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Picture Credits

Long ago, on a tiny island in the South Pacific, there lived five brothers who loved adventure. The first, Hoku, loved the sun, the moon, and especially the stars. The second, Na‘ale, loved the sea. The third, ‘Opua, loved clouds. The fourth, Makani, loved the wind, and the fifth, tiny Manu, loved birds.

One night Hoku told his brothers there was an island below a certain bright star, which he pointed out to them. “Let us sail to it,” he proposed. No one had ever gone so far before.

Tiny Manu was the first to accept the proposal. But his brothers laughed and said such a dangerous trip would be out of the question for such a small boy.

The next morning Manu watched his brothers prepare for the great trip. Hoku dried fruit for them to eat. Na‘ale made fishhooks and readied the harpoons. ‘Opua gathered rainwater. Makani repaired the sails. After several weeks of preparation, they were ready. The last night they had a great celebration and then set sail just before dawn.

Little Manu had sneaked aboard the canoe during the celebration. He was not discovered until sunset of the first sailing day. After pretending to throw Manu overboard, the brothers accepted him and put him to work.

Everyone had a job. Manu caught fish. Hoku used the sun, moon, and the bright star to navigate. Na‘ale used the rhythms of the ocean waves to keep the canoe on course when clouds covered “the heavenly map.” ‘Opua watched the clouds to predict storms. Mankani “disentangled the knotted wind.”

After several weeks at sail, Mankani noticed a strange rush of warm air. The waves grew. A strange cloud appeared. Fearing rough weather, the brothers tied a safety rope to Manu. For five days and nights they struggled to survive the monstrous storm.

After the storm passed the brothers realized that they had been blown off course. But Manu caught sight of a bird—high, very high, in the sky. Manu alone was able to see the direction in which the bird was flying. Hoku steered the canoe in what Manu told him was the direction of the bird’s flight.

That night the brothers saw the bright star again. No one could sleep. The next morning they saw the island, and a quiet bay for the canoe. At sunset they went ashore. That night they gave thanks for their safe journey to the island below the bright star.

This simple, but gripping, story of how Polynesian explorers discovered the Hawaiian Islands more than 1,500 years ago is told in language worthy of a poet and illustrated in watercolors of artistic merit. It is a story of how a child can see something important that the much more experienced adults around him have missed.

The fact that children see their environment with fresh eyes is part of what makes doing philosophy with children so rewarding—rewarding both for children and adults. My grandson, Johnny, visiting last week from California, commented, while eating sunflower seeds, that he was “murdering” the seeds. His provocative comment introduced a discussion of whether all killing was murder and whether seeds were alive anyway, or only in some state of potential animation. Johnny’s father soon joined in the discussion, which soon became quite fascinating (and postponed bedtime for a good half hour).

*The Island-below-the-Star* is also a story about origins, in this case, the human discovery and settlement of Hawai‘i. But unlike the story of Christopher Columbus discovering the New World, no greed or disdain for the native population tarnishes this tale. It is a story of adventure that includes respect for the gifts of each person in the canoe and for their individual love and respect for some aspect of the natural world.

Should hearing or reading this story make an Hawaiian proud to be Hawaiian? We shouldn’t just give a glib ‘Yes’ answer to that question, but take the time, whether at home or in school, to think about what we have a right to be proud of, and why.

We may have a right to be proud of our accomplishments, say, getting a good grade on a paper, or making a basket in basketball. But being a native Hawaiian, or Minnesotan, or New Yorker, or American, is not really an accomplishment. Does anyone have a right to be proud of one of those things?

Sartre, in *Being and Nothingness*, tells us that although, in a way, where we are born is obviously a pure accident, something “absurd,” there is a way in which I choose being born, and even where I am born. I may affirm, or ignore, celebrate, or denigrate, my place of birth. But above all, I have to interpret what it means for me to call myself Hawaiian, or Californian, or Southern, or Yankee. So, although I would be in bad faith to simply deny what Sartre calls the “facticity” of my birth, I have to decide what it means for me to claim a place of birth. If I can succeed in doing that in a non-chauvinistic way, I may have a right to say I am proud to be what I am.

In any case, reading and lingering over the illustrations of *The Island-below-the-Star* might well be, for Hawaiians, a good first step toward being justifiably proud to be Hawaiian.

— Gareth B. Matthews —
We’re not in a rush to get anywhere…” is the spirit that animates, guides, informs the work of P4C in Hawaii. When presented at workshops and talks this opening thought elicits surprise, an occasional smile, puzzlement and even discomfort. It is, after all, so completely at odds with the reality of the world we experience every day.

The crushing reality is that in fact we—parents, teachers, administrators, business people, politicians, all of us, including increasingly our children—ARE in a rush. We ARE in a rush to get somewhere—to get the kids to soccer practice, to respond to the latest email, to submit that proposal, to raise the test scores, to be sure “No Child is Left Behind,” to bring democracy to the Iraqi people, on and on.

Not as readily apparent or acknowledged is that in this rush to get somewhere, something very special, precious, essential to being and becoming fully human is being lost: our sense of wonder.

Most of us are prepared to admit that, if all goes well, children enter this world filled with a sense of wonder. The world is a mysterious, fascinating, puzzling, wonderful place. Yes, it is also a terrifying, awful, wretched, depressing, discouraging place. And yet, if things go well, young children fill the world around them with their wonder, their joy (as well as their tears and frustrations), their tenacity and resilience. From their wonder spring an abundance of questions, “Why this?” “How come that?” Practically every waking moment an adventure!

If good fortune smiles, that sense of wonder continues to grow until one momentous day children enter school. If our ears, eyes and hearts are still open to young children, if we are not in a rush, we will soon be in awe of the things children wonder about and the questions that flow from this wonder. In a very natural way, they overflow with questions, questions that go very deep into the heart of things. The world, they recognize, is puzzling, beautiful, sometimes frustrating, even dangerous, yet all the while mysterious. They remind us deep down of how it once was.

If we revisit these children as they progress through school we will assuredly find that their sense of wonder, and the questioning that flows from it, diminishes with dismaying predictability. As schooling progresses, even in some of the “best” schools, the sense of wonder is replaced by anything from indifference or hostility to enthusiastic participation in the “program.” Too many “experts” are there to assure and persuade us that this is a “natural part of maturation.” “Raging hormones,” not yet complete brain development, growth spurts, all are cited to account for the change. Whatever the purported explanation, in the end, those authentic childhood voices become increasingly muted, diffuse, if not lost altogether. The wonder that remains has become prosaic and utilitarian. By the time students enter university, questions tend to be on the order of “Will this be on the exam?” or “What do I have to do in here to get an ‘A’?”

So what! Is it not in the nature of things that this be so? Assuredly not! What is lost with the sense of wonder, and the questions that flow from it, is a particular quality of thinking/feeling, a way of engaging and being in the world. Wonder, as Plato noted, is the wellspring of philosophy. In this sense, we begin our lives as philosophers, and philosophy, as Socrates noted, is a call from deep within us to live an “examined life.” A person who is committed to living life in this way possesses a quality of thinking/feeling that is open, creative, caring, empathetic, ready to move outside of established “boxes.” Such thinking/feeling is innocent and sensitive, yet penetrating and “critical” in the best sense.
of that now overworked concept. Such a person has a grounded sense of who they are and of what is important. They have an ability to think for themselves, to make sound judgments and to act in responsible ways. They are citizens in the best sense. Such individuals are keenly aware that there are situations in the world that demand our urgent attention, but they have a capacity to reflect rather than rush to judgment.

For the past 18 years, P4C Hawai`i has been engaged in the effort to establish, as an accepted part of every classroom, a time that is devoted to recovering, sustaining and developing the sense of wonder. For most its life, the Hawai`i Project (also known as the “Philosophy in the Schools Project”) has been a joint effort of the State of Hawaii Department of Education (DOE) and the University of Hawai`i Philosophy Department. Until two years ago, the DOE funded the philosophy graduate teaching assistants, whose task it is to assist teachers in creating places and spaces for wonder. For an entire school year, on a once a week basis, these graduate students participate, in partnership with the teachers, in classroom P4C sessions. They learn from each other, while at the same time learning from the students. They are often surprised at the depth and power of the thinking that young students are capable of, if given a space and place within which to wonder.

As part of the requirement for the university credits they receive, teachers agree to conduct two sessions each week and to attend an after school session once a week with their colleagues. These after school sessions aim to develop among the teachers and graduate students their own inquiry community. We have found the two times a week plus after school sessions absolutely essential if P4C is to have a chance of surviving in the midst of the rush to get somewhere. Some teachers try to simply do “P4C” throughout the day, rather than having a special time. This simply does not work. What results is a watered-down, still teacher-centered curriculum with no chance for student-centered wonder and inquiry. Currently, veteran P4C teachers, undergraduate philosophy students, and graduate students are continuing the work of assisting new teachers with their twice-weekly sessions.

In these 18 years, convincing teachers of the need to create and then maintain space and time for wonder has proved the most daunting task. The rush to get somewhere profoundly impacts teachers who find themselves overwhelmed by too much to do, too many often conflicting demands from parents, administrators, boards of education. Added to this are the widely varying needs of their students. Though teachers begin P4C with enthusiasm, without ongoing, sustained support, many choose not to continue. Their own sense of wonder, briefly re-ignited, falters and is again overwhelmed by the rush to get somewhere. Why is this?

When I began this work, it soon became apparent that the Lipman materials in and of themselves, though inspired in many ways, were simply not up to the task. First of all, the survival of wonder in a school setting requires, in addi-
In P4C Hawaii, the making of a community ball (CB) is an important ritual that begins molding the circle into what will mature, given proper time and nurturing, into an intellectually safe community. Once made, the CB introduces a second powerful, potentially transforming element: the person holding the CB is the one authorized to speak. Some Native American traditions employ a “Talking Stick” in a similar manner. This opens up a space where all potentially have the right to be heard. In Hawaii, this power to hold the CB, along with the understanding that if the CB comes to you, you always have the right to pass, has occasioned more than one student to speak in class for the first time.

Handing this power over to students is not always easy for teachers, any more than it is for students. Most of us have internalized from our years in school a mental model of what it means to be a teacher. The teacher is the one “in the know,” dispensing knowledge to students. The teacher is the expert, the students the novices. The teacher is in command and control of the agenda, especially the content. To allow the students to have a great deal more control over the flow of the discourse can be very challenging. As teachers have noted, as inquiries become more sophisticated, students can be ahead of the teacher’s thinking on a question. One first grade teacher was met with disbelief, even indignation from some of her students when she responded in an early P4C session to a child’s question: “I don’t know.” One child exclaimed “But you’re the teacher! You’re getting paid!”

A number of years ago a graduate student astutely observed: “P4C doesn’t necessarily create problems, it reveals them.” A skillfully managed classroom with teacher in charge, students participating, might have seemed safe. Moving to more meaningful inclusion of new voices can...
reveal underlying weaknesses and anxieties. P4C asks us adults to “unlearn” some of these mental models and to become open and vulnerable, to reveal our own puzzlement and wonder about questions to which we really don’t know the answer to. Children, sensing our uncertainty, have a wonderful way of coming to our aid, helping to make it safe for us! Success again requires that we not be in a rush, that we be as patient with ourselves as we need to be with our students.

Other helps, like “Magic Words” (MW’s) tend to ease this transforming process. The interpersonal dynamics of a community can make interactions cumbersome and difficult. If the topic seems to be going adrift, or lingering too long on a particular point, classrooms aren’t the only place where this can create an awkward situation. Just think of faculty meetings that drift or seem to bog down. To be able to say “LMO!” (Let’s Move On!) or “GÖS!” (Going Off Subject) has proven, when used appropriately, to be very effective in moving a discourse forward. Their use carries and teaches a form of responsibility in the community to be mindful of what one says and does.

After a time, the human need to be heard can lead to too many voices in the circle at once, in spite of the CB. “POPAAT!” (Please, One Person At A Time) assists in reminding the community of this essential courtesy. More important, however, is the growing realization that in this time, we aren’t in a rush to get anywhere and so there will be time for all to be heard. The impact of this is most apparent in schools like Waikiki School and Haha’ione Elementary where P4C has been practiced for many years. It is at once remarkable and humbling to sit in a P4C circle with a group of sixth graders, most of whom have been P4C practitioners since kindergarten. The space for wondering is firmly established and the depth of the thinking/feeling is inspiring! Indeed, adults who participate in such a session for the first time are not infrequently left with a sense of disbelief that such a level of thinking/feeling is even possible at “such a young age”. Adults who visit even younger classes are similarly impacted. They are reminded again of what is possible.

The community circle, the CB, MW’s, the deepening internalization of intellectual safety together create the necessary conditions auspicious for inquiry. In the end, it is P4C inquiry that initiates, sustains and develops the sense of wonder. As those familiar with P4C are well aware, the following aspects of inquiry give P4C its power in a school setting:

1. The topics, whenever possible, come from the students,
2. The inquiry moves with the interests of the students,
3. No one knows in advance where the inquiry will lead,
4. The inquiry is self-corrective, and
5. The inquiry will be suffused with the Good Thinker’s Toolkit.

The Good Thinker’s Toolkit grew out of an imperative need to provide, to teachers and their students, visible, concrete ways of deepening their own thinking/feeling, of “scratching beneath the surface” or opening up a topic.” It is crucial to the development of authentic student voices, that they be given the opportunity to discuss topics of interest to them but how to do this in ways that are intellectually responsible and rigorous? The Toolkit responds to this challenge. The seven letters each represent a way of deepening a nascent inquiry. They call attention to the need to clarify what might be meant [W], to ask for or give reasons [R] to support what is being said, to be alert for possible assumptions [A] or inferences [I] being made. They heighten awareness of possible implications [I] of what is said and whether or not an assertion is true [T]; if true, whether there is evidence [E] in support or counterexamples [C] to restrict the range of the claim made.

The Toolkit initiates, first in the community, and then, ala Vygotsky, in each person’s internal discourse, a much more sophisticated inner dialogue and sharpened self-reflection. It permeates and refines one’s inner voice in the wonder space to pose questions to oneself and others like:

**Good Thinker’s Tool Kit**

| W | What do you/were mean by...? W highlights the importance of being sensitive to possible multiplicity of meanings and ambiguity hence, a readiness to seek clarification when needed.
| R | Reasons. R reflects that in inquiry one should expect that it is not enough to simply offer an opinion. Whenever possible, group members should support their opinions with reasons.
| A | Assumptions. A represents the importance of making explicit, whenever appropriate, the assumptions that underlie the discussion during inquiry.
| I | Inferences. I highlights the central role of inferences we might make, of possible implications of what someone has said, and of hypothetical statements such as, “if what Judy said is true, then...”
| T | True? T indicates that a major concern in our inquiry is the question of whether or not what someone has stated is in fact true, and how we might jog about finding out.
| E | Examples, Evidence. E points out the importance of giving examples to illustrate or clarify what someone is saying and of providing evidence to support a claim.
| C | Counterexamples. C represents an important check on assertions or claims that possibly cast too wide a net. For example, “always” or “never” frequently occur in conversations, such as “The boys always get to go first” or “We never get to stay up late.” The search for counterexamples is a way of checking the truth of such a claim. For example, “You get to stay up late if it’s a holiday” is a counterexample.

Teachers also discover that, over time, this deeper thinking appears in other subjects during the day and in the interactions of the students with each other. Most importantly, teachers find, if they persist with P4C, that they themselves have changed. The examined life has blossomed in them. Their own lives have been positively transformed, including relations with those closest to them. The space for wonder has reawakened. This change they bring to their teaching and their students, who of course, respond and are changed as well.

When all is said and done, it is this fundamental change in the teacher that assures that time will be found for P4C on a regular, sustained basis. The circle, CB, Magic Words, Toolkit, the community and its many inquiries collectively have done their work.

P4C Hawai‘i is not in a rush to get anywhere. I am confident as you read the articles in this special issue of Thinking, you will agree that we have, nevertheless, gotten somewhere…and the reason we have “gotten somewhere” is because we have not been in a rush!

“What are they assuming here?” “What am I assuming here?” “I found my pencil missing and figured it was stolen. I now realize that I too easily assume [A] that when something is missing, it must have been stolen.” “I understand that some people have assumed that because I have difficulty reading that I’m a poor thinker.” “I see adults inferring [I] from low test scores that our school is a bad school. I now understand that this doesn’t follow. For starters, it depends on what they mean [W] by ‘bad’.”

The letters give concrete shape to living an examined life. “What is most important in life?” The Toolkit helps move this question forward. I can ask “Well, what is meant [W] by ‘important’?” “What are some examples [E] of important things?” “What reasons [R] are there why some people think of these things as being important?”

Students who come to the P4C circle with these tools engage in inquiry with each other in very sophisticated ways. They give voice to their own views in reasoned, responsible ways and hear the voices of their peers, and, importantly, of their teacher as well, who comes to be seen as a valued voice in the community.

Thomas Jackson & Matthew Lipman, August 1987, at Montclair State University.
Philosophy for Children and the Cultivation of Good Judgment

THOMAS B. YOS

Several years ago a single question became increasingly perplexing to me. What, I wondered, is the value of Philosophy for Children (P4C)? Why is it important? When asked this question, I could, to be sure, provide some sort of answer. But I always felt that my answers lacked the needed authority and conviction.

Searching for an answer to my question, I turned to the literature of P4C. Within this literature I found many good reasons for why schools ought to embrace P4C. Indeed, I found too many reasons. P4C, I discovered, can be connected with many educational aims. There are so many different arguments which can be (and, in fact, have been) made for the value of P4C.

Overwhelmed by this abundance of arguments, I felt as if, to make use of an old expression, I could not see the forest through the trees. Where I was looking for a single comprehensive and coherent argument, I found a plethora of different arguments which were, at least to my mind, too disconnected.

Naive to what I was getting myself into, I decided to take up the task of constructing an argument for the worth of P4C. This task, I came to understand, involved addressing two far-reaching educational questions. The first is a normative one: What should be the primary aims of education? The second is a pedagogical one: How might these aims be realized? In order to show why P4C is valuable, I concluded, I would first have to make some statement about what the proper business of education should be. Then I would need to connect P4C with these identified aims.

It was only after working full-time at a public elementary school for some years that an answer to the normative question which I posed began to emerge. Seeing first-hand what was and was not being done in my school, I came to realize that what schools (at least within my culture and epoch) need to concern themselves with vigorously (but not exclusively) is the task of cultivating good judgment.

This insight, as is often the case, gave rise to an additional question. This question was a conceptual one: what is "good judgment" anyway? Answering this latter question, I realized, was essential to my project; one cannot, after all, effectively argue that schools ought to educate for good judgment if one is not even clear on what "good judgment" is. And, at least within educational circles, there is a lack of clarity about what, precisely, "good judgment" means.

In the pages which follow I will take up the conceptual, normative, and pedagogical questions which I have posed. I will, first of all, endeavor to shed light on the elusive concept of "good judgment." Then I shall argue that schools ought to concern themselves with cultivating good judgment. Finally, I will contend that P4C is an effective pedagogical means through which to cultivate good judgment.

What is Good Judgment?

There are within the world some people who regularly make poor judgments and others who frequently make good judgments. This qualitative consistency which characterizes the judging of both the foolish and the wise suggests that the worth of our judgments depends not merely on chance but on competency. The wise, we reason, do not characteristically make good judgments because they are lucky; they do so because they have some talent. Similarly, we conclude that the foolish make poor judgments because they lack some competency or power.

From the reasonable assumption that there is some competency which empowers one to make good judgments, however, it does not follow that there exists some "mysterious faculty" of judgment. One need not attribute the power to make good judgments to some "inscrutable quality."3

Indeed, to make this move of attributing the power to make good judgments to a faculty is to fall into a linguistic trap. The act of replacing "Socrates has some sort of talent which empowers him to consistently exercise good judgment" with "Socrates has good judgment" is, to be sure, a useful bit of linguistic short-hand. The problem with this

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short-hand, however, is that it tempts us to conclude unduly that "good judgment" is, like a shirt or a book, a thing which one can possess.4

There is no reason to conclude that this power to make good judgments is the product of a single discrete faculty because there is a simpler, more easily confirmed possibility:

I see no harm in rehabilitating the concept of faculty as a convenient label to designate a bundle of mental processes that at the level of common usage present a unitary face to the outside observer. In this sense intelligence, in the IQ sense, whatever its complex components, can usefully be referred to as a faculty. In the same sense I suggest it is useful to think of judgment as a faculty.5

The power to make good judgments, F. H. Low-Beer contends, comes not from a single faculty but rather from a complex bundle of abilities. To have good judgment is not to possess some faculty of good judgment; it is to be able to perform well the moves through which good judgments are made.

The possession of certain abilities is an essential ingredient of good judgment. One would not say of a person that she has good judgment if she did not have the ability to make good judgments. To have the ability or potential to make good judgments, however, is not, in and of itself, a sufficient condition for the predication of good judgment. It is, as Andrew Norman notes, "perfectly possible to have a capacity for sound judgment, yet fail to employ it." If someone never or only on occasion made good judgments, one would not say that she has good judgment. Essential to good judgment is the exercise of good judgment. This exercise need not be unfailing (for, "even the wise make mistakes") but it does need to be consistent. The phrase "has sound judgment is properly predicated only if the subject of predication exercises consistently sound judgment."6

The ability to make good judgments, then, is not enough. Ability, as Dewey notes, must be coupled with disposition.7 One must not only be able to make good judgments; one must also be ready to make good judgments. One must be in the habit of making good judgments.

Here I take "habit" not as an unthinking routine but rather as a tendency to act in a certain way. One who is in the habit of making good judgments is one who tends to perform consistently (but not necessarily invariably) those moves through which such judging is done. She has learned and embraced these moves and, hence, regularly (but not unthinkingly) performs them. She has, through her consistent action, made these moves a part of her character.

One who is in the habit of making good judgments, then, is one who has the "character trait" of good judgment.8 This person has, in addition to the ability to make some moves, the desire or will to actually perform these moves consistently. She is one who, on account of her particular bent and distinctive aptitudes, consistently exercises good judgment.

One who consistently exercises good judgment is one who characteristically judges well. Judging well, like all judging, is a process of thinking. It is, like all judging, a part of, to use William James' term, the ongoing "stream of thinking."9 It is not, however, the whole of this stream. Rather, it is, like a portion of a stream which has been diverted to turn the wheels of a mill, just that thinking which has been applied to the work of deciding between legitimate alternatives. It is, then, not merely a cognitive process; it is a cognitive means.

Judging well, like all judging, is a process of thoughtful choosing.

Such are the ways in which judging well is akin to judging. But what is the differentia which distinguishes judging well from other sorts of judging? Just this: judging well is judging which proceeds through "more effective" thinking which, as Dewey puts it, "[does] better the work that thinking can do..."10 It proceeds through ways of thinking which (thus far) have proven to be especially well-suited to the cognitive work of judging. It proceeds through ways of thinking which characteristically help us to make good judgments.11

Thinking which is good for judging—which, for the sake of convenience, I shall simply call "good thinking"—is the distinctive mark of judging well. Like all judging, judging well is a process of choosing which is performed.
through thinking. Unlike all judging, however, judging well is choosing through good thinking.

But what is this sort of "good thinking"? It has, I argue, at least two characteristics: (1) it is performed through the skillful exercise of a variety of appropriate cognitive moves, and (2) it "leans back on" one's understanding.

(1) Part of good thinking is the effective employment of a variety of cognitive moves. Just as a skilled craftsman is able and disposed to capably employ a variety of tools in the doing of his work, an individual who is skilled at thinking has the ability and inclination to adeptly make use of a number of cognitive moves in doing the work of judging.

Cognitive moves are the temporally and functionally distinct movements of which the ongoing stream of thinking is comprised. These movements are like the individual flaps of a hummingbird's wings. In normal time, at normal speed, they oftentimes go unnoticed. But if one slows things down, if one carefully examines the process of thinking, one finds that behind the smooth blur of movement lies an irregularly pitching series of distinct moves.

Each cognitive move is, like the flap of a hummingbird's wing, a burst of energy through which thinking proceeds onwards. But cognitive moves are not merely random discharges of mental energy. A cognitive move is a bundle of cognitive activity which, unlike a haphazard selection of such activity, does something. A cognitive move is a tool which serves some function. It is a means through which one attempts to get along within one's world.

A great number of distinct cognitive moves have been identified by philosophers and psychologists. Thomas Jackson's "Good Thinker's Tool Kit" is one attempt to distinguish key cognitive moves. Good thinkers, Jackson explains, tend to make the moves of seeking clarification (by asking "what do you mean by...?") providing reasons, identifying assumptions, noting inferences and implications, evaluating the truth of claims, giving examples, and providing counter-examples. Not all cognitive moves, it should be noted, are of help in the work of judging well. Some cognitive moves, in fact, have been shown to be an impediment to good judgment. Logical fallacies—such as when one jumps too quickly from an instance to a generalization—are, for instance, cognitive moves which tend to lead one's judging astray.

There are, however, some cognitive moves (like those which Jackson emphasizes) which have proven to be especially useful in the work of judging well. They have been "proven" to be useful not by some certain, ahistorical god's-eye perspective but rather by the malleable collective experience of humankind. Human beings have found that certain cognitive moves have thus far characteristically conduced to judging well. It is through these moves that good thinking proceeds.

(2a) Having the ability and disposition to skillfully employ effective cognitive moves is a necessary ingredient of good judging. This alone, however, does not ensure good judging. One must also be ready and able to lean back upon one's understanding.

Thinking, Dewey explains, is too often no more than an "uncontrolled coursing of ideas through our heads." It is a "random" succession of "mental states" through one's "mind." This "irregular sequence" of "something or other," Dewey continues, "does not suffice." Indeed, this sort of thinking is hardly even worth the penny which one might offer for it because, while pleasant, it "rarely leaves much that is worth while behind."14

A "better way of thinking," Dewey continues, is "reflective thinking." Unlike undisciplined thinking, reflective thinking is neither aimless whim nor unintelligent cut and try. Instead, it is orderly. It always involves the deliberate and purposeful appeal to one's prior thought. It "leans back on" or "refers to" one's thought.

Here, following James' lead, we use "thought" as a "general term by which to designate all states of consciousness merely as such..."15 "Thought" should be interpreted, for our purposes, as a broad and varied cognitive fund upon which reflective thinking draws. One's experiences, one's memories, one's ideas, one's knowledge, and the facts with which one is acquainted; these are all a part of this fund of thought which reflective thinking accesses and employs.

Leaning back on one's fund of thought is not a product of reflective thinking but rather is that through which reflective thinking proceeds. "Leaning back" is a complex cognitive move which is the definitive element of reflective thinking. To engage in reflective thinking is to make the move of leaning back.

Leaning back consists, I assert, of both a forward-looking element and a backward-looking element. The backward-looking element I call reflection. The forward-looking move I call self-correction.

Reflection is the move through which one accesses one's fund of thought. To reflect is to refer back to or, quite literally, to "re-call" or "re-collect" one's fund of thought.

Self-correction is the move through which one employs one's fund of thought. To self-correct is to advance from that to which one has referred back. It is to make use of one's reflected upon thought in order to direct the course of one's future thinking, judging, and acting.

To make use of an analogy, the complex cognitive move of leaning back on one's thought is like a hiker's act of using her compass to direct her journey. The hiker's initial act of pulling out and referring to her compass is like the backward-looking act of reflection. The hiker's consequent act of correcting her course of travel based upon the compass reading which she has taken is like the forward-looking act of self-correction. Like the hiker, the reflective thinker refers back and then, with the results of this act of reference in mind, proceeds onwards.

(2b) Good thinking is a sub-class of reflective thinking. Like all reflective thinking, good thinking essentially involves the skillful performance of the cognitive move of leaning back on one's thought. Unlike all reflective thinking, however, good thinking leans back especially upon a
particular *quality* of thought.

The fund of thought upon which reflective thinking leans back is neither simple nor of uniform quality. Within this fund one finds both great ideas and half-baked opinions. One finds profound insights, trivial bits of data, sound knowledge, and even misunderstandings. While the ratio of useful content to useless clutter will vary from one individual's fund to another's, it is safe to say that each person's fund of thought contains both that which is worthwhile and that which is worthless (or, even worse, dangerously harmful).

Good thinking may reflect back upon both the worthless and the worthwhile but it tends to take its lead only from the latter. That is to say, good thinking tends not to be guided by shabby 'knowledge' or intellectual garbage. Quite to the contrary, good thinking is in large part "good" precisely because it proceeds forwards from high-quality knowledge. Good thinking is characteristically guided by understanding.

"Understanding," of course, can be interpreted in a variety of ways. By "understanding" I mean a knowledge which is both meaning-laden and true. To say that understanding is meaning-laden is to emphasize its *depth*. Whereas *information* is a superficial acquaintance, *understanding* is a deeper, richer knowledge about "what makes [matters] what they are." One who understands something grasps the meaning of it and "see[s] it in its relations to other things." To say that understanding is true is to emphasize its *usefulness*. Understanding, unlike misunderstanding, *works*; it does not take things amiss and, hence, provides one with reliable guidance.

(2c) Implicit within my assertion that one who judges well leans back on understanding is the assumption that there is, in fact, an understanding to which this person can appeal. For one cannot appeal to one's understanding and employ it as a judgment-guiding criterion if one does not even have understanding. The good thinker, then, not only thinks well; she also possesses understanding.

While the comprehensiveness and subject-matter of one person's understanding will be different from that of another, all good thinkers must possess "a fund of relevant knowledge" upon which they can draw in confronting the perplexities of their lives. Though the specific contour of this fund of relevant knowledge depends upon the situation within which one finds oneself, there are, I contend, certain broad areas of understanding upon which all good thinkers characteristically lean back. All good thinkers must have some understanding of their world, themselves, and others. They must, to be more specific, have an understanding of the possibilities and limitations of their environment, a self-awareness of who they are and who they wish to become, and an ethical appreciation of others as human subjects.

(2d) One who judges well must possess some understanding. But where does this understanding come from? Some suggest that understanding is something which is *given* to one. One gains knowledge by, as E. D. Hirsch says, "piling up [the] specific, communally shared information" which is provided to one.

Hirsch is correct, I think, when he says that information can be given. Information is a "bare impression" which can be transmitted from one person to another.

Hirsch also gets it right when he says that there is a connection between the piling up of information and understanding. Information, either in the form of the facts which one is told or the impressions which one experiences, is the raw material of understanding. "There must," as Dewey says, "be data at command to supply the considerations required in dealing with the specific difficulty which has presented itself.

From the fact that information is an essential ingredient for understanding, however, it does not follow that information is understanding. Indeed, as Dewey contends, "information" is not "understanding." Information is a relatively superficial acquaintance with something. It is an "undigested burden." Understanding, on the other hand, is an integrated, meaning-laden, useful knowledge about something.

Following from this mistaken identification of information with understanding is the false supposition that understanding, like information, can be given. Quite to the contrary, argue Lipman and his colleagues, understanding is not the sort of thing which can be given: Means cannot be dispensed. They cannot be given or handed out to children. Means must be acquired; they are *capta*, not data...

One must, to be sure, have hold of some information. But this information, this raw material, this "working capital," only becomes understanding when it has, through one's thoughtful reflection, been refined.

From this it follows that the good thinker cannot merely possess understanding. Since understanding cannot be given to her, she must have something more. She must have at her disposal means which enable her to create understanding. *She must have the power to understand.*

(2e) This power to understand is comprised of both an *ability* to understand and a *disposition* to understand. One who can judge well is both ready and able to pursue understanding.

To be *disposed to understand* is to be inclined to wonder. One who is continually working to revise and extend her understanding is one who has been infected with (or, perhaps more accurately, remains infected with) wonder. She is one who possesses a sort of "intellectual curiosity"; she possesses a motivating inclination "to penetrate to deeper levels of meaning—to go below the surface and find out the connections of any event or object, and to keep at it."

She is in the habit of living the examined life.

To have the *ability to understand* is, in large part, to be armed with the appropriate cognitive moves. "Thinking," Lipman writes, "is the skill par excellence that enables us to acquire meanings." It is through the skillful use of cogni-
tive moves that one orders and refines one's experience and information. Grasping the relations which bind a particular thing, event, or situation to the broader context of which it is a part, one moves through thinking from a bare acquaintance to a useful, meaning-laden understanding. The skillful use of cognitive moves, then, is not only the means through which good judgments are made; it is also the means through which understanding is gained.

The ability and disposition to skillfully employ cognitive moves, the ability and disposition to appeal to one's understanding, the ability and disposition to gain a deep understanding of one's situation; these are essential ingredients of good judgment. To possess the power to judge well and, so, to consistently make good judgments—or, to employ a figure of speech, to have good judgment—is to have made these abilities and dispositions one's own.

Having gotten clear on what good judgment is, it becomes evident that good judgment can be taught. For abilities and dispositions are the sorts of things which can be purposefully cultivated. One can, as the rise of the critical thinking movement attests to, empower children to more skillfully do such things as give reasons, spot assumptions, and provide examples. Dispositions can also be cultivated. This is a point which current proponents of "values education" make. One can cultivate the inclination to wonder, to be respectful, to be reflective, and, so too, to perform certain cognitive moves.

**Should Schools Work to Cultivate Good Judgment?**

Not only can good judgment be cultivated but, indeed, it ought to be cultivated. Good judgment, unlike the current fashion or the latest trend, is something that human beings cannot do without. Good judgment empowers us to act effectively within our world while paying due deference to this world. Good judgment enables us to dwell together harmoniously and to govern ourselves judiciously. Good judgment helps us to be true to ourselves and, so, to lead lives which are rich, worthy, and fulfilling.

While good judgment is something which people have always needed, current circumstances now make the need for good judgment especially acute. In the past century the technological prowess of human beings has advanced at an extraordinary pace. With this gain in power there has come, to be sure, opportunity for unprecedented progress and prosperity. But just as surely it seems at times as if, as James puts it, we will "drown in [our technological] wealth like a child in a bath-tub, who has turned on the water and who can not turn it off." Whether our power will be a boon or a curse depends, in very large part, upon our judgment. In order to harness our great power wisely we need to exercise good judgment. We must, if we are to survive (let alone flourish), base our decisions upon a good understanding and choose through sound thinking.

Good judgment is what humankind undeniably needs. Unfortunately, however, good judgment is precisely what is oftentimes lacking in today's world. This is made evident in the news headlines of terrorist attacks and corporate collapses. But such dramatic instances are only the tip of the iceberg. The extent of the problem only becomes clear when one goes beyond the headlines and finds, in the back pages and small print, a staggering overabundance of examples of decidedly poor judgment. In a single day's paper, for instance, one reads of the massacre of thirty-four people, tobacco companies which put profit before public health, ocean species that have been driven to the brink of extinction, an archbishop who is on trial for loan-sharking and misappropriating church funds, and individuals who deliberately endeavor to contract the HIV virus in order to gain kinship, respect, and notoriety.

There is, accounts like this scream out, currently a dearth of good judgment. Too many of people's decisions are rash or confused. Too many of their actions are ineffective, unethical, or inauthentic. Too often that which human beings say, do, and create is marked not by good judgment, but rather by ignorance and imprudence. The conclusion is practically unavoidable: In the world today there is a precipitous lack of good judgment.

How should we respond to this shortage of good judgment? We cannot flee from our power for, like a modern day Pandora's Box, the knowledge of how to split the atom, clone a cell, or create a computer chip cannot be simply closed-up and forgotten. Nor would such a course of action even be desirable since technology can be a boon as well as a bane.

Given the untenability of escapism, the only other response is, as Albert Einstein suggests, to change our "modes of thinking." We must, if we are to survive and flourish, address the current dearth of good judgment by purposefully endeavoring to improve people's thinking, understanding, and choosing. We must take up in earnest the work of cultivating good judgment.

There are, of course, a variety of social mediums within which one can work in cultivating good judgment. The family, the job site, religious institutions, political organizations, and clubs; these are just some of the places where one can (and should) foster good judgment.

Among the spheres within which one can work in cultivating judgment of particular importance are a society's schools of formal education. Unlike other social environments, schools are "framed with express reference to influencing the mental and moral disposition of their members." The very function of schools is to do the work of shaping children into the sorts of citizens whom society values. Given this mission, schools can potentially be ideal venues for fostering good judgment. They, more than any other social environment, can be deliberately structured and purposefully equipped for the work of cultivating good judgment.

While schools have the potential to be ideal venues within which to cultivate good judgment, they have, by and large, failed to live up to this potential. This, of course, is
not to say that every school—let alone every teacher—fails to do enough to foster good judgment. My contention, rather, is that, because the attention and energies of administrators and educators are occupied by other matters, schools do not do as much as they should to foster good judgment. More must be done to educate for good judgment.

What Can Schools Do To Cultivate Good Judgment?

In order to cultivate good judgment, our conceptual analysis has revealed, one must both empower and inspire children to skillfully employ cognitive moves, to wonder, and to reflect back on and make use of their understanding. One must also help them to gain understanding of themselves, their world, and others.

The community of inquiry approach of Philosophy for Children (P4C), I contend, is an excellent means through which to do these things. When one transforms the classroom into an intellectually safe community where students engage, not in unkind "parliamentary sparing" or in meandering "small-talk," but rather in "disciplined conversation" which proceeds from their own interests, one does much to cultivate the skills, dispositions, and understanding which are essential to good judgment.

P4C's community of inquiry approach cultivates good judgment, first of all, by encouraging the modeling of essential skills by the children's peers. "In a community of inquiry," writes Lipman, "children will use other children's behavior as models for their own." If, for example, some children within the community consistently give reasons, the other children may well, with sufficient exposure, begin to do likewise. Children learn to think well by following the lead of their peers.

Another source of modeling is the teacher herself. The teacher can deliberately, and quite explicitly, model desirable moves. The modeling of the teacher is, as Splitter and Sharp note, particularly important in the early stages of the development of a community of inquiry when the children have not yet begun to consistently exercise moves themselves.

A third source of modeling can be the characters in the texts which the community reads together. If the characters in these texts model certain moves, then there may be, with sufficient exposure, a "gradual internalization of the thinking behaviors of the fictional characters." "The live students in the classroom [will] take the behavior of these fictional characters as models of how to behave." 37

Allowing for the modeling of essential moves is an important way in which the P4C approach cultivates good judgment. Of equal importance, however, is the fact that members of the community of inquiry are given the chance, not just to observe, but to practice these moves themselves. Within the community of inquiry children are, during the natural flow of dialogue, both allowed and encouraged to practice doing such things as giving reasons, evaluating inferences, and reflecting back upon their experience.

That children are placed within an environment where they can observe and practice moves such as these is of great pedagogical significance. For, it is largely through continuing observation and practice that children develop both the ability and the disposition to make these moves. There is an "intrapsychical reproduction of the interpsychical." 38 The "interpersonal process" of dialogue is, with due time, "transformed into an intrapersonal" process of thinking. 39 Children learn to think well by internalizing the good thinking which is expressed through classroom dialogue. Not only the ability but the very "tendency" to think well "becomes effectively ingrained in [them] in proportion to the uninterrupted frequency with which" they are immersed within the community's dialogue. 40

This process of internalization is aided by the opportunity for reflection which the community of inquiry provides. 41 Within the community of inquiry children are encouraged to turn their thinking upon itself. They are invited to inquire together into the efficacy and very nature of the moves which they are employing. This inquiry can take the form of a consideration, either impromptu or planned, of these moves or, as Jackson suggests, a post-session evaluation of the community's discussion. 42

It is pedagogically efficacious to provide children with this opportunity for reflection because it provides them with an opportunity to discover of their own accord the worth of
the moves which are essential to judgment. If children are not helped to understand for themselves the value of these moves, they may resist our efforts to cultivate these moves.44 Enlisting the children's aid in examining these moves, one helps them to become more disposed to employ them. This opportunity for reflection is also pedagogically efficacious because it prepares children to make better use of these moves. As is the case with any tool, if one does not fully understand what a particular move is or how it works, then one is not fully prepared to use it effectively. Reflection upon moves which are essential to judging well not only encourages the doing of these moves; it also helps children to know what they are doing.

