

When is a standard a 'standard'? An exploratory study on the standards used in the training of facilitators in Philosophy for/with Children

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Abstract

The popularisation of the Philosophy for/with Children (P4/wC) pedagogical method has given rise to a range of diverse training programs for prospective philosophical dialogue facilitators. This raises questions around what types of standards and practices are being targeted in these programs, as well as around the sorts of facilitator competencies being valued, identified and developed. What, for instance, are some of the similarities and dissimilarities between providers of training programs? A questionnaire was developed by the authors, each experienced in P4/wC facilitation, and forwarded to seventeen established P4/wC facilitator training providers across nine countries. An analysis of responses revealed that while facilitator competencies, such as 'listening skills', figured in responses, references to sound 'management skills' featured more frequently than 'facilitation skills'. Additionally, while the possession of a philosophical or pedagogical background of facilitator candidates was typically not required, responses were suggestive that facilitators could in time attain the

desired pedagogical and philosophical knowledge and experience to effectively facilitate the P4/wC method. In this study, we examine these and other findings.

Key Words

communities of inquiry, dialogic teaching, facilitation, facilitator training, Philosophy for/with Children

1. Introduction

The Philosophy for/with Children pedagogical method (hereon P4/wC) has a history spanning fifty years and is uniquely characterised by the involvement of children and youth in thinking and discussing philosophical questions under the guidance of a facilitator. Participants come together to explore philosophical questions and concepts and, in the process, challenge their own and others' assumptions, and exercise their reasoning processes while engaging in communal dialogue. The facilitator is responsible for understanding the philosophical and pedagogical foundations of the method and overseeing or guiding the session as needed. To fulfil this role, a facilitator not uncommonly undertakes P4/wC training, usually in a structured program, gaining increasing experience through their practice. Facilitator training and the programs that have sprung up tasked with developing P4/wC facilitators have, therefore, emerged as an important component in the whole P4/wC enterprise, helping to bridge the theoretical and practical foundations of the method. This article presents analysis and results of research aimed at exploring current and ideal standards and practices pursued by individuals and organisations providing P4/wC facilitator training programs.

Minimally, P4/wC philosophical inquiry aims to not just build on children's reasoning skills but enhance their social and emotional competencies through communal contemplation of existential questions and global issues (Topping, Trickey & Cleghorn 2019). Unlike traditional teaching approaches, the facilitator sets out to promote an interactional, student-centred pedagogy that prioritises participant involvement. To this end, the facilitator seeks to cultivate a safe thinking environment where participants explore philosophical questions, exchange ideas, evaluate claims, and analyse arguments, ultimately leading to epistemic progress or, in rare instances, a sense of communal convergence. This shift in approach sees the facilitator typically guide the philosophical inquiry rather than acting as the bearer of knowledge (Lipman 1988). Unsurprisingly, therefore, the role of the P4/wC facilitator is multifaceted and complex but vital in the inquiry process.

Over the years, P4/wC practices have diversified, leading to a wider variety of P4/wC facilitator training programs and an increase in the number of individuals and organisations offering this training. And it is not just the providers that have changed. P4/wC's target audiences has also diversified, with the method now being employed in early childhood, primary and secondary settings, teacher-training colleges, as well as attracting experienced educators and philosophers. Facilitator training programs have therefore needed to adapt accordingly. The increase in both the diversity and number of providers prompts several questions. What, for instance, are the goals of P4/wC trainers when they train facilitators? What are the standards they see or desire to see in a facilitator? Is there a shared understanding of the prerequisites needed for achieving these standards? Using questionnaires, this study attempts to address these questions while aiming to stimulate discussions by analysing key findings. It seeks to fill the research gap in existing studies that historically have focused on the impact of philosophical inquiry on participants but offer limited insight into the standards and practices used in facilitator training. This study, therefore, seeks to address the following questions:

- a. What are the current standards being employed by P4C facilitator trainers in their training courses? and
- b. What ideal standards do P4C facilitator trainers aspire for their trainees to achieve?

The scope of the research was deliberately broad, with trainers from a diverse range of programs invited to participate. While the data collection method used allowed room for differing interpretations, cross tabulation, coupled with the authors' knowledge of the field, helped to reduce biases, while allowing for more granular insights, particularly in identifying patterns and relationships that may not have otherwise been obvious.

2. Literature review: Theoretical framework

2.1 Foundations of P4C: The Lipman–Sharp model

Developed in the early 1970s, Philosophy for Children (P4C) is an educational program pioneered by Matthew Lipman and Ann Margaret Sharp, designed to engage children in philosophical inquiry and dialogue. Its primary aim is to cultivate critical and creative thinking skills in participants through the exploration of philosophical questions and concepts. Additionally, it seeks to foster communication

and collaboration skills from an early age, thereby supporting democratic development and civic engagement (Lipman 2003).

Lipman and Sharp's program was grounded in their conviction that formal logic and philosophical thinking play a vital role in shaping sound judgement, fostering individual reasonableness, and advancing democratic values as part of one's social character (Lipman 2017). Aligned with these goals, they also aimed to establish philosophy as a recognised content area within US public schools, an ambition that has become increasingly difficult to realise over time (Vansieleghem & Kennedy 2011).

To support these aims, Lipman and Sharp developed curriculum materials for grades K–12, consisting of fictional novels for students (approximately eighty pages each) and extensive teacher manuals (approximately four hundred pages each). These novels were not written merely as stories but were purposefully crafted to embed philosophical ideas, concepts, and questions in ways that made classroom dialogue accessible and meaningful (Lipman 2017). They deliberately avoided technical philosophical terminology, encouraging children to approach the texts with greater interest and ease, while also enabling teachers without a background in philosophy to engage more confidently with the material. Recognising that meaningful philosophical inquiry requires both student engagement and teacher facilitation, Lipman and Sharp supplemented these books with exercises, discussion plans, and a range of activities in the manuals.

