# Question Quadrant's Role in Philosophy for Children

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**Abstract**

*Philosophy for Children (P4C) has gained significant attention in recent years as an approach that fosters critical thinking, creativity, and collaborative learning among young learners. At the heart of this pedagogical framework lies the Question Quadrant Method, an innovative strategy designed to help students categorize and explore questions in meaningful ways. The Question Quadrant Method represents a powerful tool for enhancing the teaching and learning experience in Philosophy for Children. While teachers generally recognize its potential to foster critical thinking and engagement, addressing the challenges associated with its implementation in Romania is very important.*

**Keywords:** *P4C, Question Quadrant, critical thinking.*

*Introduction*

Philosophy for Children (P4C) involves engaging young learners in structured discussions that address philosophical questions relevant to their experiences and understanding of the world. As Echeverria (2007) observes, children possess a natural capacity for questioning, making them ideal participants in collaborative philosophical exploration. Within P4C, the teacher's role is not to impose authoritative answers but to create a safe, dialogic space where inquiry is encouraged, perspectives are shared, and ideas are critically examined.

In this approach, education is understood as an active process of inquiry, reflection, and collective meaning-making. Learners are encouraged to examine concepts, test assumptions, and explore the implications of different viewpoints through respectful dialogue. One of the key pedagogical tools in this context is the *Question Quadrant*, developed by Philip Cam, which provides a framework for categorizing questions according to their depth, scope, and connection to a given stimulus. By guiding students in generating and classifying their own questions, the Question Quadrant supports richer classroom discussions and helps develop both critical and creative thinking skills.

*Literature review*

1. PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN (P4C)

Philosophy for Children (P4C) is a widely implemented educational approach in schools. It aims to stimulate dialogue on various topics, improve communication skills, and help children formulate their own philosophical questions or arguments. P4C is applied to the whole class and encourages peer-to-peer dialogue based on philosophical questions arising from stories, films, or other stimuli. Students sit in a circle, facing each other, while the teacher introduces an activity or game related to a particular theme, skill, or disposition they want to emphasize. This might involve a video, a story, an image, or an artifact. The group discusses the stimulus, raises a series of questions, and collectively selects one suitable for discussion (Trickey & Topping, 2004), such as *What is kindness?*, *Is it ever right to limit someone's freedom?*, or *Are a person's looks more important than their actions*?.

Once the appropriate question is chosen, the main discussion begins. Students share their ideas on the question and argue their perspectives. The teacher, trained in P4C facilitation, guides the process without dominating it, encouraging participants to support their claims with examples, test assumptions, and explore potential consequences. The session ends with closing remarks from all participants. Students may maintain their initial opinions or change them after they talk to each other. They have the opportunity to express their own thoughts succinctly, but also to reflect on the session's progress. So, the discussion typically concludes with a reflective review, in which participants consider the quality of their reasoning, highlight productive moments, and identify areas for improvement.

Haynes & Murris (2012, as cited in Tricky & Topping, 2004) outlined nine stages of a P4C session:

1. *Starting* – begin with a relaxation exercise and establish interaction rules;
2. *Introducing a stimulus* – use a prompt to initiate inquiry;
3. *Pause for thought* – allow time to think;
4. *Interrogation* – encourage students to think of intriguing or complex questions;
5. *Connections* – link questions together;
6. *Choosing a question* – decide on one question for investigation;
7. *Building on ideas* – encourage students to build on one another's thoughts while also exploring independent avenues of inquiry;
8. *Recording the conversation* – mapping or documenting ideas;

9. *Review and closure* – summarize, reflect on the process, and consider if perspectives have changed.

Philosophical discussions in P4C avoid suggestive questions that could lead to random answers or teacher-biased responses. Instead, it privileges open-ended questions with multiple possible answers, fostering both intellectual autonomy and respect for diverse perspectives (Lipman, 2003). P4C is not about authoritarian or indoctrinating practices but about fostering alternative ways of thinking, respecting the opinions of both children and adults.

