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Creating a learning environment conducive to children's well-being through philosophy with children in a Scottish classroom

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ABSTRACT
This article presents a small-scale study that sought to explore in what ways Philosophy with Children (PwC) might support a classroom environment that is conducive to children's well-being. Following a series of Community of Philosophical Inquiry sessions with a class of nineteen Primary six children (ten- and eleven-year-olds) in a Scottish primary school, seven themes emerged as important when establishing a learning environment conducive to children's well-being: structure, participation, dynamics of interaction, emotional response, listening, confidence, and teachers' practice. These themes were identified through analysis of the teacher's and CoPI facilitator's observations during the sessions and the recorded dialogues following the sessions. In addition, the teacher was interviewed at the end of the intervention period. The results of the study also suggest that the notion of well-being with a focus on the individual may be overly narrow and that nurturing community allows children to recognise themselves as part of a wider whole, thereby enriching their well-being.

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Introduction

The challenges presented to children's well-being have never been more acute than in the current context, sitting amidst a global pandemic. There is, therefore, a need to consider children's well-being when creating the learning environments in which they find themselves. The importance of supporting children's well-being in the school setting is well-recognised (Mashford-Scott, Church, and Tayler 2012). This article focuses on one project in a primary school that set out to explore ways in which engaging in Philosophy with Children (PwC) might support a classroom environment conducive to children's well-being.

Literature review

There is consensus that defining well-being is challenging (Thomas et al. 2016; Amerijckx and Humblet 2014; Mashford-Scott, Church, and Tayler 2012; Camfield, Streuli, and Woodhead 2009; Bourke and Geldins 2007). However, there is some agreement. Generally, well-being aligns one's health to social, emotional, mental, physical and intellectual wellness. With respect to these elements, factors considered to be important include agency, autonomy, respect, community, happiness, being valued, satisfaction and relationships (Cassidy 2017). Amerijckx and Humblet (2014)

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draw attention to the binary nature of discussions of children's well-being, pointing to language such as positive versus negative well-being, the end state versus the process in attaining well-being, objective versus subjective well-being, and the individual versus community.

This latter, the individual as opposed to the community is especially interesting. Well-being, particularly as promoted in schools, has a focus on the child as individual. It is an atomistic view of the child, the child set apart from the wider world and treated as an individual rather than in and of the world (Cassidy and Mohr Lone 2020; Cassidy 2021). Perhaps this is easier for those measuring what happens in schools, as in the likes of the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), and the Trends in International Maths and Science Study (TIMMS), where individual children's academic performance is collated in order to be compared against those in other countries. Now schools aim to gauge children's well-being against particular measures too, such as in Scotland where children's individual well-being is monitored to ensure that they are safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included (https://www.gov.scot/policies/girfec/wellbeing-indicators-shanarri/). Of course, it is important that children are considered as individuals but the focus on outcomes in this way runs the risk of losing sight of the child as part of a whole.

Internationally, well-being is increasingly part school curricula; see, for instance, those from Australia, Canada, Finland, Japan and Scotland (Cassidy 2017). It is also situated in a broader global context. For example, well-being is recognised in the third of the United Nations' seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (https://sdgs.un.org/goals). The SDGs state clearly that countries should strive to 'ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages' (https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal3). It is important that the SDGs are read together, where the goals, though stated individually, work as one. This means that the fourth goal of providing quality education that is inclusive and equitable should articulate with the third goal regarding well-being, the eleventh where cities should be safe, inclusive and resilient, and the sixteenth that asserts the need for institutions to be inclusive as a move towards building and sustaining inclusive societies. Thinking of people as interconnected is important when considering well-being, something to which Amerijckx and Humblet (2014) refer when sharing an example of the Matsigenka people from the Amazon region in Peru. They highlight the elements the community shares with respect to well-being, including, the fostering of positive relationships, the control of anger and other emotions such as jealousy, the resolution of disputes, happiness, and the like. This broader notion of well-being may be something schools might usefully consider.