Drawing on traditional philosophy and formal logic, these resources were designed to strengthen children's concept formation, reasoning, and inquiry skills while equipping teachers to guide rich and structured philosophical dialogues in the classroom (Sharp 2017).

2.2 Conceptual shifts in P4C: From method to movement

Building upon the solid foundation laid by Lipman and Sharp, the P4C program has inspired a variety of new models and adaptations, reflecting its dynamic adaptation to changing educational landscapes. Some of these developments introduced entirely new models, such as McCall's (2009) Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CoPI), while others emerged as reinterpretations of the original P4C framework in response to changing educational and global contexts, often referred to as the second generation of P4C theorists (Vansieleghem & Kennedy 2011).

Among these, McCall's CoPI presents a more structured and analytically demanding model, in which the facilitator, equipped with strong philosophical training, guides participants through a stimulus-based dialogue, assisting them in surfacing and examining the assumptions underlying their judgements (McCall 2009; McCall & Weijers 2016).

Second-generation theorists have been more critical of Lipman's strong emphasis on analytical reasoning as the primary pathway to critical thinking. As Van der Leeuw (2009) observes, while Lipman's novels and manuals heavily stress reasoning, categorisation, and logical ordering, it is not always evident how these skills lead to a deeper search for meaning. These theorists argue that philosophical inquiry cannot be confined solely to logic or traditional philosophical thinking, as participants necessarily bring their lived experiences, worldviews, epistemologies, values, and ways of knowing to the dialogue.

Kennedy (2006), a long-time collaborator of Lipman and a leading figure in the second generation of P4C, reimagines the practice with a focus on relationality, affect, and the aesthetic dimensions of philosophical dialogue. Drawing on continental philosophy and existentialist thought, he reframes childhood as a philosophical condition and emphasises philosophical inquiry as an embodied, transformative, and intersubjective process. Murris and Haynes (2018) reimagine literacy and pedagogy through posthumanist and decolonial frameworks that challenge humanist hierarchies between adult and child, and propose radically relational approaches to learning beyond dialogic and individualistic models. In Latin America, Kohan (2014) reconceptualises P4C not as a pedagogical tool but as a transformative philosophical practice, proposing a 'childlike education' that challenges the instrumental logic of schooling and rethinks philosophy itself through the experience of childhood. Santi and Zorzi (2020) in Italy conceptualise philosophical inquiry in the community as an inherently improvisational practice, where teachers and students cultivate a 'readiness to improvise' that transforms dialogue into a dynamic, co-creative process of thinking together. In light of these developments, P4C has gradually transformed into Philosophy with Children (PwC). In a later reflection, Lipman (2017) referred to PwC as 'a small offshoot of P4C' (p. 3), noting that it aims to nurture children as young philosophers without relying on specially written stories (see also Sutcliffe 2017). Sharp (2017) similarly acknowledged the shared aims of both approaches while underscoring P4C's commitment to a sequenced and analytically grounded curriculum.

Building on this trajectory, the field has recently adopted Philosophy for/with Children (P4/wC) as a more inclusive term for an expanding range of practices. The growing use of this term also reflects the expansion of P4/wC into a wider array of educational and social contexts. Beyond schools, philosophical dialogues are now conducted in community centres, universities, prisons, and parent-education programs. This development broadens both the audiences engaged and the competencies expected of facilitators, who must adapt their methods to a wider variety of social environments and participant needs. Within this trend toward broader civic and community applications, Kizel's (2016) work highlights P4/wC as an approach that explicitly integrates philosophical inquiry with democratic engagement. His perspective underscores the importance of flexibility over fixed curricular structures and illustrates how the practice has evolved from a school-centred model into a more widely applied and participatory movement.

Altogether, these developments indicate a gradual movement from Philosophy for Children as a singular, standardised 'method' to Philosophy for/with Children as a pluralistic 'movement'. The linguistic shift from 'for' to 'for/with' captures this emphasis on dialogue, communal meaning-making, and context-sensitive reasoning, where inquiry is shaped by the communities in which it occurs rather than by a universal, predetermined logic (Vansielegheem & Kennedy 2011). While each approach maintains the core value of engaging participants in shared philosophical inquiry, they vary significantly in how they conceptualise the facilitator's role, the skills required, and the contexts in which philosophical dialogue occurs. These differences also shape expectations for facilitator training, a point that becomes especially evident when comparing the standards and pathways offered by academic institutions and practitioner-oriented organisations within the P4/wC movement. As P4/wC practices continue to diversify, there is a growing need to re-evaluate the standards used in facilitator training.

2.3 Facilitator training in P4/wC: Models and standards

The diversity of theories and practices encompassed by the term Philosophy for/with Children (P4/wC) is closely intertwined with the corresponding diversity in facilitator training programs. Across institutional contexts, different understandings of what it means to be a facilitator and, by extension, how facilitators should be trained, have given rise to markedly divergent pathways and standards.

Lipman's original P4C model, developed within a school-based framework, placed considerable emphasis on professional training and curriculum fidelity. His model

was built around sustained partnerships with cohorts of teachers and was supported by structured training in three phases: exploration, modelling, and observation (Gregory 2008). Lipman (1988) was particularly concerned with the training of facilitator trainers, arguing that only individuals with strong philosophical backgrounds, such as university-level instructors or those holding doctorates in philosophy, should assume this role.

