



dossier “philosophy with children across boundaries”

critical, creative, and caring thinking: communities of practice in sydney, australia

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doi: 10.12957/childphilo.2025.88325

abstract

Philosophy for Children (P4C) has been developed in the Australian context since the early 1990s, and applications and innovations continue to the present day. Evidence of the history of P4C in Australia is spelled out in detail in Burgh and Thornton (2016, 2018), including the establishment of several associations set up to provide professional learning for educators about how to activate and adopt this pedagogy. This paper provides an addendum to these works, highlighting a case study of a more recent joint initiative which situates P4C at the centre of teaching, learning, and well-being for students in delivery of the Australian Curriculum in New South Wales (NSW). The novel and innovative partnership between the Association for Philosophy in Schools NSW and the Centre for Critical Thinking and Ethics at Newington College, has led to establishing a lighthouse school of community best practice showcasing a set of practices that arise from and are directly informed by the tradition spearheaded by Lipman and Sharp. The goals of this paper are two-fold: first, to describe and analyse the initiative



including the benefits to both partners and the larger community, and second, to discuss the broader implications for the NSW community and the viability of the practice of P4C in NSW and the Asia-Pacific. Specifically, this paper points to the role of teacher training in assuring best practice in P4C and the potential for future development of P4C practices in Australia in particular contexts.

keywords: critical thinking; education; collaboration; pedagogy; professional learning.

pensamento crítico, criativo e cuidadoso: comunidades de prática em sydney, austrália

resumo

A Filosofia para Crianças (FpC) vem sendo desenvolvida no contexto australiano desde o início da década de 1990, e suas aplicações e inovações continuam até os dias atuais. A história da FpC na Austrália é detalhada em Burgh e Thornton (2016, 2018), incluindo o estabelecimento de diversas associações criadas para proporcionar aprendizado profissional a educadores sobre como incorporar e adotar essa pedagogia. Este artigo fornece um adendo a esses trabalhos, destacando um estudo de caso de uma iniciativa conjunta mais recente que situa a FpC no centro do ensino, da aprendizagem e do bem-estar dos alunos na implementação do Currículo Australiano em Nova Gales do Sul (NSW). A parceria inovadora entre a Associação de Filosofia nas Escolas de NSW e o Centro de Pensamento Crítico e Ética do Newington College levou ao estabelecimento de uma escola-referência de melhores práticas comunitárias, apresentando um conjunto de práticas que surgem e são diretamente informadas pela tradição liderada por Lipman e Sharp. Os objetivos deste artigo são duplos: primeiro, descrever e analisar a iniciativa, incluindo os benefícios para os parceiros e para a comunidade em geral; e, segundo,

discutir as implicações mais amplas para a comunidade de NSW e a viabilidade da prática do P4C em NSW e na região da Ásia-Pacífico. Especificamente, este artigo aponta para o papel da formação docente na garantia das melhores práticas em P4C e o potencial para o desenvolvimento futuro de práticas de P4C na Austrália em contextos específicos.

palavras-chave: pensamento crítico; educação; colaboração; pedagogia; aprendizagem profissional.

pensamiento crítico, creativo y cuidante: comunidades de práctica en sídney, australia

resumen

Filosofía para Niños (FPN) se ha desarrollado en el contexto australiano desde principios de la década de 1990, y sus aplicaciones e innovaciones continúan hasta la actualidad. Burgh y Thornton (2016, 2018) detallan la historia de la FPN en Australia, incluyendo la creación de varias asociaciones para brindar formación profesional a educadores sobre cómo activar y adoptar esta pedagogía. Este artículo complementa estos trabajos y destaca el estudio de caso de una iniciativa conjunta más reciente que sitúa la FPN en el centro de la enseñanza, el aprendizaje y el bienestar del alumnado en el marco del currículo australiano en Nueva Gales del Sur (NSW). La novedosa e innovadora colaboración entre la Asociación para la Filosofía en las Escuelas de NSW y el Centro para el Pensamiento Crítico y la Ética del Newington College ha dado lugar al establecimiento de una escuela referente de buenas prácticas comunitarias que muestra un conjunto de prácticas que surgen de la tradición liderada por Lipman y Sharp y que se basan directamente en ella. Los objetivos de este documento son dos: primero, describir y analizar la iniciativa, incluyendo los beneficios para ambos socios y la comunidad en general; y segundo, analizar las implicaciones más

amplias para la comunidad de Nueva Gales del Sur y la viabilidad de la práctica de la FpN en Nueva Gales del Sur y la región Asia-Pacífico. En concreto, este documento destaca el papel de la formación docente para garantizar las mejores prácticas en FpN y el potencial para el desarrollo futuro de prácticas de FpN en Australia en contextos específicos.

