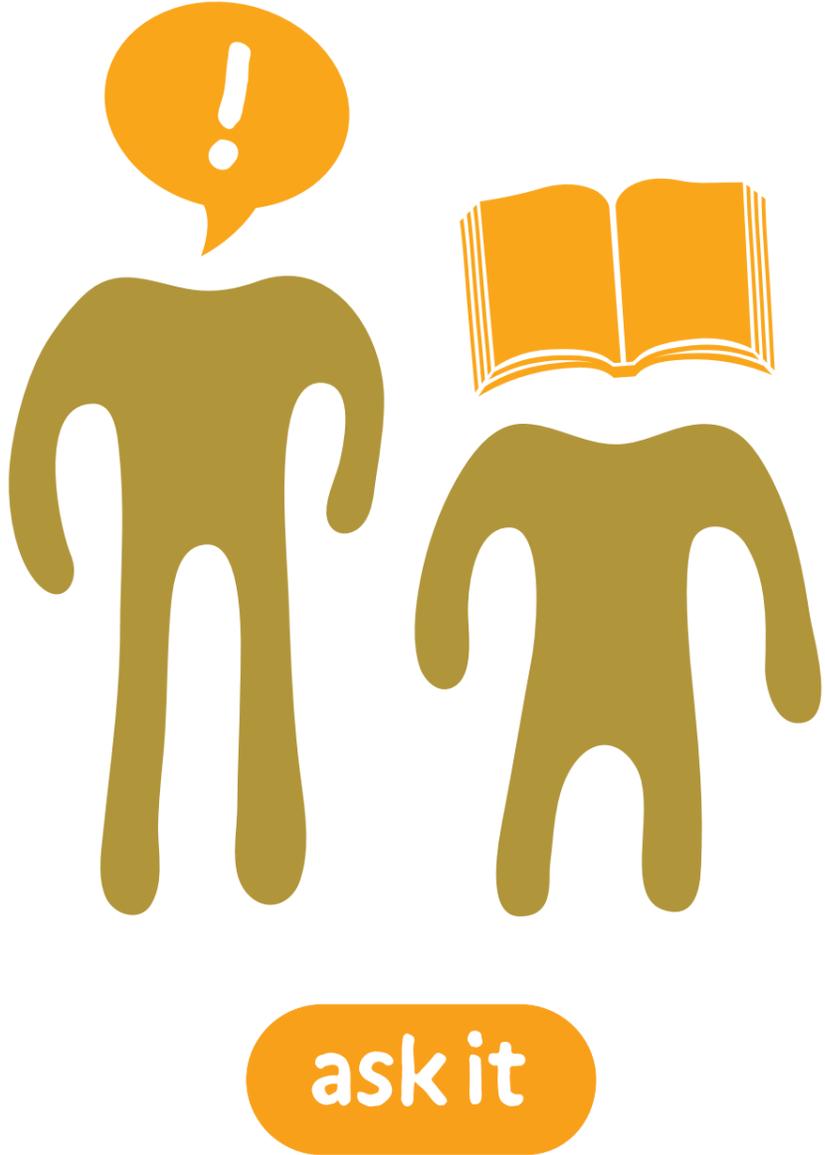


# The Open Futures askit Mentoring Guide

Supporting Teachers in Philosophical Enquiry



# askit Mentoring Guide

## Supporting Teachers in Philosophical Enquiry

The *askit* mentor is a teacher, trained to Level 2 in *askit* or P4C, who takes the lead in furthering philosophical enquiry in a school or across a group of schools involved in an *Open Futures* network. If you take on the role of the mentor as described in this guide, you will be helping not only to enhance the professional skills of teachers but also the capacities of children to enquire, to learn and to answer their own questions about what to think and how to live.

*askit* has been developed with *Open Futures*, by SAPERE, the UK charity for Philosophy for Children also known as P4C. P4C is an approach to teaching and learning which has been developed over 30 years, and is now practised in 60 countries worldwide. Research has clearly established it as an effective way of raising academic achievement, enhancing pupils' social, emotional and behavioural development, and realising creative potential with any age group, any ability, and in any subject.

Throughout this publication *askit* is used to refer to P4C in the context of *Open Futures*.

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# What is askit?

In this section we introduce *askit* as a strand of *Open Futures* that aims to develop, in children, the skills and dispositions required for enquiry-based learning and philosophical thinking.

## 1.01 Introduction Skills and dispositions

*Open Futures* is a skills and enquiry based learning programme that focuses on encouraging children to 'learn through doing'. The programme has developed through a series of interlinked and related curriculum strands: *growit*, *cookit*, *filmit* and *askit*.

In one sense, *askit* is the least specialised of the *Open Futures* strands. It promotes the most general skills of enquiry, reasoning and communication. These are not only applicable in each of the other strands, they are fundamental to effective and meaningful learning throughout one's life.

Dispositions, as much as skills, are important for the development of self-motivated enquiry. Pupils should be willing, as well as able, to enquire, reason and communicate. The *askit* strand therefore emphasises the skills and dispositions necessary for enquiry through the doing of it – having reasonable dialogue about questions children themselves pose about what to think and how to live. Enquiry prepares children to be self-sustaining learners through involving them in a community of enquiry.

In this last sense, *askit* is specialised because the practice of developing a community of enquiry with children and introducing them to philosophical questioning and reasoning requires skill, knowledge and patience.

## 1.02 Questioning for enquiry

Far from finding continuing outlets for their questions, it would seem that many children are conditioned out of asking questions, almost as soon as they begin formal education.

Typically, in both primary and secondary classes at the end of the last century, teachers asked almost all the questions (something like 400 a day), whilst pupils asked, on the average, one question per month. (James Dillon, 1990, *The Practice of Questioning*, Routledge).

In the last 10 years or so, many teachers have tried to elicit more questions from pupils. They have also focused more on the quality of questioning in the classroom by modelling good questioning themselves and encouraging children to seek understanding beyond the given facts. But this change of practice is not so easy to achieve.

It is not simply that there are habits to be broken and conditions to be changed; it is also that asking good questions is a skill and a disposition that needs to be cultivated. Both teachers and children need regular practice at forming questions and developing lines of enquiry.

## 1.03 Reasoning is best done with others

The same can be said about the need to practise reasoning and communication skills. Good speaking, listening and reasoning come from regular practice in conversation. However the form of conversation that provides the best opportunity for developing these skills is 'philosophical enquiry' – in which personal experiences, understandings and interests are expressed, explored and expanded.