A similar stance is observed in McCall's CoPI model. While CoPI shares with P4C a commitment to philosophical dialogue, its demands on facilitators are even more stringent. McCall argues that CoPI trainers must have both a doctorate in philosophy and direct experience in facilitating CoPI sessions with adults and children. Moreover, any teacher wishing to apply the CoPI method in a classroom must undergo at least eighty hours of training, including instruction in logic and philosophy (McCall 2009). This approach reflects a vision of facilitation grounded in philosophical expertise and analytical skill, with the trainer positioned not only as a guide but also as a knowledgeable co-inquirer capable of drawing out the philosophical depth of participants' contributions.

In addition to these academically intensive models, several organisations offer more accessible and practice-oriented forms of facilitator training. For instance, the UK-based Society for the Advancement of Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education (SAPERE) provides a modular training pathway tailored to classroom teachers (<https://www.sapere.org.uk>). Its Level 1 Foundation Course usually takes place over two days (approximately twelve hours) and requires no prior experience in philosophy. The program equips educators with the fundamental skills for facilitating philosophical dialogue and offers further levels of certification for those progressing toward trainer status. SAPERE's approach emphasises inclusivity, adaptability, and scalability, enabling the dissemination of P4/wC practices within diverse educational contexts without expecting advanced academic credentials.

Similarly, the US-based Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization (PLATO) promotes philosophy education in K–12 schools (<https://www.plato-philosophy.org>). Rather than prescribing a single standardised pathway for facilitator training, PLATO offers flexible, educator-driven resources, including lesson plans, philosophical toolkits, ethics bowls, and professional development workshops. Their mission centres on nurturing curiosity, critical thinking, ethical reflection, and dialogue among young learners, enabling diverse philosophical engagement across varied school and community settings to this end.

It is important to note that the institutions mentioned above are only a few of the many that provide facilitator training in P4/wC. While our empirical study included a range of such providers from different countries, it is beyond the scope of this article to offer a comprehensive account of all relevant organisations in this regard. Here we have simply drawn on selected established literature to contextualise our research findings and contrast them with prominent models of facilitator education that have significantly influenced the field.

2.4 Facilitator formation: Ideal standards and practical realities

As the foregoing examples illustrate, the diversity of pathways to facilitator training in P4/wC reflects a range of institutional commitments and philosophical assumptions. This variation has led to persistent tensions within the field, between academic and practice-based visions of facilitation, between lengthy, formal training and shorter, applied formats, and between perceptions of the facilitator as a philosophical expert versus a pedagogical enabler. Beyond these structural contrasts, further tensions arise from normative expectations articulated in the literature. Many scholars have outlined ideal standards for facilitators, such as philosophical intuition, intellectual agility, dialogic sensitivity, and ethical awareness, which are difficult to cultivate and even more difficult to assess. It is precisely this gap between the aspirations of theory and the constraints of practice that informs the central questions guiding this study.

Sharp (2017), reflecting on the shift from a structured P4C curriculum to more open-ended practices, maintains that facilitators must nonetheless possess a foundational philosophical competence. She outlines several core attributes: familiarity with the history of philosophy, the ability to recognise the philosophical dimension in children's contributions, skill in modelling philosophical procedures, the capacity to design and adapt discussion plans in real time, and the ability to maintain focus on philosophical issues. This portrait of the facilitator emphasises intellectual agility, philosophical intuition, and pedagogical sensitivity. Sharp's articulation is situated within the original Lipman framework, but it continues to be cited as a benchmark across P4/wC approaches in the literature.

Other scholars have expanded this perspective by drawing attention to common misapplications and pedagogical blind spots. Golding (2014), for example, identifies several challenges facilitators face: the difficulty of supporting open inquiry without dominating it, the tendency to reduce P4/wC to generic thinking skills, and the misconception that philosophy involves no evaluative criteria, thus encouraging an

'anything goes' mentality among students. He also raises practical concerns, such as the selection and use of appropriate materials, ranging from classic literature to newly developed tools and games. Golding's remarks suggest that philosophical facilitation requires a nuanced understanding of both open inquiry and disciplined thinking.

In a pointed critique, Turgeon (2013) warns that short-term professional development programs can lead teachers to perceive themselves as experts prematurely, whereas P4/wC facilitation requires long-term apprenticeship beyond mere technical skill. She also argues that teachers' search for different educational materials stems not only from dissatisfaction with the literary qualities of Lipman's novels, but also from their inability to recognise and maintain the philosophical dialogue in these novels. For Turgeon, effective facilitation entails the ability to distinguish philosophical from non-philosophical inquiry, to develop the dispositions, skills, and sensitivities necessary for engaging students in critical reflection, and to adapt to the questions of philosophy and recognise them when encountered in daily life.

Murris and Haynes (2011) critically reflect on the practice of P4/wC and its epistemological and pedagogical implications for teacher education. They argue that P4/wC is not merely a weekly course on inquiry but a form of critical pedagogy that invites learners to participate in democratic life itself. They emphasise that practitioners must examine how they exercise authority, remain attentive to students' voices, collaborate in curriculum development, and create opportunities for student agency. In summary, practitioners should rethink their roles as both learners and teachers. The authors also highlight recurring challenges in training: the unpredictability of dialogue, the non-linear progression of discussion, the difficulty of formulating philosophical questions, honouring student ownership of inquiry, and avoiding epistemological and moral relativism.

Together, these perspectives underscore that facilitating philosophical inquiry with children cannot be reduced to a set of techniques. Rather, it involves a complex combination of philosophical understanding, ethical reflection, and pedagogical responsiveness. However, as this literature reveals, there is often a significant gap between the ideals articulated in theory and the realities of facilitator preparation in diverse educational settings. While some training programs attempt to address this complexity, many operate under practical constraints that make it difficult to cultivate the philosophical depth and pedagogical flexibility envisioned by theorists.

This tension between ideals and realities forms the basis of the central research questions of the present study: What standards are currently being employed by

P4/wC facilitator trainers in their training courses? What are the ideal standards they aspire for their trainees to achieve?

