can help young people make sense of justice in the context of the environment, and adults understand how to incorporate children’s perspectives in classrooms.

Over 25 years engaging with P4C in classrooms has convinced me that P4C has the capacity to animate the voice of the child and in so doing can challenge deficit models of the child held by many teachers. At a time when it is the young who are leading the way in telling adults they have a moral imperative to address the existential threat of climate and ecological breakdown, our very survival may depend on our capacity to practice epistemic justice by confronting adult prejudice and take the voice of the child seriously. Climate Justice is set to become a key issue in philosophy and P4C can lead the way in the classroom.

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