palabras clave: pensamiento crítico; educación; colaboración; pedagogía; aprendizaje profesional.

critical, creative, and caring thinking: communities of practice in sydney, australia

introduction

2022 marked the 30-year anniversary of the Federation of Asia-Pacific Philosophy in Schools Associations (FAPSA), which speaks to the longevity and growth of the theory and practice of Philosophy for Children (P4C) in this part of the world. From early beginnings arising from around the time of the first national conference in Melbourne in 1992, FAPSA (then known as FAPCA) has grown to connect and support P4C organisations in New Zealand, Singapore, and Hong Kong, together with several Australian regional affiliates. In Australia, where oversight of education has traditionally been a matter for state governments, there has been varying uptake and development of P4C, and its accompanying pedagogy the Community of Inquiry (COI), in each state, territory, or region. This paper will focus on the state of New South Wales (NSW) and the work of colleagues via the FAPSA affiliate organisation in this region: the Association for Philosophy in Schools NSW, henceforth referred to as *PinS NSW*. *PinS NSW* is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to "improving the quality of the thinking that occurs in NSW classrooms and the quality of the pedagogy stimulating that thinking." Based on the work of John Dewey, Matthew Lipman, Lev Vygotsky, Laurence Splitter, Philip Cam, Janette Poulton, and many others, FAPSA-trained lead-educators advocate for P4C, generally referred to in the Asia-Pacific as *Philosophy in Schools*.¹ The aim is to upskill teachers to facilitate rigorous critical, creative, collaborative, and caring dialogue by establishing the COI in classrooms. As is well known to those familiar with the pedagogy, it is student-centred, meaning that teacher-facilitators assist students both to set the agenda for their learning and to monitor the processes and the quality of their learning. These strategies both develop students' capacities for critical and creative thought (via the explicit teaching of higher order thinking skills and reasoning strategies) and also advance students' personal and social capabilities (due to their deliberate inclusive nature).

¹ This nomenclature is typical across Australian associations cf., VAPS – the Victorian Philosophy in Schools Association and APIS – the Association for Philosophy in Schools in Western Australia.

Established in 1992, the same year as the aforementioned Melbourne-based conference, PinS NSW has been successfully led by Philip Cam, Sandy Lynch, Michael Parker, and other Sydney-based colleagues, for years linked primarily to the Philosophy Department at the University of New South Wales (UNSW).² In the early 1990s San MacColl of UNSW attracted a research grant to develop a range of philosophy materials for infant school contexts: the *Philosophy with Kids* series. Lucy McCutcheon and Chris de Haan worked on the project, and in this era the projects enjoyed the support of the Head of the School of Philosophy at UNSW at the time, Stephen Cohen. Currently, PinS NSW is not linked to any particular research group but instead enjoys support and collaboration from philosophers and educators across a range of universities in Sydney.

During the last thirty years, teachers and philosophers have worked together to establish and roll out a series of professional learning courses to build capacity with this pedagogy (see Poulton, 2018). The introductory (Level 1) training was initially adapted from the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC) model, and over time developed a greater emphasis on facilitation skills and classroom activities in the P4C tradition, sometimes to the detriment of the theory and practice, or understanding of some of the canonical ideas in the field of philosophy, which were carefully woven into the Lipman/IAPC novels and accompanying teacher manuals in the earlier days (Poulton, 2018, p. 150). Throughout these years, there was robust discussion within the P4C community about the nature and purpose of training, including advocates for various, sometimes competing, elements to be included in the training program. To ensure broad coverage of the areas deemed most important, there has been consistent support for the requirement that all workshops must be

² To illustrate the development and contextualisation of P4C in Australia, the work of Philip Cam cannot be underestimated. Many of his works emerged out of collaborations with teachers at schools in NSW and other Australian states (e.g., Cam, 2006b, 2020; Cam et al., 2007). His materials remain central resources that model and drive collaborative classroom activities in the NSW (and Australian) context. In keeping with the tradition of using purpose-written texts as stimuli for communities of inquiry, Cam (1993, 1994, 2013) produced *Thinking Stories I*, *Thinking Stories II*, and *Philosophy Park*, respectively, together with accompanying teachers' materials for use with these stories. It is uncontroversial to say that Cam's work constitutes a substantial component of the Australian canon of material. A clear thread throughout this canon is the explicit focus on thinking moves, and on student identification, tracking, and reflection on the use of these moves in the thinking of the community.

delivered by a collaborative team consisting of someone with Philosophy credentials and a peer with education credentials (or the rare person who has both). For the full range of workshops now on offer (since 2019) please see the FAPSA guidelines (2022).