3. Research method

This exploratory research aims to shed light on how training for facilitators in P4/wC is conducted in the post-Lipman era. Our study can be classified as a mixed-method approach, combining elements of qualitative and quantitative descriptive research including elements of content analysis. The research seeks to understand the methods and practices of P4/wC trainers through the analysis of responses to open-ended questionnaires. It is also descriptive, in aiming to portray the current state of training practices among P4/wC facilitator trainers. Content analysis enables a systematic examination and interpretation of the questionnaire responses, involving the coding and categorisation of data to identify key themes, patterns, and insights (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2018; Krippendorff 2004). Leading experts within the facilitator training community were invited to participate in the questionnaire, which was designed to elicit detailed descriptions of their educational practices. Respondents granted consent for submitted content to be published. Apart from United Kingdom and New Zealand, respondents' first language was not English.

3.1. The questionnaires

Two questionnaires were used to answer the research questions. A pilot questionnaire sought feedback from possible respondents. Distributed at the end of 2021, its purpose was a) to ensure the clarity of the proposed questions that were to be used in the finalised questionnaire, and b) to identify whether particular questions should be included or excluded. Feedback received resulted in a revised and final version, Questionnaire 2, which was subsequently distributed to P4/wC facilitators in January 2022.

The pilot questionnaire included both identification questions and open-ended information queries, as it was considered a favoured method for collating viewpoints concerning the initially established goals of the investigation. The questionnaire consisted of presenting a predetermined set of questions, intended to explore the thoughts of respondents, and that included access to facts (current data), opinions (subjective data), attitudes, motivations and feelings, and, lastly, cognitions. The pilot questionnaire was sent to professional organisations either providing philosophical dialogues for children and/or providing training facilities for P4/wC dialogue facilitators. It was sent to key stakeholders and contacts within P4/wC organisations,

utilising the authors' P4/wC networks, in cooperation with the Sophia Network, the European Foundation for the Advancement of Doing Philosophy with Children.¹

In the following phase, Questionnaire 2 was constructed, consisting of questions requesting details about the responder's organisation, the training of future facilitators, the standards of professionalism, pedagogical choices in training courses and assessment (see Appendix).

Sierra Bravo (1998), as cited in Vilelas (2009, p. 295), together with LoBiondo-Wood and Haber (2001), corroborate this method by characterising questionnaires as meticulously constructed written instruments designed to collect data from participants. The questions contained there aim to evaluate participants' understandings, value orientations, interpretative frameworks, and affective dimensions. Furthermore, according to José Vilelas (2009), the findings obtained through this technique may be generalisable to a broader population, and the communication channels between the researcher and the respondent may assume various forms, including digital platforms such as the internet.

3.2 Content analysis

A content analysis was carried out based on the responses collected during January 2022 from 17 participants. Qualitative data from the questionnaire were coded and analysed according to the principles used in the qualitative content analysis. This systematic classification of the data allowed themes and patterns to be identified. We proceeded with multiple readings of the questionnaire responses. Two researchers within the author group independently coded each response to optimise the reliability of their proposed categories (Cole 2023; Krippendorff 2004; Olson et al. 2016). After grouping and coding respondents' answers separately by the two researchers within the author group, codes from each independent researcher were then further reviewed among the authors/researchers. This enabled cross-tabulation of the data intended to reduce subjective interpretations of the findings. The capital letter 'Q' is used to denote a 'question' followed by an ascending number as it is presented in the questionnaire. So Q1 denotes to the first question, Q2 denotes the second question, and so on. For each open question, micro and macro categories were identified. Micro categories summarise the essential points of participants' answers. Macro categories refer to the grouping of the participants' answers into larger categories as agreed by

¹ Sophia is an open group of professionals that aims to bring together different practices across Europe to help teachers and practitioners to learn and develop from and with one another.

the researchers. That is, rather than including numerous types of different dispositions a facilitator should have, those appearing in low frequency were merged, while more frequently mentioned dispositions were grouped into categories.

The macro categories are major category types, designed to better capture overarching themes, allowing for improved accessibility and, therefore, interpretation of the data. For instance, the macro category 'Facilitation skills and dispositions' consists of micro-categories such as 'planning' and 'organising', 'MC' is used for 'Macro Category' to identify the grouping of the participants' answers as agreed by the researchers. For instance, Q1 MC3 refers to the third macro category of Question 1. This allowed researchers to compare and/or analyse multiple categories rather than doing so individually. Additionally, descriptive statistics was utilised for questions Q2, Q3, Q8 and Q9 (see Appendix). Data were subsequently recorded in tables and charts.

3.3 Limitations

Four main limitations of the research are acknowledged. First, a small sample size and most respondents residing and practicing in Europe may have limited the diversity of perspectives and resulted in a predominantly Eurocentric viewpoint. Additionally, as most respondents were non-native English speakers and residing in a non-English speaking region (where training would be provided in a language other than English) this presented difficulties in accurately interpreting the nature of the training delivered by respondents based on their written responses to the questionnaire, due to potential language barriers and differences in perspectives and educational objectives regarding philosophising with children across countries.

Second, while the open questionnaires provided rich data, it also presented the authors with difficulties in handling the data. As mentioned, while there was more than one researcher grouping participants' answers and defining the macro categories during the content analysis, which enabled cross tabulation, the method allowed room for differing interpretations of the findings.

Third, rather than recording small 'slices' of different dispositions a facilitator should have, those that appeared in low frequency were merged, while dispositions that were more frequently mentioned by the group of respondents were assigned their own category. This was a deliberate methodological decision made to better categorise data. However, this also allowed room for subjectivity.

