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# EMPOWERING GLOBAL P4C RESEARCH AND PRACTICE THROUGH SELF-STUDY

## The Philosophy for Children Hawai'i International Journaling and Self-Study Project

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This chapter explores how four international Philosophy for Children (P4C) researchers use self-study methodologies (Loughran, 2007) to systematically examine the nuanced roles of a teacher facilitator in a philosophy for children Hawai'i (p4cHI) community of inquiry. It also offers sustainable structures for supporting the professional development of P4C teacher educators, practitioners, and researchers like us. Respectively from the USA, Taiwan, Canada, and China, we came together in the spring of 2014 to form the p4cHI International Journaling and Self-Study Project. Inspired by the findings of a recent study that reported on the positive role of self-study and online journaling in an international p4cHI research collective (Makaiau, Leng & Fukui, 2015), our group was interested in experimenting further with this new direction and method in P4C research. We wanted to:

- 1 Expand the culturally responsive international p4cHI research collective that was initially created by Makaiau, Leng, & Fukui (2015);
- 2 Explore the role of a p4cHI teacher/facilitator with international partners;
- 3 Reflect on the professional and personal impact of belonging to an international research collective;
- 4 Disseminate and mobilize knowledge relating to the professional development of P4C teacher educators, practitioners, and researchers.

In this chapter, we recount how the methods of self-study and interactive online journaling led us to the discovery of emergent pedagogical *tensions* in our practice as p4cHI teacher/facilitators.

These tensions revolve around reflections arising from our conceptions of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). SoTL engages faculty to reflect upon and initiate positive

changes to curricula and pedagogical practices (Hubball, Clarke, & Poole, 2010). In our case, scholarly reflections focused on (1) the dichotomy of having a Socratic or Confucian approach to teaching and learning; (2) developing community or fostering inquiry with students; (3) acknowledging or deconstructing the cultural mores of our international contexts; and (4) focusing on technical or creative modes of professional practice. We purposely frame the tensions not as binary opposites, but within a balanced holistic perspective, similar to the yin and yang. In our conclusion, we share the new knowledge gained from our collaborative work and we position self-study research methodologies and online journaling as a professional development model for globalized P4C teacher educators, practitioners, and researchers.

### **Background and theoretical framework**

p4cHI is Thomas Jackson's (2001) teacher-lead and culturally responsive offshoot of Lipman's original P4C movement. It is an innovative approach to education that transforms the schooling experience by engaging learners in the activity of philosophy. p4cHI practitioners set out to convert traditional classrooms into 'intellectually safe' (Jackson, 2001: 460) communities of inquiry where students and teachers co-create and co-construct their abilities to think for themselves in responsible ways. Defined by both a theoretical framework and actual set of classroom strategies, p4cHI is best characterized as a philosopher's pedagogy (Makaiau & Miller, 2012) that can be adapted and modeled to fit the needs of students in a wide range of educational settings. It is for these reasons that p4cHI practitioners are now found in a number of locations across the globe, and why researchers like us, who are working to study p4cHI in a wide range of geo-sociopolitical contexts, need methods that bend to the interests of our diverse backgrounds and facilitate a common ground for us to discuss and to reflect together.

Tracing its roots back to teacher inquiry (Dewey, 1938), action research (Loughran, 2004), and reflective practice (Schön, 1983; Zeichner & Liston, 1996), self-study is a research methodology used by teachers and teacher educators to create structures for ongoing professional development (Beck, Freese, & Kosnik, 2004; Macintyre & Buck, 2007) in a variety of cultural contexts. It is a systematic analysis of practice that acknowledges how the integration of 'self in research design . . . can contribute to our understanding of teaching and teacher education' (Hamilton, Smith, & Worthington, 2008: 17). Aimed at promoting the development of 'personal, constructivist, and collaborative' (Beck et al., 2004) professional communities of inquiry, self-study is a promising methodology for researchers like us, who are 'concerned with both enhanced understanding of teacher education in general and the immediate improvement of our practice' (LaBoskey, 2007: 818).