Reading the Australian literature, and drawing from the lived experiences of Australian educators, the viability of P4C in NSW can be evidenced by three indicators:

- (i) the maintenance of whole-of-school approaches in the state of NSW
- (ii) the number of teachers undertaking ongoing professional learning in this space and
- (iii) the level of enthusiasm and community engagement (including professional communities of teachers and demand and opportunities for inter-school events for students.)

These criteria could turn out to be applicable more generally, as future research might reveal, but for the purposes of this paper, the work of PinS NSW will be analysed against each of these criteria.

whole-of-school approaches

In recent history, there have been three lighthouse schools of practice in NSW in the primary school context: Stanmore Public School, Bondi Public School, and Leichhardt Public School (Kennedy White et al., 2018, pp. 177–178).³ In the few years since that publication, the centrality of P4C to teaching and learning in two out of three of these schools has unfortunately faded. One can speculate that the decline in maintenance of these programs may have been due to changes in leadership and staff turnover; two factors that had previously been identified as central to the vitality of other P4C initiatives in Australia (Kennedy White et al., 2018, p. 181).

In addition, the move to on-line learning during the lockdowns of 2020–2021 disrupted the use of the pedagogy of the COI. Looking across the state of NSW, so far as PinS NSW leaders were aware, during the time of COVID, P4C was regularly used by just small pockets of teachers across NSW schools. Virtual

³ In NSW this is approximately equivalent to elementary schools in the North American context, for students roughly aged 5–12.

communities of inquiry were reported to be feasible only for some students, particularly in classes of high performing (gifted) students and/or contexts in which the norms and expectations of COI were already well-understood by students. However, the literature indicates that virtual teaching is inherently challenging for any age group and particularly challenging for younger children (Ford et al., 2021; Ethridge et al., 2022). This could partly explain why there was little in the way of a network and few instances of communication between schools around implementation of this pedagogy during this difficult time.

As NSW schools transitioned out of online-learning, only Leichhardt Public School continued to offer philosophy to primary students (Years K–6) under the expert guidance of Principal and FAPSA Teacher Educator, Dan Muir-Smith. In the secondary school context (for ages 12–18) there have been no whole-of-school approaches in the last decade or so, and certainly no K–12 school showcasing this pedagogy in a whole-school fashion, complete with classroom strategies and activities specifically dedicated to nurturing critical, creative and caring thinking.

In 2022 (the post-COVID era), PinS NSW forged a partnership underpinned by shared values with the newly established Centre for Critical Thinking and Ethics (CCT&E) at Newington College, an established independent K–12 school in Sydney. CCT&E was charged with helping to enact Newington College’s strategic plan, “to empower our students to develop great hearts, inspired minds and strong wings, ready to make a positive contribution to society and the future”. The goals of the CCT&E include making Newington a lighthouse “Thinking School” through collaborative commitment to dialogue and to becoming a hub of best practice, in order to share this dialogic approach with others in the local, regional, national, and global community. This work was spearheaded from the top, by Newington’s Headmaster Michael Parker, himself an expert P4C practitioner, previous PinS NSW leader, and published author of materials for teaching philosophy to children (Parker, 1995), dialogues with children (Parker, 2014), and critical thinking (Parker & Morrison, 2025). He assembled a team of expert practitioners to co-lead the initiative and over time other collaborators joined the CCT&E leadership team from within the school context. One promising feature of the mutually beneficial partnership between CCT&E and PinS NSW is to offer more educators an expanded range of opportunities to make use of bespoke

resources, classroom strategies and practices. This will be explained in more detail shortly.