Finally, quantifying qualitative data, especially when philosophising, is inherently tricky, as philosophising, by its very nature, lends itself to multiple interpretations. We acknowledge, therefore, that some of our categories might be interpreted differently by other researchers.

4. Distribution of respondents

A total of 17 completed questionnaires were returned, distributed across nine countries. These included Belgium, New Zealand, Portugal, Romania, Spain, The Netherlands, Turkey, Ukraine and the United Kingdom (Table 1).

Table 1: Country of origin

Country	Number
Belgium	5
New Zealand	1
Portugal	1
Romania	1
Spain	1
The Netherlands	2
Turkey	1
Ukraine	1
United Kingdom	4
	17

5. Findings and discussion

The first research objective is primarily addressed by questions 2, 3, 5, 8, and 9 (see Appendix). Question 5 inquires into the current standards that P4/wC trainers aim for when training facilitators. In this context, 'current standards' refer to the specific learning objectives that trainers of P4/wC facilitators set for their trainees. Questions 2 and 3 asked respondents to specify the minimum philosophical and pedagogical background that trainees should possess prior to their commencement of the course. Question 8 sought answers on whether peer observation is a requirement within their training programs. Question 9 allowed respondents to clarify whether different P4/wC training is offered depending on whether the trainees are teachers, philosophers, social workers, or from other professional backgrounds. Questions 1

and 7 addressed the second research objective, which sought feedback on the ideal standards that P4/wC facilitator trainers should emphasise, regardless of whether these are currently prioritised in their existing programs. 'Ideal standards' refer to the key competencies that trainee facilitators should demonstrate in their practice, which are highly valued by trainers. All questions yielded rich qualitative data and revealed various interconnections.

5.1 Current standards, expected philosophical and educational backgrounds of trainees

The qualifications required by P4/wC facilitator training courses regarding previous philosophical or pedagogical background varied considerably. Only a small number (2 of the 17 respondents) indicated that a bachelor's or master's degree in philosophy was necessary. Most respondents either did not specify any requirements or mentioned only a minimal level of training in philosophy without providing further detail. Regarding one's familiarity with pedagogical practices, a large proportion of P4/wC facilitator training courses required no previous pedagogical background (7 out of 17 respondents). In a few cases, a formal pedagogical degree from a university was required, though a large number of respondents provide no further information.

5.2 Types of P4/wC training

The range of P4/wC facilitator training types offered included postgraduate courses, constituting the largest group, followed by tailor-made training courses designed according to participants' needs, assessment approaches, or multifaceted structures. Other forms of training mentioned included master's level programs, P4/wC training embedded within university courses, summer courses, training focused on applying P4/wC methods, and training that emphasises philosophy rather than psychology.

5.3 Evaluation during facilitator training

The importance of using peer assessment (Q8) was highly acknowledged. When respondents were asked to elaborate how peer assessment was used, they referred to several methods, such as: a) using peer assessment during classes, b) observations (inner and outer circles), c) micro-teaching, d) mentoring, or e) each participant becoming the facilitator and receiving feedback from the other trainees. Peer assessment was considered important by respondents because it was deemed to foster reflective practice which was perceived to help student facilitators acquire essential knowledge and to better understand basic P4/wC principles.

5.4 Key learning goals

Several themes surfaced when respondents responded to Q5, which asked about the organisation's key learning goals when training future P4/wC facilitators (Table 2). In the left-hand column in Table 2, respondents' answers are grouped into micro categories, while in the right-hand column micro categories are grouped into their respective macro category. In Table 1, Q5MC2, for example, refers to Q5, macro category 2. The same abbreviation method is used across all tables.

Table 2: Key learning goals of the training

Q5: What are your organisation's key learning goals when training future P4/wC facilitators? (a learning goal is what you want the participants to evidence in order to complete one's training?)

Micro category	Macro category
a) Management b) Facilitation expertise c) Pedagogy d) Self-evaluation e) Asking questions f) Planning g) Listening	Q5MC1 Facilitation skills and dispositions
a) Critical thinking b) P4wC knowledge c) 4C d) P4wC practice e) Philosophical dialogue f) P4wc facilitation styles	Q5MC2 P4/wC knowledge and practice
a) Planning and reflection b) Philosophical thinking c) Philosophical questions d) Philosophical sensitivity towards childhood	Q5MC3 Philosophical sensitivity

The macro category Q5MC1 *Facilitation skills and dispositions* consists of seven micro categories. (a) Management is highlighted by respondents and concerns class management, leadership and also the ability to establish/manage dialogue. (b) Facilitation expertise is expressed by the respondents as 'modelling, explaining, and encouraging interweaving strands of the philosophical teaching and learning' (c), Pedagogy mostly referred to 'promoting dialogue' and the importance of philosophical questions. The other micro-categories were not further analysed.

Q5MC2 *P4wC knowledge and practice* relates directly to what is important for a facilitator to learn about P4/wC in order to be a facilitator. The P4/wC community acknowledges the existence of different methods each with a significant history since Lipman and Sharp introduced the Philosophy for Children program. This explains why some respondents mention facilitation styles (f) to distinguish between facilitation styles and becoming familiar with a range of philosophical topics and exercises.

Q5MC3 *Philosophical sensitivity* consists of respondents' answers that referred to (a) planning and reflection, (b) philosophical thinking, (c) philosophical questioning and (d) philosophical sensitivity towards childhood. 'Philosophical sensitivity' was understood to mean the kind of sensitivity that 'involves the development of our ability to identify and ponder fundamental questions about the human condition and to be unwilling to stop at whatever answers we find' (Lone 2012, p. 23). Micro categories (b) and (c) abide by this definition.

