

# AoC Professional Exchange Group

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*British Values and  
Critical Thinking  
ARC project*



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**Barking & Dagenham College**

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# Section 1: Setting the context

## Background to the project

This Professional Exchange Group has focused on developing learners' understanding of British Values, and their critical thinking skills. As a group we note a link between British Values and critical thinking. We draw from the idea that critical thinking is about use of your ability to reason, and about being an active learner rather than a passive recipient of information. Following from this, the promotion of British Values in colleges serves to:

- Enable students to develop their self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence
- Enable students to distinguish right from wrong
- Further tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions by enabling students to acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures

*(Promoting fundamental British Values as part of SMSC in schools, DFE: 2014)*

From the very outset, the group agreed that the strategies we were going to trial as part of this project would allow these to feature 'naturally', rather than being treated as 'extra' or 'add-ons'. With this, we hoped to create authentic and meaningful experiences for learners where British Values could feature, and critical thinking take place, in subject specific contexts. In order to achieve this, we agreed as a group to explore the use of similar pedagogical approaches, namely discussion-based activities. We noted the benefits that structured discussions can have when working with learners, with evidence from previous studies noting that this can "help children (sic) become more willing and be able to question, reason, construct arguments and collaborate with others" (P4C, 2019).

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## Section 2: What did we set out to do?

### Project aims

- Explore how British Values can be effectively embedding in a range of settings and subject contexts
- Enhance learners' critical thinking faculties, through engagement with 'big' ideas and concepts (such as British Values)

### What activities did we complete, individually and collectively?

- As a group we participated in P4C training, and experienced this approach from the perspective of a learner.
- As teachers, we ran communities of enquiry, and structured discussion-based activities that connected our learners with 'big ideas' including the four British Values.
- As a group, we evaluated the effectiveness of using these approaches by drawing on learner voice and our own reflections.

***“Structured discussions can help children (sic) become more willing and be able to question, reason, construct arguments and collaborate with others”***

***(P4C, 2019).***

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## What were the activities that we trialed with learners?

### **End of the world debate:**

**Scenario:** World War 3 has just occurred. You and nine other people find yourselves alone in a nuclear bunker designed for three people. If all of you stay then you will live for a maximum of 2 years, not enough time for the Earth to be free of radiation. If three wish to survive for long enough to come back above ground and rebuild their lives, then seven people would have to leave and sacrifice themselves (or be forced out!!) ....

**How?** By using your powers of persuasion, charm, wits and effective communication skills to convince the remaining survivors you are more deserving of a place in the bunker than they are...

### **Balloon debate:**

**Scenario:** Learners are assembled into groups. Allocate each group with subject matter relating to their current curriculum module. For example; learners studying environmental technologies used in the construction industry, wherein each group represents a source of energy such as coal, solar, biomass etc. The class have thirty/forty minutes to compile as many positive and/or useful facts about their allocated subject and suggest that they may wish to use the time to research some negative points about the subjects being represented by their peers.

**How?** Explain to the group that they are sitting in a hot air balloon but it will only be light enough to take off when there is just one group left. Each group will have 2 minutes (or whatever suits your area/lesson) to promote their subject and put forward their argument on why they should remain in the balloon. After the first round of debate the learners can put forward any counter arguments/negative aspects of their peer's subject, at which point each team votes for the team they think should leave the balloon.

Repeat this process until you only have one team left in the balloon. The teams voted out of the balloon still get to vote at the end of each round to keep them involved and collectively they have the deciding vote in the event of a tie. At the end of the debate when only one team remain you can have a discussion with the group regarding their thoughts on the voting system; did they think it was fair? why was it fair?

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## **Community of Enquiry (Philosophy for Children):**

P4C is a whole-class intervention which aims to stimulate classroom dialogue in response to learner's own questions about shared stories, films and other stimulus. The main emphasis is to allow learners to think and ask questions. With guidance from the teacher, the dialogue is focused not only on the chosen questions but also on the assumptions that lie behind the answers and the criteria used to make judgements. P4C aims to help learners think logically, to voice their opinion, to use appropriate language in argumentation, and to listen to the views and opinions of others. The following are the main ten stages of a P4C session:

1. Getting set
2. Presentation of stimulus
3. Thinking time
4. Question making
5. Question airing
6. Question choosing
7. First thoughts
8. Building
9. Last thoughts
10. Review

## **What learners did we involve?**

Learners spanning a range of curriculum areas:

- Plumbing Level 1
- Access Level 2 Health and Social Care, Access Level 3 Health Professions
- ESOL Level 1
- Performing Arts Level 1, Level 2, Level 3
- GCSE English
- Teacher Education Level 4.