Clarke, Sixsmith, and Barry (2015) highlight that initiatives designed specifically to promote children's good mental health increasingly demonstrate long-term benefits for those involved, particularly in relation to 'social emotional functioning and academic performance' (579). Again, the focus here seems to be on the individual. It might be suggested that in considering well-being in the classroom that we draw from the Matsigenka people; the class *community* is something to which teachers should attend. van Petegem et al. (2005) argue that putting positive relationships at the heart of the classroom environment is necessary for teachers and children to feel good. Often, they say, teachers over-estimate the extent to which they enjoy positive relationships with the children with whom they work. Creating an ethos where children and teacher are considered as part of one community may support well-being rather than seeing the teacher as distinct from the children in the same space. Indeed, the promotion of happiness in teachers' working environments is crucial in the performativity culture in which they often find themselves if well-being is to be fostered (Acton and Glasgow 2015). If teachers are stressed and unhappy, the chances of them fostering positive relationships in their classrooms are likely to be reduced, so diminishing their well-being and that of the children they teach.

In their study of young people and youth workers' understanding of well-being, Bourke and Geldins (2007) found both groups saw well-being holistically. By this, they understood it as inter-connected. However, a tendency remained to view well-being on an individual level, whether that was in attaining one's goals or being happy or having good relationships. They note a lack of criticality in

the young people who 'indicated that aspects of the self and their relationships were more important to their well-being while youth workers focused on social contexts and emotions' (Bourke and Geldins 2007, 48). Consequently, suggest Bourke and Geldens, despite thinking they were able to control their well-being, the young people were less likely to challenge the social structures that had an impact on their well-being, while the youth workers saw connections between well-being and the social environment as more explicitly linked. However, what remains is the idea of well-being as rooted in a sense of the individual, whether this is the young people seeing themselves in control or the youth workers recognising the impact of social structures on individuals' lives. Gillett-Swan suggests that well-being in its 'broadest sense encompasses all aspects of human experience within a holistic perception of the individual at any given time' (2014, 64). She notes the fluctuations in one's experiences that may lead to positive or negative well-being while highlighting that children's understanding of well-being has been untapped. The children in her study discussed the importance of relationships while working towards their definitions of well-being, though the forging or maintenance of relationships did not feature in their final, written definition. Instead, the children focused on the self and well-being in relation to the individual. Gillett-Swan acknowledges that the children's definitions tended not to vary greatly from those of adults. So, even in recognising that relationships are important in our human experience when considering well-being, notions of the individual seems to dominate. This is perhaps fed by the instruments used to measure children's well-being such as that created by McLellan and Steward (2015) where children were asked to rate themselves, as individuals, against statements such as *I feel confident, I feel cared for, I feel I enjoy things.* Of course, it is important to ensure that individually we are well, but there is arguably something missing when focusing on individuals' well-being. In a world that has never been more connected, technologically speaking, a focus beyond the individual may be worthy of attention.

What might support a shift towards a broader sense of well-being is one that works towards community, where interconnectedness is fostered to support the good life and *being* well in-relation to the world. Children are often understood to be a part of society while being apart from society (Cassidy 2021). This view as arguably unhelpful in nurturing well-being and it considers well-being as subjective. The subjective view of the good life seeks and recognises what is good for us as individuals; it relates to our personal likes, preferences and pleasures (Conrad, Cassidy, and Mathis 2015). On the other hand, the objective good life, is one in which we consider ourselves in-relation to the world and others (Cassidy 2021). The likes of Jónsdóttir (2015) and Griffiths and Murray (2017) question what it means to live well in the world. Jónsdóttir is clear that unless we are serious about the quality of others' lives, we cannot attain the good life. Conrad, Cassidy, and Mathis (2015), in their discussion of the good life, assert that what is good for all inevitably becomes good for the individual. With this in mind, it is important to consider how we might move towards this view in the classroom. One approach that may be conducive to children's well-being beyond the individual, while attending to the individual, could be Philosophy with Children.

Philosophy with children

Simply put, Philosophy with Children (PwC) is the generic term for approaches to structured, practical, collaborative philosophising practised with children and young people. With its roots in the work of Matthew Lipman, who created his Philosophy for Children programme (Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan 1980; Lipman 2003; Daniel and Auriac 2011), the practice is different to traditional, academic philosophy that might be described as the history of ideas such as that studied in universities. In PwC, participants engage in structured dialogue that is philosophically focused (Murris 2000), making connections between the various contributions to the dialogue, often by agreeing or disagreeing with the ideas presented and, crucially, offering reasons for that dis/agreement.