It is in such dialogical encounters about questions of significance that pupils learn from each other how to listen attentively, how to enter into each others' stories, how to recognize different perspectives and values, how to see the many motives and reasons people have for believing one thing, or doing another, and how to construct their own ways of thinking and acting. With encouragement and guidance from teachers, pupils will be able to apply the skills, dispositions and strategies they develop in philosophical enquiry to other areas of the curriculum and other strands of *Open Futures*.



## 1.04 The importance of regular philosophy sessions

Without proper emphasis on enquiry and dialogue in regular philosophy sessions, the likelihood is that pupils' skills of questioning, reasoning and communication will not be stretched as far as they could or should be.

Of course, pupils could be encouraged to ask questions and to reason together in other parts of the curriculum – not least within the other strands of *Open Futures*. Some progress would be made that way.

However, it would not have the transformational effect that has been seen time and again when teachers and pupils have shared special 'philosophy' times together. It is in those times that pupils truly appreciate that learning is for them, and not just for the adults. Once they have rediscovered the joy of asking their own questions and the satisfaction of thinking things through for themselves, they are (re)equipped to be independent, lifelong learners.

This is what makes *askit* so consonant with the vision that Helen Hamlyn herself expresses in the *Open Futures* handbook:

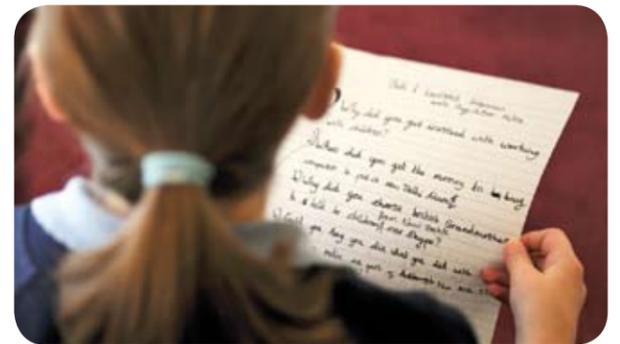
**“The principles underpinning *Open Futures* have long been of great personal concern to me and to my Trust. Its purpose is to help children to discover and develop practical skills, personal interests and values, which will contribute to their education and help to enhance their adult lives.”**

– Lady Helen Hamlyn

## 1.05 Some ideas for linking and extending the four strands

- Once a month or half-term, the class teacher could focus reflection on the *Open Futures* activities of the period around the question: What have we learnt about what other people are doing in the present and about what we could do in the future?
- Ethical issues to do with each of the strands could be raised for philosophical enquiry. For example, issues around buying food from abroad that could be grown at home, or around spending more time and money on gadgets than on cooking fresh food, or on whether you should always get someone's permission to film them. Such issues crop up from time to time in the news and can easily be brought into a philosophy session for discussion. However, it should be stressed that the aim of philosophical enquiry is not to guide children towards any particular views, but to examine the reasons given for each opinion children offer before asking them to come to their own, carefully-judged conclusions.
- Encourage colleagues and pupils to think of people whom they might invite into the school for a personal or professional interview (e.g. a retired gardener, a local chef or keen parent cook, a designer of public spaces or someone working in the arts). The children could consider and develop an enquiry plan for putting questions to the guest, ranging from the personal to the professional, political and ethical. Different questions should be asked by different children. The interview could be filmed, analysed and edited.

A theme common to all of the strands is 'living a good, healthy life'. As stated in the *Open Futures* handbook, this can be linked with many national initiatives, such as Every Child Matters, Eco Schools, Healthy Schools and so on. The question: What makes a good and healthy life? is a valuable one to ask at any time, but it is worth returning to regularly, especially when reflecting on the other three strands of *Open Futures*. Consider asking the pupils to write an ongoing journal on the topic: My journey to a good and healthy life.



## 1.06 Dispositions, last and first

Overall, *askit* can be seen as an initiative to develop fundamental skills and dispositions that enhance the learning in the other three strands by making it more meaningful. When we judge, as we do, that it is good to grow and cook one's own food, and good to create stories and points of view in pictures and words, we make those judgements as reflective beings – as persons who are building our own lives and, in a proper sense of the word, our own philosophies of life. Dispositions are to skills what roots are to plants. Without them, the plants will wither and die. Without the dispositions to enquire, reason and communicate, learning becomes a chore, not a choice.



# The askit mentor

In this section we explain the role of the *askit* mentor and explore the nature of relationships between the mentor and other teachers working with the *askit* strand.

## 2.01 The mentor's role

The *askit* mentor is a teacher who takes the lead in furthering philosophical enquiry in a school and possibly across a group of schools involved in an *Open Futures* network. The mentor will have taken at least a SAPERE-approved Level 2 course in Philosophical Enquiry for Children, though they may not have completed the assignment. They will be a co-ordinator of the *askit* strand in their own school as an *askit* 'champion'.

**The *askit* strand benefits children by helping them to develop the skills and dispositions necessary for self-sustained questioning, reasoning and learning.**

A champion is a teacher who takes responsibility for developing an individual strand of *Open Futures* in a school. There may be more than one champion per strand. An *askit* mentor will be an *askit* champion in their own school, but will also help champions in others.

Even if all teachers in a school have taken a SAPERE Level 1 introductory course in Philosophy for Children (P4C), the mentor's input is essential to ensure the further progression in philosophical enquiry.

The mentor is the in-house expert: the school's most experienced person in the theory and practice of *askit*.

A mentor would do some or all of the following:

- Demonstrate *askit* in their own school and in other schools involved in *Open Futures*. Help other colleagues, through co-planning and observation, to facilitate philosophical enquiries.
- Enable meetings and collaboration between teachers with the aim of enhancing the quality of philosophical enquiry across schools in the local *Open Futures* network.
- Establish a resource base for philosophical enquiry to be used throughout their own school and encourage *askit* champions in other schools to do the same.
- Suggest ideas, strategies and training opportunities to other teachers.
- Suggest appropriate training for teachers new to *askit* or wishing to advance their knowledge and skills.
- Model the dispositions of curiosity, humility, trust, sharing and open-mindedness that should characterise all *askit* facilitators. These dispositions would be in evidence both during demonstrations with pupils and in professional conversations with colleagues.

