



**open futures** • *linking learning and life*

grow it

film it

cook it

ask it

## **Delivering on Key Agendas - A brief overview**

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*Open Futures* is a skills and enquiry based education initiative for primary schools initiated, directed and funded by the Helen Hamlyn Trust. Its purpose is to help children discover and develop practical skills, personal interests and values which will contribute to their education and stay with them throughout their adult lives.

*Open Futures* began as a pilot project in 10 schools along the south coast in 2005, it is now running in 64 primary schools nationally in the UK and includes a partnership pilot with Wakefield Local Authority. 12 Schools in Delhi are also participating via filmIt.

*Open Futures* has four strands:

- growIt – supported by Royal Horticultural Society field officers
- cookIt – supported by Focus on Food field officers and Cooking Buses
- askIt – (Philosophy for Children) – supported by SAPERE trainers
- filmIt – (an internet video messaging system) developed by the Trust for *Open Futures* and which has a variety of support mechanisms

## **KEY FEATURES**

1. *Open Futures* provides a practical and creative dimension to the curriculum by providing intensely human and satisfying activities such as growing, cooking, discussing stories and telling stories through film. It provides an experiential curriculum with tangible end products.
2. Schools are exploring a skills and enquiry based curriculum using *Open Futures* as a foundation.
3. Evaluations by teachers, other adults, parents, children and support officers have all been very positive.
4. There is considerable synergy with government initiatives. *Open Futures* pilot schools have, for example, used the initiative to spearhead or underpin their work on:
  - Healthy Schools
  - Eco-Schools
  - Every Child Matters
  - Literacy
  - Curriculum reform
  - Co-operative learning
  - Community/parental links
  - Social and emotional literacy



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5. *Open Futures* offers an apprenticeship model of learning in which pupils learn from knowledgeable and motivated adults through experience, instruction and imitation.
6. Philosophy for Children has brought the particular benefit of a very different pedagogy in which children's questions and imagination are encouraged, creating a stronger basis for authentic communication and relationships.

Newcastle University's Research Centre for Learning and Teaching is evaluating *Open Futures* through attendance at meetings and training, questionnaires and interviews of teachers, trainers and pupils.

### ***Open Futures* – a timely programme**

*Open Futures* is important for five reasons:

- It is timely in that it addresses many government policy priorities, particularly those represented by Every Child Matters
- It appeals strongly to commonly held values of teachers and parents concerning good primary education which are reflected in important human activities of growing, cooking and asking questions;
- It has strength as a flexible curriculum development model which stands in contrast to more prescriptive models. The evidence (e.g. Fullan, 2008) is that prescriptive models do not last even when they generate short term gains in test scores. Flexible models, which allow for teacher interpretation, last longer and generate a wider range of outcome gains.
- The positive evidence relating to Philosophy for Children (see Trickey & Topping, 2006) based on ten research studies on P4C which included control groups, and measuring outcomes by norm-referenced tests of reading, reasoning, cognitive ability, and other curriculum-related abilities, by measures of self-esteem and child behaviour, and by child and teacher questionnaires.
- It provides an excellent foundation for schools to develop home-school and community links.

It is too early to say whether *Open Futures* is having an impact on SAT scores, although these data are being tracked through a matched schools design. However evaluations from headteachers, teachers, other adults in schools and children provide a long list of benefits and accounts of enjoyment.

- Over 40% of the positive outcomes reported by teachers and others related to *affective* outcomes, such as confidence, enthusiasm and enjoyment;
- Another 40% of the positive outcomes related to skills, across a very wide spectrum including fine motor skills, speaking and listening and co-operative skills;
- The remaining positive outcomes were shared evenly between mentions of improved relationships and improved understanding particularly related to foods and science.
- There is also good evidence from self evaluation in two Wakefield schools that science attainment related to living organisms has improved.

The curriculum value of *Open Futures* is strongly indicated in the QCA (in association with CUREE) meta-analysis of reviews of research on curriculum-related topics (2008). The report covered 56 separate reviews covering a total of over 4000 studies.