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## Section 3: Findings

### Balloon debate - L3 Performing Arts learners

#### British Values:

- You can't tackle all British values at once. Instead focusing on one or two.
- Using the lesson topic, and drawing British values from that.
- Differentiation- lower level learners may need more guidance to complete the task.

#### Critical Thinking:

- All learners given an opportunity to 'think on the spot' and reflect
- Some students can think critically, continue guiding learners less likely to think critically during the session and for further development. Continue to develop these skills rather than 'leave them at the door'

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### End of the world debate - L1 ESOL learners

#### British Values:

Learners showed an explicit appreciation of ideas including individual liberty, respect and tolerance of others, and the value of following a democratic process.

#### Quotes:

*"People should be respectful to each other"*

*"this activity tells me that we have not to exclude any one, only we have to respect each other, and accept each other like this."*

#### Critical Thinking:

Some learners noted the value of dialogue in helping to arrive at a group decision that took into account different points of view.

#### Quotes:

*"these values and beliefs help to have (sic) a peaceful life"*

*"We judge people thinking that we are perfect. We should estimate people by their inner world, because our body is a physical object."*

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## Community of Enquiry- L2 & L3 Access learners

An evening was selected and learners invited to attend an extracurricular event 'Keeping it Reel' to watch the documentary Professor Green- Living in Poverty with a discussion held after to explore the learners thoughts on impact and understanding of poverty in the UK.

### *Commentary on the enquiry, and reflections*

Four learners enjoyed the documentary and were able to delve into some of their opinions, concerns and questions regarding topic such as crime, social class, inequality and community. During the discussion learners voted on ideas to discuss, posed questions and critically discussed each other's points. The learners answered a Google form to reflect and evaluate how they experienced the event. Learners found that the main values covered were democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law. While the discussion was insightful throughout, learners did, at times, focus on their own opinions too much without relating back to others in the group. Graphs below show some learner feedback.

### *Conclusion*

The main critique of the event was that they would have preferred more learners to have attended to share ideas and push the discussion further as well as having a longer discussion. It is difficult to find a suitable time for adult learners to attend in larger numbers due to commitments outside of their timetable. While facilitating the discussion, it may be important to take a lead role to structure the points that need more focus.

#### What aspects of this event were most useful or valuable?

3 responses

The documentary and discussion sections are useful, as the documentary is about the effects of poverty in the family and how it affects both the children and their parents .During the discussion, we discussed in detail the factors that leads to poverty, the consequent and the solutions.

Discussing the problem as a group and possibility of seeing different opinions and perspectives on it.

The documentary was very insightful, and it was good to have discussions around the topic and to hear other peoples views. It was also good that the organiser had preset questions/areas for consideration in mind, thus helping to stimulate the discussions.

*Learner feedback from Access learners in response to attending the documentary showing and participating in a community of enquiry*



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## **Community of Enquiry - L3 Access learners**

I was starting a new unit titled 'Equality and Diversity within a Health Care Setting' to my Blended Access to Health Professions group. During the discussion I took more of a leader role rather than a facilitator as I was wary of going off topic.

### ***Commentary on the enquiry, and reflections***

At the start, each learner came up with key words surrounding the stimulus, the unit title. I grouped their responses together and voted on what area we should discuss, using the principle of being able to vote for as many options as they wanted. We chose the group of keywords that focused on equality and protected characteristics and identity. This is something we have previously covered so the learners had some background information already. By going round in the circle everyone was able to participate.

One learner became quite emotional when we changed our stimulus to the keyword disempowerment, with her sharing a personal experience in which she had recently felt disempowered at work. Her peers raised similar concerns in the discussion, especially in relation to how to cope with confrontation in the workplace. Other contributions revealed they were concerned about becoming desensitised to the harm and pain they will see as practising nurses.

### ***Conclusions***

Generally British values can be embedded well when discussing professionalism, it can also lead to discussions on topics that can be controversial so it's important to go in prepared for those discussions. Also adult learners that may not get the time to actually discuss things with other people and get advice can open up about personal issues, and it's important to be prepared for that and try to apply their situation to the course content.

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## Community of Enquiry - GCSE English learners

I ran a community of enquiry with a group of eight GCSE English learners. The aim of the session was to analyse a text in how language and structure had been used to interest the reader. The text in question was a song - Bob Dylan's *The Ballad of Hollis Brown*.