It is, then, largely through the modeling, practice, and reflection which it invites that the community of inquiry approach of P4C cultivates the abilities and dispositions which are essential to good judgment. The community of inquiry approach also educates for good judgment by helping children to craft the sort of quality understanding from which good judgments arise.

The community of inquiry approach helps children to understand, first and foremost, by empowering them with the means by which to craft understanding. Some of these means are cognitive. Arming children with the cognitive moves through which the raw material of their experience is processed into understanding, one gives them the power not only to understand but, more importantly, to continue to understand.

Other of these means are social. P4C arms children with certain social habits—such as listening well, being patient, clearly expressing oneself, and being respectful of others. These social habits are essential preconditions to the sort of disciplined conversation practiced within the community of inquiry. This sort of disciplined conversation (which need not only be practiced in the classroom) is, in turn, a form of social inquiry through which understanding is effectively pursued. Thus, to empower children with the social habits which are essential to disciplined conversation is also to empower them with means through which to pursue understanding.

The community of inquiry approach also helps children to gain understanding by providing them with the materials from which understanding is created. Taking part in the community of inquiry, children learn things. The information about the world, themselves, and others which they gain during P4C discussions serves as raw material from which their understandings will be crafted.

Here I reject the contention that, simply because the community of inquiry's primary aim is to empower children to think well, it fails to provide children with important information. It is not the case that the process of thinking can somehow be cleaved from the content of thought and that children do not learn content even as they learn how to think well. For, as Dewey argues, the "how" of "experiencing" is always accompanied by the "what" which is "experienced."44 Just as one cannot "eat without eating something," one cannot think without thinking about something. Learning how to think well necessitates thinking about some content. Students must, if they are to practice the good thinking which will empower them to understand, be simultaneously informed about their world.

Finally, the community of inquiry approach helps children to gain understanding by providing the opportunity for information to be refined. In the community of inquiry information is not merely transmitted. Rather, it is thought about, mulled over, reflected upon, and, hence, made sense of and refined into understanding. Having the opportunity to engage in the reflective process of meaning-making, children commonly take away from an inquiry session not just information but understanding.

I have, in this section, argued that the pedagogy of P4C is well-suited to cultivating the sophistication of thinking and understanding which is essential to good judgment. But is P4C, in actuality, an effective means through which to cultivate this sort of thinking and understanding? I certainly believe that it is and there is, to be sure, research which supports this hypothesis.45 To be honest, however, more work must be done. Does P4C empower children to be more reflective and self-corrective? Does P4C inspire children to wonder? Does P4C arm children with the social behaviors which are prerequisites to disciplined conversation? Does P4C help children to become more empathetic, respectful, and caring? If one is to make the case that P4C is an effective means through which to cultivate good judgment, these are some of the research questions which need to be addressed.

Conclusion

A newspaper article tells the story about how a nineteen year old beat his best friend to death. Why did the young man kill his friend? It was not because he harbored ill feelings against his friend but rather because he was zealously following his gang's code of conduct. "I was listening to what they were saying," he said, "trying to impress everybody, trying to look hard."46

As I read this story my mind travels back to a conversation which I had with former fifth grade teacher Jean Matsumoto. Matsumoto, by any measure a truly outstanding teacher, was retiring after some forty years in the classroom. As she packed the last of her classroom items into her car she reflected upon her many years of teaching. Traditional academic subjects, she said, were never the most important thing to her. What she always aimed to do, above all else, was to help her students to become good people.

Matsumoto, like Dewey, has gotten it right. It is not enough in today's world to teach children how to read, write, and calculate. It is not enough to fill their minds with facts, to arm them with dazzling computer skills, or to prepare them for tests. Though these things may be important, we must do more.
If we want our children and, with them, our society to flourish, we need to empower them to judge well, to think well, and to understand deeply. Just as importantly we must help them to know themselves and, so too, to care for others. We must arm them with the interpersonal talents which will enable them to successfully interact within their society and, finally, enrich them with a spirit of wonder.

Philosophy for Children is most commonly presented as a "thinking skills" program. Indeed, it is. But it is also much more. The community of inquiry is a place of laughter and joy. It is a safe place where children come together in fellowship and proceed forward with wonder and care. It is a place where children and, so too, their teachers are granted permission to slow down, to reflect deeply, and to think for themselves about the things which matter most. It is, put most simply, a place where good judgment is cultivated. It is a place where children are empowered and disposed to live not just smartly and successfully but, more importantly, wisely and well.

Endnotes


2. This article is a summary of (and contains many excerpts from) a longer work: Yos, Thomas Butler (2002), *Educating for Good Judgment*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Dissertation Services/ProQuest Information and Learning Company, 2003. In this longer work I examine more thoroughly the points which I raise in this article.


10. Dewey (1933), p. 3.

11. A "good judgment," as I understand it, is the characteristic product of the process of judging well. It, like all judgments, is at one and the same time the settlement of some uncertainty, the affirmation of an alternative, the product of one's thought, the proclamation of one's resolve, and a promise of future action. Unlike all judgments, however, a good judgment is a judgment which fits with one's situation. For more on this see Yos (2002).


15. James (1890), pp. 185-186.


26. Here it is worth noting that even if we were to reject the assertion that understanding can never be given, it still does not obviate our contention that the good thinker needs to have the power to understand. The good thinker still needs this power because, while one might admit that some of the needed understanding can be given to one, it can never be the case that one can instill an a priori within an individual all of the knowledge which will be required to contend wisely with the unpredictable twists and turns of life.


45. See, for instance, Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan (1980) and Yos (2002)

P⁴C: Philosophy—Process, Perspective, and Pluralism— for Children

LARA M. MITIAS

It was an unsurprisingly beautiful afternoon in Honolulu, and Dr. Jackson’s Philosophy for Children course was in full swing. It was late in the semester, and we had become experienced P⁴C-ers. We were ready to experiment. We had divided our class into groups of four or five, and Dr. J had brought us “philosophical questions” to discuss as mini-communities of inquirers. As a special treat, one of the students had brought two children to class to participate in our discussion. We broke into our groups and began to address the question at hand. On the index card was written our question: When does ‘now’ end?

In my particular group (to the best of my recollection) we had two Philosophy graduate students, an Education major and a Hawaiian Studies major, both undergraduates, and one of our visiting guests – a boy in fourth or fifth grade. The “trained” philosophers (perhaps like other trained beings) began to answer the question as one might expect – with a plethora of logical options – such things as: “Now ends now.” and, “Now never ends.” Longer trains of thought were quickly offered: “Now cannot end because it cannot begin,” etc. The discussion continued with explanations and more questions, e.g., “If now ends, when is it then?” After coming up with many possible answers, including, e.g., “Now ends when I die,” the conversation in our group reached a lull. And after a general appreciation of the more humorous aspects of the discussion, we turned to our child-participant – who had been somewhat shy to join in – and asked when he thought ‘now’ ended. Smiling broadly, he said, “After the ‘w.’

It was an answer we “adults” had not thought of, but which we all recognized as brilliant, for he had brought us an alternate perspective. After hearing our many answers, he had found a way to address the question that we had not thought of. We might make the point, as “trained” philosophers, that the card did not ask when “now” ends, but when ‘now,’ (the concept) we don’t know when that ends – we don’t even know what that is. But this was not the point, for his answer rung true. P⁴C allows for the appreciation of such an answer.

P⁴C offers time and space for alternate thinking. As P⁴C facilitators, we can’t be in rush, or we will be in danger of missing the subtle points which are essential to philosophy. As an example of this, teachers sometimes take to describing philosophical questions to children (and even undergraduates) as “unanswerable questions.” This is often a shortcut taken to avoid such questions being proposed for discussion as When did the dinosaurs go extinct? While emphasizing the essential openness of philosophical questioning, this shortcut is, however, essentially a misunderstanding of the purpose of philosophy, and P⁴C as a community of inquiry, and the intention of philosophical inquiry as promoting the application of logical and methodological analysis to all questions and arguments.

On one particular occasion, as a response to a teacher’s request for an “unanswerable question” to discuss, one of the children this past year quickly replied, “If it is unanswerable, why are we trying to answer it?” His question was quickly glossed over by the claim that we were looking for questions to discuss for P⁴C (something I’m sure he already knew), and the attention of the teacher moving immediately to again ask for “unanswerable questions” from other students. His questioning response to the teacher’s request was, however, the perfectly appropriate logical question, and expresses succinctly the essence of why we do P⁴C. In retrospect we, as facilitators, should have seized upon his question and then asked, Is it true we can’t answer an unanswerable question? In what way is it true (or not true)? Perhaps we could have discussed: So what do we...
mean by ‘answer’? What do we mean by ‘unanswerable’? How might it be possible to answer an “unanswerable” question? Or, Could there be any point in trying to do something if we think it is impossible? Can we know what is impossible before we try it? We could ask for examples, e.g., What are some examples of impossible things? How do we know these are impossible? If we could do this..., then would it be impossible? We could even have gone imaginative, e.g. Can you think of something you’d like to do that’s impossible? Can you think of something that would make it possible?

A philosophical question is not an unanswerable question. It just doesn’t have a closed or simple, or single, answer. It may have many possible answers, and may lead to many more questions. Philosophical questions are thus open questions, requiring further inquiry, and as with scientific inquiry, further evidence or logical analysis can’t be dismissed.

**Philosophy with Children**

When we do philosophy with children we do not teach philosophy as a subject; we teach by example, the philosophical method—a method of reasoned inquiry and logical analysis often referred to as “Socratic.” As the ‘teaching’ is done by questioning, we are not trying to teach facts or information (although these are important steps in any inquiry), but a way of examining knowledge, realizing associations (inferences and similarities) and a method and practice of focused inquiry in community. Thus, fundamentally, what is being ‘taught’ is a method of creative learning and productive communication, a method of reasoned inquiry and analysis. If we recognize that education of the individual is a life-long process—a constantly required synthetic or constructive activity which proceeds in community—then such a method is essential to continued productive self-development.

The P4C “teacher” acts as a facilitator or coordinator for the group, teaching the method of inquiry by example—asking the questions. Experience in the active P4C classroom teaches the teacher that the community of inquiry has a life of its own; the natural logical ability of the students is surprising, and, after teaching the toolkit, the group quickly becomes self-facilitating. The children question one another, returning to each other’s statements. The inquiry proceeds, and, as in scientific inquiry, given the tools of analysis, the community refines the questions and comes to agree upon the relevance of other questions and tentative answers. The facilitator becomes almost an observer, sometimes a peace-keeper, and the successful P4C discussion takes on a life and direction of its own.

While this may be disconcerting at first, especially for teachers already on a tight schedule of lesson plans and benchmarks, the benefits for the child as an individual are exponential; and although the attainments are perhaps not easy to evaluate by current standardized testing procedures,1 they are evident in real testing experiences—the deeper and continuing success of the children as individuals who are continuously integrating experience and learning. They realize the power and potential of their thinking and reasoning through such questions as: What do you mean by “x”? Why do you think that? Can you give reasons? Is “x” true? How do we know? Can you give an example? Can you think of a counterexample? Is this a good inference? Isn’t this assuming “x”? After practicing such inquiry in P4C, the P4C toolkit starts to be used outside of its original purview and becomes an integrated part of the thinking of the students. Philosophy for children is thus an effort to encourage productive habits of thought.2

Such methodological inquiry is essential because it is revealing. Questions bring focus to the issues relevant to the discussion of the community and the decisions and beliefs of the individual. The natural ambiguity of language and thought can be recognized, brought forward and questioned. Such questions further and focus the inquiry and enable the individual to integrate their own knowledge into a synthetic whole. This

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1 Mitias, P4C: Philosophy—Process, Perspective & Pluralism—for Children
2 Philosophy with Children

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P4C is Like a Child

By Amanda

P4C is like a Child because it grows and doesn’t ever stay the same. During P4C, I will always find something new because there are so many experiences to discover.
leads to the recognition of valid distinctions and gives confidence and a sense of self-determination to the learning process. Many believe encouraging active questioning and analysis greatly increases the capacity and ability of the students to learn and understand, as well as to communicate clearly and effectively, to pursue informed opinions, and develop productive habits and make sound decisions.

In an excellent mini-guide to “The Art of Asking Essential Questions,” Dr. Linda Elder and Dr. Richard Paul of The Foundation for Critical Thinking have divided questions into three categories: (1) questions of procedure, (2) questions of preference, and (3) questions of judgment. For questions of procedure, there is a one-system, or established means of arriving at an answer. These are often matters of definition, e.g., What is 5 + 7? Which has the shorter wavelength, red or blue? The second type of question, questions of preference, have no established or preferred system of adjudication, e.g., What is your favorite animal? Would you rather visit the past or the future? Answers to these second type of questions may be justified, e.g., I like cats best because they purr; I would go to the future because we already have some idea what has happened in the past. I may convince others with my justification, or may start an interesting debate, but they are ultimately questions with no rational, or objectively verifiable means of adjudication. The third type of question Paul and Elder distinguish, questions of judgment, require a method of rational adjudication. They write, “We evaluate answers to these questions using universal intellectual standards such as clarity, accuracy, relevance, etc.” These are often social or political questions, questions involving values, or complex reasoning and assumptions, e.g., Are there basic human rights? Should parents be allowed to determine if their children receive medical treatment in all cases? These questions require agreed upon definitions and premises. To discuss them productively, we need to locate, examine and analyze the facts and their relevance, as well as our values. Such questions require not only that we successfully analyze our assumptions and inferences, but that we also examine our emotions and goals – our perspective and the perspectives of others.

What is useful, I think, to consider as educators is that there are very few real-life questions that are questions of procedure alone; and although these are the easiest to test in a standardized way, it is questions of judgment that pervade our experience. Questions of judgment pervade almost all questions of procedure and questions of preference. Questions of judgment are questions which appropriately involve rational adjudication and the analysis of the framework which lay in the background of our answers. We must ask about assumptions and inferences, about evidence and counter-evidence, and question that we consider true. Even questions of procedure require acceptance of an established system which can be changed or questioned, e.g., the appropriate answer to 11 + 11, is 110, if we are working within a binary system. As well, our questions of preferences involve questions of judgment, and may be more or less examined and more or less useful.

It is interesting to consider that there may be commercial and political interest in convincing us not only that there are questions that are simply matters of procedure or preference, but that most questions are simple questions of procedure, or questions of preference. We are thus more easily convinced, led and misled, not looking toward the difficult process of open inquiry and rational adjudication. It is also easier to consider questions of judgment as matters of preference or matters of procedure. Our questions then have clear (or absolute) answers: clearly right, clearly wrong, or clearly relative. We don’t have to inquire further or remain open to other possibilities. Often we hold to our beliefs and our habits even when our experience would suggest we should question them, and sometimes we don’t even recognize them. Habit informs our individual practice; and our mental processes, like our biological processes are inertial, often to our detriment. Conflict, which often results from the inability to change or to compromise, is in many ways simply easier than trying to distinguish what we know, or what we share in common, from what we do not.

It is often said in introductory Philosophy courses that “philosophy” comes from the Greek words philo- "loving" + sophia "wisdom." To love wisdom is an attitude which requires openness. It is an attitude which befriends inquiry and centers itself, ideally, in uncertainty, i.e., not being certain or closed with respect to what one deems to be true or adequate knowledge. Such openness is the only method with which to acquire truth from knowledge and wisdom from experience. Yet openness and inquiry alone are not enough, philosophical inquiry requires logic and reason – a methodology.

Understood as promoting reasoned inquiry in community, Philosophy for Children aims at providing students the tools with which to develop a good (i.e., coherent and useful), examined framework within which to understand and interpret their experience. Such a personal and subjective framework, as the framework of our ability to know, is unavoidable. Each one of us, in this sense, has a philosophy of a sort, whether or not we consciously pursue its development or examine its coherence. P4C is not aimed at providing individual students the particular scaffolding or its content, but rather the tools with which to build such foundations as solid, and well-grounded. These tools are more essential than any particular foundation of information, since in the course of our experience we often find the foundations we have laid have shifted or that the knowledge we have assumed is not as grounded or as true as we once thought. We find with our changing information and experience that we must sometimes reconstruct.

While our foundational beliefs should be solid (i.e., sound and valid) we cannot expect they will suffice the way we have first built them. For most of what we have built we have not built intentionally but instead has been occasioned by our experience, much of which we have not chosen. Fur-
Moreover, while our thoughts are our own, they are formed only in a community of other knowers and within an extensive network of knowledge. Our knowledge is not and should not be set in stone, but is built upon, and for our changing experience. We revise our past knowledge and thoughts as we learn more. This is the way in which knowledge and wisdom are developed within scientific and philosophical communities of inquiry. Without acquiring the ability to develop appropriate or useful distinctions and sound habits of reasoning, the openness of our inquiry cannot achieve knowledge or wisdom.

**Process and Perspective**

In his 1929 book, *The Aims of Education*, Alfred North Whitehead writes,

> You may not divide the seamless coat of learning. What education has to impart is an intimate sense for the power of ideas, for the beauty of ideas, and for the structure of ideas, together with a particular body of knowledge which has peculiar reference to the life of the being possessing it.  

As individuals, our experience is inescapably filtered by our own thoughts and our own knowledge. As thinking individuals, our own thoughts are the constant center of our experience – a center that is constantly changing, or in constant process of becoming. To know anything requires a knower, i.e., that it be known from a limited or subjective perspective. Any understanding we achieve is thus both limited and made possible by our own particular perspective. In this way, subjectivity is essential to knowledge.

As we act in the world and interact with the world and with others, we are questioning in an unspoken way, and are as well constantly being questioned. Such questioning, examined or unexamined provides the ground for our experience and our perceptions and conceptions of ourselves and others. The degree to which we are able to question productively determines the degree to which we are self-determining individuals. If our thoughts and our actions proceed without directed questioning or intentional deliberation, we function primarily out of habit and previously determined psychological association. In this way, we do not fully participate in our experience.

Søren Kierkegaard (a Danish philosopher writing in the 19th century) called this unexamined perspective “inauthentic.” Recognizing the subjectivity of individuality and the necessity for constant choice, he believed that any and all truth(s) require subjective appropriation. “The truth exists only in the process of becoming, in the process of appropriation.” In his work, Kierkegaard demonstrated his view of the importance of individual decision and freedom with the method of indirect communication, taking different points of view, publishing these under pseudonymous names, creating a conversation or dialogue of reasoned preferences among which the reader must choose. Each one of us as individuals, Kierkegaard says, must “untie the knot for ourselves.”

In Kierkegaard’s view, truth belongs only to a perceiving individual – it is experienced; and all truths, to be realized as true, require subjective appropriation. We must make them our own – or think them in our own voice – before we can realize their truth. We incorporate experience integrating it with past experience and future expectation. Our subjectivity as a process of living is itself the ground of truth. And we are required by our individuality and subjectivity to constantly decide what is true. As Kierkegaard describes it, subjectivity is truth. In this sense, our habits of thinking and the perspective we have developed are not only the basis of our individuality, but also the ultimate source of our freedom and our personal responsibility. As P4C facilitators we might be said to use such an indirect method of communication, a method of asking questions and analyzing assumptions and implications, or offering alternative possibilities.

As individuals, we require something like a scientific method, emphasizing reasoning and analysis, and proceeding within a community of inquirers with multiple perspectives and thus enabling convergence on valid knowledge. However, instead of physical experimentation, we need the ability to do logical analysis and experimentation. The philosophical method emphasizes the “thought experiment” and the analysis of our thinking itself. As Whitehead describes it:

> The philosophic attitude is a resolute attempt to enlarge the understanding of the scope of application of every notion which enters into our current thought. The philosophic attempt takes every word, and every phrase, in the verbal expression of thought, and asks, What does it mean? It refuses to be satisfied by the conventional presupposition that every sensible person knows the answer. As soon as you rest satisfied with primitive ideas, and with primitive propositions, You have ceased to be a philosopher.

In P4C we emphasize that we are, in any given class, a “community of inquirers.” This phrase was originally coined by Charles Sanders Peirce. Basing his conception of truth on the indisputable successes of the scientific method, he emphasized that truth is an ideal limit toward which, given sufficient time and resources, divergent communities of inquiry would converge. As individuals, our knowing is distinctly personal and necessarily subjectively appropriated. As thinkers, we are choosers. We cannot avoid the freedom and responsibility of our own individuality. We are each of us, the ultimate arbiter and, for our own decisions and our own thoughts and experience, each one of us is ultimately responsible. But we are “only human,” each one of us, infinitely fallible. In community inquiry, we achieve a more finite, or more limited fallibility. We have knowledge only in and through conversation and community.

Many of our disagreements, as Peirce and many other
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must be capable of, and open to, recognizing the cracks in our foundations (the discrepancies in our thought-structures and those of others) and to assess them carefully and in a reasoned and productive, or objectively justifiable, way.

Strangely enough, in addition to community, it is the fallibility of our cognition, and its perspectival limitation, which enable knowledge. Knowing is itself a process, one which takes a span of time, a certain length of awareness or distance, or perspective. It takes both time, and other assumptions or definitions, to determine—for example—the sum of 5 + 7. All knowledge is connected with other knowledge. It is likewise with error. We realize that the snake was only a stick if we look again, if we look closer, and if we are able to revise our former perception, realigning it with our new perception. We need alternate perspectives in order to recognize the error. Another perspective may be a gestalt shift, e.g., and we can choose to see either a vase or two faces by altering our perception of which is in the foreground.

Our perception, and thus our knowledge, is only evaluative and qualitative. It is relative. Truth stands apart only against error and vice versa. We see by such distinctions and discriminations, only because we have a located (defined and limited) perspective, and only because this perspective is alterable, and fallible. Without the ability to change our perspective, to build and revise our knowledge, and thus to take more than one perspective (e.g., two eyes instead of one) we cannot adequately recognize depth or distinction.

One perspective on Philosophy for Children is that it is
an effort toward exercising and maximizing this ability, which is essentially a flexibility. By enabling the rational perception and recognition (and re-cognition) of alternate viewpoints we enable the individual, as a center of decision, to gain perspective, enabling a better perception of where he or she stands and why.

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
- T.S Eliot, *Four Quartets*

**P4C and Pluralism**

In an age of conflicting information and overwhelmingly-promoted differing opinions, this ability, or flexibility, to recognize position and perspective in oneself and others, becomes increasingly necessary. In such a pressing environment, adequate learning is not simply a matter of information acquisition and retrieval, but requires an advanced ability to evaluate information, its sources and objectives, and to analyze and distinguish among competing systems and conflicting views. It requires an attitude which invites continued inquiry and is comfortable with fallibility and un-certainty. In our modern era of mass information and the expectation of low-attention, it is easy to become overwhelmed by the amount of information (often superficial) and endless personal options available – and further overwhelmed by their forceful emotive promotion. How should we prepare children to survive successfully – for their own well-being and happiness – in such confusing circumstance?

In a commencement speech at Mount Ida College, the Harvard University Professor Rev. Peter Gomes said, “It is a good life and not a good living that the wise aspire to.” He recognized two facets of such a life as (1) embracing our failures, as they have a far greater impact upon us as individuals and from which we learn much more than our successes; and, (2) attempting the impossible by freely imagining possibilities, since we do not truly know the limits of what is possible. These qualities, he said, would be the start toward a good life.

Understanding our experience in a way productive to the quality of our own life requires not only integrating experience and gathering relevant information, but also examining and re-examining our knowledge and ourselves in a way that admits of non-closure. This requires not only the integrity of reason but the creativity of imagination – the freedom of open-questions and alternative frameworks.

Recognizing and synthesizing knowledge and experience effectively enables adaptation to ever novel circumstance and productive integration of further information and experience. As individuals, we have different experiences and are exposed to different information; it is inevitable that we understand things somewhat differently. We are seemingly left in a difficult position between authoritarianism (i.e., a single truth to be accepted on the basis of the power of position or of the prevailing or local norm) and relativism (i.e., recognition of the validity of different truths with no way to adjudicate between them). An alternative to these two extremes is a third position, one which is a fact of the world and, some would say, a value we should uphold – pluralism. As with questions of judgment, pluralistic answers require examination, adjudication, thoughtfulness, and clear expression. To defend the fact of pluralism as a value and perspective to be protected, against the tendencies of authoritarianism or relativism, requires something special. In P4C we hope to foster a method of reasoned inquiry and analysis, as well as encourage a productive and useful imagination.

As in a scientific inquiry, in philosophical inquiry, a community of concerned inquirers will converge on similar questions and similar answers, and given adequate analysis and definition, time and resources, there will be a convergence of ideas and alternatives. Peirce’s consensus or convergence theory of truth (as an ideal limit of methodological inquiry) and Kierkegaard’s conception of truth as subjectivity (or that which is subjectively appropriated in absolute inwardness) would seem each to require trust, in reason and thus in the individual. Both philosophers recognized this, but claimed this trust was itself a condition of the possibility of realizing any truth, i.e., that we do and must trust reason, ourselves and others is a factual condition. Peirce writes with regard to those who might lack this trust in truth or reason,

These minds do not seem to believe that disputation is ever to cease; they seem to think that the opinion which is natural for one man is not so for another, and that belief will, consequently, never be settled. In contenting themselves with fixing their own opinions by a method which would lead another man to a different result, they betray their feeble hold of the conception of what truth is.

Truth is an unavoidable phenomenon. It is not created but disclosed, revealed in inquiry. Truth is, in a sense, what we share. Peirce makes the point, that by contenting ourselves with fixing and holding our own beliefs we show that we have no desire for truth and no recognition that it is, after all, a publicly recognizable matter. We seem to have very little trust or expectation today that we might agree on what is true. We seem to have lost our trust in our own reasoning ability and that of others. Since it is unavoidable that we rely on the testimony of others, we are in a position in which we must trust human subjectivity and reason, and we must trust the integrity of others.

If we are teachers of others, as well as self-recognized lifelong learners, we cannot be confined by the method of tenacity or that of authority to determine truth. As Kierke-
gaard recognized we must always and at every moment choose for ourselves. Since even avoiding choosing is making a choice, our radical subjectivity with its radical responsibility is unavoidable, and the methods of tenaciously holding beliefs or holding them on the basis of authority are fundamentally opposed to genuine inquiry and education. It is the thoroughness and objectivity of the inquiry, requiring that we trust in human reason and subjectivity, which is prerequisite to coming to any adequate understanding.

As P4C facilitators, we ask for reasons and encourage the students to envision conceptual relations. Such questions have only to be hypothetical, “If..., then...” As facilitators, we do not have to provide answers. We do not have to be critical or judge the thoughts of the students as good or bad, correct or incorrect. It is only essential that we ask the rational questions, the questions that follow naturally in a dialogue of focused and directed inquiry, e.g., If that is true, what else might follow? If we want to answer this question, what other questions might we ask? It is our continuing questions and not our “certain” answers which are most critical to the development of our thinking and our knowing, and that of our students.

Rational examination and adjudication requires great effort and great uncertainty (or non-certainty). As philosophers, or friends of truth, we must readily recognize that this is not the most comfortable position. If we are aware of our own thinking with its infinite fallibility and our own perspective with its radical limitation, we realize the unavoidability of this position. It can only be ameliorated and adapted to by the spirit of open inquiry and reasoned analysis. Being open to changing our beliefs requires great personal integrity and security. But many proponents of P4C believe this is precisely what we want to give our students and our children. As Whitehead, among others, has noted, our intellects have evolved in order to enable us to gather more food and to successfully reproduce ourselves and our ideas, but the modern world of global communication and democratization seems to require more.

Without a means of adjudication, pluralism easily becomes relativism. Without the openness of genuine concern and genuine inquiry we take questions of judgment as simple questions of preference or procedure. Without befriending wisdom or loving truth we appeal to the relativity of the issues involved, or to an authority. As ultimate justifications these appeals do at least as much harm as good. Pluralism, like relativism, admits the validity of different perspectives; but unlike relativism, a pluralistic standpoint recognizes that these perspectives may be more or less adequate than one another, more or less limited, and more or less valid in any given circumstance. Maintaining a productive pluralism requires reasoned adjudication, as well as continuing openness and revision.

Philosophy begins in wonder. And, at the end, when philosophic thought has done its best, the wonder remains. There have been added, however, some grasp of the immensity of things, some purification of emotion by understanding.¹⁰

In Conclusion: Why P4C?

I have proposed that “doing philosophy” or pursuing philosophical inquiry with children allows for the recognition of three Ps – process, perspective, and pluralism – as important aspects of educating in the modern environment; and that this can contribute significantly to the students’ individual development. Very briefly stated, this is because:

(1) The education of the individual is a lifelong process and, since individuals and their thinking are constantly in process, they require the tools of learning – inquiry and analysis – more than just the acquisition of information.

(2) The individual knows from a subjective perspective requiring constant decision and re-integration in order to maintain subjective integrity; and in this process the recognition and analysis of alternate perspectives is essential.

(3) A pluralistic environment is both unavoidable and desirable since knowledge is arrived at by the individual within a community of other thinkers and within a network of knowledge.

In this view, some of the important goals of P4C are: to enable and encourage the individual’s ability to examine, synthesize and relate information, experience, and ideas; to allow for the free play of a productive imagination and space for continued learning; and to develop good habits of inquiry and practice in the methods of logical analysis and reasoned adjudication.

Notes

1. Perhaps this is due to an overemphasis on the “basic skills” (of procedure) and a real deficit in the standardized tests for K-12. For example, the LSAT (Law School Aptitude Test) tests such analytic ability. As well, books of “logic puzzles” or “logic games” are written for children and could be adapted for such purposes.


8. A parallel can be drawn between ‘authoritarianism’ and ‘questions of procedure’ and ‘relativism’ and ‘questions of preference’; ‘pluralism’ can be related to ‘questions of judgment.’


Rethinking Dialogue: Reflections on P4C with Autistic Children

BENJAMIN LUKEY

Introduction

One of the interesting directions that P4C has taken in Hawaii is work with autistic children. A fellow graduate student and P4C Hawaii alumnus introduced me to Loveland Academy, a local private school that specializes in educating children with special needs, specifically autism. I have been working with the children in their after-school program for almost two years, attempting to bring P4C to children who are not in the mainstream curriculum.

One of the most rewarding aspects of this work is its richness. Like P4C in general, someone who engages in the challenge of creating communities of responsible thinkers works from two perspectives. One perspective is the academic challenge presented by the work we do. The other perspective is the pedagogical challenge of creating activities and programs that are effective in achieving our goals. In working with children with autism and other special needs, these two perspectives have at times seemed discordant. This paper is an attempt to explore the source of this seeming tension, and to highlight the fact that Philosophy for Children is philosophy in the fullest sense, i.e., a theory/methodology intertwined with practice.

Although I think the academic and pedagogical issues of this paper are of interest to all who study and do P4C, the inspiration behind this paper is largely personal. In working with the children at Loveland, I came to question the efficacy of my approach, which in turn was the result of my philosophical convictions. As an academic, I began to study accounts of autism and attempted to understand the disorder. I also examined some of the literature on what I felt was the most exciting, and most problematic, aspect of P4C, dialogue. This research was manifested in the classroom time with the students, which in turn colored my research, which continued in a circle. I do not presume to be an expert on P4C, autism, or pedagogy. This paper will merely whet the appetites of those interested in the scholarship surrounding autism or dialogue, nor will it be completely satisfying for those who seek complete lesson plans and the complete details of my work at Loveland. My primary concern is to find a way to make learning more satisfying and enriching for “special needs” children by introducing them to P4C. Thus, this article serves two functions. First, it brings to the fore a potential limitation in the P4C methodology, an academic problem regarding the scope and meaning of dialogue. Second, it serves as an invitation for others doing similar work to engage in dialogue about how to bring together the wonder, thinking and community of P4C with the education and enrichment of special needs students.

Autism 101

For those not familiar with children with autism or autistic behaviors, it is extremely difficult to describe. Two books, Exiting Nirvana, by Clara Park, and Thinking in Pictures, by Temple Grandin, have been most helpful in my own understanding of autism. There are of course, many texts replete with technical, psychological theorizing, but both of these books succeed in putting a human face on experiences with autism. As an educator, this is extremely important since it is individuals with whom I work, not diagnoses. Diagnoses, however are a helpful starting point, and so I borrow from Grandin:

Today, autism is regarded as an early childhood disorder by definition, and it is three times more common in boys than in girls. For the diagnosis to be made, autistic symptoms must appear before the age of three. The most common symptoms in young children are no speech or abnormal speech, lack of eye contact, frequent temper tantrums, oversensitivity to touch, the appearance of deafness, a preference for being alone, rocking or other rhythmic stereotypic behavior, aloofness, and a lack of social contact with parents and siblings. Another sign is inappropriate play with toys. The child may spend long periods of time spinning the wheel of a toy car instead of driving it around on the floor.1

The above description reveals the extreme range of behaviors and symptoms, many of which may be exhibited by...

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children without autism, that make diagnosis of the disorder challenging. There are many related categories that some consider subgroups of autism and others consider separate disorders. Grandin calls this spectrum “The Great Continuum.” “It appears that at one end of the spectrum, autism is primarily a cognitive disorder, and at the other end, it is primarily a sensory processing disorder. [...] Both the severity and the ratio of these two components are variable, and each case of autism is different.”

Almost every child at Loveland is at a different point within this spectrum. Some are only dealing with cognitive (in which I include social) challenges, and others struggle with sensory challenges, but each of these individuals has required a different strategy in achieving effective communication.

I relate these few observations about autism to call attention to two important points regarding my P4C work with the above-mentioned local school. First, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible to make generalizations about autistic children. This is true of all children, but it becomes painfully obvious within a small group of “special needs” children where it is very rare for more than two individuals to positively respond to an activity. Second, given this extreme uniqueness, group discussion, or even communication, becomes exponentially more difficult. Yet one-on-one interaction, the strategy that is most fruitful for these children in the academic setting, seems to deflate the goals of P4C, which are centered around group dialogue and respectful communication.

After my first six months of working with the students on a one-to-one basis, I realized that I was not doing P4C or anything that would count as a stepping stone towards P4C. I realized that we were not having anything close to a dialogue, or even a discussion, because I was merely pulling thoughts and ideas from the children. It seemed that they really didn’t understand the purpose of dialogue or even the structure of it (more accurately, they weren’t behaving as if they understood). I went back to square one and tried to structure activities that would slowly build an understanding of group discussion and perhaps even dialogue. I will return to these attempts later. I wanted to mention the practical challenges I discovered, because it was these challenges that made me step back and examine the work I was doing. I began to wonder if it was even possible to achieve at Loveland the same kind of experience (what I defined as a successful P4C session) that was familiar in my work at other “regular” schools in Honolulu.

**P4C and Dialogue**

The goal of P4C in Hawaii, as I assume most readers already know, is to develop communities of inquiry, where individuals learn to be responsible thinkers. One of the strengths of our program here in Hawaii is our weekly meetings where we (Dr. Jackson and as many P4C practitioner as can make it) discuss issues ranging from the general (e.g., What is safety?) to the specific, (What are we going to do in Ms. Smith’s class on Monday?). These meetings weave together the two perspectives of P4C. We tackle theoretical problems and these discussions are manifested in our classroom actions. We also create lesson plans and think about pedagogical “tips” that, after they have been implemented, become fodder for our theoretical discussion. Thus we maintain a healthy balance of theory and practice.

Our weekly teacher meetings, as instantiations of P4C itself, almost always involve sharing experiences from the classroom. During these sharings, the excitement is palpable as someone relates a session where a child shared a thought or question and the community immediately coalesced around this idea, adding, wondering, and digging deeper. The community dialogue both enriches and is enriched by the participation of the members of the community. Every time a vocal student steps aside and passes the ball to someone who hasn’t had a chance to speak yet, we slap high-fives. Every time a child identifies an assumption within a response, we inwardly cheer. These are things that we recognize as good for the children’s education and good for the community. And, unfortunately, these are things that are frustratingly rare in my work at Loveland Academy. Thinking together about an idea, displaying sensitivity and interest towards others in the community, and thinking critically about one’s own thoughts are all elements in an enriched notion of “dialogue” or “inquiry” that we share in P4C. Thus, I questioned whether this notion of dialogue could ever be realized within the specialized communities of the Loveland students.

Before I talk more about these specialized communities, I feel that the notion of dialogue I am working with deserves more explanation. When there is genuine dialogue in a P4C classroom, it is more than just talking. David Bohm, a pioneer in the philosophy and practice of dialogue serves as a logical starting point for examining what we mean by dialogue in P4C. His work offers a scholarly context for the successes that we celebrate in our weekly P4C meeting, while at the same time revealing challenges of dialogue with a group of students such as I have at Loveland Academy.

In Bohm’s work, *On Dialogue*, he emphasizes several aspects of dialogue that we can recognize in P4C. First, dialogue is a collective endeavor. It is a “stream of meaning” in which our culture (i.e., collectively shared meaning) is revealed. It requires that we play with each other, not against each other; “everybody wins.” Bohm recognizes the importance of sitting in a circle and the necessity of trust and safety if the dialogue is to “scratch beneath the surface.” He also recognizes that the community in the circle must be an “empty space where we are not obliged to do anything.” This acknowledgment that freedom from a fixed purpose or agenda can be transformative for introspective, interpersonal, and cultural relationships is akin to Dr. Jackson’s reminder, “We’re not in a rush to get anywhere, but that doesn’t mean we aren’t going somewhere.” Though
Bohm does not use the term, it certainly seems that he is very much concerned about community. I like to think that he would celebrate with us when a normally quiet student is given a chance to participate and seizes that opportunity.

Community deepens the thinking of its participants. By exploring our own thoughts juxtaposed against those in the circle we become more aware of our own thoughts. As Bohm describes it, “the whole group becomes a mirror for each person.” This reflection reveals one’s assumptions, another aspect of dialogue that Bohm greatly values. Bohm argues that everyone has assumptions or closely held beliefs that are felt to be “absolutely necessary,” meaning that an individual cannot turn that assumption or opinion aside; it is a part of that individual. When individuals have differing assumptions that are “absolutely necessary” there is conflict. But Bohm argues that if one becomes aware of these “necessary” assumptions and recognizes that others also have “necessary” assumptions (which may be different), then one will realize that conflict will not end unless one questions the “necessity” of these assumptions and suspends them to a certain extent. Thus, people are able to share meaning rather than butt heads. We think together and meaning flows, rather than fighting to prove that we are right. Again, I think Bohm would recognize the importance of our efforts to get children to identify assumptions and learn from themselves and others; and he would share our enthusiasm when these efforts bear fruit.

Another aspect (and the final one that I will address) that Bohm emphasizes is the importance of sensitivity and empathy for dialogue. Again, this is something that receives a fair amount of practical and academic attention in our weekly P4C meetings. For Bohm, the attitude of dialogue – what happens when one enriches one’s relationships in society and is able participate in and hold all of these coherent meanings in one’s own mind – can permeate any encounter, and thus dialogue can occur in small groups or one-on-one. This idea is especially enticing considering that working in large groups at Loveland is so challenging. However, in order to develop all these relationships through dialogue, Bohm argues that sensitivity is necessary. Relationships, though a fundamental part of who we are, are not easy and require a kind of cultivated perception (sensitivity) in order to develop these relationships and the meaning that flows from them. Indeed, it is the seeming lack of this kind of cultivated sensitivity that makes P4C so challenging with autistic children. As Bohm points out, sensitivity in relationships requires the senses. Yet this is not all, “The senses will tell you what is happening, and then the consciousness must build a form, or create some sense of what it means, which holds it together.” We excitedly notice the development of such sensitivity in our P4C classrooms; it is yet another source of “warm fuzzies” during our weekly meetings.