PwC provides children with space to reflect on ideas that are important to them. They engage with a stimulus that prompts questions with these, in turn, being the focus of the ensuing dialogue. These questions often address how we live our lives. Considering how one lives in the world will, Cassidy (2012a) argues, support one's well-being, one's living well. Living well, she understands as 'engaging positively with the world and others in it' (Cassidy 2021). To do so, children need to have opportunities to practise their thinking together. Of course, children acquire skills on an individual level; however, they can practise these skills together with a view to engaging in the wider world as a way towards being well.

Methods

The question driving the study was: In what ways might Community of Philosophical Inquiry support a classroom environment that is conducive to children's well-being? Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CoPI) (McCall 2009) is one approach to PwC and was the approach adopted in the study.

CoPI employs a clear structure that is followed regardless of the age or experience of participants. To begin, participants read a stimulus aloud. The stimulus has been chosen to prompt questions. After noting the questions, the facilitator chooses one for the group – the *Community* – to explore. Participants are seated in a circle to see one another, with the facilitator outside. Participants raise their hand should they wish to contribute to the dialogue and wait to be called to speak by the facilitator. They may not be called in the order in which they raise their hand. When they contribute, they begin by using the phrase 'I agree with [person's name] because [give reason(s)]' or I disagree with [person's name] because [give reason(s)]'. They may partially agree/disagree on the point. They may even agree with the point but disagree with the reasons offered. The remaining rules are: participants may not refer to an authority to support their dis/agreements; they need not give their own opinions; they should avoid technical language or jargon; and a conclusion or consensus is not being sought (McCall 2009; Cassidy 2012b).

Beginning in January 2020, one class of nineteen Primary six children (aged ten and eleven) from a primary school in the West of Scotland engaged in a series of CoPI sessions. In the previous academic session, the children had been in a class of thirty-two and the school had taken the decision to split the class for the session due to some challenging behaviour. The local authority was chosen by the project funders, Barnardo's, as they worked closely with schools in the local area and well-being was a specific focus of their work in this area. The area is high in socio-economic disadvantage.

Ten CoPI sessions were scheduled to run over ten weeks, with the facilitator being part of the research team. Each session lasted up to an hour and took place in the children's classroom. A range of stimuli was used in the sessions to generate questions relating to different philosophical themes. The sessions were audio-recorded to aid analysis. All children participated in the sessions, though only fourteen returned consent forms, meaning four children engaged in the dialogues but did not form part of the data collected. Due to the Coronavirus pandemic and the closure of schools, the final two CoPI sessions could not be undertaken.

Observations

An observation schedule was created for use during the CoPI sessions. The teacher maintained the observation schedule during each session over the eight weeks. To ensure the team all understood the schedule in the same way, some time was spent inducting the teacher into how it should be used.

The schedules were created based on previous work undertaken by the team (Cassidy et al. 2017; Cassidy and Heron 2018; Heron and Cassidy 2018). The first eight elements related to the children observing the CoPI rules, the others focused on the children's behaviours in each session. These included whether children posed questions, if they made others follow the CoPI rules, the way in which children responded to the facilitator's request for clarification, on-task interruptions during

the dialogue, off-task interruptions during the dialogue, talking over someone, building on another's example, an emotional outburst, trying to distract others, demonstrating patience while waiting to be called to speak, demonstrating attentive behaviour, demonstrating distracted behaviour, and using humour. The team agreed an explanation for each element to ensure clarity of meaning. The teacher recorded comments against these elements in each dialogue. After all the sessions, the team listened again to the audio-recordings against the observation schedules. It was not possible to determine all behaviour while listening to the recordings but it allowed the team to hear ways in which children participated and if they used humour, interrupted or built on examples.

The teacher undertook observations using the schedule during each CoPI session and also made notes of anything she considered noteworthy during or as a consequence of the sessions. On the fifth week, to ensure the approach adopted was robust, and the team understood the schedule in the same way, another member of the team facilitated CoPI while the usual facilitator and the teacher collaborated on completing the schedule. The team was reassured that there was a shared understanding of the observation schedule.

In addition to the teacher's observations, the facilitator also maintained an observational record. He wrote notes immediately following each session, commenting on the children's engagement and on the dialogue generally. These observations included incidental comments from the children when they chatted with him informally prior to and following the dialogues.