## 2.02 Benefits of mentoring

The *askit* strand benefits children by helping them to develop the skills and dispositions necessary for self-sustained questioning, reasoning and learning. The success of this development is dependent on the quality and regularity of *askit* teaching. Mentors help colleagues become good *askit* teachers, able to get the most from philosophical enquiry. Mentoring can benefit teachers in many ways.

- They will receive focused, sympathetic one-to-one support from an experienced colleague, the mentor, whose aim is to help them develop, not to criticise or grade their work.
- They will have opportunities to share with colleagues their discoveries, frustrations, difficulties and expect constructive and sympathetic responses.
- They can improve their ability to facilitate philosophical enquiry at their own speed, whilst also responding to the evolving needs of their children.
- They will be able to identify outcomes for the lesson in collaboration with the children.
- They learn how to ensure that the children are doing some demanding philosophical thinking, but also to help children think for themselves by showing them how to instigate reasoning and questioning in a dialogue.
- They will gain advice on training and resources from supportive colleagues.
- They become co-enquirers about *askit* in relation to their own lessons and lessons they have observed.

The mentor also stands to gain a great deal. Their experience of *askit* grows exponentially by being able to observe and reflect on many different enquiries, by working closely with colleagues to develop ideas, and by focusing on the theory and practice of *askit*.

## 2.03 Relationships and confidentiality

The *askit* mentor will negotiate appropriate levels of support with colleagues. They will keep their interactions confidential unless colleagues want to share their discoveries and experiences with others. The mentor will provide the perspective of a sympathetic professional partner, acting as a sounding board for the teacher's own reflections, while at the same time able to offer suggestions based on greater experience and knowledge.

Some teachers may find it difficult to respond to new initiatives with openness and enthusiasm – whether through general innovation fatigue, a feeling of being overloaded or an aversion to unpredictability in lessons. It is clear that patience, understanding and empathy are required for successful mentoring.

## 2.04 Relationships with teachers in one's own school

The teachers who are most enthusiastic about *askit* will be the mentor's first concern. They are likely to ask to observe and be observed. They will be willing to contribute to P4C resources and share anecdotes of children's achievements in enquiry. They will want to try out new ideas and find solutions to problems.

It is probably best to give reluctant members of staff some time to recognise the potential of *askit*. They could be invited to observe the P4C sessions of other teachers, after which the mentor could ask for their feedback.

The reflections they offer on the observed lessons may give clues about the sources of their reluctance. If the mentor is seen as a source of help and encouragement, then even reluctant members of staff will seek them out.

## 2.05 Relationships with teachers in other schools

In other schools, a mentor will work mostly with *askit* champions who are not themselves mentors.

Relationships with *askit* champions will depend on the same levels of confidentiality, encouragement and empathy as with staff in one's own school. It may be that regular meetings could be set up with champions both in a local network via scheduled meetings and by visits to individual schools.

The mentor would do similar work with champions as with teachers in her own school and might also encourage the champions to take on a mentor-like role with their own colleagues, eventually progressing to become mentors themselves.

## 2.06 Relationships with other mentors

Representatives of *Open Futures* and of the *askit* strand will facilitate opportunities for mentors to meet together, be informed about developments in *askit*, receive new ideas and resources for *askit* and acquire further training.

# Dimensions of mentoring

In this section we suggest some of the ways a mentor could help teachers develop their abilities to facilitate philosophical enquiry in the *askit* strand.

## 3.01 Introduction

The precise role of each mentor will vary according to the levels of support received from senior management and the level of priority each school gives to *askit*. It is advisable that the mentor has regular (ideally half-termly) meetings with members of the senior management team (SMT) in their own school and advises *askit* champions in their schools to do the same. It is also hoped that in each school one member of the SMT has specific responsibility for *askit* and is in regular contact with the *askit* champion or mentor. Sections 3.02 – 3.06 outline the things a mentor would do, given sufficient time and support from their school.

## 3.02 Demonstrating *askit* enquiry

The mentor should be ready to conduct demonstration enquiries for visitors to their own class or model an enquiry with someone else's class. It is therefore helpful to have a portfolio of:

- Stimulus materials
- Ideas for developing enquiries around those materials
- A bank of skill-building exercises

A mentor will be demonstrating lessons with pupils of varying age ranges and they will use her contact with colleagues to collect materials and activities suitable for the full range. If any colleagues show particular abilities for *askit* with the children they teach, a mentor might ask them to do some demonstrations for teachers of the same age group. In this sense, one role of the mentor is that of a 'talent scout' – able to spot good practice and promote it to other colleagues.

There should always be time after a modelled enquiry for the observers to discuss the session with the mentor. What did they notice, like, or dislike? What do they want to question? The mentor should also share their own planning, expectations and evaluation of the enquiry with the observers. How did it go in comparison to the plans? What was surprising, good or disappointing? What might be the next steps with the group? The example planning grid (page 8) might provide a model that could be used or adapted for demonstration and recommendation.

The mentor should be forthcoming about things that didn't go according to their hopes or expectations. It is very helpful for colleagues to see the mentor question their own choices in an enquiry and to move on from there. Such behaviour models the humility, courage and open-mindedness necessary for being an effective facilitator.

## Philosophical Inquiry Session Planner

Inquiry element	Activity	Skills
<b>Introduction</b>	Themes: feelings, esp. worrying. Skill focus: careful listening.	Listening.
<b>Warm-ups</b>	Game of 'animal emotions'.	Connecting concepts, listening, following on.
<b>Grouping</b>	Pairs >> snowball into 4s. Working with new partners (nb. Do this after stimulus)	Working with new partners collaborative thinking
<b>Stimulus</b>	Picture book 'The Huge Bag of Worries' Listening	Listening, concept focus private thinking.
<b>Question making</b>	3 per pair >> 1 per pair >> 1 question per group of 4	Creative thinking, negotiation, evaluation.
<b>Question airing</b>	Question appreciation. (Ref to 'open' questions)	Evaluation, critical thinking, caring thinking.
<b>Question choosing</b>	Open 'omnivote'. Stress on finding 'best question'.	Choosing, evaluation, community building.
<b>Dialogue</b>	Focus on building, following on, helping others.	Caring thinking, memory, connecting concepts.
<b>Process reflection</b>	Pass the parrot	Reflection, listening, speaking, turn taking.
<b>Examples of good listening</b>	Examples of good listening Values of good listening.	Evaluation, meta-thinking, listening, speaking.
<b>Time</b> .....	<b>Date</b> .....	<b>Group</b> .....