The work of the CCT&E builds upon insights from the seminal work of Lipman and Sharp, who invite educators to cultivate higher-order (critical, creating and caring) thinking in a classroom context through philosophical inquiry. This is partly justified in recognition that philosophy as a discipline is metacognitive, as doing philosophy entails thinking about thinking (e.g., paying systematic attention to reason, argument, and conceptual exploration). The approach of the CCT&E is premised on the claim made throughout the canon of works that philosophy is well-placed to enable thinking *in* and thinking *among* the disciplines (see Gazzard & Lipman, 1988; Lipman, 1991).

In addition to the foundational work of Lipman, Sharp, and colleagues, there are many other sources of inspiration for school-wide work of the CCT&E, only some of which are included here, such as the seminal work of Cam (2006b, 2018), the ongoing work of The Philosophy Man, Jason Buckley (e.g., *Pocket P4C*), the extensive work of the Critical Thinking Foundation in the USA led by Richard Paul and Linda Elder, (e.g., Paul & Elder, 2008), work on the importance of inquiry dialogue as in Reznitskaya and Wilkinson (2017), Philosophy in Public Spaces (PiPs) developed by the Victorian Association for Philosophy in Schools, and the ongoing collaborative work undertaken throughout the Thinking Schools Network, maintained by the University of Queensland Critical Thinking Project, which developed in part from Ellerton (2019). Drawing from these sources, the CCT&E has fashioned a way forward to support a whole-school approach that makes optimum use of three elements:

1. Developing a resourced, stand-alone critical, creative, and caring thinking program to introduce and explicitly teach and practice foundational thinking tools and skills (for years K–10). Wherever possible, this program is delivered by experienced P4C practitioners.
2. Reinforcing students' practice of critical thinking tools and skills by supporting teachers to call attention to these tools and skills in classroom activities across the curriculum. This 'embedding' part of the project requires both professional learning and a shared vision across the school about the value of developing and enhancing student

thinking and metacognition. A suite of customised resources is in use by all our staff and available for others wishing to use it as well.

3. Situating thinking in a collaborative, dialogic model (COI) that emerges from the Philosophy in Schools tradition. This is not to be underestimated, as part of developing skilful critical thinkers is cultivating and nurturing epistemic virtues, dispositions, and attitudes to truth-seeking. Situating thinking in this collaborative model enables us to explicitly call attention to the community norms and pro-social aspects of inquiry that are essential for inquiry dialogue.⁴

Each of the three elements will be briefly detailed below.

1. stand-alone, whole-school program

The stand-alone program is delivered in Newington's Junior schools via standard COI lessons delivered by a specialist P4C practitioner. These lessons are at times linked to curriculum concepts, but importantly they allow for maximal student agency in driving the inquiry. By contrast, in secondary school, for years 7-10, the stand-alone critical thinking lessons are not delivered via the same COI-method across all lessons. Instead, the stand-alone lessons form part of a rigorous and obligatory course for all students in Philosophy and Religious Studies (PRS). To unify these two strands, which are quite different in terms of their delivery, we have devised a spiralised skills progression to scaffold and track the development of a range of community norms and inquiry skills at key developmental points. The secondary program has adapted the textbook-COI methodology to address delivery of syllabus content as well as afford opportunities for student-led inquiry. In lessons which are more content focused, there is, nevertheless, explicit and sustained focus on thinking in the spirit of the *Teaching for Thinking* approach advocated at UQCTP, though articulated in a bespoke fashion in our context. In this way, the Newington model exhibits aspects of tradition and aspects of innovation. One reason that Newington has chosen to focus the stand-alone program on critical thinking tools, skills, and values is to bootstrap embedding of critical and creative thinking skills as broadly as possible

⁴ The nature of this initiative is spelled out in greater detail in Jensen et al. (2024).

across the curriculum within the secondary school context. This will become clearer in the next section where the embedding is clarified.

The first key classroom resource supporting this program piloted as part of the secondary stand-alone project was the Year 7 Critical Thinking Passport, as reported in Jensen and Giles (2023). The updated resource (now called the Critical Thinking Toolkit) is available in digital form by request to the author. It has been shared widely with schools in NSW, across Australia, and across the globe, including being translated into several languages.