Due to the school's closure, the teacher was unable to retrieve her notes from weeks seven and eight. The facilitator, however, had retained his observational notes. To address the missing observation schedules and notes from the teacher, the facilitator worked back through all the audio recordings of the CoPI sessions in order to complete these. Inevitably, there are some elements of the observation schedules that cannot be completed from audio recordings alone, but a rationale for decisions taken was agreed. To ensure consistency in this regard, the facilitator revisited the recordings and completed observation schedules from week one to compare these with those of the teacher.

To further support the teacher and facilitator's individual observation schedules, the teacher completed a record of observations on each child. She recorded each child's behaviour and engagement in classwork generally prior to the intervention, any changes or progress during the intervention, any evidence of the intervention's impact outwith CoPI sessions, and any external factors that might have influenced the child's participation or behaviour during the session, for example, involvement in a school assembly, indoor play-time, an argument with a peer, and the like. To augment this, the teacher was also interviewed on-line after the school closure. The interview lasted an hour and was audio-recorded.

Questionnaires

Prior to the sessions, the children completed a questionnaire. The questionnaire focused on elements relating to friendships, the extent to which they enjoyed and participated in class discussions, whether they considered themselves to be a good listener, when they felt listened to and the ways in which they worked with others. The intention had been to issue a questionnaire following the sessions but due to the school closures this was not possible. Where appropriate, reference is made to children's responses to provide context on beginning the project.

Analysis

The dialogues were audio-recorded, allowing the team to listen repeatedly to the dialogues. They independently considered the teacher's and facilitator's notes and the observation schedules using thematic analysis (Denscombe 2010). They then came together and, following an iterative approach (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña 2013) generated the seven themes identified.

Ethics

Permission to undertake the study was granted by the Local Authority and the school's Headteacher. Ethical approval was granted by the School of Education Ethics Committee at the University of Strathclyde and by Barnardo's. Fourteen of the nineteen children in the class, and their parent/guardian gave consent for participation in the project. The teacher also provided consent to participate in the project.

Findings and discussion

Seven themes emerged from the observation records, the audio recordings, the children's questionnaire responses, the teacher's interview and the teachers' and facilitator's notes. The themes are: (1) structure; (2) participation; (3) dynamics of interaction; (4) emotional response; (5) listening; (6) confidence; and (7) teacher's practice.

Structure

The structure of the sessions was new to the children. It involved them in working with others they did not normally work with. All children were able to follow the structure of raising their hand, waiting to be called, dis/agreeing with at least one previous contribution, and providing a reason for that dis/agreement. The children rarely needed to be reminded of the need to dis/agree or to provide reasons. Indeed, when this was absent, other participants reminded the child to adhere to the rules. The rules had been internalised by the participants, and they also perhaps recognised that the structure worked to support them and the dialogue.

Interestingly, the participants engaged in what might be described as a meta-dialogue on some occasions. This occurred when they responded to the effectiveness of the stimulus or in making comment on others' questions, such as which would be chosen, or on the format and structure itself, for example, when Leo comments that the dialogue is 'like an agree/disagree battle!'. Being able to predict which question may be chosen is a strong indication that participants have a sense of which might hold good potential for philosophical dialogue and that a strong initial question is important for dialogue.

For at least one child (Colin) who did not often speak in class discussions, commenting on the structure and trying to explain why it worked may have supported his engagement by helping him understand what he was doing as he became a particularly vocal participant. Similarly, Maureen who was extremely quiet during class discussions became a key member of the sessions and was fully aware of how her contributions worked within the structure, referring to her 'presentations of disagreeing with everyone'. Given that some children commented in their questionnaires that they sometimes find it hard to get a turn to speak, understanding the structure of CoPI and realising that everyone will have a chance to speak may have helped some children find a way into the dialogue. A growing engagement with CoPI suggests an awareness of how the structure might support dialogue and participation.

Participation

The children's participation varied. Not all children contributed verbally to all sessions, while some spoke in all eight. It should be noted that not volunteering a contribution does not constitute non-participation as participants might be reflecting on what they have heard; they may simply choose not to speak. For example, Brenda was absent for three weeks and did not contribute to the dialogues, though her body language suggested she was engaged. In her questionnaire, she had noted that she finds it 'weird' working with people outwith her normal working group, so

this may have influenced her lack of overt participation as she had not been part of the community in its earliest stages and she was taking time to understand how the sessions worked.

