

Global and Local Impacts of Philosophy for Children: A Summary of Recent Research Findings

Prepared by Amber Strong Makaiau, PhD
Director of Curriculum and Research at the UHM Uehiro Academy
amakaiau@hawaii.edu

Philosophy for Children (P4C) is a widely respected international movement in education. It was started around 1969 when Matthew Lipman, a Columbia University philosophy professor, observed that children did not think as well as they could or should in a democratic society. To address these issues Lipman created a curriculum that incorporated the skills of logic and reasoning found in the practice of philosophy to improve students' thinking in the K – 12 setting. In an effort to extend Lipman's original curriculum and vision to a variety of geo-cultural contexts, a number of P4C Centers have been established worldwide. Among these centers is the Uehiro Academy for Philosophy and Ethics in Education at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. The Uehiro Academy is home of p4cHI, which is Thomas Jackson's culturally responsive offshoot of Lipman's original approach. The goal of p4cHI is to move school culture from a top-down model to a community-based, participatory model grounded in sound pedagogy and effective educational philosophy. To accomplish this goal, p4cHI practitioners convert traditional classrooms into intellectually safe communities of inquiry where students and teachers develop their abilities to think for themselves in responsible ways. To learn more about the impact of Philosophy for Children, both globally and locally, read the summary of key recent research findings included below.

Global Findings

P4C's Impact on Students' Cognitive Growth. Three recent research reports by Topping and Trickey (2007a; 2007b), by Fair and colleagues (2015), and by Gorard, Siddiqui and Huat See (2015) have produced data that support the conclusion that a Philosophy for Children (P4C) program of one-hour-per-week structured discussions has a marked positive impact on students. An additional article presents the most recent data from a follow up study done three years after the completion of the study reported in Fair et al. (2015). The data show that the positive gains in scores on the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT in the USA and CAT in the UK) were still present and had not faded after three years. Given the strength of these confirmations of the positive durable impact of the P4C program of structured discussions and given the relatively low cost of implementing the P4C program, it is recommended that it become a standard part of the school curriculum. Read the most recent study here: <http://www.ojs.unisa.edu.au/index.php/jps/article/view/1268/833>

P4C's Impact on Students' Academic Scores, Confidence to Speak, Listening Skills, and Self-Esteem. Lead researcher Stephen Gorard, Professor in the School of Education, at Durham University, recently conducted an evaluation for the Education Endowment Foundation to assess whether a year of P4C instruction for elementary students would lead to higher academic attainment in the areas of math, reading, and writing. The project also assessed whether P4C instruction had an impact on Cognitive Abilities Test results. The results of his evaluation suggest, "philosophy sessions can have a positive impact on pupils' maths, reading and perhaps their writing skills. But crucially, they seem to work especially well for the children who are most disadvantaged." In response to this evaluation, Dr Kevan Collins, Chief Executive of the foundation, said: "Philosophy for Children is a long-established and well-respected programme. It's absolutely brilliant that today's results give us evidence of its positive impact on primary pupils' maths and reading results. Given its low cost, teachers should use these results to seriously consider whether philosophy sessions and promoting philosophical thinking could work in their classroom." Visit the full report here: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evaluation/projects/philosophy-for-children>

Access These Links for Additional Research on the Impacts of P4C in the Following Areas:

- (1) Cognitive Skills: <https://www.montclair.edu/cehs/academics/centers-and-institutes/iapc/research/cognitive-skills/>
- (2) Affective and Social Skills: <https://www.montclair.edu/cehs/academics/centers-and-institutes/iapc/research/affective-social/>
- (3) Cognitive and Affective Skills: <https://www.montclair.edu/cehs/academics/centers-and-institutes/iapc/research/both-skills/>
- (4) Methodological/Theoretical Aspects: <https://www.montclair.edu/cehs/academics/centers-and-institutes/iapc/research/methodological-theoretical/>

Local Findings

p4cHI's Impact on Academic Learning, Personal Growth, Community Building, Prejudice Reduction, and Violence Prevention. The following studies were conducted to learn more about the impact of p4cHI on student learning in a Hawaii State Department of Education (HIDOE) high school Ethnic Studies course.