With that said, concerns relating to the validity in the research process of self-study exist. To address them, self-study researchers systematically and rationally examine their professional practice in teaching by collecting extensive data, analyzing and processing their instructional situations, and reflectively examining critical events throughout their personal and professional lives. They not only acknowledge the role of the self in research, but also emphasize that the focus is not on the self but more the relational space between the self and practice.

In this self-study we used an interactive online learning journal (Lee, 2010; Moon, 2006) to create the conditions that we needed for reflective practice (Loughran, 1996) in our international research collective. In line with Spalding and Wilson (2002), who examined pedagogical strategies for encouraging reflective journal writing, we recognized the importance of using interactive technologies to facilitate our cross-cultural research collaboration (O'Brien, Alfano, & Magnusson, 2007) and overall journaling process (Makaiau, Leng, & Fukui, 2015). We hypothesized that, despite our geographic distance, these methods would provide us with

greater opportunities for ‘constructing our learning together, probing one another’s ideas, and reviewing and reframing our ideas collaboratively’ (Kosnik, Samaras, & Freese, 2006: 153).

### **Research questions**

The following research questions were used to guide this study: What does it mean to be a facilitator in a p4cHI community of inquiry? What is the role of interactive online journaling and self-study in the development of our practice and understanding of what it means to be p4cHI facilitators? What is the impact of culture on the role of a p4cHI facilitator?

### **Data sources**

Data came from the interactive online journal that we kept with one another and two other colleagues, Mitsuyo Toyoda from Japan and Ann Yeh from Taiwan. We wrote in the journal at least once a week for six months (8/28/2014 to 1/8/2015) and we used Google documents to share our writing with one another in a ‘live’ online setting. ‘The content of our journals included personal reflections, perceptions and questions’ (Elliott-Johns et al., 2010: 81).

To get our journal started, we used email to brainstorm a set of working guidelines. They included: having each participant select a color to write in, making sure to write once a week, maintaining intellectual safety, asking questions that are important and interesting, engaging in personal reflection and dialogue with others, examining both theoretical and practical aspects of p4cHI, and committing to growing professionally and personally. Then, to launch our online community of inquiry, we each wrote an initial journal entry that answered the following questions: What are three things that you would want others to know about you? What are your previous experiences with teaching/facilitating a p4cHI community of inquiry? What are the reasons that you want to participate in this international self-study journaling project about the role of the facilitator in a p4cHI community of inquiry? From there, new wonderings and insights emerged, and we used those questions and comments to guide further inquiry. This led to ongoing and continuous dialogue, which was characterized by careful listening, questioning, and openness to different viewpoints. At the end of our data collection period, we had 78 pages of single-spaced journal entries and written dialogue. Secondary data sources included emails and analytic memos (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007).

### **Data analysis**

To analyze our data, we drew from the methods of constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This occurred in three phases. In phase one, we worked on our own and engaged in the analytic process of open coding (Charmaz, 2006). This included placing ‘names’ on the themes that emerged from our back and forth comparison of the data (Charmaz, 2006: 47–57). Then, in phase two, we came together via Skype and worked as critical friends (Miles & Huberman, 1994). We shared our open codes and collectively refined, collapsed, and organized our individual findings. We used the methods of axial (Charmaz, 2006: 60–63) and theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2006: 63–67) to bring together our initial open codes and created a composite set of analytic themes. For each of these themes we specified their ‘properties and dimensions’, and related each theme to sub-themes (Charmaz, 2006: 60). This culminated in the development of four main themes and three related sub-themes. In phase three, we wrote up our findings and collaborated further to revise and refine our thinking.

Collaborative analysis of our journal produced four major themes. These themes, described as *tensions*, were representative of the choices that we struggled with and tried to balance during our experiences facilitating p4cHI communities of inquiry. They are described in the following sections.