Several of the children were extremely keen to begin the reading of the stimulus. Some were also very enthusiastic about asking questions prompted by the stimulus. Most questions were comprehension questions rather than philosophical, such as: 'Why did the time machine stop working?'; 'Were there cows on the island?'; and 'Would the robot not break if it went in water?'. Bearing in mind that CoPI is a practice and that participants improve over time, this is not an issue, particularly as the intervention stopped prematurely. The comprehension questions and the enthusiasm for reading aloud perhaps suggests the type of activity the children normally experience in school. Turn-taking, reading aloud and comprehension questions are common-place in the majority of classrooms. This is not to suggest that comprehension questions – and associated responses – are not important, but the dominance of this kind of activity stunts opportunities for more open and philosophical questions and dialogue.

All the children responded positively when prompted by the facilitator to clarify a term or offer an example to support their point. In responding positively, some were able to provide clarification or an example, while others found it challenging to extend their initial point, such as Inaya who responded to the facilitator's request to say more by looking as though she was thinking particularly hard and then not being able to progress. Leo, when pressed to say more about his point about whether children should be allowed to vote, asked the facilitator to choose someone else. When this request was refused and he was encouraged to try to respond he was able to do so at length. In the teacher's interview, it became clear that the children did not generally offer lengthy justifications or extend the points they make.

While the structure demands that participants make at least one connection to a previous contribution by dis/agreeing, several children also built upon examples provided by others. This means that in addition to connecting ideas and making links across the dialogue, the structure also enabled the children to create shared meaning by using one another's examples to support the point they wanted to make. This is important because it demonstrates that the children were collaborating and that they recognised the value of others' contributions to aid the development of their own, thereby seeing the interconnected nature of the community.

Dynamics of interaction

At the beginning of the eight weeks, there were instances of on-task and off-task interruptions during the dialogues, with a greater proportion of on-task interruptions. Off-task interruptions have nothing to do with the dialogue, such as commenting on the weather or asking to leave the room. On-task interruptions, on the other hand, relate to the dialogue or session structure. These kinds of interruptions may involve a comment on another participant's contribution, an exclamation in response to a contribution or an aside, such as a joke relating to the dialogue, for instance: 'I already have a disagree'; 'She's going to disagree with him'; 'It's like an agree disagree battle!'; and 'I didn't say that!'. On-task interruptions need not be viewed negatively, despite them not sitting wholly within the rules. They suggest participant engagement because to interrupt on-task reference must be made to the dialogue in progress such as when one child said, 'You can basically say agree to me'. Further, the interruption may be a sign of excitement in response to what is being said, for example, when the children said things like: 'Ooh, can I please just say one!'; 'Yes, you agreed with me!'; 'I actually agree with them now'. The number of interruptions, both on and off-task decreased over the eight weeks as the children became used to the practice, recognising that they would receive a turn to speak should they so wish.

There was little by way of distracting behaviour in the sessions. Distracting behaviour is behaviour employed intentionally to disengage at least one other participant from the dialogue. In the circle the children were seated randomly in the first couple of weeks, but the teacher decided to arrange seating in the order children appeared in the register, potentially to minimise disruption,

meaning children sat beside the same person over six of the sessions. It is worth commenting that in CoPI it is often helpful to encourage participants, where possible, to sit beside someone new on each occasion. This means that participants experience a different dynamic on each occasion and learn from that.

What distracting behaviour there was within the sessions, such as one child singing, poking and trying to tickle another two children, and another child throwing a rubber at someone and flicking an elastic band at another, was ignored by the participants it was aimed at, with some whispering to those exhibiting disruptive behaviour to stop. It is encouraging that the dialogue was engaging enough to hold participants' attention and that when instances of distracting behaviour occurred, it was diminished by other participants ignoring it. There were other factors, however, that proved distracting for some of the participants. For instance, if a child had been in trouble during the lunch break, just prior to the session, this could prove distracting for her/him, though this did not seem to impact negatively on anyone else's participation. The school had a Book Week event and the class had an assembly to lead, so there was some excitement in the class on these occasions. In addition, on the fifth week, a ferocious storm whipped up during the dialogue. In this latter incident, the participants calmed down quickly following the initial excitement and distraction, though hearing contributions was more challenging. In all instances of exciting events happening prior to or immediately following the session, the children were able to remain focused on the dialogue, and if they were thinking about the events external to the session, it wasn't obvious to the facilitator or teacher recording observations.