- Makaiau and Freese (2013) analyzed 117 high school and university students' class assignments from a HIDOE Ethnic Studies course and a Multicultural Education class at a large university. The findings from their study report how a personal-constructivist- collaborative approach to self-study in an intellectually safe p4cHI classroom environment provides both students and teachers with a context for challenging their socially constructed assumptions about race, culture, and ethnicity and supports the unpacking of previously held stereotypes and biases. They also found that the formal and informal sharing of personal stories in the context of an intellectually safe p4cHI classroom helped students and teachers to be more thoughtful about the complexity of identities, develop new understandings of their own and others' multicultural identities, and gain a critical consciousness about the connection between self-understanding and prejudice reduction.
- Also using qualitative methods, Makaiau (2013; 2010) found that when p4cHI is used to teach Ethnic Studies in the HIDOE, students develop their ability to construct philosophical questions, gather relevant information for an inquiry from a variety of sources, analyze data, construct a well- reasoned thesis, write, reflect, and participate in a philosophical community of inquiry. They also showed increased understanding of Ethnic Studies vocabulary and concepts. In addition, the p4cHI approach helped students: (1) recognize how they can positively affect their identity construction process, (2) find their way through the developmental transition period of adolescence, and (3) overcome prejudices towards others.
- Momohara, Sugimoto-Matsuda, Hishinuma & Chang (2011) found that the p4cHI HIDOE Ethnic Studies students increased their: (1) awareness and understanding of different forms of violence; (2) acknowledged that they do not need to fight in order to stand up for themselves, and (3) learned to see that there are healthier alternatives to violence. In addition more students in this study reported that being non- violent is (1) the right decision, (2) is the best way to avoid getting hurt or hurting others, and (3) will positively affect their future.

- Rehuher, Momohara, Sugimoto-Matsuda & Hishinuma (2010) examined differences between p4cHI HIDEOE Ethnic Studies students and a comparison group of their peers not participating in the program. Relative to the comparison group, Ethnic Studies students increased their: (1) involvement with groups different than their own; (2) understanding of ethnic studies terms and concepts; (3) commitment to their community's improvement; (4) belief in having the capacity to relate to people from different backgrounds; and (4) a sense of power as individuals.

p4cHI and Mindfulness. Makaiau, Wang, Ragoonaden, Leng, and DeWoody (2016) conducted a qualitative study to examine the connection between p4cHI and mindfulness. Data came from an interactive online journal that a group of international p4cHI practitioners from five different countries used to document their practice for six months. The study's findings describe how the four pillars of p4cHI (community, inquiry, philosophy, and reflection) promote and sustain mindful practices in education. Matsuoka (2012; 2007) also conducted a study to determine whether and how former sixth-grade students at Waikiki Elementary School (WES) used the thinking processes and strategies they were taught in elementary school when they were in middle school. Participants engaged in focus group interviews, written reflections, and follow-up interviews to provide more in-depth data. Parents of the students were also interviewed. The qualitative analysis of the data revealed that the students had retained some of the key vocabulary that they had learned as a part of the problem-solving processes that had been taught in the Habits of the Mind and p4cHI program at WES. In addition, students were able to describe occasions after they had left elementary school in which they had used what they learned from Habits of the Mind and p4cHI to think through the consequences of their actions and make informed choices.

p4cHI's Impact on Psychological Well-Being. Leng (2015) applied both qualitative and quantitative methods, to develop a deeper understanding of what p4cHI classroom contexts, conditions, discourses, tools and practices promote positive adolescent learning experiences. The qualitative findings indicate that p4cHI supported students and teachers in: 1) maintaining a safe and positive classroom environment; 2) asking questions, sharing ideas, listening attentively, thinking deeply, and making connections; and 3) students reported that they transcended their learning experiences by living a new philosophy. The quantitative results suggest students' global Sense of Coherence (Antonovsky, 1979) was improved by p4cHI as well. For example, participants reported that they made more sense of the world and the events that occurred in their daily lives. They also believed they were more able to manage resources to solve problems and make informed decisions. Tzeng (2015) also examined the role of p4cHI on psychological well-being, especially as it relates to the identity development of young adults. This study employed a quasi-experimental technique utilizing the Extended Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status 2 scales (EMOIS II) questionnaires, which were used as both the introductory and final test for the control and independent variable (p4cHI) groups. In addition, some participants in the experimental group were randomly selected for the Ego Identity Status interview (IDS). The findings show significant pre-post identity development growth in the experimental group, which provides empirical evidence of positive impact of the p4cHI pedagogy on college students' psychological well-being.