5.5 *Ideal standards P4/wC-trainers aim for*

Whereas the first research question aimed to describe actual practice, the second research question focused on respondents' concept of 'the ideal key competences a facilitator should have'. Table 3 summarises the micro categories based on the responses and the macro categories which were developed by the researchers' grouping of the responses. Table 4 asks What pleases trainers in student facilitators' performances.

Table 3: The ideal competences a good P4/wC facilitator should have

Q.1: What are the key competences a good P4/wC facilitator should have?	
Micro category	Macro category
a) Humility (being able to admit that you don't know something) b) Humor (being able to make fun of yourself) c) Curiosity d) Wonder e) Diversity f) Responsiveness g) Interest h) Giving feedback i) Patience k) Respect	Q1MC1 Desirable facilitation attitudes
a) Be attentive b) Listen to the exact words that participants use c) Understand what each participant said	Q1MC2 Being a listener
a) Pertinent, b) Enable pop up questions c) Ask good philosophical questions and follow up questions	Q1MC3 Being a good questioner
a) Learn and grow from one's own b) Self-aware c) Open to re-evaluation d) Able to practice reflectiveness within a philosophical community of inquiry e) Committed to reflection	Q1MC4 Being reflective
a) Openness to new ideas and answers b) Not sticking to fixed ideas and what might be already in the facilitator's mind	Q1MC5 Being creative and open-minded
a) Distinguish particular utterances, assertions, arguments, arguments for arguments, etc. b) Having the knowledge of philosophical tools to help the group to think and to think about the thinking	Q1MC6 Being a critical thinker

Q.1: What are the key competences a good P4/wC facilitator should have?

a) Managing children's behaviors, timings and resources	Q1MC7 Being a classroom manager
b) Mastering facilitators' movements such as positioning, arguing concretising	
c) Building a safe space for a philosophical inquiry	
d) Creating dialogue among the participants	
a) Recognising and focusing on key philosophical issues and concepts and keep the dialogue philosophical	Q1MC8 The philosophy content
b) Being familiar with logic and reasoning	
c) Understanding the history of philosophy	
d) Having a philosophical background	
a) Neutrality (keeping one's own opinions out of the inquiry, and conveying no evaluation of the content of individual students' contributions)	Q1MC9* Socratic
b) Keeping an 'uninvolved involved' position (Socratic stance)	
a) Experience in doing philosophy with children	Q1MC10 Experience in doing philosophy with children

*This category could potentially be merged with MC8. A separate macro category was assigned because 'Socratic' was specifically mentioned in the responses.

Table 4: What pleases trainers in student facilitators' performances**Q.7: What makes your eyes sparkle if you see a performance of someone you trained as a P4/wC facilitator?**

Micro Category	Macro Category
a) Being 'Not in a hurry' b) Love for philosophical thinking as it grows and spreads c) Feeling sorry when time is up d) Feeling delighted by the dialogue process	Q7MC1 Enjoying the dialogue
a) Mastering the questioning, b) Asking follow up questions on the spot (pop up questions) c) Eliciting questions, d) Asking questions that help students give birth to their ideas	Q7MC2 Questioning
a) Enabling and eliciting ideas from the participants	Q7MC3 Enabling and eliciting ideas from the participants
a) Sense of surprise and wonder	Q7MC4 Sense of surprise and wonder
a) Paraphrasing correctly	Q7MC5 Listening carefully
a) Good judgement when to refrain	Q7MC6 Good judgement when to refrain and when to intervene
a) Using unusual stimuli b) Being able to creatively apply P4C scenarios c) Being able to adapt creatively ideas of existing resources	Q7MC7 Being creative
a) Outdoor education/STEM	Q7MC8 P4C application in other subjects
a) Focus on what is philosophical	Q7MC9 Focus on what is philosophical

6. Discussion

How does one train a good P4/wC dialogue facilitator, and what should one aim for when training one? Our study describing training practices may help to answer these questions. The following insights can be discerned from the survey data:

6.1 A broad range of pedagogical dispositions is valued in trainee facilitators

The findings demonstrate that respondents value a broad range of pedagogical dispositions from trainees, ranging from philosophical curiosity to questioning, listening and general facilitation skills. Macro categories derived from Question 1 include 'desirable facilitator attitudes', which encompass micro categories such as demonstrating respect, humility, and humour, while exhibiting patience, curiosity, wonder, and interest. Respondents also emphasised the importance of P4/wC facilitators being effective 'listeners', skilled 'questioners,' and possessing qualities such as being 'reflective', creative', and 'open-minded'. Additionally, while mentioned to a lesser extent, being a strong 'critical thinker' was identified as a valued trait (more on which below).

Masterful questioning and good listening likewise emerge in respondents' answers to Q5 and Q7. This is unsurprising. In the P4/wC community, listening has long been a topic of interest. Mohr Lone (2021) in the USA underscores the urgency of genuinely listening to children's voices within the P4/wC community. In the Netherlands, Muraqaba Lamberti (2019) highlights listening as the starting point of Socratic dialogue, emphasising its role as the foundation for meaningful philosophical exchange. In Portugal, Machado (2013) identifies listening as essential to metacognitive thinking. Worley (2019) in the UK defines listening as a fully attentive philosophical act which engages ears, eyes, and mind in genuine consideration of what children say, rather than merely hearing their words.

It was anticipated that there would be a correlation between the key competencies a P4/wC facilitator should possess (Q1) and the attributes that trainers appreciate when observing trainee facilitators (Q7). Beyond appreciating the dialogue and valuing a sense of surprise and wonder, respondents emphasise the importance of questioning, attentive listening, creativity, eliciting ideas from participants, and exercising sound judgement about when to intervene or refrain from doing so. Overall, respondents appear to support the style of facilitation, advocated by Lipman (2003), McCall (2009), Cam (1998) and others, which is student-centred and characterised by minimal

facilitator intervention. When facilitator intervention is necessary, it is typically signalled through the use of purposeful or 'masterful' questioning.