Before I move into discussing dialogue and autism, I think it is interesting to consider a perspective on dialogue that is not from the field of education. Dialogue is a concept that has not only benefited education, but also business and government. Daniel Yankelovich is an expert on dialogue and an adviser to corporations, government, and organizations. He acknowledges David Bohm as one of his influences, and, indeed, his book, *The Magic of Dialogue*, shares many features with Bohm’s general philosophy of dialogue. One of the more valuable contributions of his book is his distinction between discussion and dialogue. Yankelovich proposes three key features that are necessary for dialogue (and which distinguish it from discussion): (1) equality and the absence of coercive influences, (2) listening with empathy, and (3) bringing assumptions into the open. One can see the obvious similarities with Bohm, but Yankelovich has turned Bohm’s insights into necessary conditions for the practice of dialogue. Furthermore, Yankelovich has focused Bohm’s notion of sensitivity into the concept of empathy. Yankelovich describes “the gift of empathy” as “the ability to think someone else’s thoughts and feel someone else’s feelings,” and claims that it “is indispensable to dialogue” (43). Even given the earlier brief description of the behaviors associated with autism, one can already see the difficulty in attempting dialogue with autistic children. I turn now to examine those challenges more closely.

**Autism and Dialogue**

As noted above, autism can be viewed as a cognitive disorder and a sensory processing disorder. As a sensory processing disorder, the kind of sensitivity that Bohm says is necessary for dialogue to flourish may be physiologically impossible for some students. Indeed, it is often the lack of this kind of sensitivity that prompts the diagnosis of autism. Clara Park theorizes that the sensory disorder of autism can be seen as an inability to direct attention to multiple things at once and rapidly shift one’s attention among the various sensory stimuli. Temple Grandin admits that a pager can completely distract her from a lecture. Hearing tests have confirmed that her ability to process and attend to one voice against the background of another is severely impaired.

Grandin reports stories about individuals who cannot process visual and auditory stimuli at the same time, or who get the stimuli mixed up so that sound comes through as color, or who hit themselves not realizing that they are injuring themselves. The ability to sense body language and the subtle meaning suggested by minute facial changes is something that Grandin herself has difficulty with. Given that there are such challenges in sensory processing, the kind of behavior that we consider successes in a regular P4C classroom may be close to impossible with some individuals. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine that a P4C community or empathy would be possible among students who can’t be sure that they are perceiving in the same way as their fellow participants.

Added to the sensory challenges are the cognitive challenges of communicating with others, collective reasoning, and identifying assumptions. It is theorized that one of the defining features of autistic children (particularly those with
Kanner’s syndrome, a categorization of lower-functioning autism) is that they lack a theory of mind. In the field of developmental psychology, a theory of mind is “a set of ideas about mental activities.” Many autistic children are unable to imagine what other people are thinking and often fail to recognize others as thinking and feeling persons. The inability to recognize other minds means that the group would not be able to serve as a mirror for the individual. Likewise, if one isn’t aware of others in the group as thinking beings, then it is extremely unlikely that one will think together with them.

As for Yankelovich’s three necessary conditions for dialogue, it is difficult to imagine three criteria that would be more difficult to satisfy in working with autistic children. Merely requiring some autistic children to talk is often coercive, and often rewards must be established to motivate a child to interact with his peers and teachers. This may be because the meanings of words are too abstract to grasp for some autistic children. Although Grandin is highly articulate, her verbal ability is something that does not come naturally to her (it wasn’t until Grandin was in college that she realized that some people think entirely in words). She says that she thinks in pictures; something like a videotape of images in her head that she can edit at will. She translates these images into words and words into images. The Lord’s Prayer was incomprehensible to her until she broke it into specific visual images. Images have meaning for Grandin, and spoken words must be translated into images to acquire meaning. This may also be why many children at Loveland have already learned to read even though they still have difficulty using and understanding words. Printed words are more readily memorized and translated into meaningful images. Spoken dialogue may be an ineffective and unnecessarily coercive activity to get these children to communicate their thoughts.

Empathy may also be a criterion that is unreasonable to expect from some autistic students. Some autistics are in a constant state of agitation, somewhat akin to the fight or flight response, which precludes the feelings of warmth and togetherness associated with empathy. Grandin herself couldn’t understand or feel empathy until she built a pressure machine that helped her control her sensory overstimulation. Gradin’s “squeeze machine” gave her soothing feelings which she realized she needed to cultivate with others. The machine sufficiently calmed her so that she could feel affection and togetherness with others (though she still admits that she is denied the pleasure that people take in natural beauty, such as a landscape). Yet, Grandin herself notes that this treatment is not something that will work with all autistics. There are also cognitive barriers to empathy. If an autistic student lacks a theory of mind and is unable to recognize that a fellow student has feelings and thoughts of her own, then the autistic student is unlikely to feel any empathy towards the other student.

Given that prompting a student to speak may be coercive, and that empathy may be unattainable, bringing assumptions into the open is an achievement that rarely happens on the level which we would recognize in regular P4C classrooms. Still, I think that this criteria of Yankelovich’s might be satisfied if we alter our understanding of “assumptions.” For a student to realize that another perceives things differently is a great accomplishment, and yet this realization might comes from a directed activity that the student is initially uninterested in. Likewise, for a student to use the correct pronouns to correctly describe that what he did that morning was different from what another did is an event that causes high-fives among the facilitators.

Thinking that she is the only person thinking or feeling, and that everyone experiences the world as she does are the assumptions being recognized and overcome in such behavior (though I wonder whether the individual actually thinks these thoughts). They may not be beliefs, but they are “necessities” that must be put aside if communication is to be possible.

Ultimately, I think Grandin’s work confirms many of the insights offered by Bohm and Yankelovich, but I also think that her perspective forces us to recognize some presuppositions of dialogue. Because Grandin adds her voice to the discussion about education, learning and autism, we are made aware of our own assumptions, and she of hers. Grandin’s book is especially fascinating because she herself is extremely articulate (she has Asperger’s Syndrome, a high-functioning form of autism). We come to see that thought is not merely internal language and that the very way our senses process the world is an “assumption” which some individuals do not share. There is much within Grandin’s book that serves as a mirror for identifying our own assumptions about how we engage the world. There is also much that Grandin herself gains from reading and questioning others. She has come to better understand her own differences and is therefore such an effective communicator, because she can articulate how her experiences differ from others.

Even though Grandin’s writings and lectures may reveal assumptions on all sides and help deepen our engagement in meaning, it doesn’t seem as if such interaction is properly labeled “dialogue,” as Bohm or Yankelovich defines it. First of all, communication through writing is not sitting around a circle. When someone writes a book or presents a lecture, there is a purpose. It is neither as free and open as a group sitting in a circle, nor is everyone on equal footing since there is a presenter and an audience. Furthermore, as
one comes to know others in the group, one grows more sensitive to their non-verbal communication. This may be unfeasible for some autistic children, which might affect the level of communication occurring within the circle. Yet, I think that these differences and challenges are not critical for dialogue. I think that Grandin is an excellent example of someone who has adopted what Bohm calls “the attitude of dialogue.” What I suspect, and what I want to confirm, is that this attitude may be fostered without creating a circle of thirty students spontaneously sharing their thoughts and feelings. In attempting to foster this attitude, I think Grandin’s narrative and the general scholarship on autism suggest something that all practitioners of P4C should keep in mind.

The first is that P4C can and should be sensitive and accommodating to other modes of thought. Grandin’s account belies the assumption that words and speech are necessary for thought, and so we must be careful, or at least explicit, about what we are trying to cultivate in children. By focusing on words and abstraction, we may be neglecting some forms of imagination or meaning that children more readily understand and share. We must be cautious about generalizing Grandin’s kind of visual thinking to all people with autism, but it does at least establish that there are different modes of thought which P4C, as I imagine most people practice it, may have difficulty accommodating. For someone who has not yet learned how to translate from a visual form of thought into a verbal form of thought, the practice of dialogue must shift in order to achieve its goals—shared meaning and the bringing of assumptions into the open.

Part of this accommodation should be a willingness to teach in both directions. We are certainly attempting to bring autistic children into the world of speech, relationships and empathy. I would be overjoyed if the students at Loveland mastered the translation skills that Grandin has acquired so that they could articulate their difficulties with and assumptions about abstraction, empathy, spirituality and other aspects of life with which many of us identify. But we must also be willing to try and enter their world to the extent that this is possible. This may mean using more pictoral cues and doing more visual activities so that we share meaning in pictures rather than in words. The exchange must be bi-directional. Language has helped Grandin and several of my students to understand themselves and others better. It is because they have access to our language-based way of thinking that they can participate in discussions and dialogues with peers. This may be a necessity; yet, it seems unfair to only acknowledge someone as a participant in a dialogue if she “speaks our language.” Furthermore, if we undertake to become more familiar with their mode of thought, we might hold even more meanings in our mind (Bohm’s characterization of the attitude of dialogue). I admit that I am genuinely curious, and often skeptical, as to how much I can really understand the perspective of an autistic student, but I am reluctant to forego the attempt.

**What To Do?**

It is with intentional irony that I extend an invitation for dialogue about the bias and limitation of dialogue as it applies to autistic children, and, more generally, different kinds of thinkers. I will admit upfront that I am extremely challenged as to how to conduct P4C in a way that is open to other modes of communication. My academic ruminations present me with a practical dilemma: Is P4C fundamentally an activity and way of learning and developing for those who are able to verbally communicate and process thoughts and who can empathize with others to form a “community?” If it is, then my efforts at Loveland are futile, and those children are fated to “miss the P4C bus,” something that makes me uncomfortable as a P4C facilitator and educator. If not, then how do we expand our activity, our communities of inquiry to include those who don’t communicate in a way we typically understand? I am ultimately hoping that others will help me formulate an answer to this question. I put forth my own thoughts and attempts in order to contribute to the dialogue.

As I mentioned above, after my first six months of working at Loveland Academy, I realized that there was no community of inquiry, and it was not in the process of being formed. My overall goal was to get the students communicating with each other, or at least to acknowledge that other students were sources of unknown information. Digging beneath the surface, revealing assumptions, and shared meaning were eventual goals but seemed far off on the horizon. Listening was the first important element. Sitting at a table, I tried to structure activities so that only one person would speak at a time and the children would know what they were supposed to be listening for.

Once I felt that the children had a handle on listening I introduced the concept of questioning and answering, since many did not seem to understand the practice of asking and answering questions. They would ask questions in order to get something they wanted (e.g., Can I watch a video?) but they rarely asked questions out of curiosity. Furthermore, when they answered questions, they often seemed unconcerned as to whether their answers were understood. In regular P4C sessions, children are often eager to ask questions of an individual if she has related an interesting event or fact, and children are concerned if others ignore or misunderstand their answers. Asking and answering questions is an important element of P4C because it makes the inquiry the project of the community.

Working under the assumption that if the children were provided with a structured activity to practice asking and answering questions then they would be more likely to ask and answer questions in a more conversational setting, I created cards with six questions words (who, what, where, why, when, and how), six pronouns (I, you, he, she, it, they), some common verbs, and some auxiliary preposi-
There were also cards to indicate who was asking a question and who was answering. It was difficult for several of the students to create questions, so I allowed them to repeat the question that they had heard from the person next to them. The pronoun cards indicated the pattern of response (e.g., if some one asks “What did you eat for lunch today?” the answer has to be “I ate/had …”). The proper use of pronouns was challenging for many of the students. It became even more challenging and more interesting when I had the students use certain pronouns for their questions. Students struggled to ask the person next to them questions about themselves or others in the circle (e.g., “What time does Joe go home from school?” “What is my favorite food?”). I often found that students answered from a first person perspective. Likewise, students often didn’t wait for an answer and supplied it themselves (E.g., “Where do I live?... in Hawaii”). It was difficult for the question asker because she either had to ask a question to which they didn’t know the answer, or think of a question that that the other person would be able to answer. Likewise it was difficult for the answerer because she had to answer a question in second or third person, and this required knowing information about others. However, after much practice students were able to recognize and explain that others had different answers to the same questions. We still have a long way to go to achieve a true discussion, but I think that having a repetitive, consistent activity provides a structure for developing the awareness and curiosity about others that we take for granted in other P4C classrooms.

I have also tried to move away from verbally centered forms of communication by encouraging curiosity and communication through media other than words. On a blackboard, we play a game of Pictionary where once a student guesses what is being drawn she/he tries to draw something that is conceptually related. By the end of the activity, there is a collage of drawings on the blackboard and we try to retrace the steps of how the different pictures came about. Then, usually with the more verbal and higher-functioning students, we try to create a story that incorporates each drawing. I have also integrated the question/answer activity into more physical games, such as darts (plastic tips of course), bowling, boardgames, and others, so that the focus of the activity is the game rather than the stressful process of asking and answering questions.

While many of these activities have been successful with some students, I do not think there was one that was successful with all the students. And what remains most frustrating is that these activities seem most successful with people at a certain level; i.e., those children who are just beginning to use words effectively to communicate and grasp the existence of other minds. It focuses “lower” functioning children who have no interest in communicating with others so that they respond more readily to questions and can ask questions appropriately. However, it hasn’t yet made them ready for what we would recognize as P4C discussion, much less dialogue. There is no expressed sense of wonder about themselves or others (and perhaps someone can’t wonder about herself if she isn’t really aware of others); when someone expresses a thought or idea, there is almost never an impulse from someone else in the circle to raise his hand and contribute something else. This may be impossible for the “lower-functioning” students, and the activities may be too simplistic for the “higher-functioning” students. Indeed, the higher functioning students seem capable of a P4C discussion as it occurs in other “mainstream” schools but either share very little experience or interests with children their own age, or they have difficulty feeling comfortable with their peers.

It may be that the very strengths of Loveland Academy function as constraints for doing P4C. Small classes and one-on-one assistance for almost every student means that children are not used to working in groups and when groups greater than three or four students are formed, the difference in abilities and behaviors makes almost any activity frustrating for the participants. Or rather, perhaps P4C needs to create ways to accommodate very small groups of children who require educational aids to provide prompts and mediate differences. The successes achieved in such a context may be different from those in a regular P4C classroom, but they should still be P4C successes. There is a certain child who is very content in his own little world and who often seems deep in thought, wondering about things to himself in slight murmurs. I may never understand how he perceives the world or what he thinks about, but whenever he gives one of his highly original answers or solutions, I consider it a P4C success. With such successes in mind, I appeal to both academics and educators in exploring the philosophical and psychological issue of dialogue with people with autism and the pedagogical issue of how to approach such a challenge.

### Notes
2. Ibid. 58.
4. Ibid. 20.
5. Bohm, 40.

### Bibliographic References
Scratching Beneath the Phenomena: P4C as the Practice of Comparative Philosophy

JAMES McRAE

In their essay, “Saving the Phenomena,” Ji-yuan Yu and Nicholas Bunnin argue for an Aristotelian method of comparative philosophy in which seemingly incommensurable systems of thought can engage in a constructive dialogue with one another. The practice of Philosophy for Children provides an opportunity to both teach and actively pursue a critical, philosophical inquiry in a dynamic dialectic with other people. In this paper, I argue that Philosophy for Children is a method of engaged comparative philosophy according to the Aristotelian comparative method of Saving the Phenomenon outlined by Yu and Bunnin. This essay is divided into two sections. In the first, I offer a summary of Yu and Bunnin’s notion of Saving the Phenomena, along with a critique of the possible limitations of this method of comparative philosophy. In the second section, I describe Philosophy for Children as it is practiced by Thomas Jackson at the University of Hawaii and offer an explanation of how this practice can be understood as the dynamic application of Saving the Phenomena. By offering an arena in which both children and adults can engage in a creative, philosophical dialectic, philosophy for children can be understood as the active practice of the Aristotelian method of comparative philosophy.

Saving the Phenomena

Yu and Bunnin argue that the discipline of comparative philosophy can be understood according to the Aristotelian method of Saving the Phenomena. Aristotle’s method is an outgrowth of the Socratic dialectic, but, unlike Socrates, Aristotle is not satisfied to let his dialectic end in aporia (no solution). For Aristotle, bringing such aporiai to light is only the first step; the philosopher must strive to reconcile the differences in the apparently conflicting views that lead to aporiai. This is done through a three step process in which one first establishes the phenomena in question, then analyzes the conflicts between them, and finally seeks to reconcile the truth contained in each into a coherent and systematic whole.

The word “phenomena” comes from the Greek phainomena and refers to the commonly held beliefs of individuals in a particular context. Within the genus of phainomena is the differentia of eudoxa, which “includes views which are not commonly accepted but are held by a small number of wise people or even by a single wise person.” Saving the Phenomena thus has two spheres of inquiry: it can examine either commonly held beliefs or those views endorsed predominantly by the wise. For Aristotle, comparative philosophy begins by bringing together views from two (or more) philosophical traditions to see if there is a common ground of “similar theoretical or practical concerns.” It is important to note, however, that this is not mere eclecticism; the goal of Saving the Phenomena is to reconcile the truth contained in different traditions, not to simply make empty, superficial comparisons. Comparative philosophy as a discipline is often criticized for lacking a philosophical purpose. Aristotle circumvents this objection by providing a practical value for comparative studies. By analyzing and comparing various philosophical traditions, we can discover the relative strengths and weaknesses in these traditions and seek to ameliorate our own philosophical views.

“Establishing Comparable Phenomena”

The first step in Saving the Phenomena is to determine whether a comparison is possible between two points of view or philosophical systems. Although two phenomena might seem quite similar, it is necessary to determine
whether they indeed address “the same sort of theoretical and practical issues.” One must not presuppose that a comparison exists because of superficial similarities of scope or terminology. Furthermore, one must not impose the philosophical system of one tradition upon the other tradition being compared. One should not try to fit Confucian ethics into an Aristotelian box by striving to find the Confucian equivalents of the golden mean or the virtues of prudence, wisdom, courage, and justice. Though both thinkers might endorse systems of virtue ethics, these systems are unique and must be treated as such. Any similarities between the two lie at a deeper level, and it would thus be irresponsible to try to interpret one system according to the tenets of another.

**“Articulating Differences”**

After one has established that two systems contain similar comparable phenomena, one must seek to articulate the differences between these phenomena. It is at this stage that one must systematically elucidate the aporiai, the “difficulties and contradictions that are presented to us by the phenomena.” By clearly stating the tensions between the traditions, one can seek either to resolve these tensions or to explain why it is important that they cannot be resolved. Often, the differences between two traditions are more interesting and more consequential than the similarities. There are three reasons for this. First, by articulating the differences in two traditions, we avoid the construction of straw-man fallacies or stereotypes. We strive to understand each tradition on its own philosophical terms and within its own socio-historical context, rather than interpret all traditions according to our own philosophical schemes. Second, by articulating the differences among traditions we are provided with multiple perspectives on a single philosophical issue. Third, this articulation of differences prompts us to scrutinize our own views on the issue and question our implicit assumptions that might otherwise have gone unexamined. Such a questioning goes both ways; each philosophical system brings to light the “elusive presuppositions” of the other.

**“Saving the Truth in Comparable Phenomena”**

After articulating the differences between phenomena and using these differences to examine the implicit assumptions of each tradition, one must “save the truth” of the phenomena by synthesizing the eudoxa into a coherent, systematic whole. This final stage reconciles aporiai by appealing to a more fundamental level of truth reflected in both traditions. Though each tradition might approach this truth, neither can convey the full meaning alone. It is only through the dialectic between multiple, alternative traditions that we may uncover this truth. It is this final stage of Saving the Phenomena that makes comparative philosophy more than just a historical discipline; by acting as a means through which traditions might criticize and inform one another, comparative philosophy becomes a constructive discipline capable of contributing new insights to the field of philosophy. Saving the Phenomena is more than just a simple synthesis of the valuable parts of two traditions. It is a “process of reworking and creating” in which the philosopher uses his or her own unique insights to add to the synthesis of traditions.

**Problems With Understanding Comparative Philosophy As Saving the Phenomena**

Although Yu and Bunnin’s analysis of Saving the Phenomena is an extremely valuable comparative methodology, its emphasis upon the pursuit of a single, fundamental Truth is potentially problematic. The notion of creativity that is so strongly emphasized at the end of the article makes little sense when Aristotle thinks there is one right answer to be found. While Aristotle’s methodology apparently encourages the pursuit of an Ultimate Truth, Yu and Bunnin seem to suggest that the goal of comparative philosophy is not to achieve one right answer, but to engage in a creative dialogue between traditions.

In his article, “Rationality and Traditions,” Eliot Deutsch offers an understanding of truth in comparative philosophy that solves this conundrum. Like Yu and Bunnin, Deutsch argues that comparative philosophy is a process of understanding another tradition on its own terms:

- We inevitably bring our own “prejudices” or predispositions to interpret and judge what is initially alien to us, as these are informed by our cultural and personal experience and then, through letting as far as we can the other tradition speak to us in its own terms, develop a negotiating process, as it were, between our prejudgmental forms and patterns and the content and conceptual structures of that tradition. We aim then to alter our prejudices in the light of that negotiation or encounter.

This approach to comparative philosophy parallels Aristotle’s method of Saving the Phenomena in that by coming to genuinely understand another tradition, we are forced to critique our own views and creatively evolve. However, unlike Aristotle, Deutsch does not suggest that the goal of comparative philosophy is to produce a single, fundamental Truth. Rather, it is possible that there might be many right ways of approaching the same problem.

Often, there is such a fine line between relativism and pluralism that dynamic pluralisms such as this are abandoned because they lack criteria through which one can distinguish the good views from the bad. As a result, many philosophers, like Aristotle, end up endorsing a hard-line view of truth that excludes all non-compatible claims. Deutsch, however, offers a way out of this trap by suggesting criteria through which a dynamic pluralism might be founded through the elimination of invalid philosophical
systems. He argues that there are exclusionary principles that apply to truth such that we can exclude certain epistemic practices as fundamentally irrational and incapable of producing truth-knowledge. The law of non-contradiction is one such exclusionary principle; without it, it is impossible for rational discourse to take place at all.¹⁸

Deutsch draws a distinction between two kinds of exclusionary principles. The first are foundational exclusionary principles, which, when followed, wholly prevent an irrational system from engaging in rational discourse. A system that violates the law of non-contradiction cannot participate in rational discourse because if everyone were free to contradict themselves at any time, dialogue would be impossible. The second type of exclusionary principle is operational: these principles define what constitutes sound reasoning within a particular, historically-embedded epistemic tradition. Modern Western philosophy holds that a belief system must be coherent, falsifiable, and sharable, but these exclusionary principles might not be held by other, non-western traditions.⁵ To be a member of a particular community of inquiry, one must follow that community’s rules for rational inquiry, rules that are delineated by operational exclusionary principles.

Deutsch argues that the process of criticizing and evaluating beliefs takes place in two stages. The first stage determines whether the belief is rational according to the negative criteria of foundational and operational exclusionary principles. If the belief is determined to be potentially true by the first stage of analysis, it passes into a second stage in which the positive criteria for truth that are held by the particular community of evaluators are applied to the belief to determine the degree to which it may be said to be true.¹⁰ Stage One of Saving the Phenomena, in which both traditions are examined to see if a comparison is warranted, and Stage Two, in which the traditions evaluate the validity of one another’s arguments, can benefit from this notion of exclusionary principles. If one of the traditions in question violates the foundational exclusionary principles, a comparison is rendered impossible because the violative tradition does not qualify as philosophy. Once a comparison is deemed possible, operational exclusionary principles dictate whether the precepts of one tradition might be adopted by the other.

These exclusionary principles lead to a dynamic pluralism in which rationally invalid theories are rejected, yet multiple rational theories can participate in a constructive dialogue with one another. Deutsch’s notion of exclusionary principles allows us to engage in comparative philosophy without the demand that such comparisons result in a single Truth. These principles allow us to explore a creative pluralism without the danger of sliding into relativism. The relativist assertion that comparative philosophy is impossible because all critiques are made on the basis of one’s own culturally-embedded concept of truth is refuted by the notion of universal exclusionary principles that can be used as a basis for constructive criticism and dialogue between traditions.¹¹ Exclusionary principles allow us to enter into discourse, but do not suggest a single, right way to approach a particular philosophical problem. In such a pluralism, the “process of reworking and creating” that Yu and Bunnin describe becomes possible. As I demonstrate in the next section, it is just this kind of creative, dynamic, and pluralistic comparative thought that is at the heart of the practice of Philosophy for Children.

Philosophy for Children as Engaged Comparative Philosophy

In this section, I argue that Philosophy for Children can be understood as the practice of engaged comparative philosophy in the manner outlined in Section I. First, I give an overview of Philosophy for Children as it is practiced by Thomas Jackson in the Hawaii Philosophy in the Schools Program. To elucidate the concept of a community of inquiry, I draw from David Bohm’s understanding of dialogue. Second, I explain how Philosophy for Children’s notion of inquiry can be understood as a dynamic practice of comparative philosophy.

Philosophy for Children as a Reflective Community of Inquiry

1. Community

Thomas Jackson states that the practice of Philosophy for Children¹² involves the formation of a “reflective community of inquiry.”¹³ This consists of three main components: community, reflection, and inquiry. Jackson defines a community as “an intellectually safe place,” by which he means an environment in which people feel free to share their ideas without fear of being mocked or verbally assailed for expressing their beliefs. Without such safety, it is impossible for a philosophical discussion to take place, since the participants in the discussion will, out of fear of reprisal, be unwilling to contribute new, original, and creative ideas that deviate from the accepted norms of thinking. Thus, an intellectually safe place is one that contains the following four characteristics. First, all of the members of the community must have respect for one another as persons. Second, it must be okay for a member of the community to ask any question or make any statement he or she feels is relevant to the discussion. Third, there must be an appreciation for a diversity of viewpoints, no matter how unconventional these views might be. Fourth, listening to others is just as important as speaking—every member of the community must pay attention and respond to what the other members are saying, rather than simply trying to put forward his or her own opinion.¹⁴

2. Reflection

A community must be reflective in the sense that it exhibits an “[e]xplcit, ‘metacognitive’, reflective, consciously
articulated awareness of the standards and criteria that are at work in the community.15 By metacognition, Jackson means the constant self-awareness of the ways in which one is thinking. The community must continually critique its own ability to act as a community and to conduct a successful inquiry.

3. Inquiry

The type of inquiry pursued in Philosophy for Children is “co-inquiry.” No individual in the group has the one, right answer to the question the group is pursuing. Rather, the answer develops progressively as the whole group contributes to the discussion. However, the fact that everyone’s point of view is heard and respected does not mean that everyone’s point of view is right. This is why Jackson has developed the Good Thinker’s Toolkit16 as a methodology for conducting productive inquiry. The Toolkit allows the members of the community to examine each point of view in detail according to the principles of sound reasoning.

A Philosophy for Children Session has two main goals: (1) to function well as a reflective community and (2) to have a successful inquiry. The success of the inquiry is judged on the basis of whether or not the community “scratched beneath the surface” of the issue, which can occur in three different ways. First, the community discovers the complexity of the issue and is able to articulate the problem it is discussing to a greater degree. Second, the community is able to make connections between several different ideas or viewpoints that are raised. Third, an answer emerges to the problem that is discussed. The Good Thinker’s Toolkit is used specifically to assist this process of scratching beneath the surface, facilitating inquiry by offering a methodology through which constructive inquiry might take place.17 The Toolkit allows the community to criticize specious arguments and identify valid points of view among the many that are being compared.

David Bohm’s notion of dialogue is a helpful means of understanding the kind of inquiry that takes place in a Philosophy for Children session. Bohm understands inquiry as dialogue, which he defines as a creative stream of shared meaning that exists between the members of a community. Bohm contrasts this understanding of dialogue with “discussion,” by which he means an adversarial argument in which each person struggles to prove the superiority of his or her own point of view. Whereas dialogue is about inquiry, discussion is about winning; in a discussion, only the best orator is victorious, while in a dialogue, every member of the community wins because the group’s efforts towards inquiry produce an answer from which the whole community benefits.18 This reflects the importance of community in Philosophy for Children. The goal of dialogue is not to debate a particular issue, but to scratch beneath the surface of that issue through a progressive, unified inquiry.

Why is it important to engage in a dialogue with other persons in the first place? Bohm argues that the power of a group is in its collective focus upon a specific issue. He compares this power of focus to a laser beam. Ordinary, incoherent light consists of waves that are all moving in different directions, and is thus not particularly powerful. A laser beam, however, consists of light that is coherent, in which all of the waves are focused in a single direction to achieve maximum strength. A community of thinkers, when focused upon a single inquiry, can attain a level of philosophical power that is far beyond the capabilities of a group engaged in disjointed, argumentative discussion.19

Bohm argues that the most basic component of dialogue is the questioning of assumptions. We all have “basic assumptions” about the nature of the world and how we ought to act in it, and we naturally defend these assumptions “with an emotional charge” when they are challenged. Bohm calls such basic assumptions “opinions,” and he differentiates between two different kinds of opinions. The first are rational opinions, which are based on evidence and solid argumentation. The second are unexamined opinions, which are formed by the socio-cultural environment in which an individual lives. These assumptions are not supported by evidence or argument, yet they are an integral part of our self-identities, which is why we defend them so rabidly when they are questioned. Such fanaticism leads to heated discussions and thereby prevents genuine dialogue from taking place.20 The questioning of assumptions plays an essential part in a Philosophy for Children session. Community members use the [A] card to bring assumptions to light and then employ the remaining six cards to determine whether these assumptions are rational (based on evidence and argumentation) or simply based on opinion alone. By exposing irrational assumptions as soon as they are raised, the community can remove them from the discussion and thereby maintain its focus on rational inquiry.

For Bohm, the purpose of dialogue is to first bring the assumptions of the group out into the open and then examine them from a neutral point of view:

Then what is called for is to suspend those assumptions, so that you neither carry them out nor suppress them. You don’t believe them, nor do you disbelieve them; you don’t judge them as good or bad. You simply see what they mean—not only your own, but the other people’s as well... This is part of what I consider dialogue—for people to realize what is on each other’s minds without coming to any conclusions or judgments.21

On the surface, this view seems potentially problematic because it gives no criteria for judging which assumptions are bad and which are good. In Philosophy for Children, there is a distinction drawn between inquiry and simply having a conversation. Both involve a dialogue between members of the community, but only the former contains within it the means to determine which beliefs are valid and which are not. If we only lay our beliefs on the table, we make no pro-
progress—the session is nothing more than an airing out of our various assumptions. To truly have inquiry, we must scratch beneath the surface to determine which of these assumptions are true and whether the arguments that are derived from them are valid. Bohm does not offer any such criteria for judging the truth-value of people’s assumptions. However, this is not to say that he does not have such criteria in mind. What is important here is that when an assumption is raised by a member of the group, it is not immediately dismissed as ridiculous, no matter how unconventional it might be. Often, another person’s point of view only appears outlandish because we are so set in our own ways of thinking we are unwilling to consider alternative views. We must consider each point of view raised by members of the community as if it were true—we must give it our full respect and attention—and then use the community’s criteria for truth to determine whether, in fact, this is the case.

**Philosophy for Children as Engaged Comparative Philosophy**

Philosophy for Children can be understood as the practice of engaged comparative philosophy according to the modified form of Saving the Phenomena I have outlined in Section I of this paper. As Yu and Bunnin argue, Saving the Phenomena takes place in three stages: Establishing Comparable Phenomena, Articulating Differences, and Saving the Truth in Comparable Phenomena. A Philosophy for Children session examines phenomena according to this same procedure, though in practice there is a dynamic inter-

<table>
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<th>Level of Inquiry (Scratching Beneath the Surface)</th>
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| Level 1                                       | Establishing Comparable Phenomena; Application of Foundational Exclusionary Principles | Framing the question. Establishing multiple points of view in response to the question | QQ: Why is killing animals wrong?  
Question: Is killing animals wrong?  
Multiple Points of View:  
• Killing animals is always wrong  
• Killing animals is sometimes wrong  
• Killing animals is never wrong |
| Level 2                                       | Articulating Differences; Application of Operational Exclusionary Principles | Toolkit used to analyze multiple points of view for truth and validity. | (W): Define terms  
(A): What assumptions are you making? Are they justified?  
(R): Are there reasons for your assumptions or are they just opinions?  
(T): Is your point of view true?  
(E): Can you give examples to support your point of view?  
(I): Are you making valid inferences?  
(C): Are there counter-examples to question certain assumptions or inferences? |
| Level 3                                       | Saving the Truth in Comparable Phenomena; Creative Dialogue Amongst a Pluralism of Beliefs | Keep good parts of previous beliefs, now justified by good arguments. Creative synthesis of multiple points of view. | Killing animals is sometimes wrong for certain types of animals and/or under certain circumstances, but it is not always wrong. |

Table 1: Philosophy for Children as the Practice of Comparative Philosophy
play between stages as the dialogue progresses. Table 1 compares the stages of Saving the Phenomena to Philosophy for Children’s understanding of inquiry as scratching beneath the surface.

The inquiry of a Philosophy for Children session often begins at the level of the “surface” with the statement of a particular belief. At this level, the belief is, as Bohm says, an unquestioned assumption about a particular issue. In the right-hand column of the chart, I use an example drawn from one of my recent sessions, in which we discussed the morality of killing animals. The session began with a statement made by one of the children that it is wrong to kill animals (a belief also held by many adults, including animal rights activists and vegetarians). Here, a particular phenomenon is established to begin the inquiry.

Now, the dialogue moves into the first real level of inquiry. The statement that has been given is rephrased as a question. Often, a statement is rephrased as QQ, or a question within a question. “It’s wrong to kill animals!” becomes “why is it wrong to kill animals?,” but this type of question is not yet sufficient to begin an inquiry since it relies upon the assumption that killing animals is wrong. The QQ is stripped down to a single question, free from assumptions, that frames the issue at hand: “is it wrong to kill animals?” At this point, other members of the community respond by stating their own points of view on the issue. This stage reflects the establishment of comparable phenomena that specifically relate to the issue. Foundational exclusionary principles are used to weed out those points of view that immediately violate the most basic laws of reasoning. The multiple points of view, in this case, can be grouped into three categories: (1) killing animals is always wrong, (2) killing animals is sometimes wrong, depending upon the animal and the circumstances, and (3) killing animals is never wrong. Since Hawaii represents a true melting-pot of different cultures and traditions from both East and West, the children in the community provided a multitude of different eudoxa on the issues. Once these basic eudoxa have been established, the dialogue moves down into the second level.

At the second level of inquiry, the toolkit is used to critique the views established in Level One. This represents the level of Articulating the Differences in Saving the Phenomena. Here, the toolkit functions as a set of operational exclusionary principles to discard those aspects of a particular point of view that are problematic. Some points of view might be completely dismissed because they are found to be based upon false assumptions. Others might be only partially dismissed and the community builds upon the valid aspects of these points of view to construct a response to the question. As Yu and Bunnin state, “Each of a conflicting array of phenomena cannot be completely right, but each might be partly right. A view would be rejected by Aristotle if it contradicted all the phenomena or was incompatible with universally endorsed beliefs.” This process of critical examination leads to the third stage of inquiry.

At the third level, the community draws from the various points of view that have been critically examined using the toolkit to construct an answer to the question posed at Level One. This level is comparable to the third level of Saving the Truth in Comparable Phenomena in that it looks to establish a creative synthesis of the valid points of multiple systems of belief. It is important to note that, as mentioned earlier, the goal of scratching beneath the surface can be achieved in three ways: (1) the community finds that the issue is extremely complicated and that none of the phe-
nomina examined answer the question, (2) although a single answer does not develop, connections are established between different points of view, and (3) an answer to the question is formulated. Oftentimes, multiple points of view are creatively synthesized into a single response to the question. However, it is not necessary that only one answer be given. As Deutsch argues, it is possible to have a dynamic pluralism of beliefs, none of which violate the exclusionary principles of philosophy. Thus, it might be possible that two or more “right” answers to the question are given at the end of the session.

One might object that, although Philosophy for Children and Saving the Phenomena share a similar method of inquiry, Philosophy for Children is not comparative because it does not draw from both Eastern and Western philosophical sources. However, this objection is founded upon a misinterpretation of both comparative philosophy and Philosophy for Children. There are two things that make a particular philosophy comparative: (1) its methodology and (2) its subject matter. As I have shown above, Philosophy for Children shares a similar methodology to established forms of comparative philosophical inquiry. If this were the only similarity, we could say that Philosophy for Children is a method of comparative philosophy, though not necessarily East/West comparative philosophy. This is why subject matter is important. The Philosophy for Children program in Hawaii can be said to pursue comparative philosophy for two reasons. First, Hawaii is a true melting pot of cultures from around the globe, including many Eastern and Pacific cultures. Every Philosophy for Children session thus includes viewpoints from children of a variety of backgrounds, and these points of view enter into a dynamic dialogue with each other through the process of inquiry. Second, the University of Hawaii at Manoa’s Department of Philosophy focuses primarily upon comparative philosophy. Thus, the teaching assistants and professors that engage in the Philosophy in the Schools Program are trained in East/West comparative studies and can bring such content into a variety of different subjects. I have used many of Jackson’s techniques in teaching undergraduate ethics courses at the University of Hawaii with extremely positive results.

Notes

2. Ibid. 295.
3. Ibid. 303-5.
4. Ibid. 306.
5. Ibid. 307-8.
6. Ibid. 310-12.
8. Ibid. 245.
9. Ibid. 246-7.
10. Ibid. 247.
12. Although it goes by the name “Philosophy for Children,” this methodology can be readily used by adults to conduct inquiries into a variety of different subjects. I have used many of Jackson’s techniques in teaching undergraduate ethics courses at the University of Hawaii with extremely positive results.
15. Ibid. 3.
16. For an explanation of the Good Thinker’s Tool Kit and the Plain Vanilla procedure, please see Thomas Jackson’s article in this volume, pp. 4-8.
19. Ibid. 4.
20. Ibid. 2-3.
21. Ibid. 6.
22. Yu and Bunnin, 299.

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Expanding the Circle of Inquiry: Introducing Philosophy for Children in the People’s Republic of China

ANDREW COLVIN

Located midway between the countries of Asia and the United States, the islands of Hawai‘i form a natural bridge of sorts between the peoples and cultures of Asia and the West. This meeting of cultures can be seen in the ethnic make up of students in Hawai‘i’s public school classrooms where it is not uncommon to find in a single classroom children of a variety of ethnic backgrounds - Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Filipino, Vietnamese, Hawaiian, Samoan, Tongan, Euro-American, African American, Hispanic, Portuguese, and more. And one of the best things about doing Philosophy for Children in Hawai‘i is the opportunity to sit in a circle and participate in an inquiry with such a diverse group of voices.

Over the past decade, the Hawai‘i Philosophy in the Schools project has had the unique opportunity to expand the circle of inquiry by participating in an on-going inquiry on education in the People’s Republic of China. With support from the Beijing Soong Ching Ling Foundation and the University of Hawai‘i, teachers, administrators, and educational specialists from both Hawai‘i and China have visited each other’s schools, classes, and homes, initiating a fruitful, cultural and educational exchange.