A blank version of this planning grid is available on the *Open Futures* website

### 3.03 Team teaching and observing others

One of the best ways developing P4C in and across schools is to combine demonstrating with team teaching, observation and reciprocal feedback. This could work in various ways.

#### Model 1: Demonstrate, collaborate, observe

The mentor gives a demonstration session and another teacher observes. The mentor shares their planning (see planning grid above) and their expectations. Inviting the teacher to take notes during the enquiry using an observation sheet with the same headings as the planning grid. Immediately after the enquiry, the mentor and teacher reflect together on the session. They then plan, and later carry out, a session together with the teacher's own class. For example, each may take a leading role in different stages of the enquiry. After this co-teaching session, the mentor would observe their colleague doing a whole enquiry 'solo'. The mentor would feed back in the same way the teacher did after the demonstration lesson. The teacher would share their planning, their expectations and the thinking behind both in the same way the mentor had done.

#### Model 2: Mentor demonstrates, teachers try out

The mentor demonstrates a session. All observers then try the same stimulus with their own children and later they reflect together on the outcomes. Reflection on the different outcomes of the lessons with different groups of children can make a significant contribution to teachers' development as facilitators.

#### Model 3: Distributed observation

The mentor helps teachers pair up to observe each other's enquiries and reflect on them together. She encourages teachers to report any significant outcomes of their reflections to them so they can be aware of how *askit* is progressing. The mentor could facilitate meetings and visits by producing a contact list of teachers for each age range.

### 3.04 Encouraging and facilitating collaboration

The mentor should take the initiative to suggest and facilitate collaboration between teachers of *askit*. For example, teachers of similar year groups would have much to gain from combining within or even across schools. If they use the same resources they could:

- share planning and preparation for enquiries
- compare questions raised by children
- discuss the direction enquiries took and the interventions that were made
- explain what further structured activities were used to build skills or dispositions
- arrange to observe lessons where other teachers use the same resource

In these ways, teachers could share a wealth of experiences of using a particular resource. A copy of the resource, together with notes from teachers, could then be placed into the school's resource bank for other teachers to read.

The *askit* newsletters and email communications will give mentors, champions and teachers ideas to try out, compare and adapt. Websites dedicated to P4C also have the potential to fulfil the need to share expectations, strategies and recommendations about resources. A list of websites is given in the resources section.

If teachers monitor, record and predict the concepts emerging across the *Open Futures* strands, their resulting notes will provide another possible focus for collaboration within and across schools. Groups of teachers could discuss the concepts and construct exercises and activities to explore with children. The *askit* newsletters and the *askit* section of the *Open Futures* website will give guidance about constructing such exercises.

The *growit*, *cookit* and *filmit* strands of *Open Futures* will almost certainly give rise to various concepts, for example living and dead (plants), nature and human, work, fairness, nurture, health, animals as food, the environment, nourishment, meaning, significance, responsibility, needs and wants, poverty, lifestyle, family, and peer group. The *askit* strand provides an ideal forum for discussing such concepts and the children's ideas and beliefs associated with them.

This work on concepts could be achieved by small working groups of teachers with or without direct input from the mentor. The resulting work would be added to the growing bank of resources shared within and between schools.

### 3.05 Tips for suggesting and sharing resources

- Mentors and champions are the obvious people to establish and maintain bases for *askit* resources. A base could simply be a box, a shelf or an area accessible to all staff containing books, pictures, objects, notes and so on.
- Each resource could have its own container, such as a transparent plastic sleeve or envelope, so that teachers' notes, lists of children's questions or other follow-up material could easily be added.

- There should be a notice board where the mentor or champion can leave messages about new resources, meetings and other events for all staff. Sometimes, the national educational press will carry stories about *askit* or *Open Futures*. These could be added to the notice board too.
- The resources can be categorised by type, by the age group they are most appropriate for or by other criteria. However, such categorisations should never be treated rigidly; the needs and capabilities of children in particular classes should be the guiding factor for choosing resources. The mentor should encourage all members of staff, and children too, to be on the look-out for resources with potential to be used for *askit*.
- Mentors should seek out courses and training opportunities for other teachers who have an enthusiasm or talent for philosophical enquiry. They should also try to keep up to date with developments in P4C through SAPERE – the professional organisation for P4C in the UK (contact details are in the Useful Resources section at the end).

### 3.06 Tips for suggesting and sharing ideas for reflection

- Regular reflection on progress of the children's skills and dispositions is essential to the *askit* strand of *Open Futures*. The mentor should recommend that all teachers involved in *askit* keep their own philosophy journal or portfolio. This would contain their ideas, notes and lesson plans, as well as a brief evaluation of each session. The lesson planning grids suggested in section 3.03 (see opposite) could be used to evaluate each stage of the enquiry.
- Teachers working together could share, on a weekly basis, their evaluations and their plans for next steps – even if their plans turn out to be different, reflecting the particular requirements of the children they teach.
- One useful strategy is to monitor the progress of certain children – for example three children of different abilities or personalities in a class. The mentor would take the lead in devising an appropriate monitoring form. These would be available for each targeted child for each *askit* session and ideally filled in by an adult other than the teacher. The comparative outcomes between different age groups within and across schools will provide useful information about the effectiveness of the strategies used for *askit* and suggest areas for further planning and development.

### 3.07 Doing what is possible

The ideas put forward in this section suggest some of the actions a mentor can take to develop *askit* within her own school and across other schools collaborating in an *Open Futures* network. Each mentor's situation is different and so, therefore, will be the precise nature of the mentoring they are able to undertake. What will be the same are the main features of the mentoring role in *askit*:

- Demonstrating and modelling
- Supporting and encouraging
- Suggesting appropriate further training
- Being a resource and suggesting resources
- Networking, informing and co-ordinating

# Priorities for *askit*

In this section we provide reminders and summaries of the priorities of *askit*. They will serve to inform the mentor's work with colleagues.

## 4.01 Introduction

The special features of *askit* – community of enquiry, conceptual dialogue, democratic question making, and reflective learning – are valuable, life-enhancing activities in their own right. However philosophical enquiry is of lasting value because of what it empowers children to do and become.

This section suggests key tasks for facilitators and mentors, derived from the empowering aims of *askit* enquiry.