In the questionnaires, several children reported that they did not always wait their turn to speak. This was not the case in CoPI. Although some children interrupted on-task, the children were not simply shouting out or speaking over others to say what they wanted to say, to silence the speaker; it was clear that this was borne from enthusiasm. The structure of the sessions, with the facilitator having responsibility for selecting speakers to juxtapose the perspectives being presented, meant that the children had to wait their turn to speak. Given that in a group of nineteen this may be five or ten minutes, the children showed remarkable self-regulation in waiting to speak, and to continue to listen while doing so. The teacher noted that for one child in particular, waiting to be invited to speak was generally a real challenge, that this was not the case in the CoPI sessions and that this behaviour transferred into other aspects of the classroom. The children, in internalising the CoPI rules and structure, will have learned that if they indicated a wish to contribute then they would receive their turn, but not necessarily in the order in which they raised their hand. The key, here, is in knowing that one will be picked, so space is still open for the contribution.

Within the class there were some dominant personalities, though these children were not necessarily part of the study. What is important to note is that this has an impact on the relationships in the class and this could have influenced the manner in which some children participated. For example, they may not have wanted to dis/agree with particular individuals, such as someone who was a dominant personality in the class or a friend of that person, or with someone from their friendship group. However, the structure seems to have supported the children in these circumstances as the focus on the dis/agreement was on the contribution and not the person speaking, particularly as one of the stated CoPI rules is that participants need not offer their own opinion when they speak. This opportunity to either dis/agree with someone one does not get along well with, or to disagree with one's friends, is important in supporting children's well-being.

Emotional response

Throughout the sessions the children evidenced that they were emotionally engaged in CoPI. For example, the children were excited when the facilitator arrived, and at the end of the sessions they also wanted to speak with him to share their thoughts or contributions they would have made, and to comment on the session. The teacher reported that the children were concerned

when they thought that the session might not happen or when the timing of the session was changed to accommodate other school activities.

During the dialogue the children also demonstrated an emotional response. Some of the children showed enthusiasm for a particular contribution, for instance: 'That's true!' 'That's smart!' 'That is actually a smart thing to say'. The teacher had identified one participant prior to the study (Leo) who was prone to being defensive and who she anticipated would not like being disagreed with. During the sessions he accepted disagreement and engaged enthusiastically. Similarly, the teacher explained that another child (Maureen) could be very moody if others did not agree with her in normal class situations. This moodiness did not manifest itself in the CoPI sessions, which is even more interesting as Maureen took pride in her ability to disagree with others. It should be noted that an emotional response, even an outburst of dissatisfaction with being disagreed with or with a point being made, is not necessarily negative. Indeed, it illustrates a strong engagement with the dialogue content and/or structure, and an investment in the progress of the dialogue.

One manifestation of an emotional response that is clearly not negative was humour. The children regularly employed humour deliberately to make their point, whether this was in the example used or to the dialogue generally. Attempting to make a joke could be seen as demonstrating self-confidence, given the risk that jokes may not be found funny by one's peers, and comfort with the group because they thought the joke would be well-received. The joke was always shared with, and enjoyed by, the whole group. This supports a sense of community, a central element of the *Community* of Philosophical Inquiry, and something that suggests engagement and enjoyment.

Listening

In the questionnaires, all children reported enjoying listening to class discussions, though fewer felt as confident in contributing to these. Across the sessions, the children all demonstrated that they were listening to the dialogue, whether through making a direct contribution by following the structure, laughing at a joke, nodding in agreement, looking puzzled, or chatting with the facilitator after the session about the dialogue. It is, as noted previously, perfectly acceptable for children to remain silent during CoPI as they may be engaged in thinking about the dialogue. Because the intervention was halted prematurely, it was not possible to speak with the children about their silences.

In their questionnaires, some children commented that they were not particularly good listeners in group discussions. These children, though, did not demonstrate poor listening in the CoPI sessions, particularly over time, as was seen through their ability to self-regulate more readily. According to the teacher, for some children, this attending to others was demonstrated in an ability to partially dis/agree with other contributions. This was the case for Stuart where this translated into other elements of class activity when, after some experience of CoPI, the teacher reported that he 'worked better in group situations, took part more and was more focused and vocal'. Similarly, she commented that Leo's listening skills had improved and that he was less likely to 'cut people off' when they were speaking in class discussions.