The Hawai‘i – China connection began in the early 1990’s through the efforts of Dr. Jinmei Yuan, an award winning story writer and professor of Philosophy from Nanjing, who left China in 1993 to pursue a Ph.D. in Comparative Philosophy at the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa. Having been trained in the practice of Philosophy for Children by Dr. Thomas Jackson, and having spent several years in Hawai‘i public school classrooms helping teachers facilitate philosophical inquiries with elementary school children, Ms. Yuan felt that Philosophy for Children might be just the kind of program Chinese teachers and researchers were looking for to help their students learn to think more critically and independently.

The decision by Chinese scholars, educators, and officials to explore P4C can be seen as part of a wider trend over the last several years toward both decentralization and methodological reform in Chinese education. With its new found wealth, China was building better schools, and with their new found freedom, Chinese educators and local officials were actively seeking out alternative ways of teaching which might help alleviate what many saw as a nation-wide problem – namely, that in the course of preparing children for the college examination system, China’s schools were producing students who were good at memorizing, but disinclined to think critically, creatively, and independently.

Another problem faced by Chinese educators was what had become known as the Little Emperor syndrome. As a result of China’s one child policy, children were growing up without brothers and sisters. For most parents there would be only one child, and for most grandparents, only one grandchild. As parents and grandparents focused all their attention and affection on one child, elementary school teachers in China began to notice an increasing lack of initiative, independence, and responsible thinking in their students.

Through the cooperative efforts of Ms. Yuan, the Beijing Soong Ching Ling Foundation, the SINOPEC Corporation, and the University of Hawaii, the first team of Hawaii P4C practitioners arrived in China in 1995. Led by Dr. Thomas Jackson, Director of the Hawai‘i Philosophy in the Schools Project, the Hawaii team traveled to the small northern industrial city of Yanhua to conduct a week long...
workshop for local educators, administrators, government officials, and business leaders. Intrigued with how Philosophy for Children might be adapted to help improve the thinking of children, but still wanting to learn more about its actual implementation, the Beijing Soong Ching Ling foundation assembled a team of top teachers from various provinces and sent them to observe P4C in action in Hawai’i classrooms. Impressed by the safe atmosphere and harmonious relations between teachers and students in the P4C sessions, and by P4C’s ability to inspire both logical and creative thought, these educators convinced officials from the government and the Soong Ching Ling foundation to invite the Hawai’i P4C team to other cities in China, and to make the study of P4C a top priority. Since its first trip to Beijing in 1995, practitioners from the Hawai’i Philosophy in the Schools Project have made two more trips to China, giving presentations and workshops in Guangzhou, Nanjing, Shanghai, Wuhan, Zibo, and Jiaozuo.

Of these cities, Jiaozuo, a small mining city of approximately 4 million in northern Henan province, has emerged as a leader in adapting and implementing Philosophy for Children. Teachers, administrators, and educational researchers from Jiaozuo were first introduced to P4C in 1997 when the Soong Ching Ling foundation invited Dr. Thomas Jackson and a team of practitioners from Hawai’i to present a workshop there on the practice of Philosophy for Children. The following year, 1998, Jiaozuo sent a group of educational specialists, teachers, and administrators to Hawai’i to observe and study the actual implementation of Philosophy for Children in the public school classrooms. While in Hawai’i, the Chinese teachers spent a week living with the family of a teacher, and a week in their classrooms where they observed classes, participated in P4C sessions, and taught Chinese songs and games to the classes. Upon returning to China, this group convinced district education officials to implement the use of P4C in several of Jiaozuo’s experimental schools. However in attempting to adopt Philosophy for Children, teachers encountered two chief obstacles in the Chinese educational system — class size, and the sizable amount of material teachers were required to cover. With an average class size of well over 50 students, Chinese teachers found the Hawai’i P4C model of sitting in a circle, and giving everyone the opportunity to speak, difficult to implement. And with the large body of material they were required to cover in a limited class session, the teachers could find little time to facilitate open-ended discussions of things for which the children would not one day be tested. Unable to regularly conduct open-ended philosophical discussions with their students, Chinese researchers and educators decided to adapt P4C and some of its tools and principles in the various content areas. The result, which was termed Elicitation Inquiry Style Teaching method (qifa tanjiu shi jiaoxue fa), challenges children to seek for themselves different solutions to problems in the content areas. According to Li Junjie, the assistant Director of the Jiaozuo Institute of Education Research and chief architect of the Elicitation Inquiry method,

For us elicitation entails having teachers stimulate students to energetically reflect and ponder, and to
seek out answers and solutions by themselves. Inquiry entails encouraging students to expand their thinking and to take initiative in seeking out different ways to resolve questions.

Whether in math, art, science, or literature, teachers following the Elicitation Inquiry method designed lesson plans and class activities which encouraged students to raise questions, to engage in small group discussions, and to think for themselves about possible solutions. For example, in one class the Hawai‘i team visited, children were given the task of drawing a circle - but unlike the traditional model of education, where the teacher would stand in front of the class and show the students the proper way to draw a circle, teachers demonstrating the Elicitation Inquiry Method challenged students to work together in small groups and to think of as many ways as possible for drawing a circle.

Like P4C, this new method likewise encourages children to seek out clarification, reasons, implications, and assumptions, and to reflect on their thinking. However in comparison to the open-ended model of inquiry practiced in Hawai‘i, in which the teacher does not know in advance the direction in which the inquiry may go, teachers practicing the Elicitation Inquiry method in China were expected to play a more active role in keeping discussions on track and moving in a particular direction.

This requires teachers to maintain control as the leader, to guide students by way of appropriate and skillful means, to give students an opportunity to unload their thoughts, and to raise questions. In conducting an inquiry on a question, teachers need to let students think about methods of solving it, but they are not able to permit endless discussion and ought to make a transition when it is time for a transition.

In this way, teachers found that they could adopt the inquisitive spirit of P4C and certain of its tools and principles, but at the same time work with a class of 60 plus students and still cover required content. According to Li and other educational researchers in Jiaozuo, this adaptation proved more successful than anticipated. In the year 2000 twenty-one schools took part in an experimental trial of the Elicitation Inquiry Method. In April of 2001 both Jiaozuo’s Municipal Education Committee and its Institute of Education Research recommended that all schools in Jiaozuo adopt the Elicitation Inquiry method in their classrooms.

In the summer of 2001, Dr. Jackson and the Hawai‘i P4C team returned to Jiaozuo to take part in the “First Philosophy for Children - Elicitation Inquiry International Conference,” and to observe the implementation of these two methods in Jiaozuo’s schools.

Notes
2. Ibid.

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America’s Philosophy for Children Teaching Method and the Development of Children’s Character

LI JUNJIE (TRANSLATED BY ANDREW COLVIN & JINMEI YUAN)

Note: This translation is based on an early draft of a paper delivered by Li Junjie in Honolulu in 1998. A later revised version of the same paper has been published in Jiaozuo Education Research, 2001.2, pp 9-11.)

In June of 1997, sponsored by the Beijing Soong Ching Ling Foundation, Dr. Thomas Jackson and six representatives from the Hawaii Philosophy in the Schools Project visited our country to present a series of demonstrations on the implementation of the Philosophy for Children (P4C). Teachers from various grade levels remember these presentations to this day, and have responded warmly to the idea of combining some innovative P4C educational principles with our own educational practices. In our city, Jiaozuo, teachers from four elementary schools, one middle school, and two kindergartens expressed strong interests in P4C. They began to study and apply P4C and found that it formed a natural combination with their own program of character education. This combination has become part of new educational reform movement among Chinese teachers, the results of which have been quite significant.

There are several differences in the education system, theories, and methodologies in the United States and China, and in some degree, these differences are enormous. Why then was Philosophy for Children so warmly welcomed and enthusiastically accepted by Chinese educators? There are, I think, three reasons:

1. Education is a kind of scientific endeavor, and scientific endeavors should not be limited by national boundaries. Moreover, education is also a kind of social endeavor with its own rules and principles, and when educators probe these out, the results from their efforts can transcend national boundaries and contribute to the whole of mankind. For example, education today has been shaped by both the teachings of the ancient Chinese educator Confucius, and the more recent American educator John Dewey, whose Democracy and Education symbolized the emergence of education as an independent branch of science, and whose emphasis on the importance of the lives and activities of children has persisted as both a practical and valuable idea for educators today.

2. Philosophy for Children tries to change traditional teaching methods and to help children to think for themselves in a responsible way. Hence it is moving in the same direction as education reforms in our own country. For us, the goal of character education is to develop both the physical and mental abilities of children, and Philosophy for Children has proven successful in the development of children’s creative thinking.

3. The Hawai’i team impressed teachers with their outstanding workshop. During their short stay, they vividly demonstrated how to do Philosophy for Children in the classroom, and they successfully encouraged all participants to take part in inquiries. In their demonstration, teachers and students communicated easily and students took an active role in discussions. The results of these workshops surpassed our expectations.

Among these reasons, I think the second – that the theories and principles behind Philosophy for Children fit in well with those emerging today in China – is perhaps most significant. To show why I say this, I will first have to discuss...
the emergence of character education in China.

II

In our traditional model of elementary and middle school education, the body of students in the classroom is taken as a single unit, the teacher is expected to play the main role, and the results of both learning and teaching are evaluated by means of an examination. In each classroom, teachers give lectures and students listen. Students must learn a great deal of content and spend an enormous amount of time studying. Most teachers and students take this way of teaching for granted, and believe that this method has many advantages – for example it helps students become adept in memorizing vast amounts of textbook material. But there is an old Chinese saying, “When it comes time to apply what one has learned from books, they will see that they have learned little.” People think that the more students can memorize, the stronger and more useful their foundation must be. It is because they have this strong foundation that so many young Chinese have won top prizes in international academic examinations.

But over the past eighty years, education in China has been adversely affected by the model of “education for taking exams.” Since only a very limited number of students in China are able to enroll in China, the competition for getting into a college is extreme. When children are still in elementary schools, they have to earn top grades in order to get into a good middle school. When they get into middle school, they have to work hard to get into one of the better high schools. After they get into high school, they have to work extremely hard to compete with other students in order to get a seat in college. Therefore, students, schools, and parents all take moving ahead in schools as their only objective, and “taking exams” as the main goal of education.

In “education for taking exams,” elementary and middle schools emphasize filling student’s brains with information, but ignore their moral, physical, and aesthetic dimensions. Teaching methods are directed toward pouring information into students, and not toward the development of thinking skills, personal character, and creativity. In this model of teaching, students are treated like empty cups, and not surprising many psychological problems have been reported. In short, “education for taking exams” has become a barrier to the development of education in China.

During the late 1980s, educators in tune with the deepening call for reform in education suggested that we need to change from “education for passing exams” to “character education,” and their suggestions found support in government. What is meant here by “character education”? It means taking as the main goal in education the improvement of the overall character of each student, and working toward this goal in accordance with scientifically based models of physical and mental development among children. To do this, educators have to respect students’ points of view and intentions, while at the same time focusing on the development of their wisdom and potential. In short the overall goal of education should be the formation of a healthy character.

We are now actively trying to develop a program of character education. We have carefully changed the lesson plans and classroom structure. We created new methods of assessments. But most importantly, we have reformed the way we teach. In terms of their intellectual development, we pay meticulous attention to stimulating students’ curiosity, interest, imagination, and their desire to learn. We replaced the old boring lectures with a form of guidance through fun activities. In the classroom, we now often start with an interesting question or a beautiful story to spark student’s interests, and encourage them to inquire for themselves. We pay attention to creating a harmonious atmosphere since we want students to learn in a relaxing environment. Our teachers’ faces are no longer too serious, but now reveal emotion and feelings. In terms of their aesthetic development, we teach students how to feel beauty through imagination, and to draw, paint, and do calligraphy. We also employ teaching methods suitable to the natural course of the student’s moral and physical development. In doing so, we allow students to enjoy the development of their overall character.

In the development of “character education” we especially want to teach students how to learn. As the American futurist Alvin Toffler once remarked, “The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.” We think that teaching students how to learn is one of the most important tasks for teachers. Teachers should use the classroom and after-school activities to teach students how to handle the skills of learning. We want our students to become people with the capacity to learn and who are good at learning.

III

It was under this kind of background that Philosophy for Children was introduced into our country. Having witnessed and participated in Dr. Jackson’s workshop, we came to understand that P4C is about the philosophy of education – that is, it is a philosophy of educating children. This contemporary philosophy does not merely aim to answer questions, but attempts to help children express their own point of view clearly and precisely. It calls attention to the process of inferring, and encourages analysis and dialectical thinking. Therefore, I would say that Philosophy for Children is a practical philosophy, and its life force is found in its ability to continuously give birth to new ideas, an ability which results from the cooperative efforts of teacher and students. As practiced in Hawaii, Philosophy for Children attempts to create a “safe place” for building a reflective community of inquiry. In this community, children sit together in a circle and are encouraged to speak out freely and raise questions. And although children are free to criticize
each other’s ideas, the environment of this community is quite harmonious. In a P4C session the teacher no longer acts as a representative of the Truth, but becomes another member in the community of inquiry, thereby allowing for the unlimited development of children’s imagination and creativity.

In tune with the nature of thought in children, Dr. Jackson has developed an appealing and playful “Good Thinker’s Tool Kit” to assist children in thinking critically. Starting with one question, children are encouraged to discover more; starting from a more simple question, they are encouraged to go deeper and deeper. Instead of studying dull and tedious material, children are instead encouraged to seek knowledge and pursue truth in a relaxing and joyful environment. According to our understanding, Philosophy for Children emphasizes the process of inquiring instead of simply trying to offer answers. It probes associations among questions, but does not focus on finding the correct answer. It represents the idea that “the nature of philosophy is deny and doubting.” By doing these things, P4C leads students to become better learners.

These Philosophy for Children teaching principles and methods have been adopted and used by several schools in our city. Teachers in our kindergartens that have adopted P4C, encourage children to raise the questions that they themselves care about as a means of initiating an inquiry. In some schools, teachers helped children make their own “Good Thinker’s Tool Kits,” and developed a method for taking turns in a discussion in which a red flower is passed along through the circle to the beat of a drum, and when the drum stops, whoever has the flower gets the opportunity to speak. This is a playful and fun way to have a discussion with a large group of students. Several elementary schools have also introduced P4C in their classes and after-school activities. Students walk in the classroom with a smiling face. The environment of their classroom is relaxing and happy. Some classes use the eight tools from The Good Thinker’s Tool Kit, and some ask students to create stories while listening to music. All of these things are the resulting fruits of the educational exchange between Hawai‘i and China.

In closing we would like to raise a few concerns and questions that have come up in our research and implementation of Philosophy for Children.

1. The first concern arises from the dialectical relationship between “learning as hard work” and the notion of “joyful education.” The traditional Chinese approach to education takes learning as hard, bitter work, but P4C suggests a need to change “bitter” into “joyful” learning. Are these two conceptions necessarily antagonistic or can they be reconciled?

2. The second issue concerns the amount of content or information students need to grasp. In our country, the education plan emphasizes the task of passing knowledge on to students. It requires students to cover and learn a large amount of information and content. At the same time, however, the implementation of P4C requires a lot of class time, and if we use P4C as a general teaching method, it will be hard to cover the required content. Are there any good solutions for solving this conflict?

3. The third issue has to do with the role of the teacher in the pursuit of the truth and in bringing inquiries to a conclusion. We have seen that P4C rejects the pouring method in favor of a more scientific and democratic approach to learning. There are, to be sure, some questions that even teachers can’t answer. But in many instances teachers do know the right answer. Isn’t there a need for teachers to play leading roles in the process of inquiry?

The above questions are for mutual discussion. We hope to learn more P4C teaching methods, and warmly welcome the Hawai‘i P4C team to visit China again.
The Wisdom Beyond Languages

JINMEI YUAN

This paper is a report of my comparative research concerning the question “could there be a Chinese Harry Stottlemeier?” My comparative research focuses on Chapter One of Harry Stottlemeier’s Discovery (hereafter HSD), one of the P4C novels. This book is based on Aristotelian logic and provides the opportunity for children to figure out many logical relations and rules by themselves. I examine how children who speak different languages, such as Chinese and English, understand themselves. I examine how children who speak different languages, such as Chinese and English, understand HSD. I let two groups of children, Chinese and English, who were involved in the P4C project, read Chapter One of different versions of HSD, one in Chinese and the other in English, and discuss it in P4C classrooms. Although the focus of group discussions in China were very different from those in America both groups brought out some very valuable philosophical questions despite their different cultural backgrounds. This research leads me to conclude that P4C introduces a kind of wisdom that is beyond the limitations of any particular language, a wisdom that encourages all of us to keep a space open in our minds for a sense of wonder.

General Information Concerning My Work and the P4C Strategies Involved

HSD is one of a series of philosophical novels written for children by Dr. Matthew Lipman. It aims to achieve a number of objectives, which include the following:

1. HSD aims to present the idea of a community of inquiry to children through a story that involves children about the age of the students who will read the book (typically, ages 11-13). The children in HSD form a community of inquiry in their own classroom. In this community, they discuss a variety of issues, many of which are of philosophical import.

2. Lipman sees the development of the ability to reason as crucial to developing the ability to think for oneself and sees logic as central to developing one’s reasoning abilities. A major theme in HSD, then, is a series of “discoveries” that, in large measure, present the basic content of Aristotelian logic. For example, in Chapter One, Harry discovers a rule governing the conversion of what we recognize as A and E propositions.

The story of Chapter One in HSD begins with Harry’s mind wandering during science class. He then fails to correctly answer his teacher’s question: “What is it that has a long tail and revolves about the sun once every 77 years?” He thinks that the answer is “a planet” because he hears “revolves around the sun” and remembers that “all planets revolve around the sun.” After class, Harry tries to figure out why he made the mistake. Helped by his friend, Lisa, he discovers that one cannot reverse and maintain the truth of a sentence that starts with the word “all,” but can do so with a true sentence that starts with the word “no.” Namely, one cannot switch the places of subject and predicate in a universal, affirmative sentence, but can do so in a universal, negative sentence. Harry’s first discovery is actually about the truth value of a universal, affirmative proposition (A) and its converse, and the truth value of a universal negative proposition (E) and its converse.

I studied both American and Chinese children’s understanding of and responses to the relations between these two types of universal propositions and their converses after they read, respectively, the English and Chinese versions of Chapter One of HSD. Two groups of children were involved. Both groups consisted of elementary school students, the first from Honolulu, HI, USA, and the second from Jiaozuo, Henan, China. Both groups were made up of first, third, fourth, and fifth graders. In both groups, three constants were maintained: (1) the facilitators were experienced teachers of P4C who had received specific training in P4C theory and methodology, (2) the “Plain Vanilla” strategies for facilitating philosophical inquiry were used, and (3) participants were familiar with the “Good Thinker’s Tool Kit.” My study focused on two questions: (1) how much does language itself affect children’s understanding, and (2) how much does the traditional logic of a culture influence children’s interests in what they consider to be the relevant topics in the HSD text?

Different Ways of Thinking Between Chinese and American Children

Different Perspectives of Inquiry

Asking questions after reading HSD Chapter 1 provides an initial point from which to begin inquiry. This procedure

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was followed by both Chinese and American groups. In looking at the actual questions raised by the students, I found three significant differences. First, although the actual questions raised by each group were similar in important respects, they were also different in terms of the questions that were raised by the Chinese students but not raised by the American students. Second, there were significant differences between the groups in the actual questions selected for discussion. Third, there were equally significant differences in the manner in which these questions were discussed. These differences, I maintain, are the result of two factors: first, the influence of each culture’s natural language and, second, the imbedded structures of the traditional logical system inherent to each culture; that is, the “logical space” in the minds of Chinese children is structured differently than their Western counterparts.

A comparison of the questions raised by the American and the Chinese groups reveals essential differences in the thinking structures of each. Both groups understood the story in Chapter One of HSD at the natural language level and raised questions about why Harry reversed sentences. Also, both groups were curious about Harry’s and the other characters’ attitudes and thoughts, and questioned whether these attitudes were appropriate or inappropriate, right or wrong. Significantly, however, despite these similarities, there was a set of questions that dealt with the value or significance of Harry’s discovery that were only raised by the Chinese children. These questions do not inquire about Harry’s rules of reversing sentences — which was the main subject of inquiry in the American group — but about the essential worth of the rules and their implications for Harry as a person. In what follows, I examine these differences in preference for types of questions from the perspective of logical structures. By comparing the inquiry focus of the two groups of children, it will become evident how embedded traditional logical structures have impacted their ways of thinking and reasoning.

Different Thinking Processes

From the perspective of Western thought patterns, it is sometimes hard to understand the thinking of Chinese children. Some American teachers who have taught in China have complained that they could not understand Chinese people, because it seemed to them that Chinese students did not discuss topics directly, but rather went around them in circles. In examining my results from a Western point of view, one would seem to meet a similar problem. One would hardly be able to understand the discussions of the Chinese children, especially why they mention many things seemingly peripheral to the main topic. Chinese children did not focus on what they learned or did not want to inquire about logical relations from Harry’s discovery, although they seemed to have learned a lot from how Harry made his discovery. Aristotelian logical relations were simply not the kind of relations in which they were interested. Instead of focusing on the logical content of Harry’s discovery, they searched for similar ways to have Harry’s kind of discoveries in their own lives. This is a typical thought process according to Chinese logic: one should look for similar relations to see how to get future benefits from the application of the lessons learned from a singular case.

Chinese children did not have much interest in the topic of the content of Harry’s discovery, the logical relations between subjects and predicates. Each class would typically offer a few sentences to illustrate Harry’s rules and then turn to another topic. The story about Harry’s discovery — and the Aristotelian logical relations that it relayed — had been successfully translated into Chinese and understood, so the lack of interest was not a problem of translation. The children simply had almost no interest in pursuing any inquiry into these kinds of logical relations. What they were interested in and brought to the text was a different set of relations. In other words, even though they read a story that focused on a discovery in Aristotelian logic, their own Chinese perspective prevailed. This reveals that there are two levels of understanding to a Chinese version of HSD. One is understanding at the level of natural language. Chinese children understood the content of what they read without any prior knowledge of Aristotelian logic. However, the Chinese children were not interested in the logical content of Harry’s discovery, a major focus of the chapter, but in a different set of relations that were important to their culture and deeply embedded in the logic of their language. In effect, their thinking was influenced by traditional Chinese patterns, which include the following components: (1) associations of a singular case (Harry’s discovery) and (2) how other cases might benefit from the singular case (how might one learn from and apply the wisdom of Harry’s discovery).

Instead of focusing on the content itself or the examples involved in the discussion, Chinese children spent their energy looking for how they might benefit from Harry’s story. Since the changing relation of yin and yang is essential in Chinese logic, it is taken for granted that no discovery, including a rule of logic, can be absolutely true at all times or for all people. Chinese children were thus more interested in the question “does Harry’s discovery have value in our lives?” The way they tested this question was to ask “if one put Harry’s discovery in another situation in one’s present life, could one get benefits by following Harry’s example?” The following is an exemplary segment of a discussion among a group of fourth graders in Jiaoxi Elementary School, Jiaozuo:

The question picked by the children: What did you learn from Harry’s discovery?
Facilitator: A Chinese teacher
B1 (Boy 1): I learned that I should listen to what the teacher said. I should also learn from Harry to think hard.
B2: I learned that if I have questions, I should ask someone for help. If I do not understand a problem,
I should test it.
G1: (Girl 1): I learned from Harry’s discovery that I should not be scared of asking question.
G2: I learned from Harry’s discovery that one should start by questioning. One should not be scared of being tested by others. One should use the facts to show the power of his/her knowledge.
G3: I have learned from Harry’s discovery that in our daily life and classes I should often use my brain to think.
B3: I have learned that if Harry had listened to the class, how could he have made his discovery?
G4: I have learned that one should think hard and often ask questions.
G5: I have learned that one should not see things from one perspective but from many perspectives.

This is a pattern typical of Chinese thinking.

In contrast, the thinking of the American group focused on Harry’s discovery itself: the logical relations between subjects and predicates. They were very interested in testing Harry’s rules. Their discussions generally followed the topics that Lipman intended when he wrote the text. Even though they had no prior training in Aristotelian logic, they brought out the four kinds of propositions of the Square of Opposition (A, E, I, and O) in their discussion. It seems that this set of relations is important to Western culture and deeply embedded in Western languages. This characteristically Western thinking pattern includes the following components:

1. **Doubting**: American children doubted both the truth function of Harry’s rules and their fellow students’ interpretations of these rules.
2. **Testing**: American children developed many counter-examples to both test whether Harry’s rule worked and challenge each other’s propositions.
3. **Categorizing**: The American children were very good at putting terms into different categories and were interested in using Venn diagrams to represent the relations among these categories. In doing this, they discovered the various applications of the rules governing “Some,” “No,” and “All” propositions. By playing with these rules, they wanted to clarify the relations of A, E, I, and O propositions.
4. **Formulating**: American children addressed the problem by finding differences in detail. They formulated the problems of “All” and “No” propositions and pointed out that Harry’s sentences have “All” in them, but no “Not.” Some posed new sentences beginning with “All” according to Harry’s rule.

5. **Defining**: When a child brought in a new application of a rule, the class defined the application’s main concepts in order to make it clear. They then tried to discover new rules about “Some” propositions and “No” propositions. The children invoked some criteria to define the terms of their discussion. For example, at the end of one session, the children tried to locate one of their terms (“primate”) in a hierarchical system according to a universal definition (the system of biological taxonomy).

The reason I think these thought patterns are distinctly Western is that they are based on a belief that there is a fixed order in the world. Children took the principle of a single case (Harry’s sentence) and, through their use of criteria, applied it to other cases (their own sentences). They felt happy with the order that the relation of subject and predicate in a particular case was located in the structure of genus-species. In short, from the perspective of thinking processes, one can see major differences between the thinking of Chinese and American children, differences that are clearly influenced by the traditional ways of thinking common to their respective cultures.

**Discovering the Value of Different Ways of Thinking Through the Wisdom Beyond Languages**

In Chapter Thirteen of *HSD*, Harry says:

There are lots of different ways of looking at things and thinking about things. But I guess you have to find out about them for yourself. You get taught that there is only one way to think, and then you find out that there are a lot of other ways that may be just as good. I’d like to find out all the different ways in which it is possible to think (68).
To allow for and discover different ways of thinking is a basic principle of P4C. Children are encouraged to think for themselves in a responsible way. Accomplishing this requires a shift from the traditional classroom structure, where teachers are primarily transmitters of information to their students, to classrooms that are “communities of inquiry.” Such communities become intellectually safe places for both teachers and students. There is a focus on developing trust and courage amongst the members of the community, so that children feel free to open their minds and express their thoughts. In such an environment the classroom community then engages in inquiries that arise, as much as possible, out of the interests of the children. These inquiries involve questions that frequently have no single, correct answer. The role of the teacher/facilitator is crucial to the success of the endeavor. The teacher/facilitator is not there to guide the discussion to a particular end or specific answer, but to rather at once facilitate and participate in the inquiry with the children, serving as a co-inquirer. In an experienced community, the teacher becomes a fully equal participant. Members of the community call on each other rather than letting the discussion flow from the teacher. This classroom structure is crucial for discovering the value of different ways of thinking.

In an important sense, it does not matter how different the Chinese and English languages are. The ability to wonder and question does not depend on what language the child speaks. Putting it another way, the sense of wonder is the original power from which children question their world, though what happens to the wonder and questioning (how, whether, and in what directions it develops) is partly a matter of culture. Since the P4C classroom opens a wide space for the sense of wonder, the value of different ways of thinking blossoms. In other words, even though HSD is based on Aristotelian logic, no P4C facilitator limited the Chinese students to think within this framework by insisting they focus on the logical content of Harry’s discovery which would have narrowed the space for wonder. The inquiries were allowed to flow in the direction of the children’s interests. The inquiry of Chinese and American children thus revealed each group’s cultural background and led to real philosophical discussions. Hence, keeping space open for the sense of wonder encouraged students from different cultures to demonstrate the valuable aspects of their own culture and ways of thinking.

As discussed earlier, while the American children focused on the formal logical relations present in Lipman’s work, the Chinese children explored the practical value of Harry’s discovery in daily life. Both of these approaches represent important forms of philosophical inquiry. They simply make use of different sets of criteria for what is logical. The Chinese set of criteria judges how a rule can be used practically in life. These criteria come from the underlying belief that the world is constantly changing—there is no pre-set order on which one can base a claim of universal truth. Thus, the value of any rule must be tested in the particular place and time to which one wishes to apply it. The American set of criteria judges how to correctly locate the positions of subjects and predicates in a hierarchical system of taxonomy. If the relation between a subject and a predicate fits the positions in a structure of genus-species, then one can judge the truth-value of a proposition. This set of criteria is based on a presupposition that there is a fixed order to the world. Without the guide of P4C principles regarding intellectual safety and the importance of developing inquiry out of the interests of the children, the Chinese children’s understanding of HSD and their subsequent contributions to philosophical discussions might have been ignored or dismissed.

In Conclusion

Through the efforts of P4C, it is possible to open a philosophical discourse between children from different cultures who speak different languages. The core of this idea lies in one’s ability to keep a space open for a sense of wonder. In Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, Rorty says this “space for the sense of wonder” is created by a lack of constraint in discourse. “Space,” the opposite of “constraint,” is described by Rorty as a room that can hold any thinking. To keep space open for a sense of wonder in a continuing conversation, we should give up the desire for constraint. Though some languages and cultures are different, just as one can always wonder about both the finite and the infinite, one should be able to also wonder about different ways of thinking and how they might be related. Keeping a space open for the sense of wonder will keep open possibilities for a discourse between different children in the world, which is more important than teaching that either Aristotelian logic or Chinese logic is the only true system of knowledge.

Philosophy for Children has contributed a great deal to this notion of keeping a space open for the sense of wonder. To allow for diverse understandings is the first essential condition of having a discourse with another language-game player, whether the group is Chinese or American, adults or children. It is easy for one player to simply claim that the other player’s rule is wrong or illogical, but it is much more challenging to see his or her reasoning from the perspective of another system of logic. The possibility for a fruitful exchange between Chinese logic and Aristotelian logic depends on how much space each of them keeps open for the other. This is the step which each should take to make possible a common discourse.

When children come to school, they are full of wonder. As adults, we should assist them as much as possible in keeping this wonder alive. This is the wisdom that goes beyond any language.

Notes

1. For an explanation of Plain Vanilla and the Good Thinker’s Tool Kit, see Thomas Jackson’s article in this journal, pp. 4-8.
Thinking: The Journal of Philosophy for Children, Volume 17, Numbers 1 & 2

The Difference Between Traditional Chinese Teaching Methods and P4C from the USA

LIU HAIQIN (KATE LIU)

At the end of 1999, P4C from America was introduced into our school by Jiaozuo Teaching and Research section. This created a sensation. It played and important role for us to change from Test Education to Quality Education. In addition, there were many teachers of our school who took part in the research work. I am one of them. After one year of research, I think I understand the main meaning of P4C. Today, I’d like to share in writing these reflections about P4C and four main differences between traditional Chinese teaching methods and P4C.

Teacher-Centered vs. Student-Centered

In a Traditional class, the teacher always makes the lecture from the very beginning to the end. The students have no time to think, to practice. They can only stand straight and listen, or say “yes” or “no” together. They have no time for their own opinions or ideas. They can only memorize the answer that teachers give them and the answer is the same.

But in P4C class, the teacher talks only when it’s necessary to give directions, to teach a new concept, to answer student’s questions, or to demonstrate something. The students are encouraged to work in pairs or small groups, so they have much more opportunity to practice.

When I plan the lessons, especially the parts for practice and communication, I always try to choose activities which are student-centered, to give the students the most opportunity to develop.

So, I think involving the students as often as possible is very important. If a teacher just lectures to the students, the students will not develop their own skills. If the teacher involves the students in communicative learning activities, the students will be more motivated and interested. So, I say the first difference between them is teacher-centered in the traditional class, and student-centered in P4C class.

Threatening vs. Comfortable

In traditional class, the teacher is first and the students are second. That means, the students can’t disprove the argument of the teacher. If he or she does, he or she would be thought disrespectful. Also, the students are responsible for keeping the class organized. In class, students are particularly fearful if they are always being corrected when they speak or answer the questions. They will be afraid of making mistakes, and they will not want to take risks. So I think if a teacher has patience with student’s errors, the students will be encouraged to study more freely.

In P4C class, the classroom environment is preferred over criticism, and teachers generally try to be pleasant and approachable (friendly). The distance between teachers and students—both physical and psychological—is minimal so that teachers walk among their students while teaching and the atmosphere in the classroom is very informal. Few teachers stay behind their desk while they are having classes.

Making Critical Judgements vs. Memorizing Answers

In traditional class, the teacher thought his job was to provide correct information as directly and concisely as possible. For example, in the literature class, the students enjoyed the time-honored approach of close text analysis. They will even be willing (and able) to delve into the grammatical relationships and style elements, and they wanted to know what the works meant and how their meaning could

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be validated through the vocabulary and syntax, and then master and memorize them.

In the P4C class, I think the teacher’s job is to help raise interesting questions and provide enough background for students to draw their own conclusions. The students want to interpret and experience the works, they enjoy talking about how the works “make them feel.” And they can learn something about making judgments and respecting their own opinions.

So, I think the role of the teacher in P4C classrooms is to facilitate learning by providing information from which students can make their own critical judgments. The students are encouraged to see how the information applies to them personally and to determine what individual use they can make of it. Teachers are open to differing points of view because knowledge is many-sided and open to a variety of interpretations. Except in science and mathematics class, teachers often believe that there is no more than one correct answer. Teacher’s questions are often interpretive rather than factual, and individuals may have different interpretations within certain limitations.

In my opinion, critical thinking, the ability to make critical judgments and decisions, is the most important goal of P4C.

**Learning by Listening vs. Learning by Doing**

In traditional class, the teacher just lectures to his or her students, the students can only listen, they can’t develop their own skills.

A wise man once said, “show me and I will remember, involve me and I will understand.” So if the teacher involves the students in communicative learning activities, the students will be more motivated and interested.

“Learning by doing” is a central part of P4C. In P4C class, theory is seldom taught apart from practice or it involves some kind of application. For example, in composition classes, students write; in history classes, they might enact drama of historical events, write letters as if they were soldiers in the war, or hold debates about historical decisions. In English classes, they act out dialogue in different roles, in Social Economics classes, they invest imaginary money in the stock market or plan a budget for a hypothetical family. Therefore, I think “practice make perfect”

In Summary, P4C has four distinct characteristics: Students are treated as distinct individuals rather than as indistinguishable members of a homogeneous group. The atmosphere in the classroom is comfortable. Practice and application is more important than abstract theory.

I like P4C and I will introduce it to the more teachers in China.
The Echo of the Mountain

TRANSLATED BY ANDREW COLVIN

Jiaozuo teacher Sun Ruli used the following story in a P4C session at Jiaodong Lu elementary school on July 13, 2001. While we are uncertain of its origin, The Echo of the Mountain (Shan de huisheng), provides a good example of the type of moral stories used in Chinese classrooms, and the question it raises—"how high is the sky?"—provides a wonderful impetus for philosophical inquiry.

Once upon a time, a great mountain issued a challenge to the entire world. "Whoever can tell me how high the sky is," the mountain proclaimed, "will be rewarded all the treasures within me!" After news of the mountain’s challenge spread, all the creatures carefully contemplated this question—the worm, who wanted things to eat, the bird, who wanted a nest, the fish, who wanted clear, fresh water, the beast, who wanted success in stalking its prey, and the hunter who relied on the mountain’s abundant resources for survival—all began to wonder and ask one another, "How high is the sky?" The earthworm asked the rooster, the rooster asked the fox, the fox discussed it with the hunter, and each voiced their own ideas.

In time, the hunter sought out the advice of the County Magistrate. The County Magistrate thought about the mountain’s question for a moment then said, “The distance between the earth and the sun—that is how high the sky is.” The farmer, fearful that disagreeing with the Magistrate would lead to arrest and hard labor, offered a cautious reply. "Hmmm....The height of the sky is the height of the sun.....Of course! The treasures within the great mountain will surely be yours!" Hearing this, the County Magistrate felt satisfied and happy, and thereupon decided to carry his answer to the mountain.

But after setting out, the County Magistrate ran into the Emperor. When the Magistrate told him of the mountain’s question, the Emperor thought for a moment, then laughed, "Ha! The sky is as high as my lifespan is long." The County Magistrate, fearful of the consequences of disagreeing with the Emperor, bowed before him and cried out, “How could his Majesty be wrong? All the treasures within the mountain will surely be given to you!” Satisfied in his answer, the Emperor set off to meet with the great mountain.

On the way, however, the Emperor ran into a humble scholar. When the Emperor told the scholar his answer to the mountain’s question, the scholar, without blinking an eye, spoke up saying, “With all due respect your Majesty, I must disagree—for while the height of the sky is beyond measure, the lifespan of an Emperor is not.” Infuriated, the Emperor had the scholar killed on the spot. He then assembled together his civil and military officials, his 1000 chariots, and his cavalry of 10,000 horses, and headed straight for the mountain.

When they arrived, the Emperor ordered his emissary to come forward. Standing before the great mountain, the emissary issued a proclamation, “The sky is as high as the lifespan of His Majesty is long! Can you hear me mountain?” Suddenly the ground began to shake as the mountain rumbled and spoke “What nonsense! You couldn’t be more wrong!” Hearing this, the Emperor flew into a rage and ordered his troops to attack the audacious mountain. In the ensuing battle the Emperor lost three of his top Generals and tens of thousands of soldiers. Faced with these casualties, the Emperor grew angrier still and decided to personally take the lead in subduing the mountain. But as he ordered his remaining troops forward, there arose a tremendous roar as the earth split open, and the Emperor and all of his men were swallowed into the belly of the mountain.

Sometime later a poor farmer traveled to the great mountain and told it that there was once a wise and brave scholar who had correctly answered the mountain’s question, but that any could be considered his children, it was the poor and suffering common people. Hearing this, the mountain chose to take its forests, its many herbs, its mineral resources and precious stones, and give them to the common people.
Learning from Children: A Philosophical Journey

ELAINE TSUCHIYAMA

When young children engage in dialogue which focuses on philosophical content, interacting with topics which have different possible answers, surprising insights into children’s thinking are revealed. Children think about what is bad or good, examine who they are, and learn about criteria, to name a few. Through the community of inquiry and the dialogue process, they gradually and naturally take responsibility for their own thinking. It is the expectation of the children that their responses be supported by reasons. Beliefs and assumptions are scrutinized by questioning what is being said. Examples and counter-examples are part of the building blocks to logical reasoning. It is through this process that the children can and do make sense of the complex world in which they live.

Besides the individual benefits of becoming responsible, reflective thinkers, through P4C children experience the power of thinking as a community. They learn that they are inquirers in a community who together try to make sense of the world around them. With this comes respect for others. Children need to know that what they say is important. No put downs are accepted. The children learn that respect is shown by how they respond to each other. Listening and speaking are important parts of this dialogue. The children become keenly aware of the language they use while communicating with others. Interestingly, when the children participate in this philosophical dialogue in the classroom, I become an equal partner in the thinking process as well.

I, too, transform. As I actively engage with the children in this philosophical dialogue, I question my own beliefs and thinking. I catch myself making assumptions when I respond to or relate an opinion to a colleague, family member, or a friend. Being the facilitator in this dialogue with the children “forces” me to listen carefully to what the children are saying. I learn more about the children and the way they view the world by being an active listener at all times. There is power inherent in listening.

Reading, writing, and arithmetic have again taken center stage in education. With the new legislation of the “No Child Left Behind” act, there is little discussion about having our children become accomplished, thoughtful thinkers. It is assumed that the children are thinking as they work with the various content areas. But are we genuinely nurturing our children’s thinking? Furthermore, do we really want our children to think? Therefore, a critical question arises: “Does philosophy warrant a place in the school’s curriculum?” I strongly believe that the discipline of philosophy and the process of doing philosophical inquiry support and empower children through dialogue to define who they are. The dialogue which ensues in a philosophical context brings a more connected understanding of what makes us human.