### ***Theme 1: Socratic or Confucian?***

The first theme to emerge from the analysis of the data relates to the tensions we experienced as we struggled to identify with a generalized approach to teaching and learning. From the data we found that the defining features of a p4cHI facilitator are not static. In our roles as facilitators we were constantly changing, and these adjustments depended on factors like ‘the maturity of community, the framework of classes (whether you are teaching a specific content or not), [and] the flow of dialogue’ (Mitsuyo, 10/10/14). We also learned how we compared ourselves to personas like Socrates and Confucius help us sort through this tension. This comparison first appeared in a journal entry from Jessica:

In p4cHI, I often find myself playing two roles at the same time: that of Socrates and of Confucius. The Socrates in me is like a midwife who, by asking questions, tries to help students express and consolidate their inchoate ideas. The Confucius in me is like a mentor who, by sharing and connecting dots of insights, tries to help students enlarge their hearts and minds with powerful ideas and meaningful discoveries. (9/27/14)

In response to her entry Amber extended the inquiry by adding, ‘the Socrates and Confucius metaphor is very powerful/helpful . . . where we fall on the scale definitely changes . . . depending how much we feel we ‘know’ about any given topic’ (10/2/14). Further analysis of the data revealed how many of our additional journal entries revisited this idea of a Socrates–Confucius paradigm. In these entries, we described ourselves as being caught between the tensions of wanting to maintain a beginner’s mind (Suzuki, 2010) full of questions, or wanting to impart knowledge. This initial rumination culminated in a search for the distinction between a p4cHI facilitator being more like a teacher or student?

### ***Teacher or student?***

In our struggle to clarify the differences between teachers and students, many of us wrote about the contradiction between our own educational experiences and the type of p4cHI facilitator that we wanted to be. For example, Lulu explained the divergence between her childhood experiences and her current efforts to practice p4cHI in China.

My personal education history furnishes me with a mental model of teaching . . . course objectives, develop students’ activities and plan for assessment . . . but in p4cHI, I need to break the chains and learn to ask myself: is my role to transmit knowledge or nurture independent and critical thinkers? Can I really show respect to every student’s ideas? Am I here to learn from my students? Am I flexible enough to allow students to guide their own learning process? Am I sensible enough to respond to students’ needs and interests? (9/21/14)

This entry stimulated Amber’s and Jessica’s thinking. Amber responded ‘we can’t assume that we will always be capable of being the teacher under every circumstance in the classroom,

we have to be open to the role reversing'. Jessica embraced this openness but offered a reminder: 'to say that children can teach us something is not the same as saying that they are teachers' (9/9/14). As the dialogue continued we reached a consensus that there was a crucial difference between being a teacher and student: the teacher 'should model the ideal participant' (Amber, 12/8/14; Jessica, 1/18/15). This led us to an inquiry about when and where to intervene during a community of philosophical inquiry.

### *Intervening too much or intervening too little?*

Questions about good reasons for intervening were prevalent in our journal entries. We thought together about whether or not to *enter* into the inquiry, or make 'a suggestion to move in a direction that [the facilitator] believes to be more educationally worthwhile to pursue at that particular point' (Jessica, 9/14/14). As we explored what we meant by 'educationally worthwhile' we recognized that there was an even larger tension at play. This tension related to the decisions we made about whether to focus on the social and emotional needs of our community, or the development of our students' capacity for inquiry and intellectual growth.

### ***Theme 2: Community or inquiry?***

The second major theme to emerge from the analysis of the data captured our shared struggle to maintain both an intellectually *safe* and academically *challenging* classroom community of inquiry. It is illustrated in a journal entry of Amber's in which she describes a decision that she made while facilitating a p4cHI inquiry with university students.

At the end of their inquiry I could sense that a couple of students were beginning to 'attack' particular claims that were being made by other students, and I jumped in because I thought it would be a good time to intervene and neutralize the intensity of the inquiry . . . the classroom should be intellectually challenging, but I want it to be done in a pono (Lee, 2006) community where everyone is thoughtful, caring, and thinking about working towards a greater good. (11/7/14)

This sentiment was echoed by Jessica who believed that 'bringing everyone together in a circle facing each other sets up a moral imperative for everyone—namely, the need to learn to be responsible for themselves and for each other' (11/3/14). This remark led the group to consider whether we should see p4cHI community as 'a moral community first and a thinking community second,' (Jessica, 11/3/14) or whether the two are actually 'so interconnected and dependent on one another' (Amber, 11/3/2014).