Individual children's participation also suggested careful attention to what was being said. Being able to dis/agree with a contribution and provide a justification requires participants to decide if they agree with the point made and the justification, disagree with the point made and the justification, agree with the point made but disagree with the justification, and so on. Being able to dis/agree partially with a contribution requires careful listening, as does building on someone else's example, whether to agree with it or not. Further than this, being able to pull together several contributions to make connections across these, both agreeing and disagreeing, with a range of justifications demands much attention and is sophisticated. Several children demonstrated that they could listen and make connections across several other contributions.

A small number of children noted in the questionnaires that they find it hard to get a turn to speak in group discussions within class. The structure, being regulated by the facilitator and the children themselves, meant that all children had the opportunity to speak if they wished. Annette, in

particular, regularly found herself sitting beside a child with some challenging behaviour; she often whispered to him to put his hand up when he started to make a contribution without being called, and on at least two occasions, when he forgot to say who he disagreed with at the beginning of his contribution, she reminded him by saying who she thought he was disagreeing with. It was clear that she was listening carefully to the contributions to make this connection for him, but also that the structure was important from her perspective because she recognised that her peer not putting his hand up when he wanted to speak was not helpful.

One very significant response from the questionnaires was that all children reported feeling listened to in the class discussions, though less so in group discussions. While it is not possible to say the extent to which they felt listened to in the CoPI sessions, what is worth considering is why they felt more listened to in class. One conjecture could be in relation to who they consider the audience to be during class discussions. Generally, in class discussions, the teacher is responsible for posing questions and receiving answers and children rarely speak with one another or to others' points. It is usually the teacher who regulates the pace, direction and focus of class discussions. S/he, therefore, becomes the audience for the children, and the children direct comments to her/him, and s/he responds to the points rather than the other children in the class. If children see the teacher as the audience for their contributions to discussions, their engagement with one another will diminish and become a surface-level interaction.

Confidence

While almost all of the children in the questionnaires reported that they were happy to speak in group discussions in normal classroom activity, some were less confident speaking in a class context. As noted above, there were varying levels of participation in the dialogue in terms of volunteering contributions. This may have been because the participant did not have anything they wished to contribute, s/he was not listening or understanding, or because s/he lacked the confidence to speak out. What is worthy of comment is that all children contributed in CoPI in some way at some point, and that some children, such as Ayisha, spoke more frequently as the sessions progressed, which may be attributed to growing confidence in speaking-out. Although the children sit as a group in CoPI, it is a whole class dialogue.

Disagreement was a more frequent occurrence than agreement in the sessions. What makes this interesting is that disagreement is generally a harder thing to do, particularly amongst one's peers and the various dynamics that exist within such a group. Being willing to disagree suggests that the session was a safe space, thereby supporting children's confidence to disagree with others with whom they have strong friendship bonds or to agree with others with whom they do not have such positive relationships outwith the group. The willingness to disagree and acceptance of being disagreed with seems to suggest a certain level of resilience as each time one contributes one leaves oneself open for disagreement.

In addition, it is important to note that some children, for example, Maureen and John, disagreed with themselves. Not only does this demonstrate that they were listening to others, it shows that they were reflecting on their previous contributions in relation to the contributions from others. Disagreement with oneself, particularly publicly, highlights the acknowledgement that one may have been wrong about something, therefore putting oneself in a vulnerable position in the community. That some children were able to do this suggests an element of confidence in addition to the reflective element of participation.

The teacher noted surprise at some children's participation, particularly, Colin, Inaya and Maureen, as in normal class settings they demonstrate a lack of confidence or are particularly quiet. The likes of Maureen, someone who in other contexts rarely contributes, became a real asset to the dialogues because from the outset she was an enthusiastic participant and relished the space to disagree – her most frequent mode of engagement in CoPI. The teacher spoke about Colin in class becoming more confident in speaking with others and that he was better

able to talk with his peers, having more of a conversation. The apparent confidence that grew for some children was translated into other areas of the school day, with Maureen and Inaya volunteering more contributions in class discussions, with the teacher saying that Inaya became more relaxed in class as her confidence in speaking-out grew. Inaya and Colin, chose to work with or chat to others with whom they did not normally engage. The teacher attributed these changes to CoPI as there were no other interventions or events that might have led to this. The sense of community from the sessions appears to have bled into the wider class context where new relationships were forged and where children saw themselves and others differently.