I have observed first graders as well as sixth graders artfully dialogue with their peers. They question and look at assumptions and the implications of their actions. However, this doesn’t magically happen. Time must be set aside on a regular basis for this kind of engagement to occur. The children need time to listen to their peers and practice articulating their thoughts and feelings. Over time, a transformation does appear. It is really like seeing, in slow motion, a beautiful rose delicately blossom in front of me. Children are awesome thinkers!

Six-Year-Olds Become Socratic Thinkers Through Stories

In his passionate desire to ensure that children became Socratic thinkers, Matthew Lipman wrote several novels filled with philosophical ideas. Elfie (1988) was written for children in kindergarten through second grade. It begins:

Hi! I wish I knew your names. I’m afraid to ask. Maybe if I tell you my name, you’ll tell me yours. My name it Elfie. I hardly ever ask anybody any-

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thing. I don’t know why. I don’t have a good reason. I’m just afraid to. I’m afraid because people might find out I don’t know anything. See, that’s my secret. Or one of my secrets. One of my awful, awful secrets. (p. 1)

Elfie is a young philosopher who wonders about why she feels she knows nothing while her friend, Sofia (which means wisdom in Greek), seems so perfect. Elfie marvels at how Sofia asks such wonderful questions while she, on the other hand says very little in class. Elfie senses something special about Sofia but is unable to pinpoint what it is.

In my classroom, I helped the children make connections to Elfie’s stories by converting individual episodes into letters written to the class. The letter format simplified and personalized the episodes for my children. The content of the letter then spurred the children to write questions. It was the formulation of questions that created the atmosphere for philosophical wonder—questions that presumed no single right answers, but produced multiple possibilities. Group and personal inquiries initiated the search for truth and a deeper understanding of what and how people thought. It was in this search and journey as philosophers that the children became a more cohesive community of inquirers and more thoughtful, critical thinkers.

To Socrates, words were illusive. He re-examined meanings by asking questions to which he did not know the answers. Coming to know what these concepts (e.g. justice, piety, knowledge, or happiness) meant always brought him back to the original position of not knowing. He then cheerfully proposed to begin again. Thinking through reasoning was what he wanted to teach the young Athenians. The “unexamined life was not worth living.”

In The Life of the Mind, Hannah Arendt (1978) heralded Socrates as the model of a thinker. She argued that thinking was what made it possible for words to have meaning. Words were like frozen thoughts. The thinking process is what unfreezes the thought that then helps us to make sense of the word in the context of our experiences.

Stories from First Graders’ Philosophical Conversations

I wanted to make the invisible visible. Through this unveiling of the children’s inner self, I began to better understand their actions in the classroom. They showed me how remarkable their thinking was. The children became my guiding light, showing me how to make learning more meaningful and pertinent. And I’d like to believe that when they articulated their thoughts, they began to better understand themselves.

I started with this letter from Elfie. (Lipman, pp. 15-17)

Dear Class,

Mrs. Tripp says, ‘We are going to get a visit today from Mr. Sprockett.’ Mr. Sprockett is the principal of our school.

Later in the morning, there’s a knock at the door. Rat! Tat-tat! The door is opening. Oh-oh, here he comes!

Mr. Sprockett is wearing a blue suit with a green tie and brown shoes. He smiles and rubs his hands together. ‘Boys and girls!’ he says.

Cindy and Bruce are still whispering to each other. Mr. Sprockett’s smile gets a little smaller. ‘BOYS AND GIRLS!’ he says. ‘I have an announcement to make.’ He waits and waits.

We are all very, very quiet. I think to myself, ‘Maybe that was his announcement, and now he’ll leave without telling any more.’

But no! Mr. Sprockett says, ‘How would you like to be on television?’

We clap our hands and say, ‘Yeah! Yeah! Love,

Elfie

The questions generated by the children as a result of this letter presented a glimpse into the complex world of children’s minds. Like narrative stories, these questions revealed how children thought about themselves and the world.

I wonder where are you, Elfie. Are you fine? I wonder why Mr. Sprockett said somebody is going to be on television. How come he waited and waited? How come he is wearing a blue suit and a green tie and brown shoes? Why was the principal mad? How come they got a visit from Mr. Sprockett? I wonder if they have cookies. I wonder if Mrs. Tripp likes to be a teacher. I wonder if the principal likes shapes. I wonder if you guys need to visit him. What were Cindy and Bruce talking about? Why are Cindy and Bruce whispering? They are going to get into trouble. Why do Cindy and Bruce whisper? They can talk after. Why do Cindy and Bruce whisper? They can talk after.

Is the principal mean? How many friends do you have? How does your class look like? Do you have long recesses? Is your teacher a cousin to your principal? Could you go to the bathroom when the principal is talking to you? Did your principal go to another country? Are they talking about something important? Is he (the principal) a bit nice? Why do they like to whisper when the principal comes to the class? I know Cindy and Bruce like to whisper. Why do they like to whisper?
Why did they whisper when the principal was talking? Cindy and Bruce shouldn’t talk.
Why does the principal have to be mean? I wonder.
Dear Elfie, do you like your principal?
Would you like to be on T.V.?
Why is the principal getting mad?
Why did the class whisper?

Our community of inquirers then used these questions to dialogue which challenged everyone’s thinking. Clarification (what do you mean by…”) and reason-giving became necessary thinking tools. Implications and assumptions were examined. To expand critical thinking and reasoning abilities, the children were expected to provide examples and counter-examples to support stances they were taking. The community of inquirers questioned the validity of what was being said. Was it really true? Not all children developed their thinking skills at the same rate, but I have no doubt that the ones who were not speaking up were listening. This deep-level thinking took practice and commitment on the part of the students and me. This was a learning journey with the clear goal being that eventually all students would feel confident and safe to share their inner thoughts and feelings.

Rhonda: I wonder where you are, Elfie. Are you fine?
Jocelyn: She sounded fine in the letter.
Wayne: You need energy to write letters. I don’t see Elfie because maybe she’s gone away to heaven.
Emerson: I disagree with Wayne because if she’s in heaven, she wouldn’t be writing.
Wayne: Maybe someone else is writing for her.
Jocelyn: Wayne’s assuming. He doesn’t know if Elfie’s in heaven.
Emerson: He’s not assuming. He just doesn’t know if she’s in heaven.
Jasmine: Jocelyn’s smart.
Emerson: Wayne’s not that smart.
Teacher: If you’re not assuming, does that mean you’re not smart?
Emerson: Yeah.
Dr. Jackson: (Director of the Philosophy in the Schools Project) What do you mean by assume?
Jocelyn: You don’t know but you say it anyway.
Trevor: I disagree with Wayne because Elfie wouldn’t be writing in heaven.
Royce: Elfie’s smart because she writes nicely.
Elsie: I remember Elfie wrote letters last year.
Joanne & Royce: I remember.
Elsie: She was sick and didn’t write for a long time.
Teacher: I wonder why Mr. Sprockett said somebody’s going to be on T.V.
Burt: I didn’t know what else to write.
Royce: Maybe the principal wants to be nice.

Jocelyn: Mr. Sprockett didn’t say that. He asked everybody, but Burt said only one.
Estelle: Lots of people want to be on T.V., so Mr. Sprockett said it.
Teacher: (Rereads the part of the letter that refers to being on television.)
Wayne: I disagree with Jocelyn.
Teacher: Because…
Wayne: I forgot what she said.
Teacher: (Repeats Jocelyn’s idea.)
Trevor: Maybe Elfie asked the principal to be on T.V.
Elsie: I disagree with Trevor because Elfie doesn’t know.
Trevor: Maybe some of them were poor and needed money.
Teacher: Trevor, I have a question. Why are you thinking that poor people go on T.V. when they need money?
Trevor: Sometimes you go on T.V. to make money.

Learning from Children’s Dialogue

I learned two things by listening to these first graders during this philosophy time. First, I learned that children did connect thoughts about Elfie to their personal lives. Secondly, I learned that children did use precise words to articulate their thoughts and ideas. Particulars were important, but these particulars became interconnected. The children became theory-makers about the world they lived in.

Children Connect From and Through Narratives
About Elfie to Their Personal Lives

The questions reveal that the children make personal connections to recent happenings in the classroom. For example, Jocelyn asked if Mr. Sprockett liked shapes. We were examining the concept of shapes in math. To wonder if Mr. Sprockett liked shapes seemed so natural. Alice was not so much interested in the content of the letter but curious about Mr. Sprockett’s personal life and how the school operates. Her curiosity showed sophisticated thinking and feeling, sensitive to who another individual is. She seemed to have genuinely accepted the character of Mr. Sprockett.

Even at this young age children were curious about people’s relationships, feelings, and the nature of good health. Why was the principal getting mad? Rhonda asked, “I wonder where are you, Elfie. Are you fine?” Questions generated by these children inevitably contained questions connected with feelings—feelings they had encountered within their lifetime. These questions sparked lively dialogue amongst us.

About ten years ago, my first graders tackled the question about whether there was one sky or many skies. (Lipman, 1988) Makanae, a bright, sensitive, and articulate youngster related that skies were for real. She believed that skies were real because that was where her nana (grandmother) lived now. With poise and confidence, she
eloquently related her thoughts to us. No doubt, the sky was a heavenly place where Makano’s nana could live in peace. Her grandmother, whom she loved dearly, had recently died of cancer. Makano found comfort in this thought. So did I.

As I related this story to her mother that afternoon, she was delighted that Makano was able to console herself and articulate her thoughts to her classmate. When asked to write a note for the Fee-Lah-So-Fee Newsletter, this is what Makano’s mother wrote of this story:

I think that it is wonderful for my daughter’s first grade class to learn about philosophy and making it a part of her studies in school. My daughter has been able to express herself so deeply, using her own thoughts and feelings about everything in and around her. In particular, my mother had recently passed away and during my daughter’s philosophy discussion, she was able to share with her class that the sky was real because there was a heaven and that her Nana lived there, so there was really a place in the sky.

Socratic thinking unfolded that day ever so gracefully. No one knew in advance—not me nor the children—that Makano was going to share this touching story of her grandmother. How could a dialogue of the existence of one sky or many skies connect to Makano’s personal life and experience? But it did. I’d like to think that her peers bonded with her more deeply that day because she had shared a story about death not being so sorrowful. I marveled how this six-year-old could be so incredibly spiritual and sensitive. I felt the inherent power of having philosophical dialogue on a consistent basis in the classroom.

**Children Begin to Use Precise Words to Articulate Their Thoughts and Ideas**

Elsie asked, “Is he (the principal) a bit nice?” She did not want to know if he is nice or not nice. She wanted to know if he was a bit nice. Stated this way, the question posed a gradation of nicety. It opened dialogue for clarification. Their questions allowed us to see their realities, to see the purity of their wonder and their thinking. Each child presented a different view through how questions were formulated. Raising questions with “I wonder...” expressed a sense of subtle puzzlement. The “I” personalized the question of their wonderment. The words “I wonder...” seemed to freeze time momentarily, giving us pause to ponder. Through regular philosophy time, the first graders began to understand the concept of assumptions. This was a difficult concept to internalize, yet, by engaging in regular philosophical dialogues throughout the year, my first graders intuitively grasped the meaning of _assume_. On one occasion, the class focused on Alice’s question, “How many friends does Elfie have?” Dexter quickly exclaimed, “I assume that Elfie has five friends.” The words seemed to be just a natural part of his natural language. I was thrilled. Immediately, one of his classmates wanted to know why he assumed Elfie had five friends. As Dexter thought about this, his other classmates interjected. “Well, Elfie’s letter talked about Diane, Steve, Ricardo, Sofia, and Linda. Elfie must have at least five friends.” Isn’t this such wonderful logical reasoning?

Another philosophical thinking tool used during our philosophy time was the examination of truth. Children scrutinized the claim being made—examining the truth or falsity through the process of logical reasoning. Was it for sure? Probably? Possibly? Unsure? Or no connection? How many times have you expressed a thought thinking it was the truth, but upon examination of the statement, you discovered that it was false? False claims can be made if we do not think about the integrity of our statements. If left unchecked, false claims viewed as truths will lead to erroneous outcomes.

Engaging in daily dialogue during philosophy time afforded my first graders the opportunity to use language to think. The skillful use of language expressed precise feelings and knowing. One day, Estelle thought about assumptions and truth as she wrote a story to me. It was only through her story that I was privileged to see her thinking. She made the invisible visible. Estelle wrote:

I love my teacher. Her name is Mrs. Tsuchiyama. Of course, she loves me, too. She cares about us. That’s why she scolds us. But is that true? My mom scolds me because she loves me. I think I assume too much. Mrs. Tsuchiyama, do you assume too much like me?

**Conclusion**

My six-year-olds diligently worked hard at making sense of their questions by using their own personal experiences as springboards. They demonstrated the ability to skillfully engage in philosophical dialogue. Their dialogue contained evidence that they were thoughtful and reflective thinkers. They gained, with practice, the confidence to use these thought-provoking words to bring clarity and solid reasoning to the community. I marveled at the language that these young children used. Their stories contained a refreshing look at the world. Simply delightful! Just imagine what our world would look like if we had a citizenry who asked thoughtful questions and responded with intellectual integrity like these six-year-olds. What a wonderful world it would be.

**References**


Mindful Habits & P4C: Cultivating Thinking & Problem-Solving in Children

CARYN MATSUOKA

Teenagers beating up their peers because of what they thought was said, or a first grader being shot and killed in class because a peer doesn’t like her are just some of the stories which fill our news today. Society is faced with many violent tragedies in which students are not making morally sound decisions and choices for themselves. The news brings many stories of children who seem to lack values and morals, which are seemingly not being taught to our youth today by members of society such as family and educational institutions. This is a problem that needs to be dealt with. Waikiki School, where I teach, is making a concerted effort in two ways to respond to that need. Waikiki School has adopted Dr. Arthur Costa’s Mindful Model and P4C, which address both academics and values in educating their students.

Waikiki School has made a commitment to systematically and thoughtfully address the skills necessary to become a problem solving and thinking individual who makes good choices for him/herself. The hope is that students who have attended Waikiki School will demonstrate the ability to use their knowledge of the Mindful Habits by applying it to situations in their own lives in order to be skillful problem solvers when faced with difficult decisions. The children are given a common vocabulary in order to discuss the Mindful Habits and are provided with opportunities to practice these Mindful Habits every day. The school focuses on 16 habits of the mind, which are considered to be behaviors important in developing thinking individuals who make good choices.

A number of classes in Waikiki School at various grade levels have also begun to address thinking, problem solving, and making appropriate decisions through P4C. In P4C, the classroom community begins to take part in the inquiry process in which the children begin to construct meaning for themselves because meaning cannot be dispensed. Meanings cannot be given or handed out to children. They must be acquired (Sharp & Reed, pg. 99). Sharp and Reed (1992) go on to argue that meaning is constructed through a process of the child thinking and trying to make sense of things . . . children acquire meanings for themselves . . . it is their meaning, and they acquire it because, to them, it is meaningful. As the group participates in the inquiry process, the individuals begin to strengthen their thinking skills and become more reflective thinkers by supporting their ideas with evidence, clarifying their ideas, and testing the truth behind their beliefs.

P4C and the Mindful Habits share the goal of helping students become more thoughtful and skillful problem solvers by focusing upon thinking and giving students thinking tools to help them make informed and appropriate decisions for themselves. During the 2002-2003 school year, over a period of several months, my sixth grade class at Waikiki School participated in P4C community circles once or twice a week. I observed and recorded their progress by video taping each community circle meeting and by having the students respond in a journal at the end of each session. This field study examined the students’ abilities to practice the habits of the mind, use the Good Thinker’s Tool Kit, and incorporate the two into their own lives.

In examining the data, I noticed areas in which the Mindful Habits and P4C wove themselves together. It became apparent that the two influenced one another and helped students become better problem solvers and more skillful critical thinkers. Evidence of this interwoven connection was observed in what the children said, did, and thought. It was interesting to see how the students themselves made connections between the Mindful Habits, P4C, and the ability to solve problems. The tables below are some connections that the students have made between Mindful Habits and P4C.

These children, now in middle school, are going to be faced with many tough and challenging decisions throughout their lives. I am hoping that they will have the necessary skills to overcome and resolve problems in a safe and

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### Mindful Behavior

- Listening with Empathy
- Creativity
- Thinking Flexibly
- Managing Impulsivity
- Cooperation and Caring
- Striving for Accuracy
- Problem Solving
- Persistence
- Metacognition

### P4C

- One of the most important evaluation criteria is “How’s our listening”
- By giving “E” (example) and “C” (counter example) one is motivated to think creatively and flexibly
- By giving “R” (reason) and identifying “A” (assumption) one tends to think deliberately before acting or judging
- By verifying or asking “W” (what do you mean by…?) one shows care for others points or opinions and also confirm the accuracy of the points made.
- One of the evaluations criteria “ Do we scratch beneath the surface” will enhance problem solving ability and reinforce persistent attitude.
- The evaluation, after each P4C session helps to reflect on one thinking process and behavior during the session.

The tools of Mindfulness and P4C both work toward that very goal. The problems in their lives are a certainty, but have these students been sufficiently equipped with the necessary tools to help them face and overcome those challenges in the future?

Having observed and documented during the 2002-2003 school year a connection between the Mindful Habits and P4C in the way they provide students with necessary tools to become more thoughtful problem solvers in a classroom setting, I now intend to examine whether a longer range impact of the students ability to use these tools has occurred. As noted, throughout the 2002-2003 school year, the students demonstrated their knowledge of the Mindful Habits and Good Thinker’s Toolkit, and the ability to use them while discussing personal issues they faced in their own lives. The next step, as I continue to research and write my dissertation, is to design a longitudinal study which examines whether or not these students continue to use their knowledge by making responsible, positive decisions for themselves as they maneuver their way through middle school.

Middle school is a time in which teenagers are faced with many challenges, such as, deciding the kind of person they want to become, the kinds of friends they choose to be influenced by, and the type of actions they take when faced with difficult choices. Discovering whether or not these habits and skills are sustained over time would enable us to see what impact the Mindful Habits and P4C have in giving our students the necessary tools to becoming better thinkers. My interest in this research is in finding out if the Mindful Habits and P4C have made an impact in these children’s academic and personal lives over time.

During the 2003-2004 school year, I plan to bring the students together for focus group discussions using the P4C methods of inquiry. I intend to videotape the sessions and have the students write short journal responses at the end of each session. This will allow me to compare the videotapes I took and the journal entries the students wrote in the 2002-2003 school year to the present and look at the interaction patterns and dynamics between the children to see if they continue to practice intellectual safety, ask questions, and scratch beneath the surface. I’m hoping the questions we pose and the topics we discuss in our focus group inquiries will elicit whether and to what extent the Mindful Habits and P4C continue to impact and influence the children’s lives and their ability to make good choices when faced with difficult decisions.

The methods of gathering data using the focus group inquiries, video taping, and journal reflection responses are important because there is no adequate means for assessing and measuring this aspect of children’s thinking. The current means of assessment using the standardized tests for math and reading are not sufficiently geared toward answering the really important question, which is, are we helping students make morally sound decisions and choices for themselves? This is a vital question for educators, which has many implications upon the future of education as we continuously work toward developing and cultivating thinking skills in truly mindful individuals.

### References


The first day I attempted to practice P4C in my classroom the students revolted. The memory is clear in my mind—most potentially scarring events are. The students, all thirty-three of them, were seated in a circle which had already made them squirmy because it was not the five neatly aligned rows facing the teacher that by tenth grade they had all become accustomed to. I stood in the center of them all, as they exchanged glances with one another across the room, and began to explain how the community ball that we had made would be used during class discussions. “This is too hard,” one girl whined using that perfected teenage pitch. “Yah, you’re making us do college stuff,” commented another boy. Although I was a novice teacher, merely attempting the fine art of student teaching, I recognized that if I didn’t say something quick I would soon be buried in a shallow grave of adolescent rebellion. With conviction, I confidently replied, “This class will be different for most of you, but I know you are all excellent thinkers and capable of what we are about to do. Please take a risk with me and try something new.” This pivotal moment opened the door that led to my quest, as an educator, to explore how the ingenious ideas behind P4C could change the face of public education in the state of Hawaii.

I could have easily resigned to my student’s fears, as well as my own insecurities during the first few weeks that I experimented with P4C. I was student teaching at a Windward Oahu high school where I taught two tenth grade U.S. history classes and four senior political science classes. I had decided that I wanted to investigate how P4C could be applied in the secondary social studies classroom so I dove into a year-long action research project and took my students with me.

My students and I may have been taking our “maiden voyage,” but the P4C route was not uncharted. Over the past thirty years teachers all over the world have experimented with Matthew Lipman’s P4C curriculum in their own classrooms using “action research” to find ways to transform the fundamental ideas that center around P4C into a classroom curriculum that fits both the individual practitioner’s teaching style and, more importantly, the unique needs of their students (Cochrin – Smith and Lytle, 1993). Action research requires that teachers research and practice an existing curriculum, collect data from their experience, analyze the data and “improve the nature and specifics” of the curriculum (Oberg, 1990). The existing curriculum, in my case, was taught to me by Thomas Jackson when I participated in his P4C course at the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

I met Dr. Jackson while I was floundering in the open ocean of a Masters in Teaching education program at the University of Hawaii. Like most teacher preparation programs, no matter how liberal they seem, this one had thrown me into a vast sea of theoretical inquiry and then expected me to build my own pedagogical ship to stay afloat during my year of student teaching. Fortunately, as I attempted to construct a curriculum that matched my theoretical beliefs, I was introduced to processes that had already been created for students participating in P4C—Dr. Jackson’s “Gently Socratic” method, incorporating the use of a “community ball, magic words, Plain Vanilla, and the Good Thinker’s Tool Kit” (Jackson, 2001). Dr. Jackson’s always-apparent enthusiasm and clearly articulated methodologies inspired me and provided me with actual techniques with which to experiment in my own classroom.

As my students staged their own version of “mutiny on the bounty,” I knew that the life preservers of Dr. Lipman and Dr. Jackson would be by my side to catch anyone, including myself, if we were thrown over into the sea I described. Without giving away the story of my experience...
with P4C, I must admit there was an occasional community member thrown overboard. During my first year of student teaching my students and I both ran into unique challenges that might have ended our quest to change how we looked at teaching and learning. However, it was the experiences of each and every community that had practiced P4C before us that kept us above water—even soaring.

In my first year of student teaching, I was what veterans in the field of education referred to as a novice teacher. This meant that I was teaching six classes at the high school, conducting action research that would be used to write my Masters thesis, and concurrently attending teacher education classes. I had decided that I would be focusing my research on the success and failures that I experienced while practicing P4C. Naturally, I dialogue with Dr. Jackson frequently during this time. He and I collaboratively discussed the types of processes I could use in my P4C classes and helped me to develop effective ways to teach the students about the cognitive tools found in the Good Thinker’s Tool Kit. The shared vision, conviction and passion for P4C that Dr. Jackson and I had, gave me the support that I needed to take the risk and try something new with my students. It was a good thing that I had his support because there weren’t many other professional sources who were confident about what I was doing.

First, I was frequently challenged to justify my decision to use P4C in the classes that I was taking from the college of education. In particular I remember when we were introduced to the fine art of lesson planning. Our professors stressed that one of the main reasons for lesson plans was to “set an agenda” to eliminate any “down time” with our students. The course instructors stressed that “a novice teacher should plan for each minute that we shared with our students,” and then have a back up plan just in case the students got finished with their assignments early. Upon reflection I realize that this was good advice. The underlying assumption however was that an unplanned moment for any teacher would eventually lead her into the abyss of a classroom management nightmare. Therefore, the P4C discussions that I was “planning” to consume the entire seventy minutes of the class period were discouraged by some teacher educators. Also, most of the other novice teachers in my program, fearful of the uncertainty of class discussions, shied away from incorporating them into their developing curriculums. I must admit that the fear of thirty-five out of control raging sixteen year olds did put fear in my heart. However, I knew that in order to really have student–driven discussion–based inquiry, I would have to take the risk of that unplanned classroom moment.

Besides the classroom management issues, other educators voiced concerns about the lack of content that I would be covering by using class discussions as a method of teaching. My mentor teacher, as he corrected 180 fill-in-the-blank Civil War vocabulary tests, joked, “so what will your class be discovering in the Kumbaya circle this week?” His perception was that because discussions allowed my students to explore issues of their choice, in a non–traditional setting compared to most other high school history courses, that my students would not have the time to “know everything that they needed to know” about U.S. history. Other teachers had similar concerns as they wondered how I would be able to cover all of the chapters in the U.S. history book. Many of my colleagues believed that if I took the time for students to actively engage in a dialogue about the writings of Fredrick Douglas or President Lincoln, for example, I would never reach the Gulf War by the end of the school year. It was at this early point in my decision to use P4C that I began to rigorously question my own belief systems about learning.

The concerns voiced by the community of educators described above initiated questions that guided the perpetual discussion in which I was engaged about the meaning of schooling. Traditionally, learning is measured through standardized tests by the quantity of facts that students can recall, the accuracy of their memory, their ability to identify the standard conventions of English and apply mathematical procedures. Keeping the foundations of modern schooling in mind, I wondered what exactly was it that today’s students “should know” and what “should they know how to do” as result of participating in the courses that I designed? I had not yet established where I wanted my students to be at the end of the school year as a result of experiencing a discussion based class and I must admit that the outside pressures voiced by the contingency for traditional teaching did make me wonder if my students would end up “behind” their other classmates because of the nature of discussion–based inquiry. With all of this in mind I worked hard during that first year to create learning goals for my students and I learned to appreciate how the critical voices that surrounded me would serve as catalysts for challenging my own thinking.

During that first year I also wondered how could I, or my students for that matter, measure learning that occurred as a result of discussion-based inquiry? At the same time I also asked the question: how could the learning that took place within the four walls of our classroom be shared with the larger community that we belonged to? So, I began to create the tools my students and I would need to measure our learning. These tools consisted of daily oral assessments, rigorous seventy minute discussion debriefs that required students to use evidence from all of our discussions to critique our discussion community, writing rubrics that evaluated the student’s ability to apply the thinking skills we practiced during our discussions to the rest of their class work, and finally I began to develop a test to measure the effects of P4C over the course of a year for the following school year.

With the use of my assessment tools I collected evidence documenting what was really going on in our classroom. This evidence allowed me to become confident in my ability to share the successes and concerns I was having about P4C with people who were unfamiliar or even critical
of the program. In that first year of experimenting with P4C I relentlessly documented the success of the existing P4C methodologies with which I was experimenting, the innovative curriculum that I was forging, and most importantly I made sure to record the voices of my students. My documentation revealed much and allowed my students and I to reflect on our practice. By the end of that first year I was able to articulate what was working in regards to P4C and identify concrete areas of my developing curriculum that needed to be improved.

First, I did have classroom management challenges. After all, previous to their exposure to P4C, the students had rarely been asked to speak in class. I was now requiring them to take ownership of their learning by letting them ask their own questions based on the readings I initially selected, choose their own topics of inquiry, speak freely in an intellectually safe environment, inviting them to act as members of a democratic community and most importantly, teaching them to challenge their ability to think critically—which often meant that they would challenge me. My students who were now seeing “education as the practice of freedom” tested their new boundaries with one another and myself, which often erupted in passionate discourse (Freire, 1989). They had extreme difficulty listening to one another, and struggled to craft their verbal responses to the discussant that spoke before them. Quite often, during those first few months, “shut up” flew out of some student’s mouths and I found myself reclaiming the community ball from the group to signal that the shouting match that was occurring needed to end.

In the first few months of P4C they also tested my professional “position of authority” by introducing topics for discussion that were extremely controversial and which they might have previously thought to be were taboo in school settings. For example, they often wanted to talk about things like drug legalization or sexual identity issues. On the day that one girl used genital mutilation in Africa as a counter example to the statement that “everyone is free,” the class erupted in inappropriate laughter. In the beginning, the natural tendency for teenagers to want to talk about socially controversial issues affected classroom management because the students didn’t necessarily know how to have a critical discussion about some “hot topics” and their immaturity would result in teenage silliness that could sometimes be harmful to certain community members. However, whenever my students did push the topical boundaries I made sure that we responsibly addressed various sides of the issue and made sure that our community remained intellectually safe.

These challenges with classroom management drove my mentor teacher wild. He kept his students in impeccably straight rows and created lessons that required the students to engage in mostly silent individual work. During some particularly difficult discussions in the beginning of the school year I could see him cringing in the corner of the classroom evidently holding in his immense desire to put my students in their place. His feedback frequently questioned my decision to let the students be so vocal during class time when they obviously weren’t prepared for this type of classroom setting. It was also obvious that I was navigating my way through experimental territory not really knowing what my students could and couldn’t do before I tried something with them.

The easy way out during those first months of P4C would have been to simply silence my students as my mentor teacher alluded to. He was right—they obviously had never learned how to critically engage in a dialogue with their peers. However, I didn’t become a teacher because I thought it would be easy. I knew that I would have to work hard if things were going to change in Hawaii’s public schools. So, as a result of his feedback and my own assessment, I did realize the need to make changes in the curriculum. It was at this point that I began to develop a curriculum that would teach my students how to think critically for themselves and to brainstorm instructional strategies that would give them the necessary skills to be responsible members of a democratic classroom.

With regards to the classroom management issues, I developed listening games and challenges that required the students to think before they blurted out their comments. These exercises also included lessons that taught students how to listen to constructive feedback from their peers and required that they demonstrate their listening by changing their behavior. I also decided that when I introduced P4C to the seniors at the beginning of the new semester I would devote time to discuss with them what the difference is between a dialogue and a monologue. (Reed & Sharp, 1992). This assured that the class had a concrete, operational definition before they experimented with discussions themselves. Finally, we also learned how to discuss “hot topics” in responsible ways. It was during these discussions that I witnessed my students really engage in a school activity unlike they probably had ever done before—it gave me chicken skin.

Slowly, over the course of the year I began to see a change in the way students approached their peers during class discussion. I particularly remember a discussion that centered on a recent school shooting in California. The seniors, after reading an article about the student who had committed the crime, chose to discuss the possibility of gun related violence at our school. The question that they chose to discuss required that the class uncover the different cliques that existed at our school and examine the implications of these cliques as they were forced to socialize with one another on campus. It should be noted that school violence is common on our campus, where fighting between different social groups occurs on what seems to be a daily basis. So, naturally when the students chose this question I began facilitating with trepidation, not wanting to instigate an in class brawl. After all, in the beginning of the school year the students had been very confrontational with each other about issues that didn’t necessarily require them to draw
hardly turned in homework.

I reveled in the seniors’ ability to use the assessment criteria to give feedback to their peers and was even more overjoyed when that feedback initiated changes in the students’ behavior. I witnessed students who had been intimidating and domineering in the beginning of the year pass the community ball to quieter students as they used our new discussion language to ask the less vocal student, “what do you think about what has just been said?” Quite often with the encouragement from their peers students who I had not been able to coax into giving a verbal response during discussion time would speak when invited by their classmates.

I rejoiced on the day when one girl complained, “we never have the answer when the bell rings.” It had been a particularly deep discussion about the difference between what is real and what is ideal. The class had spent the majority of the discussion grappling with criteria and by the time the bell did ring they had not come to a consensus. I had repeatedly told the class that we were not trying to find the one right answer as a result of our discussion. However, many of the students thirsted for certainty as they exited the classroom. On this particular day as the girl I described above left the room I also heard her classmate answer, “yah, well we have lot’s of answers and at least we know the reasons behind those answers.” I couldn’t have said it better myself.

I was ultimately convinced of my students’ growth on the day that the Lieutenant Governor to the State of Hawaii sat in and participated in a Philosophy for Children discussion. It was a bright sunny Hawaiian day—one of the last days of the school year. While most Seniors were busy cutting their final day of class, all twenty-nine of my stu-
dents, plus the Lt. Governor and her entourage sat crammed in our discussion circle creating one final question that they wanted to talk about with their peers. On this last day of class, I explained to the group that the question could be about anything that they wondered about in life—something that they wanted to think about with their classmates before they ended their high school journey. The Lt. Governor was included in the group and I gave her a pencil and paper to write down her questions as well.

When the group finished constructing their questions, with out my prompting one student rose and took the position by the chalkboard that I had filled at the beginning of the school year. With this visual cue the students went around the circle and read their wonderings out loud while the student poised by the chalkboard transcribed the classes’ jewel like questions for the group to see. I remember thinking that their ability to articulate their thinking in our discussion circle creating one final question that they chose. On that final day they wanted to talk about. I clearly remember the content of the question that they chose. On that final day they wanted to know why they could successfully communicate and disagree with one another within their classroom community—yet, when they were outside of class they would fall back into their cliques and barely acknowledge each other’s presence. The discussion was unforgettable as they used examples from their own life to scratch beneath the surface of a universal issue regarding contradictions that are found in human behavior. As the bell rang they were wondering why sometimes national harmony could exist and concurrently internationally turmoil would erupt in world wars. I often like to remind myself that these are the types of things high school students choose to talk about.

It was days like the one described above that exemplified the success of P4C in my first year. The students demonstrated good thinking, an ability to respect the members of their classroom community no matter how long that person had been with the group, and their ability to use discussion as a format to challenge the status quo. My students were truly practicing the skills needed to be a member of a democratic society and I had become confident that P4C was a necessary component of the secondary social studies classroom.

At the end of that first year, while using P4C in the courses I taught, I also internalized many of my own teaching philosophies that had merely been theoretical at the beginning of the school year—hypothetical foundations in my beliefs about education prior to my hands-on experience in the classroom. I had witnessed social constructivism in action, students learning in accordance with Vygotsky’s notion of a “zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky, 1978). Jerome Bruner, along with other social learning theorists, explained that people learn as members of a community, and that it is during this community-based learning that they are able to develop their social identities as they figure out how to act in those groups (Bruner, 1996). By practicing P4C I concluded that I was not only teaching my students academics. My students were developing as people and not just as isolated individuals. I witnessed my students grow and craft identities that allowed them to participate as conscious members of our collective human social group.

I also now had evidence to support my initial belief that students could rise to any challenge that I put in front of them as long as I understood the learning steps they would need to take in order to meet that challenge. Teacher expectations do shape what students can do and their ability to think critically. I completed my year of student teaching with confidence in the capabilities of my students. Their profound ability to overcome challenges as a community of inquiry during that first year inspired me to look forward to developing a more refined P4C curriculum for the following school year.

Besides the confidence that I developed in my students’ abilities I also left that first year feeling confident in my ability as a teacher to foster a classroom culture that truly matched my theoretical ideals about education. I now knew that if I created curriculum focused on my desired outcomes for my students they could rise to the standard. I was maturing as a teacher and establishing for myself what it meant to be a teacher who incorporated discussion-based inquires in her classroom. I adjusted the way I managed my classroom, cultivated my ability to practice the art of facilitation, reflected constantly on my practice and ultimately invented new ways to teach students how to monitor their own thinking and behavior. With great expectations in mind, I began to formalize a P4C curriculum for the following school year.

In the summer before my second year of teaching I made a mental list of all the P4C activities and assessments that I wanted to work on. First, I wanted to create a measurement tool that would measure cognitive and affective
effects of P4C, about which Lipman had written extensively (Reed & Sharp, 1992). Keeping the desired outcomes for my students that I described above, I developed a pre/post test to measure the cognitive and affective effects of P4C in my classroom. I collaborated on this project with Meredith Ing, a middle school English teacher who also practiced P4C and who had been my partner while writing our Masters thesis on our experiences with P4C. We finalized the test with Dr. Jackson at the University of Hawaii and used his feedback to make adjustments to this new assessment tool we were creating.

At the beginning of the school year, my second year of teaching, I gave the pre-test to my fourth grade U.S. history classes. At the end of that year all fourth grade classes took the same post-test. I had also made sure, during this second year of teaching that another fourth grade U.S. history class that was not practicing P4C took the pre and post-test as well. Currently, I am analyzing the results of these tests.

Besides creating the pre/post test during the summer before my second year of teaching, I also began to brainstorm how I could extend the original P4C curriculum I practiced during my student teaching. Keeping my previous experiences with P4C in mind, I decided to focus on creating a curriculum that centered on teaching students how to facilitate their own P4C discussions. There were many reasons for this decision.

First, students explicitly wanted to know about facilitating. When I started doing P4C with the fifth graders they wanted to know why I could talk without holding the community ball. Understanding their concern, and addressing the major issue of fairness plaguing most teenagers, I explained the dynamics of facilitation. We began with a definition. Facilitate simply means, “to make easy,” and by utilizing specific skills the facilitator helps to keep the discussion alive (Webster, 1987).

As I continued to clarify the idea of facilitation, I used examples from our past discussions to describe how my actions as a facilitator were fueled by a desire to make inquiries “easier.” Making discussions easier meant constantly thinking about how I could help our discussions “flow,” scratch beneath the surface of our initial question and always look for ways to help our community maintain a standard of intellectual safety (Jackson, 2001). While I was coaxed by their own inquisitiveness to define what it really meant to be a facilitator, I uncovered the second reason I wanted students to facilitate their own P4C discussions: to be consistently engaged in students’ thinking through listening attentively, which I found to be essential from my own experiences facilitating. As a facilitator, after all, I realized I had to continually serve as a reflective voice regarding the community’s successes and weaknesses. This meant taking the risk to confront particular students’ behaviors tactfully and create opportunities to praise the community when things were going well. Being a facilitator forced me to imagine what direction the discussion might go as a result of the communities’ individual personalities interacting with the reading I selected. At the same time, facilitation required that I make contemporaneous decisions during our “live” discussion. In summary, facilitating class discussions required that I continually challenge my own thinking about community and inquiry.

My facilitation skills grew exponentially over the course of that first year and I began to clearly define what it meant to be a good facilitator. This is when I hypothesized that if it was true that facilitation fostered all the skills I described above in myself, then wouldn’t my students develop those very same skills if they were required to become class facilitators themselves? This guiding question, if true, had many implications and inspired further questions. If all my students were effective facilitators wouldn’t all our discussions become better in general? I imagined the students becoming better listeners, more engaged in each others’ thinking, and this final step of requiring students to facilitate would encourage them to take complete ownership of their learning. I envisioned students choosing their own reading, creating possible questions for the inquiry, establishing roles they would play during class discussions, thinking on the spot, self-assessing their successes and taking the risks to assess their peers. With all these learning goals and expectations in mind I remembered I would have to create learning opportunities that would provide my students with the skills to achieve these goals. The second voyage that I was about to take with my students was preparing to set sail.

I decided that a senior level political science class titled “American Problems” would be the perfect setting to experiment with student-led discussions simply because of the nature of the course content. This is not to say that student-led discussions could not be fostered in other courses, but because this course would focus on current events, I believed it would be easier for the students to locate articles regarding topics of their choice. The course was a semester long, and I had also decided that in the first quarter the students would be looking at global issues that involved the United States and in the second quarter the students would be required to select an internal American problem that they felt would be important to inquire about in a discussion with their peers. Having determined that American Problems would be the setting for my experiment, with a clear vision of what I wanted my students to be able to do and with the conceptual foresight of what I wanted them to understand, I began to rigorously design a discussion–based inquiry curriculum for the course.