### ***Commentary on the enquiry, and reflections***

Learners first read, and then listened to the song. They then worked in pairs forming questions that they wanted answered in relation to the content and structure of the text (Pic 1). All questions suggested an engagement with the text. One group wrote four questions, and had to choose which one to share with the group. Learners voted on which question they wanted to answer, which was decided to be "*How does the writer portray rage and hunger in this text?*"

A subsequent discussion took place on this question. Initially, I had to lead the discussion, asking students directly what their thoughts were, but as it wore on the group grew in confidence and began volunteering ideas with no prompting required. Learners annotated their copy of the text during this discussion as a result of what was arising, with some valid and interesting interpretations being recorded as a result (Pic 2).

### ***Conclusions, and key learning points***

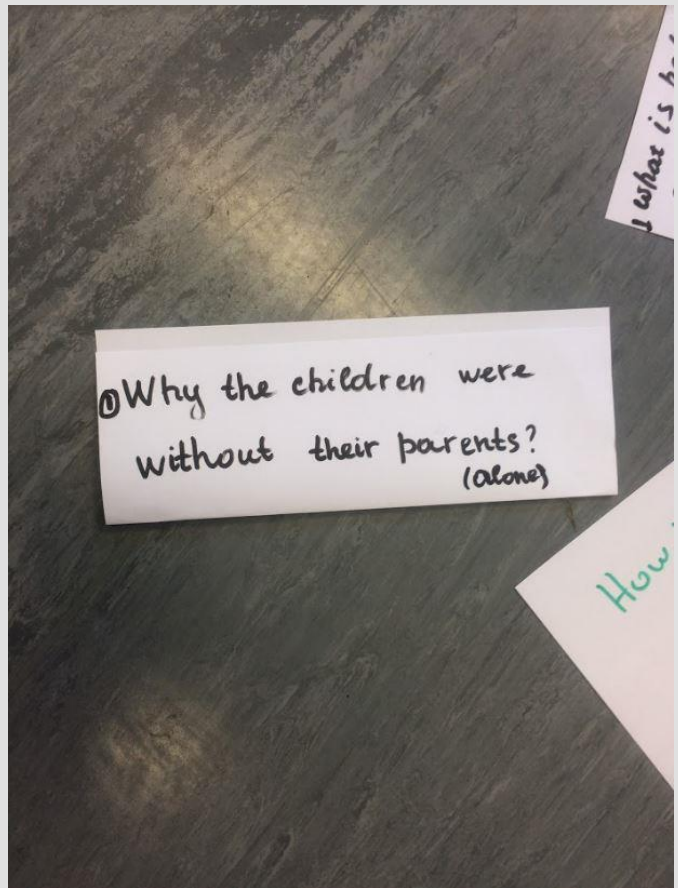
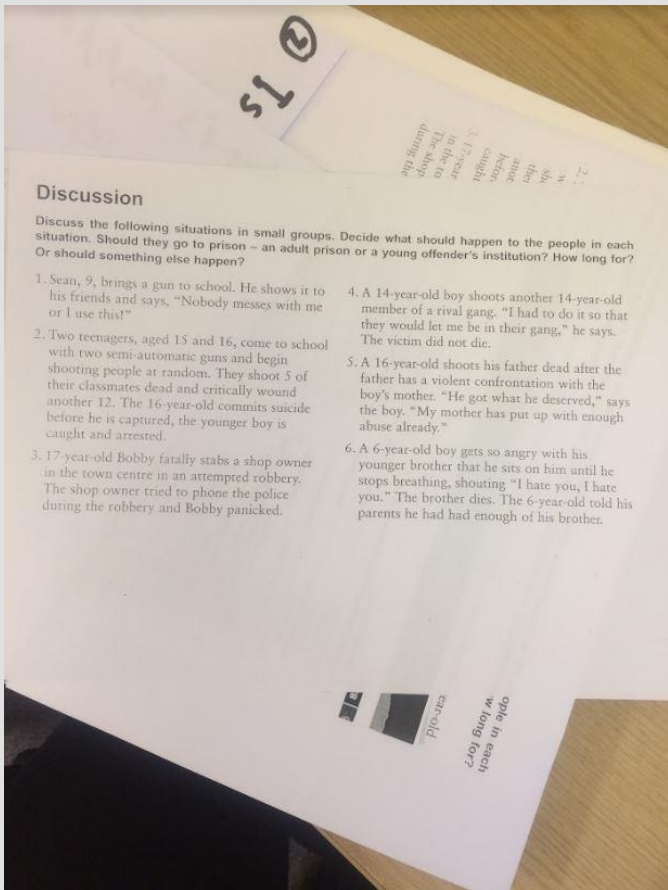
- The slowly unravelling structure of the discussion (engage with stimulus, share initial thoughts in pairs, write question in pairs, vote on question, discuss with whole group) disrupted the normal *read, annotate, discuss* sequence of textual analysis that is often followed in English class. Learners demonstrated greater autonomy and confidence in their analysis than they have done previously.
- Learners identified 'big ideas' present in the text in the questions they came up with - *depression, rage, hunger*, and made historical links - *The Great Depression*.
- Learners recognised the importance of 'each having an equal voice' in voting for their favoured question.