The specific headlines relating to curriculum structure and content provide a remarkable match to the characteristics of *Open Futures*. Consistently, evidence from different reviewers found common ground, coalesced around six key areas:

- the effectiveness of learning that is “context based” (dealing with ideas and phenomena in real or simulated practical situations) notably in reviews of studies in science and maths;
- the importance of connecting the curriculum with young people’s experiences of home and community and the related, but also distinctive, theme of parental involvement in children’s learning in the home;
- the positive impact on pupil motivation and learning of structured dialogue in group work and of collaborative learning;
- the need to create opportunities to identify and build on pupils’ existing conceptual understandings – again, notably in science and maths;
- the need to remove rigidity in the approach to the curriculum – to allow time and space for conceptual development, to encourage integration of cross-curricular learning, and
- the need for excellence and professional development in subject knowledge – without which teachers would be unable to seize opportunities for curriculum innovation.

Fullan, M. (2008) Curriculum Implementation and Sustainability in F.M. Connelly, M.F. He & J.I. Phillion (eds) *The SAGE Handbook of Curriculum and Instruction*, Sage Publications.

Trickey, S. & Topping, K. (2004) ‘Philosophy for children’: a systematic review, *Research Papers in Education*, Vol. 19 (3), pp. 365-380.

### Headteacher’s Perspective

It is worth quoting one head teacher at length as she exemplifies the breadth of positive impact of *Open Futures*:

*“(It impacts) in so many ways! The project has brought a real sense of excitement and purpose to the children – they love taking part, particularly in growing and cooking and some high quality written work has been produced. As a ‘Healthy School’ in the process of working at ‘Sustainable Schools’ the project has moved us further along the path of healthy eating – the children are much more prepared to try fruit and vegetables they might not have eaten, and when recipes go home we know the message is spreading there too from parental responses. We are becoming (as a school, as a whole and as individuals) much more aware of recycling through composting and the use of water butts. A great deal of incidental learning is taking place particularly in science (parts of a plant, micro organisms, soil types) maths and speaking and listening. The children are working well as part of a team and learning about co-operation, sharing and taking turns. Hopefully when the ICT element fully kicks in (we have only just received the equipment) this will be further enhanced, and there will be a development in planning and forward thinking skills. I would also like the project to help us to encourage the children to take some degree of control over what they learn. There is a ‘Ripple Effect’ – children are taking ideas from the project home, there are more children cooking at home with parents ...”*



## Training

The training in *Open Futures* has proved very effective. The initial training (see Figure 1), resources (Figure 2) and support visits (Figure 3) have all been evaluated very highly. The resources have included seeds and tools, raised beds, Wellington boots, cooking utensils, recipes, camera and computer and books suitable for philosophical discussion. Teachers place value on the training and resources from growIt, cookIt, filmIt and askIt, which they have found helpfully prescriptive. Where teachers lack expertise they do want a very structured model of action with little leeway. Many teachers and teaching assistants (TAs) have lacked confidence in their growing and cooking skills and the 'package' has been highly effective and efficient in getting teachers and TAs started.