The first step in developing a novel curriculum was to examine which aspects of P4C that I had already practiced would be relevant and useful with regards to the newly established learning goals that I had set. Keeping the new culminating activity in mind, student–facilitated discussions, I reviewed my already established P4C lesson plans. At this point I realized that despite the fact that I had established a new standard of where I wanted my students to be at the
end of the school year, most of the P4C activities with which I had experimented in the first year were still relevant. Over the course of the entire second year of teaching I refined the P4C activities from the previous year and guided changes with the question—what do my students need to learn how to do next in order to become facilitators themselves? Finally, by the third quarter of that second year, I had established a solid foundation for my new curriculum. The curriculum was clearly outlined in the following four distinct learning stages:

A) Establishing a Framework for Discussion–Based Inquiry
B) Building the Background by Practicing Discussion–Based Inquiry
C) Deepening the Understanding of Discussion–Based Inquiry through Role Playing and Peer Assessment
D) Culminating in Students as Facilitators for their own Discussion–Based Inquiries

In the first stage of the curriculum, a foundation for learning in P4C is established by the students and myself. In other words, throughout the rest of the year all other learning opportunities during discussion-based inquiries require that students have the base knowledge provided during this first stage in order for them to grow as philosophers and members of a community of inquiry. The lessons in the first stage provide students with “scaffolding, a temporary structure around the ‘construction’ of the student’s learning that helps hold concepts together during the early stages of” learning about the skills required for engaging in P4C (Oakes & Lipton, 1999). In this first segment of the curriculum students take the P4C pre-test; uncover the difference between dialogue and discussion; build their community of learners; discuss intellectual safety; are introduced to the Good Thinker’s Tool Kit; and learn about “Plain Vanilla.”

In the second stage students reinforce the skills, and procedures, and try out the concepts from the stage one as I facilitate a series of discussion–based inquiries. For each of these discussions I select the article and provide challenges that include various experimental exercises with the Good Thinker’s Tool Kit. Besides encouraging use of the Good Thinker’s Tool kit in their questions, I have also created a series of thinking games that focus on a particular letter of the Tool Kit.

In the third stage the classroom set up changes dramatically. In the first two stages students had been accustomed to the room set up with chairs placed in a giant circle. In this third stage the room is set up with the chairs in a “fish bowl.” This means half the chairs are in a circle in the middle of the room and the other half of the chairs are organized around the center circle. The primary goal of this third segment is to foster meta–cognition where students are thinking about their own thinking during class discussions. During the third stage the students’ discussions improved dramatically in terms of community functioning and the increased ability to scratch beneath the surface. After using the fish bowl technique one or two times students demonstrated increased concentration and practiced appropriate codes for a discussion because they knew that their peers would “call them” on their behavior. Some competition was initiated by the students themselves as they attempted to “out perform” the discussion group that had gone before them. The inside group served as a window for the outside group to look through to examine their own thinking and behaviors during discussions. Most students, who previous to this sort of reflective exercise and my own feedback had not self–corrected their thinking and behavior, quickly began to grow as critical members of our communities of inquiry.

In the fourth stage students are introduced to the requirement that they will become co–facilitators of an inquiry. I began by reviewing what it meant to be a facilitator and at this point laid out specific criteria of “good facilitation.” The students then used these criteria to write down examples of good facilitation as they observed me facilitate a discussion with their peers. After I modeled good facilitation, to the best of my ability mind you, we debriefed the discussion as a class. I then explained that the criteria I was providing for good facilitation would be the same criteria their groups would be expected to meet and be assessed by.

My students were successful—beyond my wildest dreams. And you know how I explained that most potentially scarring events stick out in your memory? Well, amazingly, wonderful events do as well. Where do I begin? First of all the students, on their own, picked a variety of dynamic topics. We had discussions about the Hawaiian sovereignty, the possibility of male pregnancy, a patient assisted suicide bill coming up for consideration in the legislature, the right to choose graduation attire, one group even chose an intimidating article concerning the relationship between science and religion. When the students were required to choose what they believed were “American Problems” they were able to do it independently from pre–determined course content thus taking complete ownership over their learning.

When the students were asked to anticipate their strengths as co–facilitators they gave the following answers. Our strengths are:

Summarizing and clarifying because we know a lot about the topic we are choosing.

Asking open–ended questions to make the environment safer, which makes it easier for the group to participate and communicate. We will be able to invite participants by using questions that should be easy to answer and challenge their thinking.

Selecting a dynamic topic is one of our strengths because the discussants will be able
to relate their during/after prom experiences to the conversation/discussion. Inviting all discussants to participate will be one of our strengths because we are all curious and interested in what everyone has to say.

It is evident from the students’ anticipatory responses that they were thinking about the possible implications of their actions. The uncertainty of how their discussions would unfold, even though they expressed that they felt they were prepared, surfaced in their responses as one of their potential weaknesses.

Here is what a couple of students had to say about their group’s potential weaknesses. Our weaknesses are:

Everyone’s opinion will be different because of the different experiences they went through. We won’t be able to anticipate everyone’s thoughts.

If the topic is not interesting it’s hard to make everyone participate.

Demonstrating our own willingness to challenge our thinking because the people in our group are not always willing to participate in discussions. We might not make great questions but will try to make questions that everyone will give input to.

It was interesting to read what the students thought of their weaknesses, which truly were the groups’ fears because they were the same things I would worry about as a facilitator. The transformation of students from discussants to facilitators allowed them to consider all members of the community – to really think about the ways members of their community might think about the topic they selected at the same time they were working hard to challenge their own thinking about the topic they had chosen.

When the students finally led their discussions, class participation was at its highest, everyone seemed engaged, and the group’s ability to scratch beneath the surface of the topics they had chosen was prevalent. I kept a journal during some group’s discussions and my comments at the time demonstrate the students’ success. The following excerpt is from the group’s first peer facilitated discussion. The topic that the group had chosen was underage drinking.

Wow! I was very impressed with the discussion. The facilitation was good because of the open-ended questions, they did an excellent job clarifying all of the difficult words, summarizing what people had said and inviting other students into the discussion. I could tell that they were thinking on the spot because at first they started to read a question that they had planned and then they decided that the class had already addressed the topic so they skipped the question and moved on. The thing that I was most impressed with however was the skills that the discussants demonstrated. Leonard, Mitchell, Makani, and Frankie constantly used parts of the article to support what they were saying. They got everyone to read the portion of the article and then they began to ask many inferential questions themselves. Leonard asked if learning about drinking was like learning about history – if only particular things are taught then do we only have a certain perception of things? Tamara began to wonder if our behavior about drinking (binge drinking) is shaped by societies perceptions or attitudes. So, because we can’t talk about drugs and alcohol it shapes how people behave – like binge drinking. The class also then began to talk about religion and how religious beliefs contribute to drinking.

Finally, I knew that the curriculum had been a success when I read the students’ facilitation self-assessment forms. Among other things they were required to reply to the following statement – describe one new thing that you learned from being a facilitator and one new thing that you learned from the group you facilitated. The following are vignettes from their responses.

I learned that being a facilitator requires a lot of listening. If you miss one answer you could be left out of the whole rotation of opinions. I learned to listen no matter what, so you don’t have to stress later on. I learned from our group that I was wrong to assume that everyone was interested in alcohol consumption. Of all people I thought Kahai would be interested and want to participate. It turned out that this topic wasn’t relevant to his life at all. That’s what I learned from the group I facilitated today.

…I also learned that everyone in the group has different points of views for their responses so I have to accept them all – from Rob’s religious points of view to Mitchell’s own experiences.

I learned that it is not easy to be a facilitator
because you have to keep the discussion flowing.

I learned that being a facilitator isn’t easy. You have to do so much you end up forgetting what your job entails. I learned that the group you facilitate will always come up with a question that will really make you think, and you won’t always think of all of their questions.

You have to have confidence in your topic and questions and have control of the students. There are always a lot of assumptions being made by people.

It’s sort of hard to facilitate, I will be more grateful to my teachers.

Are these the voices of a student led revolt against discussions? No, in fact, by the end of the year, when they were required to co-facilitate their own discussions, they were diving head first into the challenge. Was it “too hard,” like one girl had complained the first time I experimented with P4C? Well, it was hard but as I explained, when my students were given the right steps to achieve a standard that was set for them it wasn’t “too” hard as evidenced in each of their co-facilitated discussions with their peers. Was I “making them do college work,” like another boy had whined at the beginning of this effort? Maybe, it was college work because intellectual discussions are at the heart of a college education. However, being able to have an effective discussion with the people that you live with in the world goes beyond college.

In our daily lives oral communication is the most prevalent form of human interaction. On any given day we discuss a variety of topics with our families, friends, the people we work with, government officials, the guy at the counter of a convenience store, the people we love and the people that we experience the most conflict with in our lives. In so many of these contexts people in general, let alone teenagers, feel thwarted in their ability to solve problems or really express themselves. This is why practicing discussion, and the art of facilitating good discussions is a crucial practice for the classroom teacher. Inquiry-based discussions provide the most relevant learning because they mirror the reality of our social world.

From my colleagues, I eventually heard a lot less criticism and instead more dialogue about how P4C has developed in our school community. I knew things had changed when a science teacher sacrificed her measly thirty–minute lunch break to visit my classroom. “What are you doing with your students?” I had been accustomed to a culture of negativity and as I was about to ask her for clarification she replied. “They always come to science on Friday, after your lunch break to visit my classroom. “What are you doing with your students?” I had been accustomed to a culture of negativity and as I was about to ask her for clarification she replied. “They always come to science on Friday, after your lunch break to visit my classroom.

Tell me how you get them so excited.” This is when it became clear that P4C was changing the face of our school culture. Could this enthusiasm about bettering the way we look at schools grow beyond the chicken wire fences of our country school? I was beginning to think so.

The more that I work on facilitation of discussions with teenagers, the more I realize how important my job is. If teenagers are the next generation to change the world, don’t we want them to have the skills to talk about the world’s issues with one another? Most centers of power in our world operate within a context that requires their participants engage in discussions. For example, the United Nations is one of, if not the most important forum for world change and the global positioning of nations. Members of the United Nations must be able to have effective discussions in order to resolve world conflict. An example more specific to our country is the political ideal of democracy, and discussion is a requirement for the perpetuation of this ideal. Keeping these two examples of discussion-based realities in mind, I wonder, why is it that within our own communities, especially our schools, we rarely give our students a space to critically discuss issues?

Discussion-based classrooms will change the world—for the better. P4C provides the essential framework to make this change happen. However, it is up to teachers to take this program, and experiment with it in their own unique classrooms. Today’s students, diverse as they are, must have a common language that allows them to talk about their differences with one another in an intellectually safe and rigorous way. As individual teachers like myself draw on the foundations that P4C has to offer, we can provide our students with the tools to change the world that they so desperately desire. Just as I strive to change certain aspects of the Hawaii State School system I know my students are already changing certain aspects of Hawaii in general—for the better. One thing to keep in mind as you embark on your own journey with your own students: they might revolt at first, but keeping my story in mind, remember—with a little encouragement anyone can go anywhere.

**Works Cited**


Bringing P4C Into the Undergraduate Classroom

ASHBY BUTNOR

Everything I know about teaching I learned from P4C.

I’m not sure if that’s completely accurate. However, it is true that P4C has been central to my pedagogical style, reflections, and refinement as I have emerged onto the college scene after a few years learning the ropes from scores of grade school students. Teaching, its practice and improvement, has been central to my graduate experience at the University of Hawaii. My initiation into the philosophy of teaching and education that I have applied throughout my classroom experiences these last five years began with Dr. Thomas Jackson’s “Philosophy with Children” seminar. Clearly, it would be a mistake to assume that this course and the Philosophy in the Schools Project are applicable only to the teaching of elementary school children. Rather, the philosophy of teaching that we develop and implement is applicable to any classroom. This essay is an attempt to convey the central idea of P4C—the fostering of reflective communities of inquiry—and then explain how I have brought my P4C training, experiences, and methodology into the college classroom.

Our Philosophy of Teaching and Learning

What we endeavor to create in the Philosophy in the Schools Project are “reflective communities of inquiry” within every classroom, elementary or otherwise. We begin by fostering the development of community through the establishment of intellectually safe places for thoughtful engagement and inquiry. In an intellectually safe place, respect for persons and ideas is paramount, thereby creating a space for a diversity of viewpoints. Questioning of others and ourselves is central; active listening is valued as highly as speaking. As a result, learning becomes a genuinely empowering, and hence, joyful experience. As part of this community-oriented learning environment, the community as a whole, as opposed to “the Teacher,” establishes the guidelines by which dialogue shall proceed and the criteria that will be used to evaluate community inquiries. This, in part, is what is meant by a reflective community—that is, reflection refers not only to the ability to reflect on the subject matter at hand, but, further, to reflect on the process by which learning was achieved or, perhaps, failed to be achieved according to the group’s own standards.

Finally, the community is engaged collaboratively in inquiry. This is where the philosophical component of our work is perhaps most recognizable. Above and beyond the “facts” of a particular topic (and, in the case of a college course, the assigned reading materials), members of the community develop the skills necessary to take inquiry to a deeper and more intellectually rigorous level. As the community strengthens, there is an expectation that reasons will be given to support views, that evidence will be sought in support of claims, that recognition of ambiguity and the consequent clarification of meaning is necessary, that assumptions and implications will be pursued, and that counter-examples will be envisioned to test the truth of the claims being made. The exercise of these thinking tools, coupled with a responsibility for one’s own thinking and participation in the inquiry, transforms students—too many of whom have internalized the role of passive listener—into active co-inquirers, reflective thinkers, and lifetime learners.

Prior to my teaching on the UH Manoa campus, I worked as a teaching assistant in the Philosophy in the Schools Project for two and one half years. During that time, I engaged in philosophical dialogues on a weekly basis with over twenty classes in Hawai‘i’s public schools ranging from kindergarten to fifth grade. While the formation of an intellectually safe place and the practice of higher-order thinking skills are of first importance in preparing for philosophical inquiry, “doing” philosophy with children advances far beyond these initial requirements.

Although these young students do not engage directly with traditional philosophical theories, their chosen topics and the depth of their insights are far-reaching and rich. It is not uncommon, within the course of the year, for the students to inquire into the nature of reality, space, and time, the existence of God and the role of religion, the definition of happiness, and the nature of knowledge. Everything I know about teaching I learned from P4C and the Philosophy in the Schools Project.

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happiness and the good life, the structure of society and government, the value of science and technology, and numerous ethical questions that they encounter in their lives. Being a member of these dynamic communities has been of enormous benefit to me in developing patience and active listening, recognizing student insights (however inchoate) and pursuing them, adapting to the community’s interests and skills, designing creative approaches to different topics, sharing in the satisfaction of intellectually hard work, and preparing for the element of surprise. It was with this experience of genuine learning and this philosophy of teaching that I first stepped into a UH classroom in January 2001—expecting nothing less from my college students than what I had received from my grade school philosophers.

**Special Challenges of the College Setting**

The above description of reflective communities of inquiry is, of course, an ideal—but an approachable one. Each community has unique challenges and promises that will shape how its successes are defined and achieved. A teacher or facilitator must become quickly attuned to his or her community’s particularities in order to begin laying the foundation for such success. While I do not wish to stereotype all elementary and college students, I do want to point out a couple differences that I’ve noticed in working with the two groups. For example, I’ve found that younger students are much more open to change and experimentation in learning situations, and this lends itself to a more creative and imaginative engagement with thinking. They are often very free and comfortable with exploring new ideas with each other. This freedom is, I believe, a direct result of the intellectual and emotional safety created by the classroom teacher and continuously fostered by the philosophy facilitator. When such safety has not been developed and practiced, there is a very noticeable effect on all members of the classroom community.

College students, on the other hand, are very often a product of the kind of information-laden, heavily structured environment that is characteristic of most U.S. high schools. By the time they enter college, they are rather accustomed to this style of teaching and learning, have mastered it to some extent, and rely on it to continue. College students are accustomed to the instructor being “The Teacher” and passing along information that will then be returned on tests and quizzes. The possibility of classroom engagement and dialogue is something that often creates great anxiety—especially for those who were considered the top students in high school.

Another factor that can impede genuine learning that I have noticed here at the University of Hawai’i—which is largely a “commuter school” for undergraduates—is the “coolness factor.” Many of the students in any given class may have gone to high school together or have some sort of tie to other students. While this may produce an instant community of engaged learners, it may also perpetuate a situation in which the peer pressure to conform has never gone away. College then may never become the opportunity where the student steps out of his or her element and really explores and challenges his or her own thoughts, opinions, and goals. Rather, at its worst, it is simply an extension of high school—with all the trappings, associations, and expectations that go along with it. I do not want to claim that this situation represents an ultimate barrier to P4C goals, but it may be a characteristic of every community that facilitators must attend to in order to devise creative means for breaking through the walls that we build around ourselves. Once students begin to open up to each other and the given topic of a course, there is so much productive energy and enthusiasm that follows.

In addition to the unique make-up and expectations of the members of a community, every classroom will have particular constraints that will limit what can be done—for example, time, subject matter, class size, and so forth. One of our mottos in the Philosophy in the Schools Project is “We’re not in a rush to get anywhere… but that doesn’t mean we’re not going somewhere.” However, in a college course, we often are in a rush to get somewhere or, at the very least, there is an expectation that certain material will be covered. This differs from our experience in the elementary classroom where P4C facilitators often pursue inquiries that are of the students’ choosing for as long as the community interest holds. Striking a balance between the limitations imposed by required course content and time for open-ended student-directed inquiry is a skill that is difficult to master. Depending on the subject matter of a course, I have found it most productive to creatively intermingle lectures, community dialogues, student-initiated inquiries, group presentations and dialogue facilitation.

**P4C Methods in the College Classroom**

Over the past two and one half years, I have taught six introductory courses at UH—ranging from women’s studies, introduction to philosophy, ethics, and logic—and assisted with one upper-division course. With the exception of the logic courses, I have attempted to bring P4C peda-
gogy and methods into each one of these classes with varying degrees of success and many kinds of challenges. While I must admit that I have not even come close to perfecting the union of P4C and college teaching, I outline here some of the methods that I have employed.

1. Community Building

I honestly believe that building a strong community is the most important element in a successful classroom. The community serves as the primary foundation upon which learning and serious inquiry can happen. In many ways, it seems like the inquiry can take care of itself if the community is well established. While this is not necessarily the case, forming a safe community should always be the first goal of a teacher or facilitator. While difficult to define, safety may be best understood as an atmosphere of equality and freedom within a community. Classrooms are safe when there is a natural ease and mutual willingness to share ideas and explore them together. Safe classrooms are most easily recognized in contrast to unsafe ones—where tension, hesitation, embarrassment and/or hostility hang heavy in the air. When unsafe classroom dynamics are allowed to continue over time, it becomes all the more difficult to establish community and, therefore, to really become immersed in engaged dialogue.

The methods for forming a safe community in the college classroom are very much the same as the ones we use during P4C in the elementary school classroom. The first step is for the community members to get to know one another. While this may not seem so important, it allows each student to be recognized as a member of the community with certain responsibilities to himself or herself and to the group. Also, the community can begin to get a sense of the unique particularity of each member and will begin to see how each perspective contributes something special to the ongoing inquiry. This process begins with a simple restructuring of the classroom setting so that all members—the teacher included—are facing one another in a circle. This can be done by moving chairs or by rearranging seminar tables. This new arrangement not only allows students to really see and participate with others, but there’s also something about having to face the other members that reinforces the classroom activity as a shared endeavor to which everyone is responsible.

Like the elementary P4C classroom, I like to begin each course by making a community ball. The process of making a community ball together allows the members to hear from each other and begin to know one another. Since the community ball marks who is speaking in the classroom, the practice of tossing the ball around the classroom switches the classroom dynamics from a normally teacher-centered activity to a community activity. With the community ball, we can easily track the movement of the ball, and thus the speaking, around the classroom. If the ball seems to always go back to the teacher or other outspoken members, inquiries can be differently structured so as to open the dialogue to more students. While the community ball is an effective way to get students involved in the dialogue, it may also pose as an obstacle in some college classrooms. For example, the community ball may be considered too childish or “kiddy.” Throwing around a yarn ball certainly isn’t necessary in college where all students are supposedly mature and eager to engage in adult-level discussions. I have faced resistance in the use of the community ball, but I have also seen how much it helps the students take charge of their own communities of learning. It allows members of the community to reign in outspoken students who often dominate class discussion as well as giving more quiet students the forum in which to speak. Indeed, resistance to the community ball may even reflect resistance to community learning itself. The best way for a facilitator to break through this resistance is to model how one can let one’s guard down, relax, and, in the process, reinvigorate a love for learning.

2. Taking Responsibility for Classroom Dialogues

As I described above, part of what it means to have a strong community is a sense of responsibility for what goes on within that community. In P4C, this responsibility shifts from the teacher as the sole authority and disciplinarian to the whole community as a self-evaluative and corrective unit. This means that the community is responsible for the amount of safety sustained during a dialogue as well as the quality of that dialogue—meaning how good the group was at “scratching beneath the surface” of a given topic or question. Students may not always want that kind of responsibility—even as a whole. They may not want to deal with issues of student non-participation in class dialogues, outspoken, aggressive, or overly opinionated students, or the quality of class discussion. However, if the classroom is going to be a reflective community of inquiry, these are exactly the kinds of issues that the community must sort through together.

In one particular class, I had all three of these problems going on simultaneously. I tried to gently urge students to
take control of their education and the class and to steer it the way they thought it should be going. This gentle urging, however, was to no avail and students were getting increasingly frustrated. When these breakdowns of community and inquiry begin to emerge, I find it best to break from the routine of class and focus specifically on the problems in the classroom. This can be done by opening a forum through which students can evaluate how the class is going, their participation in shaping its direction, and brainstorm about creative methods for getting the class back on track. I’ve found that students really respond when the instructor takes a genuine interest in hearing what they have to say about the class and its trajectory. After these evaluation sessions, classes can often start afresh with a new set of methods and rules for the dialogue that can help refocus the community on their shared goals.

3. Critical Reflections: Self and Group Evaluations

Once a safe community is established, I think that evaluations play the next biggest role in ensuring the success (however defined) of the class. Group evaluations can be community activities, as just described. Or they can take the form of individual, written evaluations of both class and personal participation. For example, before and after group work, I like students, both within and outside the groups, to evaluate individual and group participation and learning. The most important aspect of evaluations is, I believe, their regularity. In many P4C elementary classrooms, evaluations of community safety, depth of inquiry, and fun and interest level have become a reflective way to close each session. Perhaps such frequency is not necessary in the college classroom, but setting aside time and a forum to discuss the process of collaborative learning is surely helpful—though sometimes difficult and challenging—in reaching the kinds of goals that the group has envisioned. In terms of student evaluations (namely, grades), I evaluate not only class participation, these self- and group evaluations, and group assignments, but also a fair amount of writing where I can track the depth and sophistication of their individual inquiry in the field.

4. Community in Action: Group Work

A good measure of how your class operates as a reflective community of inquiry is to assign group projects that revolve around classroom teaching and the facilitation of community dialogue. While this may seem like a hefty assignment for intro students, I like to save this activity as a sort of course culmination exercise. Towards the end of the semester, students are familiar with community dialogues and have participated in and reflected upon both successful and failed attempts within our classroom. As an example of this kind of group activity, in an introduction to ethics course, I had the students pick three contemporary ethical issues that they, as a class, wanted to explore. After we had chosen the topics, the class divided into three groups based on their interest in the selected issues. Each group was then responsible for three class days in which they covered their topics. They were responsible for assigning reading materials, doing outside research, structuring the class days, presenting the issue, and facilitating at least one full day of dialogue. I thoroughly enjoyed watching these students go through the process of learning from one another, playing off each other’s strengths, brainstorming methods to pique their classmates’ interest in their topic, and struggling through the dialogue facilitation. Most satisfying, of course, was the pleasure they took in their own achievements—particularly in their ability to take on the responsibility for teaching and to really think through how they could make it a truly collective undertaking.

Elementary vs. College Classrooms

This portrayal of my experiences as a P4C-educated college instructor is not intended to paint a dichotomous picture of education—where the elementary classroom is an emotionally safe, fun-loving, free, and creative environment for the exploration of profound ideas and the college classroom is a place of conflict-ridden communities incapable of engaging intellectually with one another. Actually, both environments can be silly or serious, profound or mundane, frustrating or exhilarating. Perhaps one advantage that P4C facilitators and teachers have in the college classroom that is sometimes lacking in the elementary classroom is the visibility of direct and lasting results. Through my work in the Philosophy in the Schools Project, I have witnessed the beginnings of a transformation of young people’s thinking and the development of a certain philosophical awareness through the process of community dialogue. However, in this work, there is always an understanding that we are only planting a seed—a seed that must be nurtured through the course of one’s education with the help of parents and teachers. We proceed with the faith that the seed that is planted—the love and respect for thinking and ideas—can somehow survive through an educational and social environment that may be constantly working against it. In contrast, working with college students, I see immediate and powerful changes in the way they perceive and think about the world. Through class discussion and even more in their writing, the impact of both the content and the skills learned in this class are clearly visible and are continuously being refined. Of course, I cannot be entirely assured that one class will turn them all into deeply profound thinkers or socially responsible individuals, but I am sure with new thinking tools and collaborative learning skills, they will walk away as different people and will be better off, in some way, as a result. This is not to say that we should wait until the time of higher education to provide such tools. But until we turn all our children into philosophers and keen social observers and reformers, we are lucky to have the opportunity to teach and learn and positively change each other’s lives—at any point therein.
The Dao of P4C

JUNG YEUP KIM

Introduction

This mysterious text was excavated in the Pacific Ocean, where the legendary Hawaiian Islands was purported to have existed, in the year 3721. It is one of the few writings that have survived the nuclear war in the year 3003, when almost everything of the ancient civilizations had been destroyed. It is very difficult for us to know the historical situation when this book was written or who wrote it and to what school the author belonged. However, with the few remaining archeological fragments we have, we have put together a hypothetical description of the background of this mysterious text.

The author seems to have studied under the ‘infant sage,’ one of the 14 sages that had shared their wisdom with their disciples, and was inspired to write this book under the influence of the sages’ teachings. The real name of the sage is not known. However, it is purported that the sage sometimes went by the name of Dr.J, so we can categorize the author as having written this book under the school of Dr.J. From the remaining fragments it has been analyzed that this Dr.J seems to have been a tall male of Caucasian descent. He was famous for his friendly smile. He is said to have lived a time of 500 years due to his secret elixir called ‘chocolate.’ Besides the teachings of the ‘infant sage,’ the author has incorporated the teachings of a sage named ‘Laozi’ who seems to have lived near the author’s point of origin. However, it is impossible for us to get a grasp of who this ‘Laozi’ was, but it seems that Laozi lived in a time too ancient for us to recollect.

Unfortunately, few works of Dr.J have survived the nuclear war. The ‘infant sage’ Dr. J seemed to have been working on a project called ‘P4C.’ There have been controversies of what this means but it is highly plausible that it means ‘Philosophy for Children.’ As the remaining fragments tell us, this project of P4C was initially started by another master possibly named Matthew Lipman. Lipman, wondering what possible benefit anyone would obtain from logic, wrote a book called Harry Stottlemeier’s Discovery (amongst many other works) to help children understand logic. Lipman took a group of children forming a ‘community of inquiry’ through their dialogues as the model for his book, and hoped that his works would “help children span the chasms between wonder and reflection, between reflection and dialogue, and between dialogue and experience.”

We do not know if this work of the mysterious author is an adequate representation of the school of Dr.J, but it being the only text to survive from this school, we rely on it to understand the teachings of the ancient sage. Hundreds of translations have been done of this text, and there still remain many controversial points. However, despite the difficulties, this school of thought has provided the most influential way of thinking that has shaped our education as it is today (4002).

The Dao of P4C

The five things that the master and his disciples meditated on were: Children, Thinking, Community, Inquiry, Philosophy

To the question: “Why is Philosophy for Children needed?”

the master replies:

“To help students develop their ability to think for themselves and to use that ability in a responsible way.”

“To set people on the journey to become ever more confident and competent facilitators of philosophical inquiry.”

To the question “How do we do it?” The master replies:

“Plain Vanilla”

As a disciple of the ‘infant sage of the West,’ Dr.J, I have meditated on these teachings of the master and also my experience as a practitioner/facilitator of P4C at schools and have integrated them with the philosophy of the ancient master Laozi who is considered as the ‘infant sage of the East.’ The reason I do this is because of the striking resonance between the teachings of the sages, and also between my experience and the teachings. It seems that P4C is a realization of the Dao. The other reason I do this is because it is my hope that people from both East and West may feel that they are not far apart, and that they may be come closer to one another in harmony.

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Chapter 55
The Dao of the Community of Inquiry 1

To possess Power that runs deep, Is to be like a newborn Child. Poisonous insects do not sting it. Fierce beasts do not seize it, Birds of prey do not strike it. It’s bones are yielding. Its muscles are relaxed, Its grip is strong. It does not yet know the union of male and female, yet its virility is active. Its Life force is at its greatest. I can scream all day, Yet it does not become hoarse. Its Harmony is at its greatest. To know Harmony is called [Chang]. To know [Chang] is called insight. To enhance Life is called propitious. To be conscious of Influence is called strength. Things overgrown must decline. This is not the Tao. What is not the Tao will soon end.

The state of the community of inquiry should be a state of harmony “The Shuowen defines he [harmony] as “mutual responsiveness” xiangying. The etymology of this term is culinary, takes us back to geng, a gruel-like staple of the early diet, comparable probably with the contemporary congee or zhou. Geng was made by combining he, the widely cultivated fox-millet, and other locally available ingredients, in service to the palate, kou. Harmony is the art of combining and blending two or more foodstuffs so they come together with mutual benefit and enhancement without losing their separate and particular identities, and yet with the effect of constituting a frictionless whole … harmony is distinguished from mere agreement by again invoking the central role of particularity.”

So the community of inquiry should not be a unity of same opinions but a harmony of each individual opinions Harmony does not always imply peacefulness. It contains tension and even conflict among the particulars. Harmony without tension would not be harmony at all, but rather a uniform agreement. To fully understand harmony here, we must understand what ‘chang’ and ‘insight’ are for Laozi. ‘Chang’ appears in chapter 16 and 28. Chapter 16: “… Experiencing [chang] is Clarity. Not to experience [chang] is to be heedless in one’s actions—bad luck. Experiencing [chang], then one is all-embracing, all embracing, an impartial Prince, Prince then King, King then Heaven, Heaven then Tao, Tao then one lasts very long. As to destroying the self, there will be nothing to fear.” Chapter 28: “Be familiar with Masculinity but watch over Femininity … Be familiar with what is praiseworthy but watch over what is disgraceful …. Your [chang power] will be sufficient. Turn back to being an Uncarved Block.”

In chapter 16 ‘chang’ is described as ‘all embracing’. Experiencing it will lead to impartiality. In Chapter 28 it is said: “Don’t be attached to one of the opposites and return to the ‘uncarved block’ (= unnamed=unfixed=unbiased= nature=spontaneity) and your ‘chang power’ will be sufficient. The impartial state of having balanced the opposites, this is harmony and this is the state of the infant.” This is the way of the community of inquiry.

In chapter 36 Laozi defines what insight is: “When you want to shrink something you must always enlarge it. When you want to weaken something you must always strengthen it. When you want to neglect something you must always involve yourself with it. When you want to deprive something you must always give to it. This is called ‘subtle [insight].’” Therefore, insight, for Laozi, is understanding that all things are interdependent and that they dynamically correspond with one another. This state of interdependence and correspondence is the state of harmony. Knowing this is the way of the community of inquiry.

Chapter 32 - The Dao of the Community of Inquiry 2

The way is forever nameless. Though the uncarved block is small, No one in the world dare claim its allegiance. Should lords and princes be able to hold fast to it, the myriad creatures will submit of their own accord. Heaven and Earth will unite and sweet dew will fall, and the people will be equitable, though no one so decrees. Only when it is cut are there names. As soon as there are names, one ought to know when to stop. Knowing when to stop, one can be free from danger. The way is to the world as the River and the Sea are to rivulets and streams.

There are two important metaphors that Laozi uses here. I will explain the second one first. The metaphor using the river, sea, rivulets and streams can be a model for the community of inquiry. The rivulets are created by the river. Likewise the individuals are created by the community. However, this is not the end. The streams create the sea. Likewise the individuals create the community. However, this is not the end. The streams create the sea. Likewise the individuals create the community. The community of inquiry is a creative interaction between the community and the individuals. It is not a one sided process of inquiry. This metaphor can be used to explain the relationship between the facilitator and the inquirers also. They mutually create one another. It is not a one way process. The second metaphor is that of the ‘Uncarved Block.’ This is one of the most important metaphors of Laozi. It is used to describe the state of the Dao.
Uncarved means unnamed. Unnamed means unfixed. That is, names fix things. Laozi wanted to escape the state of fixing things. They produce artificial prejudices. Names seem to be real but are not. They are distinctions of convention. If we are attached to these names, our minds will become fixed. If our minds become fixed we will never experience the way. It is the same with the community of inquiry. If the inquirers are always confined to their own prejudices and are not willing to see that it is merely how they name this world, they will never get to any fruitful insight. Although the child metaphor is not used here, It is clear that Laozi understands the state of the Uncarved Block as the state of the child. The way of the river, rivulet, streams and sea, the way of the Uncarved Block, This is the way of the community of inquiry.

Chapter 49 – The Dao of the Facilitator

Evolved individuals have no fixed mind; they make the mind of the People their mind. To those who are good, I am good; to those who are not good, I am also good. Goodness is Power. Of those who trust, I am trusting; of those who do not trust, I am also trusting. Trust is Power. The Evolved Individuals in the world attract the world and merge with its mind. The People all focus their eyes and ears; evolved individuals all act as infants.

The facilitator should not have a fixed mind. If he or she does, this would be detrimental to the community of inquiry. He or she should try to encompass as many views as possible. As Ronald F. Reed asserts “If questioning is to occur in a Philosophy for Children discussion, it ought to involve asking of questions where the answers are not already known to the person asking the question.” (36) He or she must have the virtue of impartiality. He or she must also be willing to maintain her/his goodness and trust to even the most hostile groups. This is the power of the facilitator. If he or she can do this he or she will be able to attract the inquirers and focus their minds. This is the state of the infant. This is the way of the facilitator.

Chapter 28

The Dao of the Inquirer (Philosopher)

Know the male, Hold to the female; Become the world’s stream. By being the world’s stream, The power will never leave, This is returning to Infancy. Know the white, Hold to the black; By becoming the world’s pattern, The Power will never falter. This is returning to Limitlessness. Know the glory, Hold to the obscurity; Become the world’s valley. By being the world’s valley, The Power will be sufficient. This is returning to Simplicity. When Simplicity is broken up, It

is made into instruments. Evolved Individuals who employ them are made into leaders. In this way the Great System is united.

As we can see from the above, the inquirer should take all cases into consideration (The male/female, white/black, glory/obscurity). He should know how to balance all views. Believing that only one side is right is what Laozi despised most.

This lead to false distinctions, which in turn lead to artificiality and superficiality. The attitude of the inquirer should be like the valley and stream. It is not on top of everything but below everything. However, because of this it can comprehend everything. It is the state of non-fixation, non-prejudice. It is the state of an infant. The way of the valley and stream, the way of the infant, this is the way of the inquirer.

Chapter 20

The Dao of Thinking for Yourself

Discard the academic; have no anxiety. How much difference is there between agreement and servility? How much difference is there between good and evil? That one should revere what others revere—how absurd and uncentered! The Collective Mind is expansive and flourishing. As if receiving a great sacrifice, As if ascending a living observatory. I alone remain uncommitted. Like an infant who has not yet smiled, Unattached, without a place to merge. I alone seem to be overlooked. I am unknowing to the core and unclear, unclear! Ordinary people are bright and obvious; I alone am dark and obscure. Ordinary people are expecting and sharp: I alone am subdued and dull. Indifferent like the sea, Ceaseless like a penetrating wind, The Collective Mind is ever present. And yet, I alone am untruly and remote. I alone am different from the others, In treasuring nourishment from the Mother.

What is thinking for yourself?

This was one of the topics focused on in a P4C session. Related to the above passage from the Daodejing, we can see that Laozi is against any kind of conventional fixation of thought. He takes the collective mind of all people into consideration. That is why he cannot be fixed. If we can maintain a state like an infant, a state of non-prejudice and non-fixation, we will be able to expand our thoughts more naturally without being confined to what is thought to be the case. Thinking for yourself is not to allow yourself to be ossified by con-
vention and prejudice. Thinking for yourself is thinking independently and creatively. The way of the collective mind, this is the way of thinking for yourself.

The Dao of Intellectual Safety

Confucius said: "...only after one has settled down does one feel safe, and only after one feels safe can one think, and only after one can think can one obtain." The ‘Way of Intellectual Safety’, the right to keep silent, in my view, is one of the profound part of the sage’s teachings. The right to silence will paradoxically end one’s silence. When forced to speak one may not be able to speak. This corresponds with the teachings of Laozi in the Daodejing. In chapter 40 Laozi says “Polarity is the movement of the Dao. Receptivity is the way it is used.” Polarity here is also translated as ‘Reversal.’ The movement of the way is paradoxical. When you go to one pole it will end up in the opposite pole. If you ask someone to speak it might make her/him silent. If you let her/him be silent he or she may speak up. Also the way is always receptive. It does not coerce. By not coercing it leaves things to proceed naturally. This is the way of intellectual safety. This is the way of the inquirer.

The Dao of no Rush –

The Master said: “We are not in a hurry to get anywhere. However, that does not mean that we are not going anywhere.” Laozi says in chapter 37 of the Daodejing: “The way never acts yet nothing is left undone.” This does not mean that you should not act. Rather it means you should not be aware that you are acting. Artificial awareness of your actions gets you nowhere. Rather you should let things go on their natural course. Laozi says in chapter 17: "...when his [the sage] task is accomplished and his work done, the people say, “It happened to us naturally.” This is the way of no rush, this is the way of the inquirer.

The Dao of ‘Plain Vanilla’ (Ordinary Rice)

...Is to read together, pick questions together from the readings, discuss together the questions, evaluate the discussion and introduce skill development exercises, as a reflective community. The topics are selected by the community and begins where the community is in its understanding. It is a process of co-inquiry, no one knows THE answer nor where the inquiry will lead. It is a self-corrective process. The community evaluates itself with the criteria of: “How did we do as a community?” (how was the listening, participation, safety of the environment?) and “How was our inquiry?” (did it maintain a focus, scratch beneath the surface, allow new understanding, challenge your thoughts, and was it interesting?) Cognitive tools such as WRAITEC are used to help the process. W: What? R: Reasons? A: Assumptions? E: Inferences T: True E: Examples C: Counterexamples. These tools are used when you have fears of doubt that creep into you and hinder you from following the path of inquiry. They must not be used artificially but must be acquired naturally over a long period of time. There are also magic words that the sage had used to expel the evil spirits that may obscure the path of inquiry. To name a few: “IDUS” (I don’t understand) “OMT” (One moment please) “POC” (Point of clarification) “LMO” (Let’s move on) “GOS” (Going off subject). If you have fully understood the above teachings of the sages and have acquired how to use these tools and magic words to the point of spontaneity, you are ready to go on to leave for the journey of inquiry. You are on the verge of becoming an inquirer, you are on the verge of becoming a philosopher. This is the way of plain vanilla. This is the way of the inquirer.

Notes

5. This quote is from chapter one of the The Great Learning. The Great Learning is one of the four great books of Confucianism, the other three being The Analects, The Mencius and The Doctrine of the Mean. The translation of the quote is mine.
8. Idem.
9. Calligraphy courtesy of Chan Lee, currently a philosophy graduate student at the University of Hawai`i at Manoa.