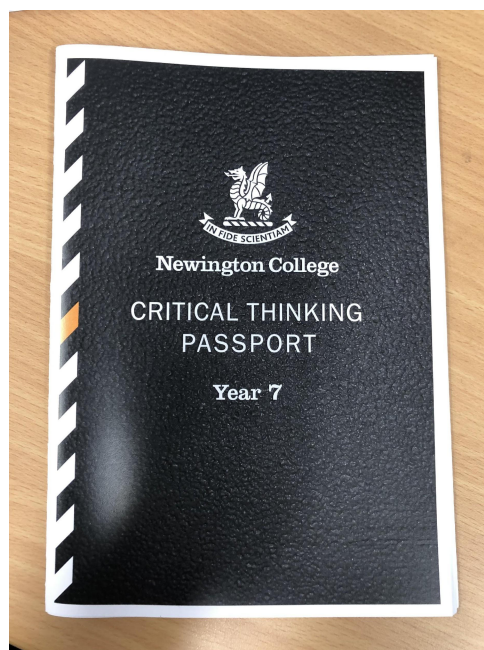


Image A: Year 7 Critical Thinking Passport (2024). **Source:** Author.

Inspired by Buckley's *Pocket P4C*, this student mini-workbook puts in the hands of the youngest students in the secondary school a range of the most commonly used thinking tools (see Cam, 2006b), such as 'question, suggestion, reason, example, and distinction', among others. Each tool is defined, and then illustrated, with opportunities for students to practice using the tool in their own thinking. Steps may include generating reasons, followed by engaging in the giving and taking of reasons, then evaluating the quality of the reasons under consideration. Across a semester, students work through explicit teaching of a range of tools, which are subsequently reinforced throughout the course. The booklet was originally fashioned as a passport to enable students to journey across their whole school day (including all their other classes and subjects) using the

suite of tools they have practised. Importantly, these tools are not domain specific, but generic (see Cam, 2018).

Anecdotal evidence from teachers of other subjects show promising uptake of these tools, which is impressive given the difficulty noted in the literature of 'transfer' between stand-alone critical thinking programs and other subjects.⁵ For instance, the Head of Geography noticed that students more regularly use metalanguage to introduce their thinking about geography, e.g., 'I'd like to give an example' or 'I can think of a counter-example to that claim'.

Once the pilot programs have been trialled and refined, the plan is to share the stand-alone programs, lesson sequences, sample lessons and classroom materials with others, so that they can replicate or adapt them. This work is well underway (see, Jensen et al., 2024; Jensen, 2025; Parker & Jensen, 2023).⁶

2. embedding of critical thinking

We have established a framework for embedding critical thinking across the curriculum, to extend and reinforce the skills introduced via the stand-alone program. Figure 1 summarises the spirit of the central elements of the embedding program: subject content, skills, tools, and values. The course **content** is supplied by the curriculum. The **skills** (e.g., *explain, justify, analyse*) are also explicitly called for by curricular documents. As pointed out by the Director of the UQCTP, critical thinking classrooms "require a range of cognitive skills and processes" (Ellerton, 2024, p. 58). Our framework provides an analytic approach to engaging with the skills through explicit teaching of a set of generic critical thinking **tools** (e.g., *giving a reason, providing an example*) which, in conjunction with one another comprise the aforementioned skills (see Jensen et al., 2024 p. 108 for a full articulation of this view). The final portion of the framework highlights critical thinking **values**. Inclusion of several key values enables us to improve upon the notions of 'good thinking' in the literature (e.g., according to Lipman, 1995, 'good thinking' may include a range of features such as being 'strong, relevant and reliable'). As does Ellerton, we take inspiration from the works of Thomas Kuhn (e.g., Kuhn, 1970)

⁵ For overview of the transfer problem, see Willingham (2019); for discussion of transferability in music, see Sala and Grobet (2017).

⁶ To review and download materials, please visit the CCT&E website where resources will be made available:
<https://www.newington.nsw.edu.au/whats-happening/critical-thinking-ethics-and-ethics/>

and Paul Richard and Linda Elder (e.g., Paul & Elder, 2008), in relation to what the latter call 'standards' of thinking: criteria for assessing or evaluating the quality of thought; criteria we refer to as 'critical thinking values' in our framework.⁷