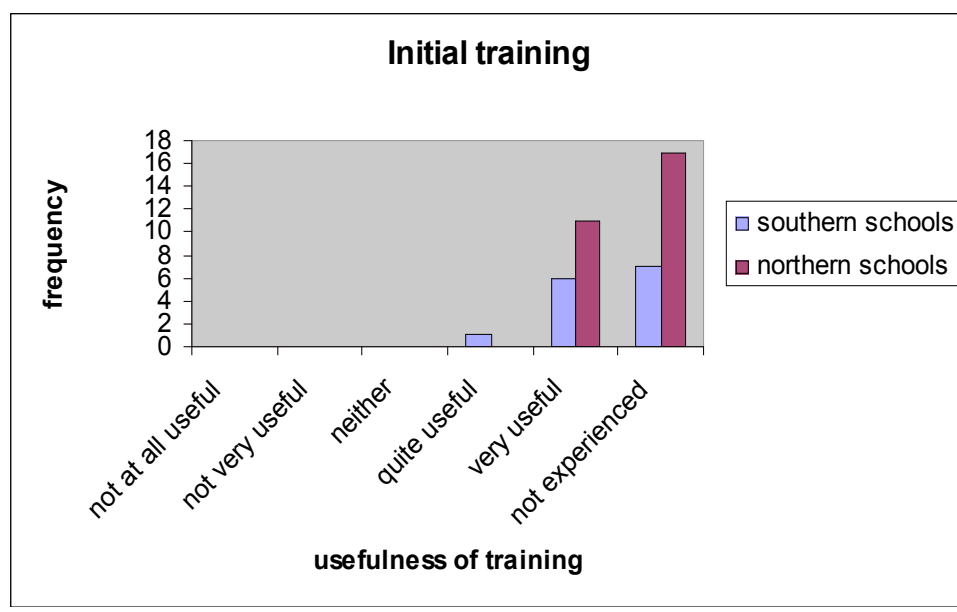
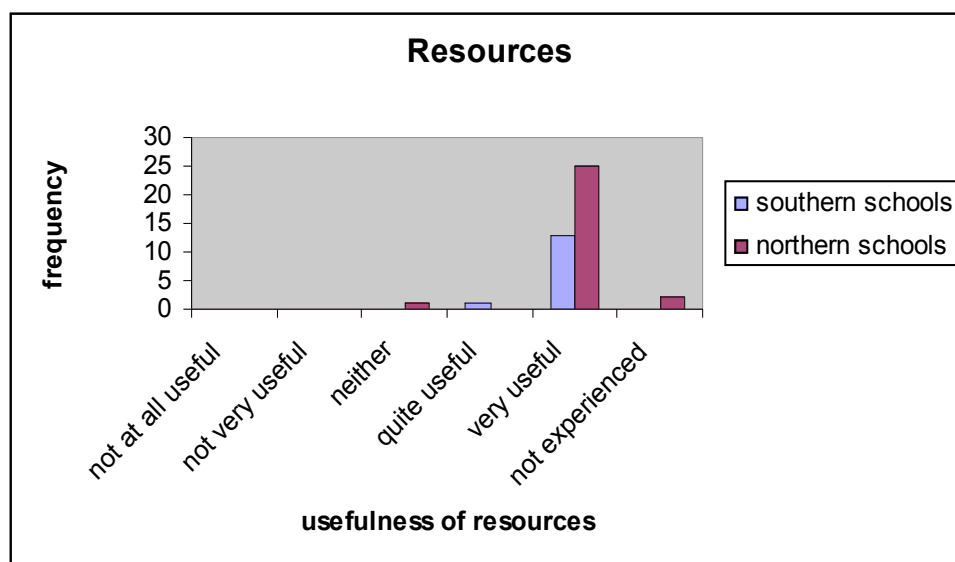


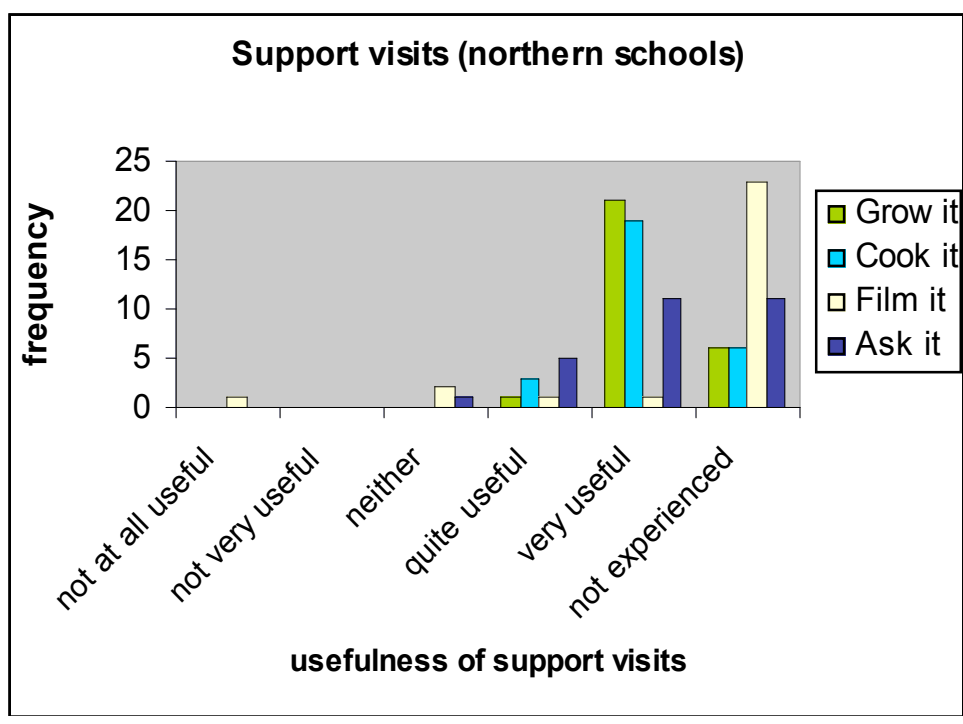


Figure 2 Bar Graph of the Evaluation of Open Future Resources





**Figure 3** Bar Graph Showing Evaluation of Support Visits (at the time of survey the southern schools had not started askit.)