Bibliographic References

Making Sense of Evaluation of P4C

CHINMEI LIEN (MALIA LIANTO)

In today's world, the word “Evaluation” has become a frequently used word in day-to-day conversation. Sometimes that word brings pressure or a burden to the people who are to be evaluated, and anxiety or uneasiness to the one who must conduct it. Nevertheless, generally there is a compelling need for people to evaluate in order to know whether the time and effort spent on someone or something has been worthwhile or has generated the expected result or profit. For instance, in business, people conduct evaluation to find out the ROI (Return On Investment) of the time, labor and material cost in producing a product or service. The result of such evaluation would determine whether to continue the production. Similarly, teachers give a test to evaluate whether the time spent or pedagogy used in teaching has shown an improvement in his or her students’ performance. However it is important to ask, can everything be evaluated in systematic ways that generate reliable results and show worth or effectiveness?

In promoting and implementing philosophy for children or P4C in the schools in Hawaii, it has always been a great challenge to find ways to evaluate or measure its effectiveness, particularly on how it makes a difference to students. Often, evaluation is perceived as an external measurement tool intended to generate hard data to backup anecdotal claims. Hence, the desired result is to generate evidence that shows P4C fosters the growth of thinking or reasoning skills and how that growth is quantitatively shown on students' academic performance, i.e. making a satisfactory improvement on their test scores. However, the question remains, does developing thinking or reasoning necessarily result in the improvement of test scores? Or is improvement of test scores necessarily due to the growth in thinking and reasoning skills? If the answer to the questions is “no” or “not sure”, then it’s important, especially for P4C, to consider whether spending effort doing evaluations to generate such “hard data” is appropriate.

Evaluation—What and What For?

Matthew Lipman states in his article “Philosophy for Children and Critical Thinking” that, through the community of inquiry, P4C is promoting critical thinking, which is: self-correcting, sensitive-to-context and leading to the making of judgements through reliance upon criteria. This involves strengthening children's ability to make practical judgments that are based on reasonableness and a sense of proportion. What does it mean to make a judgment that is reasonable? Can someone who possesses good reasoning skills make a reasonable judgment? According to John C. Thomas, “Being reasonable means something more than having reasoning skills. One who is reasonable has internalized the practice of reason and adopted it as a fundamental value for herself or himself. Hence they will begin to value the reasonableness of thinking, both in themselves and in others. In learning to value it, they learn to think for themselves.” To be able to think for oneself is to be sensitive-to-context and to make criteria based judgments. Sensitivity to context is obligatory in a community of inquiry, so that the uniqueness of particular contexts can be properly respected. Hence certain rules are not always followed if they are inappropriate to a given situation. Matthew Lipman states: “Thinking that is not sensitive to context is blundering and obtuse; thinking that is not self-correcting can easily become uncritical and unreasonable.” Thus, evaluation of P4C, instead of investigating the development of thinking and reasoning skills, should focus on how or whether students are developing ability to think for themselves and be reasonable.

Teachers in Hawaii who have practiced P4C with their students for some years state that P4C provides an environment where inquiry naturally takes place and students help each other to nurture the ability to think cooperatively and reflectively, rather than competitively. Through the community of inquiry, students are also provided a chance to learn not only how to think but also how to respect and care.

Elaine Roumasset,4 thinks that the kind of thinking that has been developed through P4C is “4C’s thinking”—Critical, Creative, Caring and Children thinking. After years of having P4C in their classroom, many teachers agree with Elaine. Especially when they witness for themselves chil-

Chin-mei Lien (Malia Lianto, chinmeilien@yahoo.com) received her BA in business Administration from Fujen Catholic University, Taipei, Taiwan MA in Human Resource Management from the University of Hull, UK. She then worked for six years as a business management consultant. For the past two years she has been a Visiting Scholar at the University of Hawaii, providing invaluable assistance to P4C Hawaii in research as well as administration and management.
dren responding to problems or issues encountered in ways that indicate P4C has taught them not merely a set of thinking or reasoning skills, but something more complex as expressed by the concept of 4C’s.

It has become apparent that P4C helps to develop thinking habits and dispositions, and not just skills. Thus, if P4C is not primarily aiming at teaching simply skills or knowledge of thinking or reasoning, then it is not appropriate to evaluate its effectiveness simply through an external skill-based measuring tool. Dr. Thomas Jackson also states that, “Social interaction dimensions of a reflective community of inquiry are completely missed by the test as are oral communication and carry-over into other content areas, all important indicators of whether the P4C has been successful.”6

Unlike learning a certain subject like Math or Physics which to know whether it’s been mastered, students can be evaluated by testing, the ability to think, particularly to think for oneself cannot simply be validated through testing or the increase of test score. Arthur L. Costa has rightly argued that, “To make a pattern of intellectual behaviors habitual, requires time—time beyond that required for one problem-solving task, one lesson, one unit, one class, or even one school year. Students must encounter, practice, and reflect on these numerous settings using a variety of contents and with adequate time for self-evaluation.”7 Therefore, evaluation cannot be a one-time effort with a single measuring tool that anticipates a particular result.

**Evaluation—Part of the Inquiry process**

Dr. Jackson, who utilizes the steps of inquiry in the community referred to as “Plain Vanilla” or “Ordinary Rice,” has put “Evaluation” as the last step. However, this step is essential not in terms of finding how well students have mastered the inquiry process or whether the inquiry process has resulted in any desired outcome, but emphasizing self-reflection of the community on its sessions together. This practice of reflection, which makes possible self-correction, is the real essence of evaluation. It means that through evaluation people systematically reflect on their own learning process. In this sense, evaluation is no longer seen as an external tool to inspect the effectiveness of the process, but a way to make the process more effective. Therefore, it’s imperative for the teacher or facilitator to devote sufficient time to do the evaluation at the end of each P4C session. In that process children are given a chance to exercise and internalize reflective thinking through recalling how they were doing in the session. There are two major elements they evaluate in P4C, one is **Community** (listening, participation and being intellectually safe), the other is **Inquiry** (maintaining focus, scratching beneath the surface, learning new thing, challenging the thinking and being interesting).8 This process is very powerful especially in helping children to be more aware of how they are supposed be in a community of inquiry and by recalling these criteria, they gain deeper self-knowledge.

Joann Soong,9 teacher at AlaWai Elementary, always starts her P4C session by picking one or two of the evaluation criteria to discuss in the community. She sees the importance of having the children decide for themselves or develop their own definition on what constitutes a good community

### P4C Student Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student’s Name (optional):</th>
<th>Gill</th>
<th>Grade: 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School: Waiaiki School</td>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher: Ms. Tam</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. I enjoyed doing philosophy (P4C) in class this year. 
   - Explain with reasons or examples: I enjoy doing P4C because it helps me learn better things and write new words.

2. Philosophy has helped me become a better thinker.
   - Explain with reasons or examples: It helped me think better because we can think and talk in P4C. It helps me to become a better reader and thinker tool.

3. Philosophy has helped me to respect others and their ideas.
   - Explain with reasons or examples: I think I can respect other peoples ideas because they may not think what you like and what they like.

4. Philosophy has helped me become a better listener.
   - Explain with reasons or examples: It has made me a better listener because it helped me to listen to Ms. Tam better.

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Chart 1
As part of the effort to know and understand what needs further improvement in P4C materials and methods so as to help students and teachers, Dr. Jackson has also designed an “End of School Year Evaluation” form. The form is a written version of the verbal evaluation conducted at the end of each P4C session (See sample of the form at Chart 1 to Chart 3). In the evaluation form, students are not only asked to rate themselves through circling the thumbs' sign, but also offered the opportunity to give reasons and examples in writing. The rating results provide a rough quantitative idea of what the students think in general about P4C and give an overview of the areas that need attention or improvement in the future (See the sample of the rating tabulation at Chart 4). The written answers provide an understanding of the reasons behind the rating tabulation.

Chart 2

**Evaluation—End of School Year Evaluation**

As part of the effort to know and understand what needs further improvement in P4C materials and methods so as to help students and teachers, Dr. Jackson has also designed an “End of School Year Evaluation” form. The form is a written version of the verbal evaluation conducted at the end of each P4C session (See sample of the form at Chart 1 to Chart 3). In the evaluation form, students are not only asked to rate themselves through circling the thumbs’ sign, but also offered the opportunity to give reasons and examples in writing. The rating results provide a rough quantitative idea of what the students think in general about P4C and give an overview of the areas that need attention or improvement in the future (See the sample of the rating tabulation at Chart 4). The written answers provide an understanding of the reasons behind the rating tabulation.

They also give evidence of how the students are able to incorporate the Good Thinker’s Toolkit or the evaluation criteria for community and inquiry into their thinking processes. In addition, their writing provides further evidence of the students’ ability to make reasonable judgments and think for themselves. Yet another contribution from the written answers is an opportunity to discover the thinking of some students who have not been talking or sharing during P4C sessions.

In evaluating early elementary grade students who have not yet learned how to write, teachers collect evidence...
through paying close attention to the interactions in the classroom and record these observations in a journal. For upper elementary, Year-end Evaluation can be done by asking the students to write a short essay. The students are asked to describe in the essay what they think of P4C. Their essays often reveal the extent to which they have internalized the evaluation criteria, i.e. listening, intellectual safety, scratching beneath the surface, thinking harder, etc. (See sample of the essay at Chart 6). Some teachers ask their students to keep a journal from the beginning to the end of the school year. From these journals, the teachers know what the students think about P4C and evaluate the progress of their thinking or reasoning by comparing the content of their writings. (See sample of the journal's comparison at Chart 5).

Conclusion

In P4C, “Evaluation” is meant to be something that students both enjoy doing and benefit from. For instance, students will spontaneously evaluate themselves not only during P4C sessions but also in other subjects and even into their own lives. Hence "Evaluation" is not simply an external measurement tool, but a habit-building tool that works to anchor student’s mind on the value of reflective thinking and self-knowledge.

Endnotes

4. See Elaine Roumasset’s article in this issue, pp. 86-88.
5. P4C emphasizes the concept of Caring Thinking, see Matthew Lipman, “Caring Thinking”.
9. See Joann Soong’s article in this issue, pp. 92-93.
10. See Laurie Tam’s article in this issue, pp. 90-91.
Thinking: The Journal of Philosophy for Children, Volume 17, Numbers 1 & 2

Waikiki Elementary - Grade 1

P&C Assessment
Year 2002-2003

Chart 4

October 25, 2002 Friday
P&C is fun because you can take whatever you want. You can learn.

April 11, 2003
Today we did P&C. I had fun. I did P&C.
We take about Easter, eggs and the Easter bunny. There was a new lady that came in today. Her name is Rachel. Rachel's favorite thing to do is sitting.
Some people said it was the Easter bunny dress or is it track? Then Taylor said when her mom was hiding the eggs, she lost her and her baby sister in the bathroom. Then Christina and Ashley said they do not agree with Taylor.
April

I think Philosophy is a good thing. It helps the child make its brain to think more and more harder. The children who do Philosophy also gets to hear others speak and what they have to say. The questions are excellent! They kind of make some children very curious like me!

I think Philosophy is a good experience for children because the way they do it makes their brain think hard and really dig beneath the surface. For me Philosophy is a real good thing to do because I like to think hard. It is one of the most precious things in the world.

Philosophy is very interesting because the topic we chose is a very good topic! When I subject on a topic I really dig deep cause I'm so interested. My braines go lulu some times because if I get so interested and excited my brain goes lulu!

I firmly believe that Philosophy is a good thing for children because it anybody doesn't that means their brain is not so good cause Philosophy is a brain worker that's what I call it. I hope I'm not being to mean.

I hope everybody agrees with me! I think Mr. Toby and Dr. Jackson are really good Philosophers. I hope I be one if I grow up. I also think Mr. Toby and Dr. Jackson are really good Thinkers. I just know they are!
NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Philosophizing with Mrs. Yoshida’s Third Graders: A Transcript from a P4C Session

THOMAS B. YOS

What follows is a transcription of a Philosophy for Children (P4C) session which I taped on April 18th, 1997 and an analysis of this transcript. I’ve found analyzing transcripts of P4C sessions to be quite useful; it not only provides me with evidence with which to support my claims but also helps me to get clearer on what, precisely, P4C does. The analysis which I provide here, it should be noted, is brief. My aim is simply to supplement my other article in this issue (“Philosophy for Children and The Cultivation of Good Judgment”) and to provide others with what I hope might be a useful resource.

Imagine, if you will, that it is a beautiful sunny day as you pull up to Ala Wai Elementary School in Honolulu, Hawai’i. You have come to this public elementary school because you have heard that Kathryn Yoshida’s class of third graders regularly (twice a week) have P4C inquiry sessions. You have also heard that they are pretty good at it.

This is Mrs. Yoshida’s third year doing P4C. The children have been doing P4C with Mrs. Yoshida for about six months. Only a few of the students had done P4C with other teachers during the previous school year.

You round the corner and walk into Mrs. Yoshida’s room. In the room you see Mrs. Yoshida, Mr. Toby Yos (a University of Hawai’i philosophy graduate student who comes once a week to help with the P4C session), and about twenty-five children (who are eight to nine years old). The group is very culturally diverse; there are at least a dozen ethnic groups represented in this class. Ala Wai School, you have been told, has a large immigrant population. English is not the first language of nearly two-thirds of the children. Indeed, it is apparent that several of the children in this class have little proficiency with the English language. Nearly three-quarters of the children, you have also been told, are from low income families. Too many are also from homes where violence and substance-abuse are prevalent.

The children and teachers are all sitting together in a circle on the floor. Having already read a philosophical novel, raised questions, and selected a topic for discussion, the members of the community are already engaged in inquiry. Though there may be occasional outbursts of excited chatter as the children all try to talk at once, for the most part the members of this classroom community of inquiry take turns speaking. The students (not the teachers) toss their class’s “community ball” to one another. Whoever holds this ball, which they built together and which symbolizes their community, is the speaker. The other students are listening carefully.

Mrs. Yoshida is “pedagogically strong”; she ensures that the community is an intellectually safe place by justly enforcing the agreed upon rules and procedures. She is also "philosophically self-effacing”; while she enriches the inquiry by helping the children to think deeply, she does not impose her intellectual perspective upon the children. She prefers instead to let the children learn by doing their own thinking.

Let’s listen to this class for awhile. Pay close attention not only to what the children say but to cognitive moves and social behaviors that they model.

Mr. Toby: You know I kind of want to LMB—move back to what Ahn Thy says 'cause [because] the more I listen the more confused I'm getting about what a relationship is. Is it just any two things that have something in common? I thought I understood, but now when I think about it more I'm not so sure what a relationship is. Brian [Mr. Toby passes the community ball to Brian].

Brian C.: They're different things, but they're the...
same thing; like ice and steam are made from water, and chocolate and vanilla [ice cream] are [both] made from ice cream. They are different things, but they're the same family.

Mr. Toby: OK, you've got to have two different things and they have got to be in the same family?

Brian C.: Yeah, something like the same family. Joseph.

Joseph: What did you say Mr. Toby?
Mr. Toby: I'm trying to figure out what a relationship is. What do we mean by relationship?

Joseph: A relationship could be two things that are alike but looking different. Like water it has three different types of forms. It could be a solid, it could be a gas, and then...well I forget the third one. They are both alike 'cause they're both water, but then they're both in different forms. So it would be sort of like something alike and it could be in a different form. Nani.

Nani: I agree with Joseph that we can have two or more things and you see what's the connection—what they're like. They can be like steam and ice; they're both made of water. So that's one reason why they're alike. And like the last time we had philosophy it was a cottage and a castle. We agreed that people can live in a cottage and a castle. That's how they were alike. So a relationship is two or more things that have something in common, or a connection. They're alike. Jason.

Jason: Steam and ice. Steam can just melt the ice and the steam is more hot than the ice. It is made of water. So the water is more hot so the steam comes out. The steam goes out 'cause the ice is made of water so the steam is made hot and so....Jackie.

Jackie: I think what a relationship is is different groups but same things. Like maybe say...a clock. It has a group of its own. There are different kinds of clocks: Round clocks like that one [points to the clock on the wall], and electric alarm clocks, and the clocks that can stand up. But they are all the same because they are all clocks. But they are all different. Thomas.

Thomas: Can we LMO [move on to another question]? I think...

Mrs. Yoshida: Let's move on! And then what were you going to say? "I think" what?
Thomas: I think that steam and ice have a relationship.

And I agree with Leigh because they are both water and when water evaporates it becomes steam. And ice is like steam 'cause they're both water.

Mrs. Yoshida: Oh, JAMP [someone is holding up a JAMP card which means "Just A Minute Please"].

Thomas: Nani.

Nani: I want to know if Mr. Toby knows what "relationship" means before we move on to the next question.

Mrs. Yoshida: Very considerate of you.
Mr. Toby: I think I understand it. Maybe new examples will come up and I'll realize that I don't understand it, but for now I'm happy. OK, how many people want NQP [move on] to the next question? [the class counts votes] What's the JAMP?

Brian S.: I want to refer to his question when he said you can do any old thing to find a relationship. I don't think so because if you do a shoe and a creature, its like there is not even a relationship. So I think you have to pick something [else] first—like a shoe and a boot.

Mrs. Yoshida: I think right now we called for NQP. The majority voted so you can pass [the ball] to Joseph. Maybe now that we've talked about some things and their relationship maybe you're ready for some more scratching [beneath the surface of the topic]. Let's see how we do with these questions.

Joseph: [reading the question which Mrs. Yoshida has written on an index card] "How are relationships like things?"

Class: Huh...I don't get it...what?

Mrs. Yoshida: How are relationships like things and the contrary question, "How are relationships different from things?" Can you separate the two? Are they alike?

Joseph: I think relationships and things are alike because you can use a relationship on two things or more. Like Nani said. You could have a clock that could hang. And then both clocks used to do the same thing. Or a relationship and a clock. In fact, I think relationship will go with any two things that are like...Kacey.

Kacey: But [if we accept what you say] then I think relationship is a thing, you know, like a clock. So how can it be a relationship? I think its just a word. But it means something.

Mr. Toby: So Kacey, you're saying that a thing and a
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Jackie: But then it doesn't really have to be a relationship and a thing. It can be different things, like maybe say an ocean and the...and many things live in the ocean so they relate to each other.

Mr. Toby: Did everyone get that? OMT, one more time.

Jackie: OK, this is a big classroom and we fit inside it and we're relating to it 'cause we're inside. So I think a relationship is a big thing...like say...a pool can fit people inside it so they relate to each other.

Mr. Toby: I think maybe you've just found a kind of relationship—a part to wholes. Like the whole is the ocean and then the parts...or maybe that's not right. A big thing and a little...Or an outside...I don't know what to call it.

Jackie: It's like a mother and a baby inside. So they relate to each other 'cause they're connected. They are a part of each other. Brian C.

Brian C.: I think the relationship and...they're both a noun. 'Cause most people is talking about things and person that belong to the noun. So I wonder if a noun could be a relationship. Ahn Thy.

Ahn Thy: OK, I think I can explain what that mean. I think what it means is without a thing there will be no relationships.

Mrs. Yoshida: You're getting us to one of our next questions.

Ahn Thy: It's the one that Jackie said. It's just like earth. It is like there are people inside, and without them there would be no earth.

Mrs. Yoshida: So you're saying if you don't have things you can't have relationships?

Ahn Thy: Yeah, 'Cause things make a relationship. It's just like a mechanical pencil. They make lead, right? Without a mechanical pencil why should there be lead?

Mrs. Yoshida: You know we're getting tight for time and...conversely Jackie you said: "A thing is inside the relationship." Well, what if we throw this question out? Joseph.

Joseph: [reading] "Can a thing have relationships within it? Can you give an example?"

Mrs. Yoshida: Jackie, I believe you said a thing is inside a relationship and Nani you agreed. But can you have the opposite? Can you have a relationship within a thing? Joseph do you want to comment about that before
Joseph: Maybe a thing inside of something can have a relationship. Like maybe your arm and your blood—inside, the fluid. Its inside your arm or your skin or something, and they're both a body part or something. Actually, we're off the subject. Kacey.

Kacey: Are you saying that we are made of relationships?

Joseph: Sort of.

Kacey: The circle right now and then all the things around us in the classroom. I mean like if we're the whole relationship, right? And then the classroom is a thing 'cause all around us is things in this room. So is that what the question is?

Mrs. Yoshida: What do you people think? Oh, I see some new hands. Maybe recognize some of our new participants.

Kacey: Max.

Max: Probably like us and this ball—the community ball. Like our care is in the philosophy ball. Something like that?

Mrs. Yoshida: Oh, so the philosophy ball is a thing and the relationships are in it. That's a good example. What do you people think?

Let's get some other viewpoints. Some new people here. Quickly, so we can give you a chance to participate.

Max: Vanessa.

Vanessa: I agree with Max because its like our relationships are inside the ball. Its like that picture [points to the diagram which was made earlier]. Its like the ball is a thing and a relationship is the hair [care?] of the ball.

Mrs. Yoshida: OK, so you agree with what Max said. Anybody have something new, something different to add? Just want to share, disagree or agree?

In this case the members of the community did not arrive at conclusive answers to their questions. But this does not mean that they did not make progress in their inquiry. They came to better appreciate the complexity of the issue. They also began to make connections with their experiences and to perceive new connections. These, Thomas Jackson argues, are forms of philosophical progress.6

That the children made progress in this particular inquiry is, of course, a matter of some interest. Of far greater interest, however, is the sophistication of the dialogue during the course of the year, learned to consistently practice certain cognitive and social moves. They demonstrate that they have both the ability and, at least within the confines of the community of inquiry, the disposition to think well and to interact cooperatively.

The children repeatedly make the sorts of cognitive moves through which good thinking proceeds. They make the move of supporting their positions with reasons (for instance on lines 35, 65, 193). They use examples to illustrate and to support their contentions (10, 54, 180, 193). So too, they search for counter-examples in order to test the legitimacy of claims (82). When they are unsure of what is being said, they seek clarification (152, 240) and when they are unsure of the accuracy of what is being said they question the truth of statements (80, 119). They also employ analogies (222) and are able to draw out the implications of what has been said (117).

Another cognitive move which the children make and which is essential to good thinking (and, so too, to good judging) is the move of leaning back upon (and then subsequently proceeding forth from) their understanding. The children do this when they make the move of reflecting back upon their prior understandings. They reflect back upon their understanding of what has transpired thus far in the inquiry and build upon each other's ideas (28, 65, 80, 111, 163, 271). They also reflect back upon their understandings of prior discussions (35) and, so too, of their world (54-58, 178-187, 221-224, 235-237).

Reflecting back upon their understanding, the children make the subsequent move of correcting their thought. They do this when, appealing to their prior experience, they respectfully disagree with one another (81, 118) and endeavor to correct the course of their inquiry (178).

These cognitive moves are important means through which good thinking proceeds, good judgments are made, and understanding is gained. That the children are practicing these moves and, during the course of their practice, continuing to improve their performance of these moves is, then, highly significant. For, the children are, through their practice, being empowered to think better, to judge better, and to understand better.

Another intellectual disposition which is connected to judging and understanding well is the tendency to wonder; wonder is the spark which propels the often-times difficult pursuit of a better understanding. The children in this community display this tendency as well. They ask one another
questions (117-120, 136-143, 240) and simply wonder about their world (197-204).

Also of note are the social behaviors which the children perform. One cluster of these social behaviors are those which are connected with the governance of the procedures of inquiry. The children are, to a large extent, self-governing. They call on one another without the direction of a teacher (16, 27, 47). They make note of when the discussion is getting off subject (239). They ask for questions to be repeated (18). They themselves determine when to move on to another question (60) or when to slow down the pace of the discussion (68, 79). Discovering that they can govern themselves and that they need not always look to the teacher for direction, the children gain both the confidence and the ability to make their own judgments and, so too, to participate in a democratic society.

Another cluster of notable social behaviors performed by the children are those oral and aural behaviors which are prerequisites to good inquiry. These children are listening to one another. This is demonstrated by the frequency with which they connect their thoughts to those of their peers; they listen to and then build upon each other's contributions (28, 65, 80, 111, 163, 271). The children are also able to voice their ideas clearly and confidently (28-47, 53-59). Having learned how to engage in these behaviors, the children are able to pursue understanding during the course of this particular inquiry. More importantly, they have, to the extent to which they have become disposed to engage in these behaviors, gained the power to inquire cooperatively with others.

A final important cluster of social behaviors are those which demonstrate the ethical appreciation which the community members have for one another. Through their behavior the children show that they respect one another and which they connect their thoughts to those of their peers; they listen to and then build upon each other's contributions (28, 65, 80, 111, 163, 271). The children are also able to voice their ideas clearly and confidently (28-47, 53-59). Having learned how to engage in these behaviors, the children are able to pursue understanding during the course of this particular inquiry. More importantly, they have, to the extent to which they have become disposed to engage in these behaviors, gained the power to inquire cooperatively with others.

A final important cluster of social behaviors are those which demonstrate the ethical appreciation which the community members have for one another. Through their behavior the children show that they respect one another and that care about each other as persons. This is demonstrated, first and foremost, by the children's good listening. Listening with care, the children show that they have regard for their classmates and take them seriously. This care is also demonstrated in other ways. Nani shows that she cares about others when she asks another community member if his concerns have been met (71) and when she purposefully asks a child who seldom speaks to share his thoughts (47). Brian and Kacey similarly show respect when they disagree with what has been said; they disagree not with combative-ness or animosity but rather with civility and kindness (81, 117).

The children in Mrs. Yoshida's class did not, to such an extent, behave in these ways at the beginning of the year. I observed, as I visited this class each week, a steady maturation of this community. As the year progressed the children more frequently performed the cognitive moves and social behaviors which I have here emphasized. This is, to my mind, significant. For it supports the contention that the community of inquiry approach can be an effective means through which to cultivate good thinking, good behavior, and, ultimately, good judgment and understanding.

Endnotes

4. I have edited this transcript slightly in order to make it more readable. The only time I have deleted entire contributions is in the case when a teacher spoke with the sole intention of repeating what a child said. Changes made within an individual contribution are limited to the elimination of repetitious or unnecessary words. For example, "Like...I think that... maybe...like...families are relationships" would be edited down to "I think that families are relationships."
5. See Jackson, Thomas. (1998) Philosophy in the Schools Project: A Guide for Teachers. Unpublished Manuscript. (p. 25) Jackson suggests helping children to govern the procedural dimension of their inquiries by teaching them a number of acronyms or "magic words." Because these words are simple, non-threatening, and fun to use, children readily embrace them a number of acronyms or "magic words." For example, "Like...I think that... maybe...like...families are relationships" would be edited down to "I think that families are relationships."
Philosophy and the Classroom Teacher

By Linda Oho

Linda Oho (whak9808@aol.com) is a doctoral candidate in the College of Education, UH/Manoa and teaches first grade at Wahiawa Elementary School. She has been a teacher for thirty years and involved with P4C since 1992.

Philosophy for Children has been an intimate part of my life for more than a decade. It is with deliberate thought and intent that I have chosen to use this word as it best describes the impact that philosophy has had in my life. It was not always the case that I viewed philosophy to be interesting or useful to me. Rudyard Kipling once wrote, "East is east and west is west and never the twain shall meet." This adage seemed to appropriately describe what I believed to be true with regard to the world of the classroom teacher and that of the philosopher. Like a Venn diagram that shares no common space, these two worlds appeared so unrelated to one another that it was almost plausible for me to perceive them as entirely separate entities. However, as life would have it, in learning to face all its difficulties and joys, I found myself turning to philosophy to better understand myself as a person. My appreciation for Philosophy for Children did not come all at once. It was after many years of teaching had passed before things began to fall into place for me. Factors, both professional and personal, came into play to fertilize my soil in anticipation for this journey.

On a professional level, at least three events stand out in my mind. The first seed was planted when I was in my third year of teaching. It was an event that created some doubt in my mind and, at the same time, piqued my curiosity. I enjoyed being in the classroom with my children, and I taught them conscientiously as I had been taught as a student and as a pre-service teacher. The transmission model of teacher as the vessel of knowledge and student as receptor of that knowledge prevailed. This was the frame of reference from which I measured myself. It was in those early years of teaching that I remember puzzling over how I would challenge my first graders to think. I asked questions from the back of the basal reader and felt very uncomfortable about the rigidity and narrow exchange of ideas that occurred. The most frightening part of all was the realization that I did not have the skills necessary to proficiently model a level and quality of thinking that would help my students to pursue their own thoughts at a deeper level. Not knowing where or how to address this concern, I quietly put it to rest somewhere in the back of my mind. As I continued to teach in the system, much like quicksand, I sank deeper and deeper into the rigid schedules, demands and procedures that were part and parcel of the Department of Education. Being a neophyte teacher at the time, I was soon thrust into a new school on a new grade level with new curriculum to learn. While this concern had not yet been addressed, nor was it at the forefront of my thoughts, it was never forgotten.

The second event which occurred in my professional career was the introduction of whole language. I began to attend workshops that introduced me to the concept of the whole child. This was all new to me as my pre-service years were dominated by the developmental approach of Piaget, whose theory emphasized optimal stages of learning. When a child reached one of these stages, then they were "ready" to be taught. Whole language, on the other hand, approached learning from a different point of view. Children were exposed to concepts using the venue of personal experience as a way of helping students gain meaning in their learning. While I did not wholeheartedly buy into all aspects of how one educated the whole child, there were ideas...
and principles embedded in this philosophy that resonated with my evolving, personal philosophy of education. Those who saw the value of educating the whole child through "whole language," struggled to put it into practice within a system that valued a more "lock-step" method to learning. There was also much resistance from colleagues who could not see outside of the box from which they were taught. At that time, many of us who took these workshops were under the impression that "whole language" was a revolutionary idea. With minimum guidance, I attempted to duplicate a classroom where choices were given and children's voices would be heard. Albeit seeing the joy in their faces as they engaged in their work was rewarding, it was also a major struggle to set up a classroom modeled on democracy when the knowledge gained was vague and limited to what was learned in these workshops. It was not until many years later that I realized that the concept of the whole child was grounded in the educational research of John Dewey. Knowing that "whole language" was grounded in Dewey's works would have alleviated some of my doubts and provided me with the needed guidance to better understand democracy in the classroom setting.

The third, and probably the most influential event that further nourished my thinking came just a few years later. I had heard about the project called Philosophy for Children or P4C. It focused on helping students to develop their abilities to think for themselves in responsible ways. This was to be accomplished by the "doing" of philosophical inquiry within a community. The internalization of these thinking skills would come with practice, and over time the application of these skills to other disciplines would become second nature. In this project, the development of higher order thinking skills is encouraged in the community of inquiry, nestled within a safe place. This was a place where all voices were valued and respected. It is within this setting that members of the community reflect and engage in inquiry that is both dynamic and relevant to their own lives. The ideas that I valued in the education of the whole child seemed to dovetail with the essential elements of Philosophy for Children. As a result, I decided to enroll in the workshop. Even after "doing" philosophy with my children for a couple of years, I had not yet internalized what it meant to engage in a philosophical discussion. I was still operating under the assumption that learning to do higher order thinking was no different than learning any other methodology. The expectation that I would follow some prescribed approach that would yield the desired results, clearly, did not materialize. In fact, because the parameters of P4C were different from that of a traditional curriculum, I struggled to understand and "master" it. Such a mentality presumed that one would be able to take from the outside and somehow magically transform the way students think. Then in 1992, I had the opportunity of a lifetime to work under the mentorship of Dr. Thomas Jackson of the Philosophy Department on the Manoa campus. While I felt honored to work with Dr. J, I was also a little apprehensive as my vision of what it meant to be involved in philosophy was of an esoteric nature. I began to question myself and thinking, "What am I doing here?" Although I had been in the project for two years, I felt like a fraud. What did I know about philosophy? My only experience had been an introductory course back when I was a college student. For the most part, I studied the thoughts of famous philosophers and what was elucidated throughout history. These profound thoughts certainly did not enter or exist in my own mind. I wondered and worried about how I would do justice to my job and be a credible source of support and help to others.

On a personal level, as I continued to work on this project, I slowly became more and more cognizant of the close relationship between philosophy and myself as a person as I began to value my own thinking. This change within me came when a gentle soul, disguised as a philosopher, literally took me by the hand and ushered me into a place that was always unintelligible, unsafe and terrifying to me in the past. I think back of the time when I was at Dr. Jackson's home. In his very down to earth manner, he was explaining to Chris, another teacher in the project, and me about Plato's allegory of the cave. Just the idea of discussing philosophical matters felt uncomfortable and out of place to me. But on that day, as Dr. J patiently and humorously walked us through that allegory, I found a new window opening up in my mind. Like the people chained in Plato's cave, our reality is based on the belief that what we are experiencing is real. If for a moment one were to accept Plato's thinking that what we believe to be reality are merely shadows, one could either go into denial and continue to exist in the same way, or one could begin to challenge that thought. The acceptance of the status quo without question places one in a passive state. At some level, the connection between thoughts and actions would be obvious,
but the examination of that relationship would appear redundant and pointless. On the other hand, challenging that thought would compel one to raise questions about practices and ideas that are often taken for granted as truth. I spent a great deal of time thinking about this allegory, and I recognized myself in that cave. At that point in my life, taking risks and making changes were not high on my priority list. My fears were based on two beliefs. The first had to do with security. I believed that I was safe, secure and happy so why would I feel the need to risk or make changes that threatened my comfort zone? As it was, the need for me to step outside of this zone came not by my own choosing. Because life's wind can shift at any given moment, what was once calm and peaceful became a turbulent, unsettling place to be. Understanding the nature of change as being part of life has allowed me to loosen the chains of security that I once held onto so tightly. The second belief was that things were always done in a particular way and, therefore, that must be the only way to do it. When changes occur, whether expected or unexpected, the need to adjust and adapt becomes critical to one's survival, and the familiar ways of resolving problems may no longer be useful. The allegory of the cave allowed me to examine myself and situations that opened my mind to different options and perspectives. I began to recognize and understand my own fears a little better. Each day I would remind myself to continue to loosen my own chains because I know how easy it is to fall back into that place where we begin to believe only in shadows. Perhaps people, in general, deny their state of captivity or choose to remain chained because it is the easier thing to do. Becoming liberated from these chains requires one to be vigilant, always tending to the fires that seek truth. Being mindful to this fire is paramount lest one fall back into captivity. Philosophy for Children has brought a heightened awareness of the quality of one's power to think as it affects one's actions. When Socrates says that the unexamined life is not worth living, it now holds incredible meaning to me and I have come to understand the wisdom behind these words. While words of wisdom may come from an extrinsic source, it is not wisdom to the individual until it becomes personally meaningful. For me, Philosophy for Children has provided me a way to think about life, strengthening that connection between my thoughts and my actions, allowing me to grow both personally and professionally. Eleven years have passed since I questioned and doubted my ability to do this work. I have yet to "arrive" as my journey continues to unfold, reminding me that there is much to learn. I have come to the conclusion that perhaps one never "arrives" because it is the journey, itself, that brings growth to one's life. I now realize that the world of the classroom teacher and the philosopher, indeed, are not separate entities but exist and evolve together as one. The knowledge that philosophy is an integral part of my life and defines who I am, are my credentials for doing this work that I love.

P4C: The Four C’s in Philosophy for Children

By Elaine Roumasset

The Philosophy in the Schools Project in Hawaii is founded on an intellectually safe community of children where inquiry occurs and where no one person knows or has the answer(s). Philosophy for Children promotes four C’s: Critical Thinking, Creative Thinking, Caring Thinking and Children’s Thinking. Many programs focus on one or two of these areas, but P4C is the first and only program, to my knowledge, that addresses all four areas, thus making it a philosophy for living, i.e., an intellectually safe community of children where thinking and wonder are encouraged.

When P4C was first mentioned at a faculty meeting at my school as a means to promote and improve critical thinking amongst the students, I was one of its biggest critics because I had already suffered through two philosophy classes as an undergraduate student at the university and both were so boring and inapplicable to my world. So, how was I to teach a class of second graders philosophy when myself couldn’t get stimulated as a college student? The two teachers who urged us to adopt this program were well-respected seasoned faculty members and we trusted their judgment. We, therefore, agreed to investigate this project and invited its Hawaii founder, Dr. Thomas Jackson from the Philosophy Department at the University of Hawaii to talk to us. What he shared with us was so unlike the classes I had taken in his very own department. Dr. Jackson talked about children engaged in conversation in an intellectually “safe” place. Children and adults alike would sit in a circle and build a community in our classrooms where critical and creative thinking were encouraged and ideas were supported with reasons. It would be similar to King Arthur’s round table where there would be no head and everyone would be equal. I could not believe what I was hearing. There would be no lecturing and no memorization of philosophers’ names and their claim to fame. After an intensive week of training of the entire faculty that summer we welcomed philosophy graduate students into our rooms one period a week for a year to help guide us through this project. They would be the philosophy teachers modeling for us how to promote inquiry in this community circle. We, in turn, would help to keep the students focused and engaged while also being a part of the community of inquirers. What proceeded to happen was incredible. Children participated in an intellectual discussion like I had never heard or seen before. They were sharing their ideas about things I never dreamed they were capable of or even interested in. They
talked about what was real and not real, what was beyond the blue sky, and whether they could have more than one name and if changing their names would change who they were. They discussed things to which I name and if changing their names would change who they are. Thinking: The Journal of Philosophy for Children, Volume 17, Numbers 1 & 2.

The students begin to think like inventors, artists, composers, poets or any other creative genius. They realize an exchange of ideas can improve their ability to think and have their voices heard. They are challenged to think or not and they can discern if the discussion was meaningful or not. The students know when they have given their minds a good workout because there is intellectual sparring occurring. The children question each other by asking, “What do you mean by…”? or ask to have a point clarified. They also learn how to accept each other’s reasons and explanations as either being logical or illogical by giving their own reason(s) for agreeing or disagreeing or by providing counterexamples to show fallacies in their assumptions. Students may also ask someone to explain a point more clearly by saying, “I don’t understand what you are saying. Can you say it again?” After careful listening and evaluating they even change their own minds because they see a more reasonable answer to a question.

P4C has empowered children to use inquiry as a means to improve their ability to think and have their voices heard. On occasion we have even skipped recess to continue our inquiry or continued well into the second hour to finish our discussion. P4C provides children with an opportunity to think critically as well as creatively during these inquiry sessions.

Another child wrote, “Nobody will be safe and nobody will learn. Children would be shy. They would not share ideas. If that happened they would not gain knowledge.” At the beginning of the year we talk about how we need to listen to the words and ideas of the person rather than focus on who is the speaker. In other words, just because someone happens to be your friend or not is not a good reason to agree or disagree. It is all right to disagree with a friend because we disagree with what the person has said and not with them as a person. Thus, the seed is planted very early in their minds that it is good to have intellectual discussions. They realize an exchange of ideas can improve their thinking and is healthy if done in a caring and respectful manner. I can safely say my students feel truly safe to share their ideas with one another. In fact, the children feel so safe that in the early years when we were first implementing P4C in the classroom, Dr. Jackson would sit in our inquiry circle and participate as a member of that community. The children knew we were having a university professor visit and yet they felt safe enough to openly disagree with him and give reasons as to why they did so. They would openly explain how they had found a counterexample to his argument. His stature, both physical and intellectual, did not intimidate them in the least because they knew that it was all right to disagree as long as they could support it with good reasons and do it in a caring manner.