While the responses suggest that P4/wC facilitator trainers tend to value similar dispositions and competencies (aligning with those valued by the founding members and contemporary proponents of P4/wC) the respondents' use of the terms 'manager' or 'classroom management' rather than the more commonly used 'facilitator' may indicate a subtle but potentially significant shift from the traditional nomenclature historically associated with P4/wC. The term 'manager' connotes a sense of 'control', perhaps in the sense of directing a group's line/s of inquiry, behaviours or outcomes and conclusions. However, given the student-centred pedagogical dispositions evident in respondents' answers, the appearance of the term 'manager' in the data might be explained by the fact that English does not constitute most respondents' first language, a language issue, rather than being suggestive of a conceptual departure from commonly accepted P4/wC norms. Still, the recurrent use of the term 'management' merits closer scrutiny. It is plausible that 'management' functions as an all-inclusive term for classroom organisation, dialogic structuring, or the coordination of turn-taking. Yet the term also evokes connotations of regulation and authority that sit uneasily alongside the participatory, co-inquisitive ethos at the heart of P4/wC. As Kennedy (2014) suggests, participation in a community of philosophical inquiry typically resists hierarchical or externally imposed structures, favouring instead a form of self-governance grounded in shared inquiry and mutual respect. Some degree of structure is of course required; facilitators must introduce or help negotiate norms of participation to ensure inclusivity, safety, and epistemic openness. The tension, then, lies not in the need for structure, but in how that structure is framed and enacted. A subtle terminological drift, where 'management' begins to replace terms such as 'facilitation' or 'coordination', may reshape how the facilitator's role is understood. This raises the question, 'How do translation choices influence the conceptual framing of facilitation in facilitator training?'

6.2 Philosophical or pedagogical knowledge among trainee facilitators

The findings suggest that the P4/wC trainers participating in this study tended not to require trainee facilitators to have either philosophical or pedagogical knowledge and experience. The need for one to have a philosophical and pedagogical background was either not mentioned, or deemed nonessential. This could potentially be attributed to the small data set (17 respondents only). Alternatively, P4/wC facilitator trainers, while not requiring trainees to possess a familiarity of, or qualifications in,

philosophical or educational training, may have instead considered one's capacity or willingness to learn and to be trained in them sufficient or, perhaps, more inclusive. P4/wC, after all, is underpinned by the belief that philosophical thinking can and should be open to all, the argument being that participants can be taught the requisite philosophical and pedagogical knowledge to become competent P4/wC practitioners, if provided the appropriate time and training. Yet even when a formal philosophical background is present, it may tell us little about the nature and orientation of that education. The academic field of philosophy is notably heterogeneous, with programs varying widely in scope, methodology, and cultural tradition. One graduate may have been trained primarily in formal logic and analytical reasoning, while another may have focused on hermeneutics, ethics, or continental thought. This diversity complicates the assumption that a philosophy degree guarantees the skills needed for effective facilitation. The essence of good facilitation may not lie in the mastery of technical content, but in the ability to draw out the philosophical in what children say and to respond with sensitivity, conceptual care, and openness. However, when asked what competencies a P4/wC facilitator are considered desirable, macro category Q1MC6, 'Being a critical thinker' was mentioned by few respondents. There is insufficient evidence, therefore, to determine the extent to which P4/wC facilitation training programs include the development of philosophical thinking or critical thinking skills.

Of course, the development of critical thinking competency in children has been a primary focus of P4/wC since its inception. Lipman's (2017) conception of multidimensional thinking deliberately puts in relation, critical with creative and caring thinking. (Sousa's recent, 2019, inclusion of a fourth 'C'—collaborative thinking—merely serves to complement rather than depart from Lipman's original conception). This aligns with Topping, Trickey and Cleghorn (2019) who refer to critical thinking as a key aim of Philosophy for Children. On the other hand, philosophical sensitivity, Q5MC3, is connected to Q1MC6, being a critical thinker, as it underlines the ability to think philosophically. And, as mentioned, Q1MC1 captures many of the attitudes described as necessary for someone to be philosophically sensitive while Q7MC9, focuses on what is philosophical.

It should be noted that P4/wC training courses varied widely, ranging from postgraduate and master's programs to well as tailor-made courses designed around particular participants' needs. And so the goals of the P4/wC facilitator training courses (Q5) can be grouped into three main categories: courses that aim to equip facilitator trainees with: a) essential facilitation skills and dispositions, such as

managing dialogue, demonstrating facilitation expertise, asking questions, planning, and listening attentively; b) P4/wC knowledge, which includes the corpus of P4/wC knowledge and practices to date, along with facilitation styles and the nature of philosophical dialogue; and c) philosophical sensitivity. However, the surprising absence of any requirement that prospective trainees possess either philosophical and pedagogical knowledge and experience by a majority of P4/wC training programs, or that training providers target such skills, raises significant questions: To what degree, and in what ways, is philosophising in the P4/wC tradition customisable, given that both Lipman (2003) and later McCall (2009) underline the importance of the facilitators possessing the relevant expertise in logic and philosophy to assist group members in the inquiry process? What are the challenges and/or affordances of broadening P4/wC in such ways?