SUBJECT CONTENT	CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS	CRITICAL THINKING TOOLS	CRITICAL THINKING VALUES
- What is a thought experiment - Causes of WWII - Conjugating in the <i>passé composé</i> and the imperfect	- apply - describe - evaluate - examine - explain - identify - infer - justify ... This is a non-exhaustive list, drawn from NESA's most recent <i>Glossary of Key Words</i> (2025)	- argument - counterargument - counterexample - criteria - distinction - example - implication - question - reason - suggestion ... This is a non-exhaustive list, building from the seminal work, <i>20 Thinking Tools</i> (Cam, 2006).	- accuracy - breadth - clarity - coherence - depth - precision - relevance - significance This non-exhaustive list is based on Intellectual Standards of <i>The Paul-Elder Critical Thinking Model</i> (Paul and Elder, 2001), with contribution from the University of Queensland Critical Thinking Project (Ellerton, 2015)

Figure 1: The CCT&E framework for embedding. **Source:** Newington College

This structure provides teachers with a clear vocabulary and metalanguage of student thinking, enabling them to plan for and explicitly support student thinking in each lesson. When teachers plan to deliver specific subject content, they are encouraged to consider which critical thinking *skills* (identified as cognitions which appear as part of the curriculum documents) students will engage with and which critical thinking *tools* will be required to successfully engage with the skills. This structure is maximally user-friendly for NSW educators since the 'skills' are 'cognitive verbs' that are found throughout the syllabi and curricular documents. Teachers are consequently very familiar with this range of skills and often have particular ways of encouraging student responses to instructions to 'describe' as compared to 'explain' or 'evaluate.' The task then becomes working out, for each unit of work, the links between the skills and the tools. For instance, in putting forward an *explanation* one may need at least one 'example' and perhaps consider various 'counterexamples'. One or more of the critical thinking values may then be used to determine the quality of the work, e.g., those involved determine to what extent the explanation under consideration is clear/relevant/precise (Costantino, 2024).

⁷ These are known as values of inquiry in the Teaching for Thinking framework (cf. Ellerton, 2019 p. 105 and subsequent works).

Even in the first two years of the CCT&E initiative, evidence of the impact of the embedding program has been evident (for early results in making thinking explicit in history classrooms, see Jensen & Laurence, 2023); (for recent school-internal results in building teacher capacity, see Jensen & Timillero, 2023).

As of 2025, CCT&E has rolled out a new resource: a small pack of cards for professional discussions and planning purposes that includes all the items in the framework. The goal of producing this resource is to assist teachers to build familiarity with the ways in which the skills and tools are related and can be explicitly taught. Teachers are encouraged to identify the central skill to be taught in a forthcoming lesson and to use procedural language to draw attention to this skill as well as the standards by which it will be evaluated (a particular *value*). A sample of the cards is shown below in Image B.



Image B: CCT&E Critical Thinking planning cards (2025). **Source:** Author.

professional learning

The partnership with PinS NSW is central to working toward the goals in the embedding part of the Newington project since this work depends on the provision of high quality P4C professional learning workshops and ongoing mentorship. The workshops provided and run by PinS NSW to introduce the community of inquiry model are hosted by Newington College and open to all teachers. Sessions are delivered by FAPSA-endorsed Teacher

Educator/Philosopher pairs, in accordance with the guidelines set out in FAPSA (2022). These workshop sequences have been developed and refined by those who trained directly with Lipman and colleagues in the formative early years, most notably in the local context, Philip Cam. The two-day, face-to-face professional learning course “Introduction to Philosophical Community of Inquiry”, has become the foundational critical thinking course for Newington teachers and indeed for P4C practitioners across the Asia-Pacific. The two-day, face-to-face course is supplemented with an additional opportunity for mentorship leading to certification in form of the FAPSA Introductory Certificate, the premier micro-credential for Philosophy in Schools pedagogy in the Asia-Pacific.⁸

The centrality of P4C methodology as part of the embedding project links closely to the third element in the CCT&E model: situating thinking in collaborative dialogue. As stated, this framework necessitates thinking about the community and collaborative aspects of thinking together, including the pro-social features of inquiry and the development of epistemic virtues such as curiosity, intellectual courage, and humility. It also invites a particular moral stance to caring dialogue that is simultaneously kind and fair-minded. Further, as Reznitskaya and Wilkinson (2017) point out, inquiry dialogue is not immediately prevalent in studies of 'classroom talk'. The CCT&E leadership team concur with Reznitskaya and Wilkinson that inquiry dialogue is a superior way in which to collaboratively build 'argument literacy.'