So if you ask me why I teach philosophy, I can truly say that it has helped me improve as a teacher. I have become a better listener and I now listen to the students’ voices and what they are saying. Our class discussions are richer with a lot more participation. I no longer accept answers at face value, even from Special Education and ESL students. In P4C
sessions everyone is equal. No one person dominates the conversation or has all the right answers. And, everyone has a voice should they choose to speak. It continues to truly amaze me to see these 7- and 8-year olds discuss a topic without an adult leading them. For many this is a time when they discover their voices and feel secure enough to speak up inside the P4C circle. I have seen this happen with children whose former teachers have told me refuse to speak up. Once they feel the safety of not being condemned for their thoughts and feelings, these students slowly begin to blossom and become active participants in the community. P4C has helped these children to find their safety net. And, their ability to think critically, creatively and caringly has helped them to develop into the person that was hidden from us. P4C is truly remarkable and both teacher and students who have implemented it have realized its worth.

When questioning my grandson who was recently involved in a P4C session about what it felt like to have his voice heard by adults, his reply was, “I feel stronger than my daddy.”

Aretêic Philosophy for Children

By Steve Bein

Steve Bein (bujinbugeijutsu@hotmail.com) is a Ph.D. candidate in philosophy at UH/Manoa where he specializes in Japanese philosophy and ethics. He is also a Title I teacher at Waikiki School. He recently published a comparative article on Watsuji Tetsuro and Martin Heidegger in the on-line journal for Asian Studies on the Pacific Coast, as well as an award-winning short story in volume XIX of L. Ron Hubbard’s Writers of the Future. He has been involved with P4C since 1997.

Patience, they say, is a virtue. That may be, but it is certainly not one of mine. Becoming more patient has been annually renewed as my New Year’s resolution for some time now, and with little success. I cannot blame the insignificance of my progress in this matter on a lack of advice. On the contrary, those who want to become more patient will never be left wanting for counsel: self-help books and the sagacity of friends and relatives are always available in abundance. The problem, of course, is that in order to develop patience, one needs to be patient enough to apply such wisdom on a sustained basis. I am bound in a catch-22: the only way to develop patience seems to be to have patience in the first place.

There is exactly one activity in life in which I reliably demonstrate patience, and in this arena I feel endowed — much to my own surprise — with almost limitless serenity and tolerance. I am undoubtedly most patient when doing philosophy with children. I know this both introspectively and because of the remarks of others. The teachers I work with sometimes compliment me on how very patient I am, only to have me correct them — this time to their surprise — that this is only true of me in the classroom. In conversation with adults my instinct is to react immediately to anything said which I feel to be incorrect. But when sitting in a circle on the floor of a classroom, the children sitting with me can do no wrong. My first instinct is not to correct but to seek clarification. To my ears the children are almost incapable of saying “stupid” things; they can only say things I am not sure I fully understand, things I am sure I will make sense of once I more fully adopt the child’s perspective.

This is certainly not the case for me when speaking with adults. They are more than capable of being stupid; on my less patient days, I seem to be the only adult who can reliably say anything intelligent at all. I am not writing this to insult my readers, nor to lament my own personal failings, nor to warn people that I am not the friendliest person in the world. I am writing to describe at least one of P4C’s effects outside of the classroom environment. The methodology of doing philosophy with children is, in my experience, uniquely capable of developing certain personal virtues, that this development can happen in both teachers and students, and that this can be seen as one of P4C’s greatest merits.

Aristotle developed an ethical philosophy based on the cultivation of aretê, or “virtue.” According to Aristotle, human beings are capable of cultivating a great number of virtues within themselves, and these virtues — such as wisdom, temperance, courage, generosity, and so on — are the wellspring of human goodness and flourishing. For Aristotle, the primary goal of ethics is not to derive some formula or principle by which we can discover what the proper answer is to an ethical dilemma. Rather, the goal is to develop the virtues such that one becomes a person of good character, trusting that the truly virtuous person can be relied upon to correctly resolve all ethical dilemmas. My contention is that philosophy for children can be seen as engaging in a very similar project, and that it can cultivate virtues not only in students but also in their teachers. Philosophy for children is therefore potentially an aretêic endeavor, one that cultivates virtue in its participants.

I will not develop an argument in defense of this position. My experience tells me it is self-evident, and is therefore accompanied by the strength and weakness of all self-evident claims: those who accept them require no arguments, and for those who do not accept them no argument will be convincing. My aim is to show how and why P4C has been an aretêic endeavor in my own life, and to recommend its practice based on its potential for self-cultivation and self-transformation.

An initial observation many may have is that doing philosophy with children has nothing to do with the story I told about my own patience: might it not be the case that I am more patient with children in general, no matter what I happen to be doing with them, and that what I should be con-
concerned about is my lack of patience with adults? Both of the latter claims are true: I am generally more patient when dealing with children, and if I want to be a happier person I should try to figure out how to be more patient with adults. But it is not the case that I was patient with children first, and then extended my patience to the realm of P4C. Rather, I am afraid I was a generally impatient person in all aspects of life until I started doing P4C.

How does P4C itself account for the change? The “Good Thinker’s Toolkit” developed by Thomas Jackson contains part of the answer: I think the question “what do you mean by that?” is a powerful tool in developing tolerance of others’ ideas. When sitting behind the wheel of a car, I rarely think, “that was an interesting way to make a left turn” or “my, that’s quite an accomplishment, cutting off three whole lanes with a car that small.” I do not seek to interpret the other drivers’ behavior: I let the insults fly.

In order to do this, my immediate assumption must be that I know what I’m doing, and that the fool in front of me (though ordinarily I don’t use the word “fool”) clearly has no idea how to drive. In some cases this is entirely true. However, the initial assumption was essentially that the other person was in the wrong. This assumption is rejected whenever one is prepared to ask, “what do you mean by that?” It may still be that the other person is wrong. Indeed, that may even still be a lingering suspicion, but in the moment one asks, “what do you mean by that?” one is allowing for the possibility of the other’s being correct. When the “W” question is asked honestly, a fundamental shift in attitude takes place: the default position is now that the other sees things correctly, and that the questioner is the one who does not fully understand.

Similarly, the drive to seek out assumptions, examples and counterexamples — the “A,” “E” and “C” letters of the toolkit — also indicates a shift in attitude. Were I to try to think of examples in my own past behavior similar to that of the moron in front of me cutting off three lanes of traffic, I do not doubt I could find one. If I were evaluate my assumptions about the other driver, I might realize that I have overlooked the possibility that this person is fifteen and one half years old, has never driven before, is paying more attention to the nerve-wracking screams of the parent in the passenger seat than to the surrounding traffic, and would really appreciate it if some of the other drivers on the road would cut a kid a little slack. I might realize that, were I in this poor teenager’s position, the last thing in the world that would help me drive intelligently is to hear the blaring horn of the impatient driver behind me. If I really wrecked my brain, I might be able to come up with some situation that constitutes a counterexample to the thesis that this particular driving maneuver is irretrievably stupid.

But impatience threatens to render one incapable of this kind of thought. Indeed, it seems impatience is opposed to philosophical thinking. Identifying assumptions, examples, and counterexamples requires time, and impatience is not willing to linger. Impatience demands only superficial analyses of situations so that it can move on. It does not scratch beneath the surface of things, while on the other hand the whole point of philosophy can be said to be scratching beneath the surface, getting under the skin to take a look at the core of what is at stake.

Now if this is the case, if philosophical thinking is diametrically opposed to the attitude of impatience, why should children enter the picture? All I have said so far is true of philosophy itself, not P4C. True, the good thinker’s toolkit is a pedagogical device of P4C, but it need not be — and indeed should not be — restricted to dialogues with children. Why was it not philosophy but philosophy with children that helps me cultivate the aretē of patience?

There are several potential answers to this question. One is that when philosophy is taught to adults, it is often presented as an antagonistic discipline. Philosophers speak of “shooting down,” “sinking,” and “defeating” arguments, of “shoring up” and “defending” their own positions. These are all militaristic terms. There are professors of analytic philosophy who speak of “the three D’s” when dealing with another philosopher’s argument in term papers: the student is to Define the terms and scope of the argument, Defend the argument in the strongest possible terms, and then Destroy it. A fundamental assumption of this approach to philosophy must be that the “opponent” is wrong, for surely we should only wish to destroy arguments that are incorrect. Rather than teaching patience, this approach to philosophy will actually tend to encourage impatience, for not only does it begin with the same assumption in which impatience is grounded — namely, that others are by default incorrect — but it provides one with the intellectual tools to “defeat” others in arguments (with such “victories” often being interpreted as proof of one’s own correctness).

A second reason doing philosophy with adults does not necessarily encourage patience is because certain assumptions seem to be more universally shared, assumptions which thereby escape scrutiny. When adults engage in discussions of metaphysics, for instance, they often share an initial agreement of what counts as real and unreal. The only questions, then, are why reality works the way it does; the what of reality is often left unexamined. This kind of discussion can be immeasurably deepened by such notable philosophical figures as Santa Claus. The question of whether Santa Claus is real is a legitimate problem of metaphysics provided one is willing to respect it as such. The trouble is that respect and intellectual openness are difficult to come by when everyone in the discussion shares the same pre-conceived answer to the question.

Children challenge many of our philosophical presuppositions, and in doing so they renew our ability to engage subjects with respect and intellectual honesty. Too often philosophical problems are of merely academic interest to adults. The question of the reality of Santa Claus is of the utmost practical importance when you are six years old, particularly when it is late December. In my own case, doing philosophy with children reminded me that I do not
know what is at stake even with such “elementary” questions as whether or not Santa Claus is real. (Did you know, for example, that Santa Claus has a magic key that can open any door or window? Having grown up in a house with a chimney, I was never aware of it; it was a first grader living in an apartment complex who taught me this.) Children re-acquainted me with what intellectual honesty is really all about.

Of course there is a last feature of P4C as we do it in Hawai‘i that directly cultivates patience: the foundational principle that when doing philosophy we must not be in a rush to get somewhere. All too many teachers have lamented the fact that they are too hurried throughout the day. Their syllabi are so demanding: they must make their students meet such-and-such a standard by such-and-such a date, they have so little time and so much to teach, while at the same time additional subjects are being forced into the curriculum. Educators are trained as greyhounds are trained: to cross finish lines in a hurry. Anyone who has ever taken in a racing greyhound as a pet after its track career knows how difficult it can be to take these poor dogs for walks. It’s something like having a perpetually popping kernel of popcorn on the end of the leash; “jittery” scarcely begins to describe an ex-racing dog. Educators often feel the same nerves: there are so many finish lines to be crossed in the course of a school day.

Philosophy should be less like a race and more like a leisurely walk in the woods: if you don’t stop to enjoy the scenery, you’re missing the point. It’s not the case that the hiker doesn’t get anywhere. Eventually the end of the trail is found, but the journey itself was the destination. An educator’s training can encourage impatience because of the pressure to cross finish lines, but philosophical education demands a more relaxed approach, and therefore serves to counteract the cultivation of impatience and encourage its opposite. I know I am not the only one who thinks so. The teachers I work with have described P4C as “coming up for air” in the middle of a hectic day, and even as giving their kids a chance to “sit back and enjoy their education.” This is not to say that children cannot enjoy their other subjects, but both students and teachers recognize a certain pressure being lifted when it comes time to sit in a circle and do P4C.

My professional and academic training describe me as a philosopher and an educator. As both philosophers and educators are too often driven to develop habits that encourage impatience, perhaps it is not entirely my own fault that I find it difficult to demonstrate patience. On the other hand, perhaps it was my natural impatience that led me to both philosophy and education, fields in which my impatience might be disguised. Whatever the causes of my lack of patience may be, the techniques, practices, and overall intellectual environment of P4C have proven uniquely therapeutic.

Please do not misunderstand me: I am not claiming that doing philosophy with adults is necessarily harmful, nor that the teaching profession inherently encourages intolerance and hasty judgment, nor that P4C will automatically make one a more patient person. On the contrary, I believe that philosophical dialogue is immeasurably important, and that many intellectual virtues can be cultivated through it. I believe that teachers demonstrate exemplary patience and understanding on a daily basis. And I believe both that cultivating patience demands a great deal of personal effort, and that P4C can encourage the cultivation of a host of virtues beyond patience. Curiosity, open-mindedness, introspection, self-respect, respect for others, intellectual honesty, and wisdom are some of the many virtues, both intellectual and moral, to be cultivated through the practice of P4C. My central claim here has been only this: like philosophy, P4C is potentially an aretêic practice, and its aretêic benefits beyond the classroom are potentially as important as anything that happens in class. In my own case P4C has been a transformative, life-altering experience, and this potential for self-transformation is as strong a recommendation for doing P4C as any of its in-class benefits.

My First Experience With Philosophy for Children

By Laurie Tam

Laurie Tam (laurie_tam@notes.k12.hi.us) is a 1st grade teacher at Waikiki School and has been teaching for 6 years. She is working on her M.A at UH/Manoa on elementary education with an emphasis on early childhood. She has been involved with P4C for 1 year.

Philosophy for Children , also known as P4C, was first introduced to me in the school year 2001-2002 when my fellow co-workers began implementing it in their classrooms. I began to hear so much positive feedback from their sessions that I decided to try it the following year. Philosophy for Children is not just a way of teaching. It is a way of thinking. It makes you analyze more and gets you to see many other points of view. Cognitive development, critical thinking skills and social skills develop over the sessions.

Waikiki School is a small elementary school in the Honolulu District from grades kindergarten through sixth grade. There are primarily two classrooms per grade level with the exception of one grade that has three and one combo class. The average enrollment is about 330 students. The majority of the students are Asian.

When P4C was introduced to our faculty by Dr. Thomas E. Jackson of the University of Hawaii at Manoa, eight out of fifteen classroom teachers participated. Currently, thirteen out of fifteen teachers are using Philosophy for Children in their classroom.

I have to admit that using Philosophy for Children was not easy at first. Because it was my first year using the pro-
gram in the classroom, two people from the University of Hawaii program came to help me. I teach first grade with twenty-one students. In the beginning it does seem like total chaos. I felt as though all I was doing was behavior management and it was driving me crazy. It was hard for me to just “let the children go” in the discussions. There were times when I thought nothing happened in the discussion when something really did. The students were getting used to the format and were learning the Magic Words and Tool Kit but I could not see the purpose of why I was doing this and I could not see what the students were getting out of it. I began to doubt how this program would benefit my students. There were so many other things that needed to be covered under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. It really felt like a waste of time. But, I stuck it out and I am so grateful that I did. I started taking notes of the discussions and this is what really showed me what was happening during the discussions. When I’d get home and re-read the notes, I began to notice the depth of the discussions. Sometimes the adults in the group didn’t understand what was happening but the children did.

For example, during Christmas, we had a discussion about how Santa knows if you’ve been naughty or nice. The children began to say that maybe Santa has a magic eye. “That’s how he knows!” I had to ask what that was and it was explained by another child that it is from the Japanese cards called Yu-Gi-Oh. It’s fake eye that allows you to see things. For instance, if you are holding a card and I can’t see it, the magic eye will allow you to see what card the person is holding. “It’s cheat!” according to one student.

The benefits to using Philosophy for Children are unimaginable. Discussions are often about things that we are learning about in class. Most of the time the students vote on topics to discuss. We started the program in the second quarter of the school semester. Now we are in the fourth quarter. The discussions have become very philosophical. Disagreements and agreements go back and forth. Children who have been passive have begun participating more frequently. Even children who have English as a second language are able to participate in discussions. Recently the children had a discussion about water and could not decide if ice came from water or water came from ice. Some of the things they said were:

- It comes from cold air.
- But how does it get into the sky.
- If water is blue then how come the clouds are white?
- How does it rain? There’s no one up in the sky holding the ice.
- Why don’t we turn into ice if it’s really cold?

The topics for discussions do not always come from the curriculum. Some of the topics that students have discussed are about Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy, Easter, sea animals and water. It doesn’t matter if an answer is right or wrong. Giving students a voice in a society where they are often unheard can be very powerful.

Students learn to justify their answers by giving reasons. They learn to agree and disagree with others. They begin to see that they don’t always have to agree with other’s opinions. They make connections to things they have been learning about at home or school. Students become more inquisitive during discussions. They begin to ask more questions or make inferences. The thinking doesn’t stop at the end of the sessions. There is a carry over into other subject areas. The journal writings from the children are much more detailed. They explain and give reasons more. After our sessions, I began to have the children write about it. They often evaluate themselves in their journals.

There is no required time limit to using Philosophy for Children. However, it is critical to take into account age appropriateness. Younger children will not and should not be required to sit for long periods of time. Take your cues from the students. When they start squirming or start becoming bored with the topic it is best to stop. Some sessions may be longer than others. I have had discussions last from fifteen minutes to about an hour. Sometimes it is hard to stop them.

During our talk about water, two girls became very involved in the topic and began a conversation between just the two of them. I was amazed that the rest of the class just sat and listened. They were making very thoughtful agreements and disagreements towards each other.

I feel that Philosophy for Children has great benefits for children. I have experienced less behavior problems in class because of the sense of community. Cognitive development is currently on the top of list for educators and this is where Philosophy for Children helps. The first two objectives from Goal three of Goals 2000 state that “The academic performance of all students at the elementary and secondary level will increase significantly every quartile” and “The percentage of all students who demonstrate the ability to reason, solve problems, apply knowledge and write and communicate effectively will increase substantially.” Philosophy for Children will help accomplish this goal.

I have seen the growth in the children. It is not easy at first, but my advice is to stick it out. It is exciting to hear the children for once in a world where they are hardly heard at all. The benefits to using the program overflow into other subject areas. It does work!

Thoughts on P4C

By JoAnn Soong

JoAnn Soong (jo_ann_soong/alawai/hidoe@notes.k12.hi.us) is a 2nd grade teacher at Ala Wai Elementary School and has been teaching for 20 years. She holds an M.A in education from UH/Manoa. She has been involved with P4C since 1997.

Why would I continue to do P4C with so many other things put upon teachers to do in the classroom? Why would I continue to do P4C when in recent years other teachers have not continued? Is it because “the philosopher” and funny Dr. J comes and joins us? Is it because a graduate assistant comes to help in the dialogue? Is it because that’s a period I can fill in my lesson plan book?

Here are my thoughts...

I have engaged in Philosophy for Children for a number of years and I have seen and experienced how P for C has engaged the students and myself in discussions that don’t take place at any other time during the day. We can talk about our thinking and question our ideas and others within this safe environment where there is respect, trust, and learning.

We sit in a circle, a symbol that ALL is important and not just one. There is a community ball, made of pieces of yarn rolled together by each child. There are extra yarn put in to represent all others who join us. So each individual IS important in the circle and the individuals together make the community. The ball is passed around in our P4C discussions, so children are heard one at a time. Interestingly, one would think that I as the teacher would naturally get the ball whenever my hand is raised, but at times, students will pass me to engage whomever they want to. That is good because they are really engaging themselves in dialogue and they are learning from each other.

That brings me to an important thing P4C has made me do. LISTEN. There is a topic of discussion. There is a format for discussion. But I am not there to push a point or to teach a lesson. There is learning, but the learning comes from the engagement of discussion. Emphasis is not on right or wrong, but rather on the right for any individual to share their thoughts and to question other people’s thoughts in responsible ways. So we need to listen and respect what each individual has to say.

I am a participant. I also take the role of facilitator, so with P4C I take both a front and back seat approach (and not a back seat driver approach). I could ask a question, set a way to decide on a topic, interject an idea, remind the community on the agreements of discussion, and then take a back seat to let the exchange go or let the community decide. When I think about this, maybe the students need me as a facilitator in the beginning of the year, but I can see how by the latter part of the year, students could be the facilitators themselves. What a unique opportunity for them and for me too.

We have had many different people come and join us in our P4C discussions. One thing that is interesting to me are the comments people make of the students. Not aware of the backgrounds of the students, they can just be amazed at some of the ideas and thoughts brought out by various students, even from special education students or students with a second language. For me, one of the highlights is when a shy, quiet child will, for the first time, raise his/her hand and say, “I think. . . .”

With all the concern of standards and the quality of education, to me this is where students are learning to “communicate effectively in groups and demonstrate tolerance for individual and cultural differences.” The students get “involved in complex thinking and problem solving.” (Quotes taken from the General Learner Outcomes of the Hawaii Content and Performance Standards.)

In discussions, one would hear “What do you mean. . .?” “I disagree with . . . because . . .” “Can you give an example?” “That’s an example.” “That’s a counter example.” “If . . . then . . .” “You’re assuming. . . is that true?” Students learn to engage in discussions in such responsible ways as the above. How much more important for them to learn these tools for thinking while they are engaged in discussions from topics like what’s in a name, war and peace, good and bad, and comparisons of things. Topics that are brought out in literature, math, social studies, and science can be brought to discussion. The students learn how to respond to the multitude of information and opinions they receive from their environment.

P4C goes even further in having students evaluate their own performance. Another general learner outcome calls for “the ability to recognize and produce quality performance.” At the end of the session each person in the circle responds with thumbs up, thumbs down, thumbs sideways. “Was it safe?” (Did we have a safe place where each person could share their thoughts?) “How was our listening?” “Did we maintain a focus?” “How was our participation?” “Did I learn something new?” “Did we challenge our
thinking?” “Did we scratch beneath the surface?” Examples are given in our response to these questions. And if there is thumbs down, then what do we need to remember the next time?

The next time for P4C is not just the next time we meet in a circle as I see how we engage in these ways of discussion in other parts of the day. We read literature and we see examples of how the author engages the reader. We give reasons why the character said or acted that way. We do math and we wonder if this is so, then what happens here. Can we assume there is only one strategy to solve this mathematical problem? We learn about the histories of people and we wonder what does that mean for us today? There is a conflict in the playground and one asks, “Did you assume that? Is that true...?” So the “tools of thinking” the students learn and engage in P4C can be used throughout the day.

The power of Philosophy for Children is in providing the opportunity for the children and all those involved in that circle to engage in thinking and the sharing of that thinking in responsible ways. That comes with respecting each person and creating that safe environment where each person can feel comfortable to engage or not to engage in discussion. That engagement comes with listening to what others have to say. Then the response can include an agreement, a disagreement with reason, a verifying with example, or even silence. Then at the end of that time, the children and the other participants can take a step back and ask, “How did we do?”. That reflection is important for us to learn from each other how to think and communicate better.

**P4C: A Librarian’s Perspective**

By Frances T.Y. Higashi

Francis T. Y. Higashi (dakine736@yahoo.com) has been a librarian at Waikiki school for 13 years. She holds an M.A. in Library and Information Studies from the University of Hawaii at Manoa. She has been involved with P4C for 1 year.

A couple of years ago when I returned to school after maternity leave, I discovered that the library had been invaded! Strangers lead by a tall gentleman whom they referred to as “Dr J” invaded the library every Thursday at approximately 2:30p.m. They did not speak much, but went busily about their work arranging chairs in a circular formation. Then as if called by some unknown source many of the teachers from our school would slowly stroll in and take a seat in this strange formation.

The strangers, teachers and the one known as “Dr. J” had a strange ritual of passing around one of the stuffed animals that I used to decorate the library (they selected a different “chosen one” each time). I noticed that only the person who was holding was holding the “chosen one” was allowed to speak, which was sometimes in a foreign language. As far as I could understand they said things like, “IDUS”, “POPAAT”, “SPLAT”, and “LMO”. Everyone seemed to understand this strange language and the conversation seemed to revolve around a central theme or topic, but sometimes after saying the word “LMO” the topic of conversation would often change. “Dr. J” would sometimes throw cards, with a single letter on them, on the floor and the conversation would seem to be redirected in some mysterious way.

The most amazing thing that I observed about this strange gathering was the vast array of feelings and emotions shared by the group. They sometimes cried, but many times I noticed them laughing and enjoying themselves thoroughly. They didn’t always agree about things and many people shared opposing views about certain issues, but in the end they always left the room with a look of contentment. This strange behavior intrigued me and I inquired of my best friend what this whole thing was about. She told me that it was “P4C”, or “Philosophy For Children.” My friend Staci told me that she was using P4C with the students in her classroom, and that “Dr. J” and a graduate student named “Chip” were helping her. She told me that the Thursday gathering was a time for them to share their successes, “AHA’s”, and of course, challenges.

Now, everything started to make sense and I was excited about what the teachers, and the strangers were doing in the classroom! When it came time again to sign up to participate in P4C, I quickly jumped at the opportunity. I don’t have a regular class to conduct P4C, but I was sure that I would be able to participate in the process in someway. I eventually adopted Staci’s class, or they adopted me. We would meet every Friday in the library during our regular library time to discuss various philosophical issues. I was amazed at the insightful responses that the students often gave about different topics. Often the same students spoke, but sometimes the students who usually don’t say a word, spoke up and gave responses that startled me.

My participation in P4C has helped me professionally and personally. I now see students in a different “light” because of what I observed in Staci’s class. I discovered that children are able to think philosophically and are able to “scratch beneath the surface” to discover meaning in their thinking. Of course, in order for all these wonderful things to happen, the students must feel “safe” in their environment without fear of embarrassment, retaliation, prejudice, or misconceived judgment by their peers or the facilitators. I think the hardest part of P4C for the teachers, is balancing classroom management with creating this “safe” environment.

I have tried to integrate facets of P4C into the library environment. I have found that children’s literature can be a great starting place for philosophical discussions. I feel that we are able to delve a little deeper into ideas or themes present in literature by asking philosophical questions. Also, by integrating the P4C lingo with our mindful school
There is enormous pressure for teachers to produce students who pass the tests. Under the federal No Child Left Behind law, schools whose students do not meet certain standards are subject to sanctions, including, ultimately, closure.

How does P4C help teachers and students in this situation? It is my assertion that P4C teaches students and teachers precision of language that can later be used in the standards based curriculum. For instance, every year I spend time with my class discussing criteria. This year we discussed what makes a watch. Does a sundial, if strapped to one’s wrist, constitute a watch? Does a device strapped around one’s toe, or one’s belly, constitute a watch? How about a giant wristwatch shaped clock hung on a wall? Ultimately, my students this year decided that there were two basic criteria for a watch: it must be portable, and it must be designed to tell time (though not necessarily working).

These discussions carried out over three weeks, allowed us to get at the root of what the word watch means. The discussions also familiarized students with the idea of criteria, and I was able to leverage this knowledge into their regular curriculum. For instance, criteria were especially helpful when we were studying fractions. Like most fifth graders, my class this year was puzzled by mixed numbers, which seem to be both whole numbers and parts of whole numbers at once. We clarified this issue by working through all the examples and counter-examples until we were able to set criteria for fractions. Whenever students were in doubt, they could check the example against the criteria and move on. The precision of our criteria enhanced my students’ thinking about fractions.

Precision of language is integral to good writing, but it is rarely found in a grade school essay. This is partly because students and teachers lack a common language to talk about non-fiction writing. A teacher may be able to say, ‘Johnny, this sentence is a run-on,’ and the student will understand the problem, but grammatical errors are easily fixed. Far more difficult is to take a student essay that is vague, and which contradicts itself, and to help the student understand why it needs to be rewritten. Often the teacher himself lacks the specificity of language to identify the problem. The Toolkit solves these problems. At the beginning of the year I teach my students my standards for a paragraph: one reason and two examples per paragraph. At the end of the essay I demand a paragraph that considers and dismissed counter-examples and counter reasons. Once students begin P4C, it is easy to correct errors. I can tell them, ‘this counter-example is actually an example, because it supports your thesis,’ or ‘you need a reason in this paragraph.’ Both the teacher and student know exactly what the other means.

Of course, I could use direct instruction to teach the idea of criteria, but I doubt very much if I would succeed. The genius of P4C is relevance—the examples and reasons that make up the criteria are relevant to the kids because they themselves generate them, and so they are able to easily generalize the ideas. In short, when I speak of P4C to a skeptic, I speak of its ability to enhance my standards based curriculum. Then I ask the skeptic to come watch a P4C session, and its other benefits become obvious as well.
A Principal’s Thought on P4C

By Carolyn M. Nakamoto

Carolyn M. Nakamoto has just retired from Haha’ione Elementary School where she served as principal for the past seven years.

I have been asked to share a principal’s perspective on the effectiveness of Philosophy for Children (P4C) at Haha’ione Elementary School, a school that has utilized P4C since the early 90s. I do so gladly as this program has endured and remained a vital part of the school’s curricula even with 90% of the teaching staff changing through retirements and transfers over the years.

Haha’ione Elementary is a School Community-Based Management (SCBM) facility within the affluent suburbs of East Honolulu known as Hawaii Kai on the island of Oahu. We service about 520 students with 21 classroom teachers and eleven certificated support staff, including one counselor, one librarian, one Student Services Coordinator, one English as Second Language teacher, four Special Education teachers, and three specialty teachers; there are also seven educational assistants. Our students score well-above the state average on all normed and criterion-referenced testing.

P4C was initially sought as a program to instruct students in engaging in higher level thinking skills in the early 90s. We had wanted to embark on establishing a Science and Technology Learning Center with critical thinking and inquiry skills as the primary focus of learning for our students at Haha’ione. The few teachers who were exposed to P4C recommended that the school adopt such a program to have our students be able to ask appropriate questions that lead to deeper knowledge and utilize more accurate information that leads to grounded opinions on different subject areas, including the selection of the best alternative solution that eventually resolves identified problems. We described the focus as one that emphasized the “processing of information,” beginning with science instruction and ultimately applying that thinking process across all content areas, including its application to the environmental and political concerns of society.

The early years began with full-faculty training in P4C. After a 3-5 day orientation, Dr. Thomas Jackson and his graduate students from the University of Hawaii provided additional support to students with periodic and regulated visitations to the classrooms. The application of P4C, however, could not be overtly seen for several years until students were given the opportunity to think in an environment that gave them full responsibility for decisions leading to the resolution of their own social problems. With the introduction of a conflict resolution model known to as Peer Mediation, each student was expected to settle minor disagreements with their peers by using a simple 4-step process. These steps included (1) one’s willingness to resolve his/her own problems, (2) each disputant identifying what (s)he thought was the problem, (3) each disputant recommending a workable solution, and (4) finally the disputants agreeing to one solution without putting down another’s recommendation and truly respecting all ideas. It was during these discussions leading to resolution that students began to ask questions that went deeper into the reasoning behind one’s ideas or opinions. As a result, one began to recognize P4C at work; its elements began to be visible.

It was only after Peer Mediation had been established that P4C began surfacing in the classroom. Students began having the courage to question the opinions of their peers while others listened respectfully, trying to understand both points of view. Seeing third graders having such a discussion about a story they all read was exciting as students asked probing questions of each other’s point of view, trying to separate fact from assumptions, inferences from implications, and wondering if, why, and how the pieces of information fit together. The proactive stance toward learning led to greater discourse among the students.

Throughout the years, we have intermittently received feedback from our complex secondary teachers, indicating that Haha’ione’s students were distinguishable from other feeder schools’. Haha’ione students were seen as persistent in questioning and more confident in practicing intellectual inquiry while simultaneously reserving and postponing
judgment until sufficient information was received. Our students generally took a more skeptical, active stance toward learning new information rather than accepting everything that was told to them passively. The inquiring mind was needed and sought for students to take active control of their learning.

As principal of the school, I could sense that teachers felt comfortable teaching and utilizing P4C concepts with pupils as young as kindergarteners. In fact, the teachers in lower elementary are the ones who actively support P4C in their classrooms and speak highly in support of its effectiveness in energizing classroom discussions. They believe in what P4C is able to do for their students and continue to support and share P4C concepts with new teachers on grade level. With more retirements these past few years, Ha-ha’ione has once again made certain that the remaining faculty who are new to our school have been trained in P4C. With support from the seasoned teachers on grade level, the newer teachers are mentored in keeping P4C a viable entity along with Peer Mediation and Anger Management, another program that attempts to help individuals recognize stages of their own emotional awareness. P4C, Peer Mediation and Anger Management are viewed as tools that individual students require to be able to have healthy interpersonal relationships with peers. Students also tend to find these programs valuable, as a few have taken the concepts and applied them within their own family environments, sharing their knowledge with siblings and parents and even trying to assist with family disputes.

During the 13.5 years as principal of Hahaione, I have seen P4C, Peer Mediation and Anger Management individually wane and peak within the classrooms. However, all three programs in combination appear to support one another, and we have maintained implementation of these programs for almost a decade. Why P4C works in combination with the other programs is difficult to pinpoint. It appears that P4C provides the inquiry tools, Peer Mediation provides the framework in which the inquiry tools can be applied, and Anger Management helps each individual become more aware of his/her own feelings within the context of the situation. The practice of being tolerant of individual differences through persistence and patience is continually fostered and emphasized. There is also a realization that the accuracy of information alone is not always sufficient in maintaining harmonious relationships. The learning of higher level thinking skills is subtle, but after years of consistent expectations among teachers throughout grades K-6, we see positive results that contribute to the development of an intellectual citizenry for a peaceful society. P4C appears to be student-friendly as well as teacher-friendly and has become a major element in identifying the success of Ha-ha’ione’s Science and Technology Learning Center. Hence, the partnership formed with Dr. Jackson and the University of Hawaii will continue for many more years to come.

As with all successful programs, a contributing factor to the success of P4C, Peer Mediation, and Anger Management school-wide is that these programs are not utilized in isolation. They are practiced during classroom hours but are also infused throughout non-instructional times by the entire staff of Haha’ione. Whether it be the counselor working with students, a specialty teacher helping a student within a pull-out program, or the administrator, head custodian, and office staff relating to students, the expectations exercised by the adults are generally consistent.

Another contributing factor to the success of the trio is having an active student government at work with a dedicated student activities coordinator. Students are involved in major decisions made through the school’s SCBM Council by being informed and polled for their opinions although they may not have an official vote on the SCBM Council itself. Major decisions involving students have included the establishment of Haha’ione as an SCBM school, changing the school’s yearlong calendar, and changing the daily bell schedule. Students are currently defining appropriate behaviors in every possible setting on campus (cafeteria, library, computer lab, science lab, playground, restrooms, hallways) as well as community and home environments to promote positive student behaviors and a healthy school climate. The definitions of appropriate behaviors in each of the settings are being completed school-wide through the Student Council and its classroom representatives. Parental input is also included in establishing positive, student-centered definitions.

Providing students every opportunity to take control of their learning environment has motivated their love for knowledge, made them want to be in school, and encouraged their participation in non-academic events of their own choosing…which they are also responsible for planning and implementing. Being congruent in our expectations and having a clear vision of these expectations are the overarching themes that contribute to the success of our programs. The school labors at being child-centered in thought and action.
Since 1999, as soon as I got my current position of director, I asked Dr. Jackson's guidance and support. Initially, as the introduction of P4C, I invited Dr. Jackson as a speaker for our annual ministers' seminar and Dharma School Teachers' biannual convention. Then, Dr. Jackson and I started to visit each district to have P4C workshops with Dharma School teachers. Approximately 30 teachers at each island participated in the workshops. I selected and translated stories from Buddhist scriptures. By integrating P4C technique and inquiry method to the stories, we had amazing discussions about preciousness and impermanence of life, love and kindness to each other, compassion and wisdom of Buddha, and foolishness of revenge. Because of Dr. Jackson's friendly and sincere character and of course the significance of P4C, all Dharma school teachers reacted very positively to the workshops and some of them said that the communication skills of P4C have been utilized among their family members as well as Dharma class settings.

Currently, Dr. Jackson and I are working to produce a workbook for Dharma School. My translation of Buddhist stories from Japanese into English with questions from Dharma class will be filed together with essential teaching and techniques of P4C.

In September 2003, the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawai'i will open its Pacific Buddhist Academy as the first Buddhist-affiliated high school in the United States of America. The academy will give America its first comprehensive system of Buddhist Education, from pre-kindergarten through Grade 12. In order to embed Buddhist values in the school life, the school will offer a "Peace Curriculum." P4C, I believe, has a great potential to be integrated into the Peace Curriculum as a tool to guide children to live a life of peace, compassion, interrelatedness and one-ness with the whole universe which is essential to teach in this chaotic world.

Education Administrators’ Thoughts on P4C

Bonnie Tabor

Bonnie Tabor (bonnie_tabor/waikiki/hidoe@notes.k12.hi.us) was present at the birth of Waikiki School as a Mindful school and is now blessed to return to the school as principal. P4C has been an important part of her professional life for ten years.

I am writing this to provide a brief overview of the importance Philosophy for Children (P4C) has come to play in our Mindful School. Waikiki School has been a Mindful School since 1990. Couched in Dr. Art Costa's model of explicitly teaching intelligent behavior to students,
Waikiki School has flourished over the past 10 years during which this reform model has been in place.

For the past two school years, P4C has been crucial in helping us develop our focus on thinking skills with increased rigor. Through P4C, students are engaged in developing their higher order thinking skills by examining questions and critically exploring the pros and cons of each point of view. The process lends itself to developing the habits of the mind, instilling a confidence in students’ ability to problem solve, while fostering an increased respect, tolerance and understanding of divergent perspectives.

With discussion questions initiated by the students themselves, topics hold a relevancy that promotes active involvement and participation. Students look forward to their P4C time. The P4C process reinforces the belief that all children can become creative, active, critical thinkers. Students who attend special education classes are as engaged by the P4C process as are our gifted students!

Another special benefit of the P4C model is its ability to develop the skill of empathetic listening. Students learn to focus and really “hear” what their classmates are saying. By the end of the year, students thrive within the collegial setting fostered by P4C. They learn to respect the unique ideas and contributions of their classmates and to appreciate the importance of asking questions, recognizing assumptions, and practicing critical thought.

As a principal, another component of P4C I have found truly inspiring is its benefit as a tool for staff development. At Waikiki School, 90% of our faculty is involved in weekly P4C "reflection community circles". Through these sessions, teachers challenge themselves to bump up their own thinking skills. Through the intense process of discussion, a camaraderie develops among staff as all strive together to become an increasingly adept community of critical thinkers. This process is enlightening. As teachers develop their own thinking, it synergistically impacts on all that happens within the school.

There is no question that P4C has enhanced our school and moved us toward our vision of becoming a community of lifelong learners. Discussions routinely expand beyond the facts-leading to complex analysis and animated intellectual dialogue. Students and teachers become empowered to trust the powers of their minds. P4C has definitely played a key role in our quest to become a school, which is a "home for the heart and mind."

We are grateful for all Dr. Jackson and his graduate students have been able to add to our school through P4C.

P4C in the Department of Philosophy

By Eliot Deutsch

Eliot Deutsch (eliot@hawaii.edu) is currently Chair of the Department of Philosophy, UH/Manoa. He has published fourteen books and over eighty articles and reviews in professional journals. He is a past president of the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy. He is currently developing a pluralistic, cross-cultural theory of rationality.

The Philosophy for Children program in Hawai‘i has its home in the department of Philosophy at the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa and, as chair of the department and also as someone involved in the development of the program since its inception in 1985, I am very pleased indeed to acknowledge the importance and value this program has had for the department as well as for the local community in general over the many years of its exciting work.

The course that director Thomas Jackson offers our graduate students interested in participating in the program is now a required course for all teaching assistants in the department. This requirement was instituted on the basis of the clear evidence we had not only of the enhanced teaching skills that the graduate students acquired but in their being able to exhibit their understanding of the genuine purposes of education by imparting to their undergraduate students an enduring sense of wonder and curiosity and the ability to think critically and creatively in all endeavors.

The process of philosophical inquiry developed in p4c, with its emphasis on forming an “intellectually safe community” for children to share ideas, celebrate diversity in viewpoints and to listen well, has become something of a model for us in the teaching of philosophy at all levels in the university. Students who have graduated with doctoral degrees in philosophy from us and who have worked with Tom testify on many occasions as to how much they have benefited from the experience in their own teaching at various colleges and universities. The program has in this sense extended its influence to adult students as well as children across the educational landscape. We are justly proud of the many accomplishments of P4C Hawai‘i under the dedicated leadership of Thomas Jackson.