p4cHI's Role in Promoting a Deliberative Democracy. In a large qualitative study, Makaiau (2016) analyzed eighty-nine p4cHI Ethnic Studies students coursework, including transcripts of their video recorded p4cHI discussion-based inquiries. The findings from this study revealed that p4cHI helped HIDEOE Ethnic Studies students and teachers develop (1) respectful and ethical civic relationships, (2) shifts in the distribution of power and access to multiple perspectives, and (3) dialogue, deliberation, and action. Additionally, in a 2015 report to the *Kettering* Foundation Makaiau shared some of the findings that have emerged from an ongoing qualitative study, which is designed to investigate the impact of p4cHI on HIDEOE students in high school Philosophical Inquiry course. When compared to focus group interviews with students in a control group, the Philosophical Inquiry students explained to researchers that p4cHI supported them in: (1) becoming deep thinkers, (2) feeling empowered-my voice matters, (3) having empathy for alternative points of view, (4) developing experience in community-based decision-making and problem-solving, and (3) made them a reflective member of society.

p4cHI's Impact on Student Engagement. In 2013, Miller investigated the impact of p4cHI on student learning in a HIDEOE high school English Language Arts class on the windward side of O'ahu. Through the analysis of student interviews he found that p4cHI created a schooling experience where students can (1) be themselves, (2) learn from each other, and (3) view their teacher as an active participant in the learning process. p4cHI was also found to transform the students' notion of what it means to know something. "Knowledge" moved beyond the acquisition of information and became the search for a feeling of satisfaction that comes once students attain an increased depth of understanding.

p4cHI's Impact on Meaningful and Sustained Professional Development. In 2013 Makaiau and Lukey analyzed data, including transcripts of planning meetings, electronic communication, workplace documents and personal memos to learn more about what it takes to create meaningful and sustained professional development for teachers in the HIDEOE. A three-part p4cHI professional development model emerged from this study's findings. In order for professional development to positively transform a school culture, teachers need: (1) an initial educative experience, (2) mentoring and coaching from a philosopher in residence, and (3) a meaningful peer/professional community of inquiry. Additionally, studies by Makaiau, Leng, and Fukui (2015), and by Makaiau, Wang, Ragoonaden, and Leng (2016) found that p4cHI, in the context of an interactive online journal, is an effective approach to promoting meaningful and sustained professional development with international p4cHI practitioners.

p4cHI Promotes Social-Emotional Learning and Engagement. Jones (2012) conducted a qualitative research study to analyze the impact of p4cHI's "intellectually safe classroom community of inquiry" on student cognitive, social, and emotional engagement in a public high school on the leeward coast of O'ahu. Data was derived from multiple sources, including student reflections, follow-up student interviews with five participants, and teacher observations of a critical incident. The findings of this study revealed how p4cHI contributed to students' positive perception of self and cognitive, social and emotional engagement. Bond and Masterson (2009) also examined the role of p4cHI in supporting the development of a social-emotional teaching practice. They used qualitative methods to conduct a six-week long study, during which researchers reflected on their own experiences and analyzed student participation levels within the p4cHI circle. The analysis of the data yielded three consistent themes within student actions: (1) an increase in intellectual safety, (2) positive community progression, and (3) an increase in the conversational flow observed during inquiry sessions.

Access This Link for Additional Research on the Impacts of p4cHI: <http://p4chawaii.org/wp-content/uploads/p4c-Hawaii-Bibliography-1.pdf>