Under each sub-heading are descriptions, suggestions and advice on how mentors can help teachers to help children:

- Ask and answer questions of importance to them
- Develop conceptual frameworks for understanding and investigating their world
- Improve and understand their own learning
- Reflect purposefully on their learning community

**The special features of *askit* – community of enquiry, conceptual dialogue, democratic question making, and reflective learning – are valuable, life-enhancing activities in their own right. But philosophical enquiry is of lasting value because of what it empowers children to do and become.**

## 4.02 Purposeful planning for enquiry

Thinking in advance about the aims for each enquiry provides focus, generates confidence, and aids evaluation. Facilitators need to be realistic though. A good tip is to focus on one or two aims per enquiry. For example one could try to develop:

- One dialogue skill (such as listening)
- One thinking skill (such as generating alternative ideas)
- One attitude (such as taking responsibility)
- One concept (such as fairness)

Aims should be flexible and mentors can help here – for example by talking with a teacher about tailoring the aims of an enquiry to the children's current needs. Mentors can ask simple questions such as: Was the group rowdy last week? Are some participants always quiet and do you need to try new strategies to include them? Is the group ready to be pushed a little further? The responses will stimulate thinking and open a space for discussion or collaboration.

## 4.03 Building a community of enquiry

Regular enquiry is the best way for a group to make progress in speaking, listening and thinking skills and, just as importantly, in behaviour and attitudes. Over time, an enquiring group may become a genuine community, one where learners share some of the responsibility for the learning environment. A community may develop some of its own character and ethos. It may make rules to govern itself, thus generating a sense of ownership amongst pupils.

Allowing a community of enquiry to develop involves giving over some control to children. But 'giving up the driver's seat' by, for example, enabling children to focus on one another rather than showing eyes to the front, is not always easy for teachers. The mentor's role includes supporting risk taking, encouraging experimentation and sharing in the excitement, fun and satisfaction of seeing a community of enquiry develop.

Mentors can also help by sharing ideas for community building and community self-regulation. For example, children could be asked to describe their community with words, symbols or pictures.

## 4.04 Working with the stages of enquiry

It is not necessary for facilitators to go through all stages in every enquiry – sometimes they will use just a few. However all facilitators should aim to become appreciative of the value of each of the stages, and be able to use a range of effective strategies during each one. The stages of enquiry introduced in the *askit* Level 1 handbook are:

- |                  |                |
|------------------|----------------|
| 1. Preparation   | 6. Airing      |
| 2. Presentation  | 7. Selection   |
| 3. Thinking time | 8. First Words |
| 4. Conversation  | 9. Building    |
| 5. Formulation   | 10. Last words |



**Just as there is no single right answer in *askit*, there are no single right questions either. Teachers should feel relaxed. Even when questions don't seem very promising, good dialogue can follow.**

## Tips on handling the stages

If you attempt all the stages in one session, then try to leave half of the available time for the dialogue (stages 8–10). If you complete the cycle of stages over several lessons, a good time to break is after the selection of the question. That gives you time to consider the pupils' chosen question and prepare your thoughts for the next session. Having more time for the first session also provides you with the opportunity to analyse and extend questions more thoroughly with pupils.

The set of enquiry stages provides a useful framework for mentors and teachers to structure observation, planning, reflection and review. A mentor may observe a session and then help a teacher to reflect on, say, the 'preparation' stage. Reflection could focus, for example, on reviewing guidelines for conduct, or on identifying appropriate warm-up games for next time.

Modelling the stages that facilitators find most challenging can also be useful, particularly when followed by review. Teachers might have problems with transitions in and out of small groups during formulation or keeping enquiry moving and focussed in the building stage. Where joint planning and execution is possible, dividing the enquiry into, and modelling, the stages where the teacher is least confident may be beneficial.

## 4.05 Ideas for progression

There are two sorts of progression to be nurtured and monitored in *askit*: progression within an enquiry and progression of a community of enquirers over time. Progression can refer to positive movements in:

- Argument and analysis
- The skills and attitudes of individuals
- The performance and ethos of the group as a whole

In an enquiry, progression for the group might mean achieving a richer understanding of the complexity of a question by recognising 'questions in the question', or seeing most pupils giving reasons for their opinions, or having them consider practical implications of positions taken. The group as a whole may make a collective decision, solve a problem co-operatively, or reflect in a new way on its activities.

Progression for individuals could be indicated by them displaying new skills, employing appropriate language, showing willingness to work with new partners or speaking with more confidence.

Over time, arguments and analyses should become increasingly sophisticated, more conceptually focussed, and address more challenging themes and issues. Individuals should become more reasonable, contribute more thoughtfully, reason better, develop meta-cognition (see section 4.10), and take on leadership roles. The group should become more relaxed and confident, more ambitious, more self-regulating, and more self-disciplined.

Mentors can help teachers to nurture and monitor progress by sharing ideas for ways of moving arguments, individuals and groups forward. Sources for ideas, in addition to *askit* newsletters, the *Open Futures* website and SAPERE course handbooks are given in the *Useful Resources* section.

## 4.06 Working with different kinds of questions

Just as there is no single right answer in *askit*, there are no single right questions either. Teachers should feel relaxed. Even when questions don't seem very promising, good dialogue can follow.

It is vitally important that children become competent at formulating their own questions. More interesting questions will arise as children become more experienced. Mentors can helpfully model how to make progress from what seem unpromising beginnings. This is often achieved by introducing a question with philosophical potential into the dialogue that builds on the children's own question but supersedes it.

Children's progress in *askit* is helped through experience of working with a variety of questions. Teachers should be encouraged to suggest to pupils that questions can start with: is, should, what, how, who, where, does, if and many other words as well as why. Mentors can share resources and give advice on promoting variety.

Mentors can also help teachers to reflect on the role and value of different kinds of questions. The *askit* 'formulation' is not just about moving away from factual or speculative questions and toward open, conceptually-rich questions. Reflection on questions should take into account the level of challenge, inclusivity, enthusiasm generated, importance sensed, practical value and generality.

#### 4.07 Improving children's questioning

Asking questions is a learned skill, and asking the quality of questions that achieve the aims of *askit* takes practice, encouragement, appreciation and time on the part of children and facilitators.