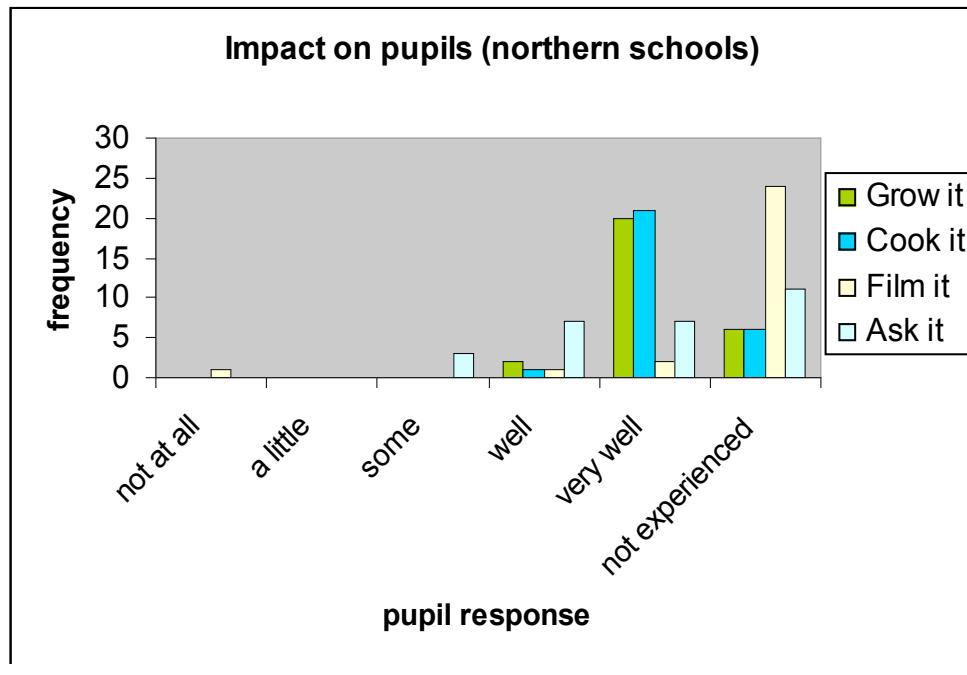


#### **Evidence relating to impact on pupils**

There is both indirect and direct evidence of the impact of *Open Futures* on pupils. Indirect evidence comes from the questionnaire to adults (headteachers, teachers, teaching assistants) who report that pupils have responded 'very well' to *Open Futures*. growit and cookit are seen as the most popular.



Figure 4 Bar Graph Showing Adult Perception of Pupil Response to *Open Futures* Strands (at the time of survey the southern schools had not started askIt)



The questionnaire also allowed respondents to give free text descriptions of the benefits of *Open Futures* to pupils. The categories have been grouped in Table 2 and Figure 7 to provide some clearer meaning, although it is recognised that some categories might lie across the boundaries of the larger headings. Table 2 gives the benefits described by teachers and other adults (n= 40) from open response questions. The notable feature of this table is the wide range of positive outcomes recorded.

**Table 1 Free text responses relating to pupil outcomes/benefits**

Category of Response	Number of mentions
Affective (e.g. helps shy, underachieving pupils gain confidence)	42
Develop Skills (e.g. speaking and listening)	40
Learning Experience (e.g. practical outdoor, first hand approach)	22
Knowledge (e.g. of healthy diets and origin of foods)	15
Relationships (e.g. improves teacher-pupil relationship)	11



There is an extraordinarily wide range of positive outcomes, which indicates that the four strands represent a very rich learning experience for pupils - the dominant impact seems to be on the affective domain. Pupils feel differently about *Open Futures* and begin to see themselves and learning differently as a consequence.