### ***Theme 3: Acknowledging or deconstructing culture***

It also became apparent during the analysis of the data that, despite our collective belief in the power of p4cHI to promote humane and socially just classroom experiences in diverse settings, we often struggled to reconcile tensions between acknowledging or deconstructing cultural differences in our daily practice. Take for example Mitsuyo's entry about eye contact. She described how her student asked if 'it was inappropriate to look eye directly in Japan', which runs counter to her belief that 'facial expression and eye contact help us to feel safe' (10/15/14). Mitsuyo wondered if she should have challenged her own view of communication. Karen also shared her thought about this intercultural tension: 'In Canadian Aboriginal

cultures, it is considered rude to maintain eye contact, whereas the dominant discourse in Canadian education is that a person who does not maintain eye contact is lacking integrity and honesty' (11/3/14). Amber responded with more questions,

When you look someone in the eye does that mean that we are more safe with one another? Could there be other ways of physical communication or body language that are akin to looking at someone in the eye? Or is there something so special about eye contact that makes it in the biggest indicator of safe relationships? (11/17/14)

In her encounter with children in Taiwan, Jessica shared that they did not maintain eye contact. She decided to openly discuss the issue with the children. They admitted feeling shy mostly but agreed that they would concentrate and understand better with proper eye contact. Jessica felt assured to help them develop 'a new habit, a new way of being with oneself and the other, and a new way of encountering the world' (10/26/14). Through transcontinental dialogue like this, we learned that deliberations about the impact of culture on our teaching and on our decisions to acknowledge and deconstruct the value-laden mores of each international context are ongoing and necessary considerations when thinking about the role of a p4cHI teacher/facilitator.

### *Security or risk?*

Directly linked to the cultural contexts of our practice were feelings of security or risk. In our group, this was especially pertinent to Lulu as she attempted to practice p4cHI in China. In a number of entries, she described feeling powerless in her ability to practice the true spirit of p4cHI—'the spirit in fostering wonder and inquiry, the spirit of cultivating student-teacher learner, and the spirit of advocating democracy in China . . . but when people can THINK, that is too dangerous, as it may challenge government's role' (10/2/14). Coming from a similar cultural context, Jessica and Lulu both saw that p4cHI facilitation can be 'risk-taking for many teachers' (Lulu, 9/21/14) because 'teachers do not know what do with the voices of their students if they happen to fall out of the normal trajectories of the good, right answers' (Jessica, 12/16/14).

In one of Mitsuyo's journal entries, this fear of uncertainty was also expressed as the tension between self-assurance and self-doubt.

I often feel scared to sit in a circle because I worry that I might miss interesting points embedded in what students say . . . then I hear Dr. J saying, 'relax and just pay attention to children's voices. You have to enjoy the dialogue.' I think that is definitely right. If the teacher feels pressured and does not feel safe, she cannot contribute to the dialogue. (10/15/14)

With reference to her mentor, Mitsuyo's candid sharing demonstrates how the support of international partners helps to increase the security and self-assurance that teacher/facilitators need when they are experimenting with p4cHI in new spaces.

### ***Theme 4: Technical or creative?***

The final theme to emerge from the analysis of the data was the tension between needing to adhere to mainstream technocratic approaches to school reform and our collective desire to experience our facilitative roles as creative enterprises. In each of our home countries,

the educational environment did not seem to ‘put much of a premium on imagination, on personal spirit, or creative thinking’ (Karen, 9/11/14), and we struggled between meeting prescriptive external demands and exercising personal judgement. Amber wrote, ‘I guess my question is whether there really are set learning goals that we are striving for when we facilitate a p4cHI style inquiry or is it truly an ‘in the moment’ experience’ (9/10/15). Mitsuyo believed that it should be more creative and open ended. She disagreed with Japanese teachers ‘preparing questions before hand and [guiding] the dialogue, in accordance with their lesson plan’ (10/15/14). In her opinion, this was not p4cHI. Jessica agreed with Mitsuyo and described the p4cHI approach as ‘an art of democracy.’