At this point, it is prudent to comment on how the provision for the embedding part of the CCT&E project has positively impacted the training programming offered by PinS NSW. To some extent, one can gauge viability of an initiative by simply looking at numbers of participants undertaking (optional) professional learning workshops. Admittedly this is only one measure. Since forging the partnership with the CCT&E, PinS NSW has provided introductory P4C training to more than 112 teachers (2022–2024) from twenty-eight different schools across all three sectors (state, Catholic, and Independent schools), with some teachers travelling across states to participate. Notably, in the five years prior to that, PinS NSW offered introductory workshops to a total of 78 teachers from all

⁸ This course of professional learning, outlined in FAPSA (2022), has recently been endorsed by the UNESCO Chair for Philosophy with Children.

sectors, 20 of which were from one school. Moreover, in the last three years the Advanced Practice workshops (launched in 2019) have been delivered to a greater number of teachers than in the three years prior. This participation data, summarised in Table 1, indicates a rise in interest among teachers and leaders in using community of inquiry in classrooms to support critical and creative thinking.

Table 1: Teacher participation in PinS NSW workshops 2017–2024.

Workshop specifications	Teacher participation	
	2017-2021 (including COVID years)	2022-2024 (since the PinS NSW & CCTE partnership)
Introduction to Philosophical Community of Inquiry: 2-days, face-to-face	78 (nb 20 from one school)	117 (from 28 different schools)
Advanced Practice 1, 2, & 3 workshops: each one day, face-to-face (launched 2019)	27	34
Assessment of Community of Inquiry (launched 2019)	8	13

Source: Author

This uptake in professional learning is especially impressive given that in the NSW local context, the potential of P4C has been largely overlooked by decision makers and education leaders.⁹ Centralising the professional learning program in one school has arguably made the difference.¹⁰

To further cultivate enthusiasm for and celebrate critical, creative, collaborative, and caring thinking, the collaborative partnership has produced new, bespoke professional learning experiences for teachers including Newington's now-annual Engaging Questions (EQ) series. The EQ series was launched in 2023, with a day-conference entitled Teaching Secondary Philosophy. Each year since then the CCT&E and PinS NSW partnership have worked together to offer another day-conference each year. In 2024, PinS NSW presenters delivered a session of workshop that had been developed in 2019 to support the use of COI as a formal assessment in senior years, *Assessment of Community of Inquiry*, and in 2025, a focused workshop was offered on *Thought Experiments*. These events assist

⁹ NSW is not unique in this regard; an overview of whole-school initiatives across all of Australia concluded, “Despite the significant [...] successes of whole-school approaches, P4C does not have a high national profile, and so it is not perceived as an obvious option when schools seek to provide teaching and learning aimed at critical and creative thinking” (Kennedy White et al., 2018, p. 182).

¹⁰ Excitingly, the leadership in South Australia have identified the promising effects of P4C training for teachers. It is hoped that this partnership can be replicated and/or extended to support the plans for teacher-training at scale in that state.

in nurturing the larger NSW community of practitioners, offering teachers the opportunity to learn from expert practitioners, to share resources, and build community so that everyone can co-strengthen practice in facilitation and building mastery with this pedagogy.

3. commitment to the dialogic model: events for students

In order to provide opportunities to students from a range of schools to engage in best-practice P4C lessons, the partnership has opened a new and promising range of inter-school events. From the first launch of the Meeting of Minds Day, this annual event has grown so readily that in 2024, Newington College, unfortunately, had to turn schools away due to space limitations. Hundreds of students in NSW are now actively engaged in COI in their schools and in events for thinking together through student-days of this nature. Demand for these inter-school days suggests that students recognise the worth of opportunities to engage in inquiry together and increased school-level membership in the Association, is an indication that the theory and practice of P4C is appealing to teachers in NSW. PinS NSW and Newington College foresee continuing to work collaboratively to develop more opportunities for students to think together. This expansion has already begun. In 2025 we launched the Socratic Summit, a day-excursion for Year 9–10 students to engage in conceptual inquiry with students from other schools. Importantly, each of these events provides opportunities for teachers to access ongoing mentorship from expert P4C practitioners.