### **Direct Evidence from Children**

Interviews with pupils confirmed the level of enjoyment and engagement felt in the project. *Open Futures* sessions were described as “more fun” than ordinary lessons. A compelling example is provided by this Y4 pupil from a southern school:

*“It’s very different. You get experience ... you’re free and it’s fun and you collaborate (she did use this word). In class you write on your own, and you’re not free, but in this you go out and get muddy and have fun.”*

Only a total of 5 pupils did not enjoy gardening, but only from in two classes in a particular school who were asked this question. Their reasons were related to not liking getting dirty or physical work and feeling cold.

Generally speaking older pupils were more considered in their evaluations. These are the views of five Y5/6 pupils from a southern school:

Pupil 1: *“In literacy and maths you are sitting down and told what to do. You have more choice and more variety in growlt and cooklt.”*

Pupil 2: *“It is relaxing – in maths and literacy I have to get everything right and I even think - I have to get a 4C. In growlt and cooklt you can learn from your mistakes. It is the experience that is important.”*

Pupil 3: *“In English and maths you can do the same (meaning similar) thing for days. In growlt and cooking you do things that are different every time. In English and maths you have to do something in a certain amount of time.”*

Pupil 4: *“... in maths you have to do the work and you might have to stay in to do it. In growlt you are eager to keep going. You say to yourself: ‘Oh no, the hour is nearly over, I want to stay longer.’ Time whizzes by. There was no hanging around, it would be 2 minutes of talking and listening and then she gets you going and you learn the way to do things. Time goes more slowly in lessons, you look at your watch a lot.”*

Pupil 5: *“Last week we really got deep (in asklt), talking about our brothers and sisters, we all realise how much we love our brothers and sisters. ... Sometimes I can be wound up round my sister but I realise that I still love her.”*

Pupil 2: *“You don’t like to say that with your friends, because if my friends come round and then my little sister comes in and wants to join and my friends think that she is cute and I get annoyed about it.”*

Pupil 5: *“You don’t feel embarrassed or that anyone will laugh. People listen much better in asklt.”*





Such views indicate the potential for *Open Futures* in general and P4C in particular to underpin a social and emotional curriculum and citizenship education.

These pupils were particularly effusive about the benefits offered by ask it in relation to creativity. It should be remembered that these pupils were all reasonably articulate and confident (although not necessarily high achieving):

Pupil 1: *"Its very good, it lets your imagination go wild (smiling broadly) – you know a spirograph, well my mind is off like that. I am imaginative but this just takes me further, it's like a big adventure."*

Pupil 4: *"Plus you can have your own opinion and it does not matter what other people think. We did a lesson when we could choose our own super power (ability) and nobody takes the mick. (Do they do that?) Yeah sometimes they do."*

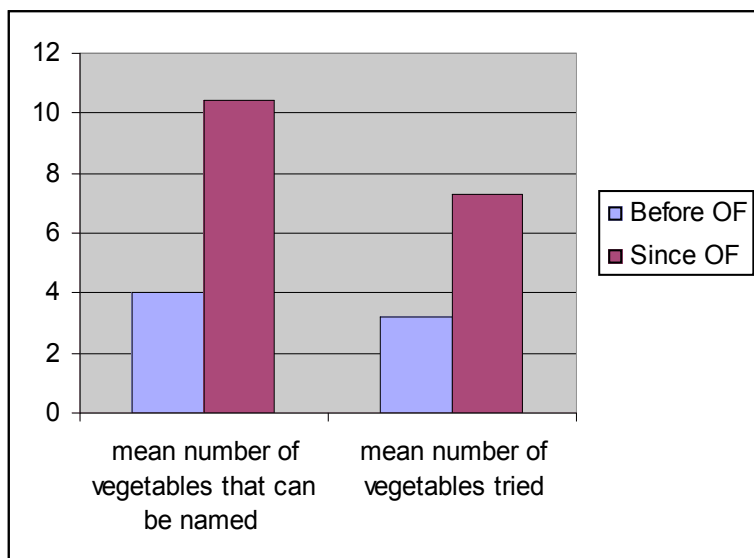
Pupil 2: *"You think that you don't have an opinion so you don't say anything but then somebody goes off saying something, but it goes into something you have thought about so you come back in."*

The evidence suggests that as children ascend the age range so they differentiate more sharply between the 'normal' curriculum and *Open Futures*. For younger children *Open Futures* mirrors the principles of the early years' curriculum, but these principles are increasingly lost in upper primary where motivation issues begin to materialise, putting a premium on *Open Futures*.