[This art] is one that cannot be reproduced, that always renews itself and rejoices over itself. Even if P4C classes don’t always present bright pictures, the dark moments will remain the background shadows that can make the brightness shine through. If there are no dark moments, how could there be beautiful creation? . . . No tolerance for digression or failures leads to no growth of the human person (not just the student, but also the teacher). (9/10/14)

With this in mind, we rested on the idea that ‘inquiry and social constructivism’, both of which are inherent in a p4cHI approach to education, can effectively be used to ‘teach the standards’ (Lulu, 9/21/14). This was an important take-away for our group of teacher educators who, in their day-to-day interactions with teachers, struggle to maintain the art and craft of philosophical inquiry that is so needed in our profession.

### **Professional development: What did we learn?**

As the self-study came to a natural conclusion, we turned our attention to this reflective, inquiry-based process by revisiting our commitment to the improvement of individual practice *and* teacher education in general. With new understandings about the nuanced roles of a teacher facilitator in a p4cHI community of inquiry, we found ourselves better prepared to communicate the normalcy of uncertainty and confusion in the experiences of teachers who are aiming to convert traditional classrooms into intellectually safe communities of inquiry. More keenly attuned to the impact of place-based cultural contexts on our practice in Hawai’i, Taiwan, Canada, China, and Japan, we also strengthened our resolve to model and engage in a p4cHI pedagogy that is imbued with a moral ethos of a time and place. Commensurate with SoTL, we realized that the strength of our international research collective was rooted in our connections to and deep understanding of contexts, experiential approaches supported by a robust critical framework, and the pursuit of positive change in educational environments. More aware of the tensions surrounding culture, pedagogical stance, creativity, criticality, and history, we learned how to see the ongoing development of teachers as occurring along a continuum, which can be facilitated through the exploration of reflective practices (Sheets, 2005) in an online journal (Lee, 2010). We also became inspired to cultivate future projects in our research collective, including an investigation into the relationship between p4cHI, critical friendship, and mindfulness.

### **Connections to P4C literature**

The role of the facilitator in a P4C community of inquiry is not a new research topic. For example, a number of previous scholars have questioned the kind of education, training,

or qualifications needed for effective P4C facilitation: whether it be basic familiarity with academic philosophy and training in philosophical inquiry itself (Murriss, 2000); goals for novice facilitators (Gardner, 2015); the cultivation of philosophical sensitivity (Gardner, 2015; Lone & Israeloff, 2012); or even an epistemological ‘paradigm shift’ (Haynes & Murriss, 2011). Other scholars have looked into some of the themes or sub-themes we identified in our findings. Take the tension between inquiry and community as an example. P4C scholars have argued for the need to ‘push for depth’ (Gardner, 2015: 82) or to pursue ‘epistemic progress’ in inquiry (Golding, 2012), while others have called attention to the ‘the emotional life’ in a community (Burgh & Yorshansky, 2011: 445) and a systematic pedagogical approach to educating empathy (Schertz, 2007). While much of this scholarship resonates with the findings from our research, it does not offer sustainable structures for supporting the professional development of international P4C teacher educators, practitioners, and researchers like us.

### Significance to future research in P4C

To ensure that the worldwide P4C movement continues to grow in responsible ways, P4C teacher educators, practitioners, and researchers from across the globe will need to work together to create culturally responsive professional development models that engage P4C teacher facilitators in inquiry as a means of promoting shifts in practice (Macintyre & Buck, 2007). In this chapter, self-study research methodologies, online journaling, and international faculty partnerships are presented as promising approaches for achieving this goal. Designed to give structure to the ongoing professional development of P4C teacher facilitators, who work in a wide range of cultural contexts and educational settings, self-study and online journaling empower P4C teacher educators, practitioners, and researchers like us, who are interested in self-reflection, dialogue, professional and personal growth, and learning about the cross-cultural relationships and connections that can be made between international colleagues.

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