Even though we cannot generalize that the use of P4C has always a positive impact, since the honesty of its implementation can take various forms, nevertheless, numerous studies have indicated that, under specific circumstances, children can experience substantial improvements in both academic performance and social skills through this form of interactive philosophical engagement. Empirical research by Sharp, Reed, and Lipman (1992) found that those children who study philosophy are more likely to achieve better academic performance and also have social benefits, such as higher self-esteem and a higher degree of empathy.

Although advocates highlight P4C's potential, critiques question its practicality within highly standardized curricula (Trickey & Topping, 2004). Time constraints, assessment pressures, and limited teacher training can reduce the scope for open-ended inquiry, leading to superficial or rushed discussions.

## 2. THE QUESTION QUADRANT

The *Question Quadrant* was developed by Australian philosopher Philip Cam as part of his work integrating the Community of Inquiry pedagogy into mainstream classrooms (Cam, 2013). One notable early application was at Buranda State School, where P4C was adopted to address challenges in student engagement, discipline, and academic performance. Reports from this initiative indicate improvements in critical thinking, teacher confidence, and overall school culture, prompting further research and documentation (Scholl, 2014).

Cam observed that even within well-facilitated philosophical discussions, students often struggled to formulate questions that could sustain deeper inquiry. Many tended toward simple factual queries or closed-ended prompts that limited discussion potential. In response, he created the Question Quadrant, a visual and conceptual framework for classifying and improving student-generated questions before engaging in dialogue.

This tool divides the questions into four categories, resulting from the intersection of two axes:

- one horizontal axis with closed-ended questions (which have a specific answer) and open-ended questions (which allow multiple answers)
- one vertical axis with questions directly related to the text or topic studied and questions that go beyond the immediate context, having a more general or intellectual nature.

Thus, the four resulting quadrants are:

- questions for understanding the text: closed-ended questions directly related to the material studied;
- factual knowledge questions: closed-ended questions that require additional information, not necessarily present in the text;
- questions that stimulate literary speculation: Open-ended questions related to the text, which encourage interpretation and exploration of ideas;
- questions for philosophical research: open and general questions, which go beyond the immediate context and invite deep reflection.

The quadrant was developed to support teachers and students to recognize and use open-ended intellectual questions that are, in fact, philosophical questions. Through the questions proposed in the quadrant, the teacher moves from the role of "omniscient" (in which he asks questions to which he knows the correct answer), to the role of facilitator in which learning is centered on the student, creating conditions for meaningful learning experiences.

The Question Quadrant Method is a tool that encourages students to differentiate between types of questions, such as factual, interpretive, evaluative, and creative. By dividing questions into these categories, learners can better understand how to approach complex issues and engage in deeper discussions. Teachers often use this method to guide students in formulating their own inquiries, fostering a sense of ownership and engagement in their learning journey.

In Romania, Associate Professor Marin Bălan, PhD, from the University of Bucharest, deepened and promoted the use of the Question Quadrant in education. He stressed the importance of encouraging children's natural curiosity and asking questions as an essential way to explore and understand the world.

Based on Cam's model, Marin Bălan (2023) proposed a simplified version of the quadrant with different labels for better understanding:

- Instead of "closed," use "one correct answer."
- Instead of "open," use "many possibilities."

- Instead of "textual understanding," use "look at the text and see the questions."
- Instead of "factual knowledge," use "ask an expert."
- Instead of "literary speculation," use "ask using your imagination."
- Instead of "research," use "think a bit."

Below is the graphic representation of the quadrant proposed by Marin Bălan (2023):