So what, then, explains the decision by providers not to require prospective trainee facilitators from having philosophical and educational knowledge or experience? While it is not possible to surmise from the data, there are a couple of possible answers. First, the most obvious is that there are too few prospective trainees willing to be trained in P4/wC facilitation who possess the requisite philosophical and/or pedagogical backgrounds. Second, it may be that prospective trainee facilitators would be deterred by the high philosophical and pedagogical demands that P4/wC requires of them. As previously noted, Lipman and Sharp were acutely aware that most teachers did not possess the requisite philosophical backgrounds minimally required of P4C facilitators (Splitter 2014). Lipman's solution was to assist teachers by publishing his P4C curriculum materials. Third, a conceptual issue may underlie the decision not to ask for a strong philosophical background of the trainees. The role of logic and analytical reasoning in P4/wC has long been the subject of debate, prompting most contemporary programs to move away from Lipman's sequenced, analytically oriented curriculum. In its place, facilitators are now expected to cultivate a much broader set of competencies—philosophical sensitivity, critical and creative thinking, inquiry, collaboration, democratic engagement, and truth-seeking. In this sense, philosophy may have become one among many requirements within a broadened P4/wC agenda, reflecting the practical realities of an already crowded educational landscape.

6.3 Age-specific approaches in facilitator training

A final point of discussion focuses on the limited information gathered about age-specific approaches in facilitator training. Either our questionnaires did not capture

such information, or it suggests that few training programs systematically distinguish between developmental stages. The latter possibility would be significant, as the philosophical and pedagogical demands of working with young children may differ considerably from those involved in facilitating dialogue with adolescents or adults. Lipman, too, was attentive to these variations. His curriculum materials were purposefully designed with age-appropriate vocabulary and narrative structures, precisely to meet children where they are (Lipman 2003). This raises the question of whether facilitator training, in aiming for universality, may overlook important differences in how children of various ages engage with philosophical content and dialogue. At the same time, as Gareth Matthews (1980) famously argued, children's philosophical questions often mirror those of canonical philosophers, though they may be expressed more naively or playfully. This tension underscores the need for facilitator training that is both developmentally responsive and philosophically attuned.

7. Conclusion

This research aimed to identify the actual and ideal standards established for the training of facilitators in Philosophy for/with Children (P4/wC). We mapped the similarities and differences among various providers of facilitator training programs and provided a foundation for further research on how future P4/wC facilitator trainers are, or should be, educated. The main findings of our research suggest that: a) while a pedagogical and philosophical background is desirable for trainers of P4/wC facilitators, it is not mandatory; b) the key learning goals for trainers, as identified by the researchers in macro categories, include equipping trainers with facilitation skills and dispositions (such as active listening and questioning), P4C knowledge, and philosophical sensitivity; c) there are expected overlaps between the actual and ideal key competencies facilitators possess or should possess, such as being a good listener (Q1MC2 and Q7MC5), an effective questioner (Q1MC3 and Q7MC2), and creative and open-minded (Q1MC5 and Q7MC7); and d) the term 'manager' appeared in participants' responses, which prompted researchers to use it in defining certain macro categories (e.g. Q1MC7), while bringing into attention whether the term 'management' is compatible with philosophising with children.

There remains significant scope for further research. Future studies could be conducted on a larger scale, incorporating not only European-based providers but also practices used in P4/wC facilitator training worldwide. This research could serve as a catalyst for increased collaboration among various organisations and providers

that train facilitators, enabling the dissemination and sharing of best practices and standards. Additionally, the research design could be further refined and more targeted, focusing on aspects of facilitator training that were previously underestimated or left ambiguous.

This study opens a broader discussion around the actual as opposed to the ideal training of P4/wC facilitators in the post-Lipman era. It raises a fundamental question about what level of philosophical and pedagogical knowledge or experience P4/wC facilitator trainees ought to possess. Lipman assumed that teachers would often lack a formal philosophical background, which is why he wrote the novels and accompanied them with manuals designed to serve as a philosophical toolkit. However, Lipman himself was a philosopher. This raises the question: what implications arise if P4/wC facilitator trainers similarly lack a philosophical background?

The competencies highlighted in the responses, such as active listening and critical thinking, are, to be sure, fundamentally important for facilitation, but they are also, of course, applicable to almost any pedagogical method or disciplinary practice. Historically, the one characteristic feature of P4/wC has been its emphasis on the 'philosophical', which has included philosophical questioning, as well as philosophical deliberation and inquiry. Paradoxically, however, the survey results indicate that providers have either deemed that the philosophical background of trainees as either non-essential or have opted to omit references to it in their responses. It is unclear, too, from the survey data what level of philosophical knowledge and experience is required of facilitator trainers. Nor do responses make clear how philosophically focused existing training programs are in practice, or indeed, what the concept of 'philosophical' is actually understood to mean. If one of the defining characteristics of P4/wC remains its engagement with the 'philosophical', as the current authors still deem it to be, it is peculiar and somewhat striking that the philosophical backgrounds of trainees has not garnered the level of attention or importance from participants' responses as would have been expected.

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Appendix: Questionnaire

Name:

Name of your organization:

In which country is your organization based?

Q1. What are the key competencies a good P4/wC facilitator should have? Give your top 5 and briefly describe the competencies (These can be characteristics such as patience, being a good listener, dialogue skills, etc.)

Q2. What is (in your organization) the minimum philosophy background for a person who wants to enroll and become a P4/wC facilitator?

Q3. What is (in your organization) the minimum pedagogical background for a person who wants to enroll and become a P4/wC facilitator?

Q4. Is a child safety policy/process required for participants in your P4/wC facilitator training program? (e.g. in some countries you have to demonstrate you are fit and allowed to work with children to prevent child abuse.)

Q5. What are your organization's key learning goals when training future P4/wC facilitators? (A learning goal is what you want the participants to evidence in order to complete one's training?)

Q6. Do you assess participants in the P4/wC training program? Which kind?

Q7. What makes your eyes sparkle if you see a performance of someone you trained as a P4/wC facilitator?

Q8. Does your P4/wC facilitator training require peer observation? If so, explain how and why?

Q9. Do you offer different P4/wC facilitator training programs to those who are teachers, philosophers, social workers etc? If so, what and why?