Mentors can help teachers reflect on the quality of questions by sharing evaluation of questions generated in children's dialogues. Teachers and mentors together might rank a set of questions according to the 'juiciness' of the concepts, speculate on potential avenues of enquiry opened by different questions, or order questions in terms of generality and specificity. They might discuss the sorts of questions they could introduce to turn an unremarkable enquiry in a more philosophical direction. In review, mentors can help teachers to identify and explore the distinctions and connections between factual, speculative and conceptual questions and how they might relate to children's lives, beliefs and interests.

**Mentors also have a role in helping teachers to reflect on their own thinking. Mentors and teachers, together, might try to identify examples of different types of thinking moves made by the teacher in an enquiry session.**

Through modelling, mentors can demonstrate how to ask, encourage and respond to, open-ended, conceptually-rich questions. As children's questioning improves, enquiry often becomes more challenging for the teacher.

Mentors can encourage teachers to accept the challenge by sharing experiences of how working with children's challenging questions has been enjoyable and helpful for their own personal and professional development.

#### 4.08 Developing thinking skills

The four Cs (critical creative, collaborative and caring thinking), along with reflective, meta-cognitive thinking, should inform all that the teacher does in *askit*. Teachers should be asking too, whether the children's thinking is becoming more flexible, independent, and satisfying.

Mentors can help teachers to find resources and advice on activities and questions that are good for developing skills and attitudes in relation to the four Cs, bearing in mind that the kinds of thinking overlap. For example, the intervention: Can anyone disagree and give a reason? This may stimulate critical thinking (by recognising a difference and giving a reason to support an opinion). However it also provokes a situation in which caring thinking might be called for (respecting a person even though they disagree with you). Yet again, there is the potential in this response for collaborative thinking (joint evaluation of all reasons and opinions offered in the community) and creative thinking (some reasons offered may be singular and ingenious).

Teachers also need to keep developing their own thinking skills. Mentors can provide a living example of this kind of progress, through setting an example and by recommending useful reading materials.

#### 4.09 Ideas for evaluation

Regular reflective evaluation is integral to learning in *askit*. This applies at all levels: Individual, small group, and whole community. It applies both to the facilitator and mentor, and it is carried out through a variety of means, including peer evaluation, individual self-evaluation and group self evaluation.

A mentor can help by monitoring, recording and analysing sessions. They can provide feedback to teachers and class groups from the perspective of observer, facilitator or participant. They are in a good position to ask teachers and participants how they feel, what has gone well, and where to go next. Sharing and advising on materials and methods for evaluation might include:

- introducing teachers to evaluation materials like the PMI (Plus, Minus and Interesting)
- co-devising checklists and indices of merit
- encouraging peer evaluation
- sharing ongoing self evaluation

Sources of evaluation techniques, apart from those available in *Open Futures* and SAPERE materials, are listed in the *Useful Resources* section.

#### 4.10 Meta-cognition

Developing meta-cognition often involves helping children to reflect on the processes of thinking and learning in a community of enquiry. We want them to be able to reflect, for example, on:

- the qualities of argument
- the value of dialogue
- the concept of active listening
- the practices attitudes that make an enquiry work better
- the promise and pitfalls of voting
- even the value of meta-cognition itself.

Meta-cognition promotes independent thinking in children, gives them insights into their own strengths and weaknesses and provides them with the means to plan, review and improve. Mentors can help teachers to foster processes of meta-cognition by modelling it during demonstration and co-delivered sessions.

In joint planning, mentors and teachers can think together about the value of particular sorts of thinking and strategies for developing it with a group of children. They might ask, for example: *What would be a good game for enabling more caring thinking? Is silence helpful for collaboration? What's the right balance between critical and creative thinking?*

Mentors also have a role in helping teachers to reflect on their own thinking. Mentors and teachers, together, might try to identify examples of different types of thinking moves made by the teacher in an enquiry session.

## Frequently asked questions

**In this section we answer common questions about *askit*. The advice may help both mentors and the teachers they mentor.**

#### 5.01 What can children of different ages be expected to do in *askit*?

Very young children may not be ready to write or form questions. They can, though, develop listening, speaking and thinking skills. They can learn to co-operate in a community, develop the vocabulary of enquiry, gain confidence in expressing themselves and have fun sharing their thinking together.

At Key Stage 1, children can say what interests them about a stimulus, identify 'question words' and create different kinds of questions (either with help or on their own). In dialogue, they can remember what others have said and they can agree and disagree with each other using reasons. They can understand how to use concepts like: example, alternative, same, different and consequence if the teacher makes an effort to draw their attention to them. At this age, children become happy to express their own views in front of others. They can learn to work in pairs and small groups and begin to evaluate group activities by considering prompts like 'we listened without interrupting' or 'we gave reasons for our opinions'.

At Key Stage 2, children ask and explore more reflective, conceptual questions which they can write down and improve through editing. They can evaluate activities and relate the content and method of enquiries to other contexts. Children of this age respond positively to a wide range of stimuli, including news items, topics arising from their own lives, and abridged philosophy. They can make decisions about the purpose and direction of their own community of enquiry by discussing their interests and feelings about what is important.

Secondary school pupils can develop advanced thinking skills, including sophisticated reflective meta-cognition. They use *askit* to address important and controversial issues and apply the learning to action in the outside world. They can help organise their own learning, plan and execute their own enquiries, and use *askit* to help decision making at home and in social life.

#### 5.02 How can I fit *askit* into the curriculum?

With regular involvement in philosophical enquiry, children are more likely to develop good discussion skills and an awareness of important concepts. These skills and concepts will have a positive impact on learning in all curriculum subject areas. In stand-alone lessons, *askit* can be done through PSHE (and perhaps for delivering SEAL), or integrated into curriculum subjects as a dialogical practice of analysis, speculation and evaluation.

Perhaps the clearest applications of *askit* in the curriculum come in subjects where debate and discussion are most encouraged. In history, for example, *askit* might be used to consider the value and meaning of, say, 'exploration'. Here, children could use philosophical enquiry to generate a list of 'good' and 'bad' reasons to explore or examine together the origins of conflict resulting from exploration. In science, *askit* is valuable for helping children to think about the relation of science to technology and ethics, for understanding the categorisation of different species, or for assessing rival interpretations of data.

P4C benefits learning throughout the curriculum by helping children to make conceptual distinctions and links, by promoting better thinking and by enabling pupils to work more effectively together through better sharing and negotiation. In making decisions about where and when to employ P4C, teachers are in the best position to ask: What are the key concepts to be learned? and Where will dialogue help?

