

“Deeper Thinking with p4c,” Kahokushinpo Children’s Newspaper, July 31, 2016

Let’s talk about the difference between a “friend,” and a “good friend.”

“Why can’t we make friendships with everyone?” The 1st grade 2nd section class of Shiroishi Daiichi Elementary experienced a class in June, where they discussed and thought deeply about this particular question that is very difficult to answer.

In this class, a discussion/inquiry method developed in the US called “p4c” or “philosophy for children” was used. The children decide the themes of the discussion and they share and work out their thoughts about “why?”

The item that is necessary for this discussion is a colorful fluffy ball made of yarn. It is called the “community ball” and only the person who has the ball can speak while the others must listen.

There are other rules for the discussion such as “everyone has to listen to what others are saying,” and “you cannot make fun of someone or deny what someone has to say.” Creating a safe place for the discussion is extremely important for p4c.

We started our discussion with 35 students and 11 teachers, some of whom were experts in p4c from Hawaii, all sitting in a circle. There was a moment when not a lot of children were expressing their thoughts so the teacher interjected with a question, “Ok everyone, do you think that it is possible to be friends with everyone?” With this question, the discussion was revived and the children went even deeper.

To the question of “Do you think you want to make friends with people who are the same type as you or would you rather make friends with people who are different from you,” a lot of students raised their hands and the community ball was passed all around the circle. “I want to make friends with both types of people—people who are like me and people who are different.” Or “I want to play and learn from friends who are different from me so I can teach the friends who are the same as me.” These fresh new thoughts spurred more thoughts in the discussion.

Miyu Mori (10 years) explained, “In p4c you get to see everyone’s face in the discussion which helps make your thoughts go deeper—this is a very good point about p4c.” Hiroshi Sato (9 years) reflected with a smile “There were so many people who participated in today’s discussion so I got to hear a lot of different thoughts!”

Shiroishi Daiichi Elementary started the implementation of p4c in 2014. The team leader Mr. Jun Yamaki states, “I feel that through p4c, children think on their own, present their own thoughts and have fun with listening to the thoughts of their

friends. They can discover new things about their friends which serves as a catalyst for deeper discussion.”

The Shiroishi Board of Education has made p4c an educational priority; therefore, 16 elementary and middle schools in the city are implementing p4c. In Sendai, more schools are adopting p4c as well.