A more direct investigation of developing knowledge was attempted by another school through a questionnaire given to a sample of children (from Y2 and 3) towards the beginning and at the end of their year of *Open Futures* activities. This revealed a very clear increase in the numbers of vegetables that respondents could name and reported having tried.



Figure 5 Changes in knowledge about vegetables



At one of the northern schools parents completed a questionnaire giving their perceptions of their children's enjoyment of growIt, cookIt and askIt. On a scale of 1-5 (good), growIt scored a mean of 4.3, cookIt 4.4 and askIt 3.6. P4C generally achieves lower scores for enjoyment from pupils too which probably reflects that it is a whole class activity without the same obviously practical element as other *Open Futures* strands. filmIt had not at this point started in this school.

### Policy Alignment

Every Child Matters is one of the key drivers for children's services. The Government's aim is for every child to have the support they need to:

- Be healthy – enjoying good physical and mental health and living a healthy lifestyle
- Stay safe – being protected from harm and neglect
- Enjoy and achieve – getting the most out of life and developing the skills for adulthood
- Make a positive contribution – being involved with the community and society and not engaging in anti-social or offending behaviour
- Achieve economic well-being – not being prevented by economic disadvantage from achieving their full potential in life

It is evident from the information presented above that *Open Futures* provides a very effective medium for engaging with the ECM agenda. In *Open Futures* schools pupils are not only introduced to fruit and vegetables but they also grow them thus exposing them to a very different food culture. Further, the potential contribution of *Open Futures* to mental health should not be missed, as we have the indications of the impact on affect and self-concept. In relation to preparation for adulthood the case can be advanced for the wide range of skills and outcomes, which may be transferable, that *Open Futures* generates (as long as they can be sustained through secondary school). Finally it will be interesting to see whether *Open Futures* can contribute to stronger school-community relationships, as is being broached in a number of the northern pilot



schools. *Open Futures* has deep principles and it has also established practice in its pilot schools, which generates an immediate impact on children and teachers.

### A Skills Based Curriculum

Although the Personal, Learning and Thinking Skills framework is designed for the 11-19 age range, *Open Futures* demonstrates how such a competence based approach can relate as strongly to the primary curriculum.

The table below attempts an approximate comparison between *Open Futures* and the PLTS framework

Personal, Learning and Thinking Skills	<i>Open Futures</i>
<b>Independent Enquirers</b> Young people process and evaluate information in their investigations, planning what to do and how to go about it. They take informed and well-reasoned decisions, recognising that others have different beliefs and attitudes.	P4C provides an excellent foundation in the principles of enquiry and growIt, cookIt and filmIt all provide rich contexts for conducting them
<b>Creative Thinkers</b> Young people think creatively by generating and exploring ideas, making original connections. They try different ways to tackle a problem, working with others to find imaginative solutions and outcomes that are of value.	P4C again strongly encourages the imagination and building ones ideas through the constant engagement with others' ideas
<b>Reflective Learners</b> Young people evaluate their strengths and limitations, setting themselves realistic goals with criteria for success. They monitor their own performance and progress, inviting feedback from others and making changes to further their learning.	GrowIt, cookIt and filmIt all have their roots in D&T and science which ensures a strong thread of evaluation
<b>Team Workers</b> Young people work confidently with others, adapting to different contexts and taking responsibility for their own part. They listen to and take account of different views. They form collaborative relationships, resolving issues to reach agreed outcomes.	growIt and filmIt involve long term planning and sustained effort in small groups in which pupils must adapt and collaborate
<b>Self-Managers</b> Young people organise themselves, showing personal responsibility, initiative, creativity and enterprise with a commitment to learning and self-improvement. They actively embrace change, responding positively to new priorities, coping with challenges and looking for opportunities.	P4C epitomises many of these processes but they are given strong manifestation in short learning cycles employed cookIt and filmIt
<b>Effective Participators</b> Young people actively engage with issues that affect them and those around them. They play a full part in the life of their school, college, workplace or wider community by taking responsible action to bring improvements for others as well as themselves.	Philosophical underpinning come from P4C but it is in growIt and associated environmental matters that participation is given full rein