#### 5.03 How can EAL and SEN children do *askit*?

Some of the most inspiring outcomes of *askit* are achieved with children who find it hard to join in, or who find linguistically-demanding activities, particularly reading and writing, highly challenging.

In P4C enquiries, children experience good dialogue with their peers in a caring and unthreatening environment. There is a lot of potential in *askit* for improving children's listening, given the opportunities for repetition, clarification and vocabulary development in a philosophical dialogue. Children in *askit* enquiries feel supported by their peers and gain a sense of achievement when expressing their thoughts publicly. Children with dyslexia, and with statements of special needs, often look forward to, and flourish in, the aural environment of *askit*.

Of course, for some children, the community of enquiry environment may be difficult. For example, a child with Asperger syndrome may find it hard to focus. Sometimes the group may be too large or the rules and boundaries not sufficiently clear. Facilitators should liaise with speech or language therapists, take account of psychological assessments and work with therapeutic practitioners to ensure that the learning environment is productive, appropriately challenging, and unthreatening for all.

# Frequently asked questions

## Continued

### 5.04 How much should I intervene in a class discussion?

Facilitators need to intervene in all dialogues to make sure things are clear to everyone and all are engaged in the same conversation and keeping up. The facilitator helps the dialogue to flow, encourages contributions and makes sure participants are valued and listened to. More proactive interventions can keep the dialogue focussed on a particular concept or theme, challenge and deepen the thinking, or help move the focus to a related area of exploration.

Without intervention, the dialogue may degenerate into unfocussed, repetitive, low-quality talk. However there is a balance to be struck. Intervening too often can disrupt the rhythm of the dialogue and put too much focus on the facilitator. Intervening too early can interrupt valuable thinking time. Intervening too forcefully can mean that dialogue is perceived as controlled by the facilitator, undermining the sense of ownership and autonomy of the community. So intervention is always a balancing act. Two useful guidelines are as follows:

1. If teachers are questioning whether they are intervening too much or too little, and whether and how they might improve, then they are probably working along the right lines.
2. The two considerations: Are the children thinking? and Are the children thinking for themselves? will help teachers set the right priorities. If the conversation is repetitive, unfocused or lacking in forward momentum, intervention will be required to get pupils thinking. If some children are capable of moving the conversation forward, they should be allowed to do so – the teacher should step back. The teacher will only know if some children have the capacity to 'take over' through careful observation, hesitating a little before contributing and prompting children to take the conversation forward through interventions like:
  - What questions do we need to ask now to move forward?
  - Have we considered all the alternatives?
  - Does anything said provide a good answer to our question?
  - I'd like to hear what you think you can agree or disagree with?

### 5.05 What's the right balance between small-group and whole-class work?

Moving between working in pairs, small groups of four or five, and larger groups of up to thirty, is a regular and vital part of *askit*. 'Pair and share' is unthreatening, it helps individuals to listen attentively, collect their thoughts, and connect with one another. In pairs, less confident individuals find a space where they have the confidence to express themselves. Small groups nurture negotiation and team work; they encourage reasonable

disagreement and collective responsibility. Enquiry in a larger group enables many thoughts and minds to be linked in one shared conversation. In a larger group, a wider diversity of backgrounds, experiences and opinions can come together in collective concept formation, analysis and understanding. A large group can be more of a democratic community.

Balancing pair and share, small-group and whole-class work rests on: the particular tasks to be achieved, the learning aims that the facilitator has in mind, and the confidence and competence of the different learners.

#### Pair and share

Pair and share activities can be spread throughout enquiries. They are good, as breaks in a dialogue, for thinking about a particular issue, and to get children talking and thinking. Pair and share is a good way to introduce people who don't know each other, to raise the confidence of shy or quiet children, or to generate feedback. Opportunities for pair and share might be:

- Sharing first thoughts before whole-class dialogue
- Creating a question
- Thinking of more than one reason 'for or against' an opinion during a whole-class dialogue
- Thinking of more than one example or counter example to illustrate a principle or concept
- Remembering and listing opinions that have arisen during the discussion and then ranking them. The same could be done with any moves in the discussion such as 'things we agreed and disagreed about' or 'examples of fairness we thought up'

#### Small groups

Small-group work is particularly useful for question-making activities. It can be used to get children to work in teams and with people they might not have chosen for themselves. Small groups can be managed so that a good range and number of questions is produced for airing and voting. If small groups are used for longer spells of discussion around a question, it is useful to give the groups something to create from their discussion together such as:

- A list of the opinions we tested
- A generalisation we would like to put forward for examination
- A couple things we agreed and disagreed about

In these extended small-group situations, children can develop roles such as scribe, facilitator or spokesperson.

#### Whole-class

Whole class is a good format for introducing a session, for conducting dialogue, and for review and reflection about the content of an enquiry and the conduct of the community. Children feel appreciated and special when everyone in the class listens to them. Also, in a whole-class session the teacher is able to hear and monitor the contributions of every pupil. Every pupil can benefit from the modelling and prompting of the teacher.

### 5.06 How should I use follow-up activities to supplement enquiry?

After an enquiry, teachers may have observed that an important concept was not explored thoroughly enough, that a certain level of skill was lacking or that essential vocabulary was not understood by all children in the group. In such circumstances it is

**It's not unusual to hear that questions raised for dialogue in the classroom have been the springboard for conversations around the dinner table or in the back of the car on the way to Grandma's house.**

very useful to carry out additional activities that focus on one skill or concept. Such activities are sometimes called 'skill builders' and 'concept stretchers'.

You will find examples of these in the *askit* newsletters and in some of the websites and publications mentioned in the *Useful Resources* section.

Another kind of follow-up depends on teachers monitoring the children's levels of interest in certain concepts such as fairness. Then they can seek materials from the resource collection related to 'hot concepts' (i.e. those inspiring high levels of interest). Similarly, teachers can be on the lookout for connections between enquiries and make pupils aware of those too. For example, would enquiries concerning equal shares, paying back, or getting angry link to one about fairness? Children could be asked to make specific links once the overall connection has been identified.

### 5.07 How can parents be involved?

Parents get involved in their children's enquiries without any prompting. It's not unusual to hear that questions raised for dialogue in the classroom have been the springboard for conversations around the dinner table or in the back of the car on the way to Grandma's house. This is great, but there are ways teachers can be pro-active about getting parents involved with each other, and with the community of enquiry.