More explicit links to British Values (individual liberty, tolerance) might have been introduced during the stimulus phase by the tutor - this is crucial moving forward.

## Community of Enquiry - ESOL learners

We began with a discussion of what an 'adult' is in my students' countries of origin and the laws regarding youth offenders. We then read the article and gathered some thoughts and the students worked on the language aspect, i.e. matching sentence halves and vocabulary. Later, pairs/groups came up with questions they wanted to explore further. They then voted on the question followed by a polite debate on the issues. We then read about some other laws from around the world and discussed their implications and explored how we could change the existing laws in the UK.

Brilliant session! Great student engagement, everyone participated and really listened to one another.



Examples of resources and learner questions that were used in the community of enquiry

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## Community of Enquiry - Performing Arts learners

I wanted to try, not only to run a community, but to 'build' one with both my Level 1 and Level 2 Performing Arts learners. When I attended the PC4 training I could see that the activities we were asked to participate in mirrored those we would use in a Performing Arts context. The idea of building a community in this way to establish four types of thinking from the learners Collaborative, Creative, Caring and Critical, was one I was keen to explore as I felt it really celebrated the British Values message and could encourage a way of working in the studio on creative projects that would be beneficial and hopefully allow for a more productive creative process.

The activities that I lead with both groups allowed them to feel relaxed and, in some cases with the more reserved learners, gave them an opportunity to speak without feeling judged or fear of getting things 'wrong'. I feel that this is an important stage of leading a community of enquiry and can see that if these activities were run at the start of an academic year, that you could build a group dynamic of openness, trust and mutual respect from the onset.

After leading the games with the learners I went on to leading an enquiry by introducing the stimulus and allowing the learners some discussion time before asking them to put forward some initial responses and potential questions for debate. This had mixed success. The Level 2 learners were inspired by the topic of social media and how it can be perceived to measure popularity. The Level 1 learners struggled to find appropriate questions for discussions, but with a little guidance, settled on questions they felt they could discuss with relative confidence.

The enquiries themselves I felt were on the whole successful. The Level 2 debate was lively and fun, covering some interesting points and allowing all participants room to put forward an opinion or point of view. My role in the Level 2 enquiry was to allow the discussion to unfold naturally and to make sure all voices in the room were heard. The Level 1 enquiry was a little more forced. I found myself having to lead the discussion and invite participation from the group. However, these learners who often struggle to communicate verbally, were able to put across valid points. The level 1 group then used the discussion as a starting point for a devised piece of performance centred on the impact of social media.

[Video example: question airing, question-choosing, and discussion 'building'](#)

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## Section 4: Moving forward

### How do we move forward, individually and collectively?

- Use these approaches as part of induction with our groups at the beginning of the 19/20 academic year, with the aim of interest of building 'communities' in our classes from the very start.
- Share these community building approaches with personal coaches (not trained teachers) who will be able to use these when delivering their tutorial sessions.
- Create a college-wide shared resource folder with games, activities, films/ documentaries that allow for British values to be embedded within curriculum
- Hold 'Keeping it Reel' events throughout the year- managed with relevant units taught in access.

### Recommendations

- Links to curriculum content are crucial - wherever possible make links between British Values and authentic curriculum content.
- Interpret British Values as behaviours, in which learners can demonstrate their understanding of these in how they act. Make these behaviours explicit to learners.
- Adapt the activities so that they are suitable for your learners - e.g. don't be constricted by following the rules for running a community of enquiry in its entirety
- Invest time in community building activities early in the academic year to embed British Values from the outset and enhance peer to peer interactions.

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## References

*Promoting fundamental British Values as part of SMSC in schools*, 2014. Department for Education. [online] Available at <[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/380595/SMSC\\_Guidance\\_Maintained\\_Schools.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/380595/SMSC_Guidance_Maintained_Schools.pdf)> [Accessed on 6 January 2019]

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