The work of CCT&E to highlight student thinking and empower teachers with greater expertise in how to plan for and support student thinking in classrooms is still expanding. The partnership with PinS NSW has been instrumental in providing the professional learning necessary to roll this initiative out across a whole-of school. The benefits of the partnership for PinS NSW are evident in terms of the number of teachers coming to undertake professional learning (in the form of the workshops) and the increased opportunities for teachers to experience mentorship (in the form of the inter-school events). Through this joint initiative, training has been made available to more teachers across NSW, by establishing professional conversations and building a community

of practice around student's critical, creative, and caring thinking. It is hoped that this partnership can inspire other similar partnerships between professional learning-associations and key schools.

discussion and implications

What has made the partnership successful? A few things: Shared values, Leadership, Inclusion, Serving many needs. Each will be addressed in turn.

Shared values: The core values underpinning the work of CCT&E and PinS NSW are largely convergent. Many educators are involved in both groups, and there is full collegiality and cooperation between the leaders of both groups.

Leadership: Both groups employ some form of collaborative/distributed leadership, in concert with the core pedagogy of collaborative dialogue. As has been repeatedly shown in the literature, initiatives of this type require committed leadership in order to flourish. Our structures and governance have guaranteed this.

Inclusion: Though Newington College students, staff, and community are the direct beneficiaries of the work of the CCT&E, the spirit of this partnership entails sharing the resources, activities and materials developed as part of this work. The generosity of this approach means that a maximal number of teachers and students may benefit from this partnership too. Certainly, with numbers of teachers enrolling in professional learning and students enrolling in the inter-school events on the rise, there is potential to have even greater impact in years to come.

Serving many needs: It is pertinent to revisit the historical tensions (see Poulton, 2018) in terms of the nature of and points of emphasis in professional learning P4C programs in the Australian context. In NSW, PinS NSW has traditionally served as a supporter and champion of the P4C pedagogy but also offers support to teachers of the subject *Philosophy*. In the present context, arising from the PinS NSW/CCT&E partnership, we have had scope to diversify and develop new courses so that each may supply the features necessary in specific contexts. For instance, the Foundational FAPSA workshop focuses on participation in and facilitation of the COI, on recognising and using thinking skills in the context of collaborative discussion with only some emphasis on the historical

underpinnings of this pedagogy, and on the specific use of this pedagogy in the teaching of Philosophy, per se. To complement these FAPSA COI workshops, the Engaging Questions workshops focus on the teaching of Philosophy in the secondary school, using some of the P4C techniques and activities. In this way, the partnership can further develop and serve each of these needs which were previously in competition. Rather than tensions, there is now room in the larger partnership to furnish several more areas of growth and refinement for a growing network of practitioners. The flexibility and malleability of the pedagogy have contributed to its ability to innovate and serve in different ways across different contexts.

Suffice to say, evaluating the success and viability of P4C in NSW against the three proposed criteria, repeated below, it seems safe to conclude that this pedagogy is alive and well in NSW.

- (i) the maintenance of whole-of-school approaches in the state of NSW
- (ii) the number of teachers undertaking ongoing professional learning in this space and
- (iii) the level of enthusiasm and community engagement (including professional communities of teachers and demand and opportunities for inter-school events for students.)

It would be fruitful in future for researchers to follow up on the sustainability of this initiative, so that we can continue to innovate in the search for best practice in supporting students' critical, creative, collaborative, and caring thinking.

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how to quote this article:

APA: Jensen, B. (2025). Critical, creative, and caring thinking: communities of practice in sydney, australia. *childhood & philosophy*, 21, 1–20.
<https://doi.org/10.12957/childphilo.2025.88325>

ABNT: JENSEN, Britta. Critical, creative, and caring thinking: communities of practice in sydney, australia. *childhood & philosophy*, v. 21, p. 1-20, 2025. Disponível em: [inserir link]. Acesso em: [inserir data de acesso].

credits

-
- **Acknowledgements:** Not applicable.
 - **Financing:** Not applicable.
 - **Conflicts of interest:** The authors certify that they have no commercial or associative interest that represents a conflict of interest in relation to the manuscript.
 - **Ethical approval:** Not applicable.
 - **Availability of data and material:** Not applicable.
 - **Authors' contribution:** Conceptualisation; Writing, revising and editing the text; Formal analysis; Research; Methodology; Resources; Validation: JENSEN, B.
 - **Image:** Not applicable.
 - **Preprint:** Not published in preprint repository.
-

article submitted to the similarity system ::plagium™

submitted: 04.01.2025 approved: 28.09.2025 published: 31.10.2025

reviewer 1: laurance splitter; reviewer 2: gilbert burgh