They can send home an exercise book with questions – perhaps those generated by the children. As homework, teachers can get children to ask relatives these questions. Children can feed back the responses to their classmates. Children could ask parents what questions they think of in response to a particular topic or stimulus.

Parents love to join in enquiry, and inter-generational work is an excellent way of showing parents what children do in *askit*. When parents come in, perhaps get children to make a display showing photographs of their dialogues and questions they have created.

### 5.08 What can I do about a couple of pupils who misbehave?

Try a warm-down rather than a warm-up at the start. Five minutes of yoga stretching and breathing works well. Get everyone to focus on a candle, or do a listening exercise, perhaps with some quiet music.

Move around more. Break up the enquiry with game-like activities focused on a concept, skill or disposition. Designate areas of the room for people to move to in a game of 'Would you rather?' Have break out areas where small groups can go to generate questions and responses. Try taking *askit* outside.

Get unfocussed individuals actively involved by having them write up questions, conduct votes, hold up cards or put out the chairs – responsibility helps group members stay involved, and contributing.

Use a variety of expressive forms. Why not have groups illustrate their question with a dramatic presentation? Invite groups to decorate their questions with pictures or fancy borders.

Make disruptive behaviour an explicit focus. Stimulate a generalised discussion about why pupils might get excited or distracted but with no particular pupils picked out for attention. Find out how group members think different behaviours help or hinder enquiry.

### 5.09 Where can I find good stimulus material?

Picture books are great for provoking thoughtful dialogue. Is there a box or area in the school where a collection of books that work well can be accessed?

For topical news items it is often best to use web versions of newspapers. Try the Children's BBC website – it has lots of interesting, handy-sized reports. Look out for themes of interest to the pupils such as crime, fashion, animals and children being active in their schools and communities. Surveys and commentaries about children, school and education work very well.

Images are good – experiment with photos or artworks. Gather, or take, photographs such as an example of vandalism, someone working on an allotment, people eating a meal together or the bloom of a flower. Modern art, especially controversial pieces, can also be highly stimulating.

Video is useful – check out the *filmit* website. Look at YouTube or Google videos as well as creating your own films. There is animation and music available and a lot of it is free. Consider artefacts – a bunch of flowers, a list of ingredients, keys to the shed, or money.

# Useful Resources

## P4C and *askit* courses

Level 1, level 2 and supplementary *askit* courses are available from *Open Futures*. For further information contact the *Open Futures* team through the website at [www.openfutures.com](http://www.openfutures.com), or directly by email [hello@openfutures.com](mailto:hello@openfutures.com) or by telephone 01865 481 402. Consultancy can be tailored to your particular context, level of experience and need. All courses and consultancy are delivered by SAPERE registered trainers who have years of practical experience in this approach, are registered SAPERE trainers with committee approval as well as being experienced in the *Open Futures* ethos and *askit*.

### Level 1 course

This course will give teachers an introduction to the practice of philosophical enquiry for *askit*. Each course is run by a SAPERE-registered trainer who will have years of experience of using this approach in schools. After completing the course, teachers will gain a certificate and should be confident enough to start *askit* with their own classes.

### Level 2 course

This course is open to those who have completed a Level 1, and leads to a nationally-recognised certificate in The Theory and Practice of Philosophical Enquiry in Education. The course involves 24 hours of theory and guided practice, followed by a minimum of 15 hours of classroom practice and a written assignment. Teachers who have completed the Level 2 course will be able to lead the development of *askit* in their schools and act as a mentor for other colleagues.

### *askit* Development

This two-day course can be taken after either the Level 1 or Level 2 training. The emphasis on the first day will be on supporting teachers to develop their own resources and activities to help children become better thinkers. On the second day, the focus will be on enhancing teachers' confidence in explaining the principles of *askit* to others and also investigating the effectiveness of *askit* for their own schools.

## Books and Publications

### Enquiry-based learning and *Open Futures*

#### Enquiry-Based Learning

Roger Sutcliffe (2010)

*Open Futures in collaboration with SAPERE*

### Practical guides to P4C

#### Storywise: Thinking Through Stories

Karin Murriss and Joanna Haynes (2000) – *Dialogue Works*

#### Creating Enquiry Minds

Sara Stanley (2006) – *Pocket Pal*

#### Twenty Thinking Tools

Phil Cam (2006) – ACER

#### But Why: Developing philosophical thinking in the classroom

Network Continuum (Key stage 1)

Sara Stanley with Steve Bowkett (2004)

#### Thinking Together: Philosophical Enquiry for the Classroom

(Key Stage 2)

Phil Cam (1995) – *Hale and Iremonger*

## In depth theory and practice

### Children as Philosophers:

#### Learning through Enquiry and Dialogue in the Primary Classroom

Joanna Haynes (2002) – *Routledge*

### Teaching Thinking:

#### Philosophical Enquiry in the Classroom 2nd Edition

Robert Fisher (2003) – *Continuum*

### Radical Encouragement: Creating Cultures for Learning

Steve Williams (2006) – *Imaginative Minds Ltd*

### Teaching for better thinking:

#### The classroom community of inquiry

Laurance J. Splitter, Ann M. Sharp (1995) – ACER

## Websites

### Open Futures

The *Open Futures* website is where you can contact an *askit* specialist for help and find teaching materials. It also provides an overview of the *Open Futures* skills and enquiry-based learning programme and its four strands – *askit*, *growit*, *cookit* and *filmit*. It gives details of the organisations and individuals who work in partnership with schools to establish, develop and support the programme. You can find out how to get more involved, where to go for expert support and advice, and information about networking opportunities, conferences and training. There are also a variety of interesting case studies from *Open Futures* schools and sample teaching resources. [www.openfutures.com](http://www.openfutures.com)

### SAPERE

The SAPERE website has information on courses, conferences and membership. There are some resources for sale such as videos of P4C in practice, including the famous documentary on the work of Matthew Lipman, first broadcast by the BBC in 1992. There are contact details if you wish you enquire about courses or membership. [www.sapere.org.uk](http://www.sapere.org.uk)

### P4C.com

P4C.com is a resource and collaboration service for P4C. It provides teachers with resources, lesson plans, advice, collaboration, and powerful tools for creating materials. There are many forums, stimulus materials, tips, exercises, games and activities with which to build the skills and attitudes of enquiry. P4C.com is a subscription service. [www.p4c.com](http://www.p4c.com)