Teacher's practice

In their questionnaire responses, the children noted that class discussions focused on project work or the novel the teacher was reading to them. According to the teacher, the focus for these discussions tended to be on emotional responses to what was being read or the topic at hand. While it is important to discuss feelings or emotional responses to topics, it is also important that children have opportunities to explore ideas on what might be a more conceptual level. The topics across the CoPI sessions were different to usual class discussion, which may have led the children to engage with them because they recognised that their interests were being followed. At the same time, it may also have been challenging for the children to engage with seemingly unusual topics in a new way. The teacher reported that, as a consequence of the sessions, she had started to find opportunities to discuss topics aside from the class project or novel. She also suggested that in observing the sessions she had started to follow the children's lead more in class discussions.

While whole class and group discussion was a feature in the classroom, the teacher spoke about there being fewer opportunities where the children were encouraged to disagree with one another. She recognised the value in this and had started to build opportunities for debate into her regular class activities. Indeed, the example she spoke about in her interview was one in which the children were engaged in a clearly philosophical topic: the difference between humans and animals. It is encouraging that the children were becoming more engaged with the philosophical and that this was transferring into their other classroom activities.

The teacher spoke about the facilitator encouraging children to extend a point and pushing back when a child tried to avoid this. She said that she had begun to build into her practice an expectation that children would offer lengthier contributions to discussions and that they would be expected to justify their contributions rather than opting out as a seemingly easy option. She reported that she used her observations of the CoPI sessions as one way to monitor children's listening skills. She also commented that generally, she saw a 'bigger change' in the children seen as having a 'lower [academic] ability'.

The teacher commented that during one of the class discussions, Anna had begun what she wanted to say by using the phrase from CoPI 'I agree with … ' and stopped herself to check with the teacher that it was permitted to use the CoPI structure in other contexts. That the child sought permission is interesting in terms of how she views the general class rules or expectations, but what is central to the study is that she had been listening carefully, had recognised an opportunity to make a connection to a point made by her peer, wanted to share that with others, naturally employing the CoPI structure through which she was able articulate that connection easily. In doing so, she also supported others to see the transferability of the structure. Importantly, this came spontaneously from the children rather than the teacher suggesting it explicitly.

In concluding her interview, the teacher said that she thought the children found the sessions to be fun, but also that 'it is giving them that voice that some of them don't usually have'. This recognition that not all voices are heard in the classroom is an important one. Despite teachers' positive intentions with respect to children's learning, she suggests that 'you might think when you're targeting them and you're looking at their [academic] level, you can think they're lower than they actually are, but it's just low confidence'. In terms of children's well-being, this is a vital point; making

assumptions based on external performance can be problematic and may have negative consequences for the individual child. She went on to say that 'I will just be more mindful of giving them that opportunity to speak so that they know they can disagree with me, they can disagree with the person … it's about having your own opinion, it's just about how to get that opinion across'.

Conclusion

The realisation of the teacher that she needs to create the conditions for the children to develop their views but, importantly, that these views are listened to and can be used effectively to support other areas of children's learning is important in advancing children's well-being. As was seen in the study, community was central to the dialogues but it also bled into the classroom and impacted positively on relationships and ethos. CoPI offers a safe space for children to explore their ideas, thereby providing opportunities for growth and development. Its structure creates conditions where children can become comfortable dis/agreeing with others and with themselves, an important element in developing their sense of self and their confidence. CoPI offers a platform for all children to participate, particularly those who are in other contexts perceived as being very shy. An additional element is that the structure supports children's emotional and behavioural self-regulation in a positive sense. In a community knowing how to regulate one's behaviour and emotion benefits the community, which, in turn, is good for the individual. That children often see the teacher as the audience for their class discussions was an interesting finding from the study. Providing a structure and practice that creates the conditions where children see themselves as actors in dialogue, as audience and contributor, is key in a learning environment that aims to support children's being well. While these elements support children's well-being on an individual, subjective level, CoPI allows children to engage as part of a wider whole, a community, offering an alternative way of thinking about well-being in the school context.

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