**Figure 1**
*Marin Bălan's Question Quadrant (2023)*
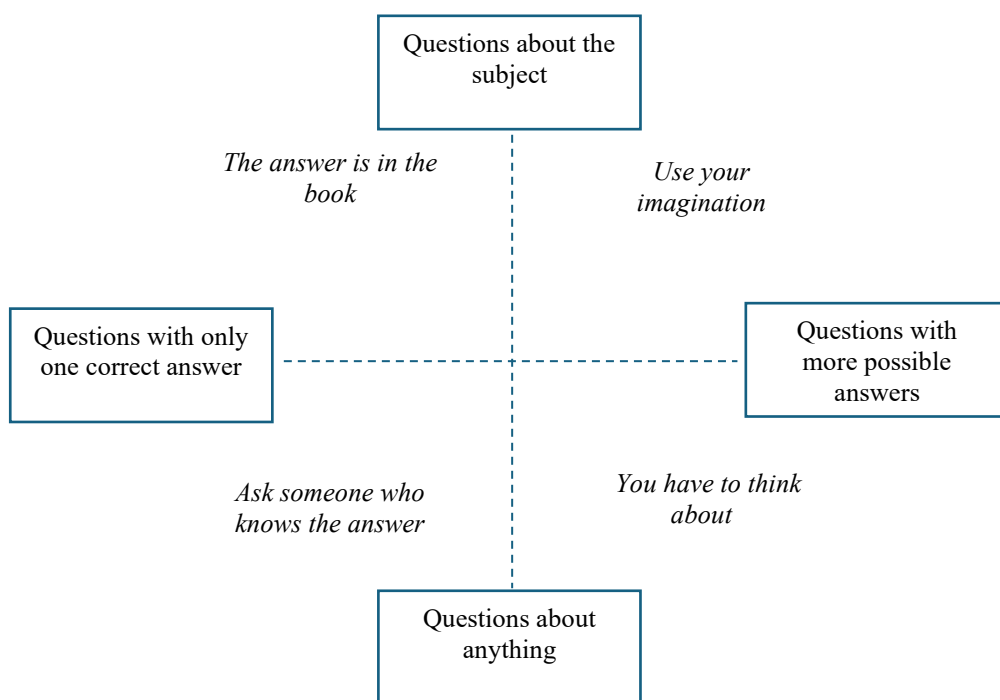


The quadrant encourages intellectual open-ended questions that lead to philosophical discussions. Teachers shift from the role of "all-knowing expert" to facilitators of student-centered learning. Bălan's (2023) adaptation preserves the quadrant's conceptual integrity while making it more accessible. Visual aids, such as cards placed in a circle or sticky notes categorizing questions, are often used to make the activity more engaging. While simplification may enhance pick-up and classroom usability, two risks arise: over-compression can obscure the distinction between textual and intellectual inquiry that prevents drift back into comprehension checks; loss of metacognitive language may reduce students' ability to self-classify and upgrade questions.

However, research suggests that the Question Quadrant can strengthen metacognitive awareness, helping students to not only participate in discussions but also reflect on the quality and purpose of their questions (Massey, 2019). Activities such as distinguishing between facts and opinions or conceptual classification exercises (Cam, 2019) can complement quadrant use, further supporting the development of critical and creative thinking.

The implementation of the Question Quadrant in the educational process facilitates a structured approach to discussions, allowing students to distinguish between different types of questions and actively engage in the learning process. This method promotes a collaborative learning environment, in which both teachers and students contribute to the exploration and deep understanding of the topics studied.

### *Conclusions*

The integration of the Question Quadrant into educational practice offers a structured yet flexible approach to guiding classroom inquiry. By categorizing questions according to their type and scope, students learn to differentiate between superficial queries and those that stimulate deeper exploration. This process not only strengthens critical and creative thinking but also fosters collaborative learning environments where teachers act as facilitators rather than sole knowledge providers.

Evidence from both Australian and Romanian contexts suggests that the method can enhance student engagement, improve the quality of discussion, and promote intellectual curiosity. However, its effectiveness depends on consistent teacher training, cultural adaptation, and alignment with broader curricular goals. When implemented thoughtfully, the Question Quadrant becomes more than a categorization tool, it functions as a catalyst for meaningful dialogue and reflective learning.

However, recent critiques of P4C note that while the program cultivates higher-order thinking, it may be impractical within standardized curricula constrained by testing regimes (Haynes & Murris, 2012). Moreover, the Question Quadrant has been accused of oversimplifying the nature of philosophical inquiry. In many instances, children's questions may fall across categories or resist categorization altogether. Trickey and Topping (2004) caution that P4C interventions often produce mixed results and that success may depend heavily on teacher training and classroom ethos.

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