

Tool: Community of Philosophical Enquiry

Many of the everyday decisions made by teachers are underpinned by the values and attitudes that they have built up before they become teachers. Often it is hard to understand what these are when you are the middle of a busy classroom making quick decisions about a range of challenges as they arise in lessons.

One way of thinking about the underpinning beliefs and values that underpin our decisions as educators is to engage in Communities of Philosophical Enquiry. This allows participants to explore in a safe environment a question that there is not time to consider in a busy classroom.

The group sit in a circle and one member of the group acts as facilitator. The session may be generated by a stimulus. This may be a professional dilemma, a picture or a piece of text. The group then decide the question which they will focus on during the session.

The facilitator ensures that the rules of the Community of Philosophical Enquiry are adhered to:

- Everyone gets a chance to voice their opinion
- Respect other's views
- Always listen carefully with an open mind
- Be polite and disagree respectfully

The facilitator's role is to encourage the expression of as many different ideas and opinions as possible in the group. The facilitator should aim to encourage depth, rather than mere articulation of ideas by encouraging the participants to question their statements with phrases such as 'Why? What did you mean by.....?' or by articulating the opposing argument.

Some questions that may be appropriate for this activity to resolve professional dilemmas in education are:

- What is the purpose of education?
- What is the purpose of assessment?
- What is the meaning of pupil agency?
- Who benefits most from school?
- What is the most important thing children learn in school?