

Philosophy for Children and Ethnic Studies at Kailua High School; A Phenomenological Study

Amber Strong Makaiau
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Introduction

In the summer of 2004, I, along with a fellow social studies teacher at Kailua High School (KHS), was commissioned by the Asian Pacific Islander Youth Violence Prevention Center (APIYVPC), University of Hawaii at Manoa, to write a school - based violence prevention curriculum for students on our campus. We were selected, not because we were knowledgeable about universal violence prevention programs (Hahn et. al., 2007) but based on: our positions in the social studies department, our strengths as innovative curriculum designers, and our commitment to social justice education. In hindsight it would have helped if we were more informed by research on youth violence but at the time we were so focused on our role as teachers, selected to create a brand new ethnic studies course, that we simply capitalized on our background knowledge in education.

Designing this new ethnic studies course, that incorporated the findings from the applied research agenda of the APIYVPC (see Mark et. al., 2004; Sobredo, 2008) as well as a culturally relevant version of ethnic studies, was labor intensive and required multiple pedagogical judgment calls. Among these early curriculum decisions was the choice to incorporate Philosophy for Children (P4C), as this approach to education seamlessly overlapped with the theoretical objectives of the course. At the time, I was deeply invested in the P4C approach and had been conducting my own research on the utility of P4C in the secondary social studies setting since 2000. P4C, an international movement in education (Lipman, 1988; 1989; 1991; 1993; Lipman & Sharp, 1978; 1985; Reed & Sharp, 1992) has a strong base at the University of Hawaii, and is headed by Dr. Thomas Jackson who has been the director of the Philosophy in the Schools project since 1984. P4C in Hawaii is defined by the four guiding principles of: 1) building community; 2) critical philosophical inquiry; 3) student-centered; and 4) fostering reflection (Jackson, 1984; 2001). Since the inception of ethnic studies, P4C has been at the core of the course curriculum and has remained central to the course's success as evidenced in its stronghold despite major course revisions. In particular, P4C has been observed as the most important element in the course in regards to the course's purpose as a violence prevention initiative. The purpose of this study is to use a phenomenological research approach (Creswell, 2007, pp. 57 – 62), as it is most appropriate considering the search for “meaning,” and understanding of the role, impact and longevity that P4C has had in ethnic studies classroom at KHS.

Review of the Literature

(For the sake of space, I am not including a review of the literature on P4C. If you would like, I could give this to you but it is quite extensive.)

Purpose of the Study

Over the past four years approximately five hundred students have and continue to experience the phenomenon of P4C in the context of the ethnic studies course that they are (or had been) enrolled in at KHS. Primarily this study aims at uncovering or describing their shared “lived experience,” (Creswell, 2007, pp. 57) as they participated in a classroom community that fostered the four guiding principles of P4C. In addition to the students’ experiences with P4C, this study is also interested in documenting teachers’ experiences as they design, implement and evaluate curriculum that incorporates P4C principles. Are there unique impacts of P4C that are experienced by students and not teachers? Does P4C play a similar role in the learning contexts of both teachers and students? Answers to questions like these, through the use of phenomenological inquiry intend to shed light on the experiences of both teachers and students as they engage in the P4C approach. There is a definite gap in the literature, regarding the systematic study of the impact of a P4C approach to education, and in this case the impact of P4C in the context of a violence-intervention curriculum. By gaining insight into the experiences of students and teachers at KHS, new knowledge about the role that P4C has in meeting the KHS ethnic studies course objectives, could ultimately broaden our understanding of the relationship between a P4C approach to education and universal violence prevention programs.

Research Question and Sub-Questions

Moustakas (1994) describes the types of questions used to frame a phenomenological study by giving the following examples: “What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon? What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon?” In the case of this study these questions were helpful in framing the central research question, which was:

- In what ways does a P4C approach to education impact experiences of teachers and students participating in ethnic studies at Kailua High School?

However, in consideration of the nature of the P4C phenomenon, this central research question could not stand on it’s own as the only guide for the study. P4C is not only a theoretical phenomenon, but is also defined by actual classroom practices. Understanding the variety of activities associated with P4C was essential for me, as the researcher whose task it was to identify and observe the P4C phenomenon in practice. For example, one of the major conceptual themes that define the P4C phenomenon is “Community.” Community, in the context of P4C, is then applied to create actual classroom activities experienced by both teachers and students. Some examples of these P4C “community activities” are: creating a community ball, using the community ball during class discussions, the intellectual safety introductory activity, and discussion-evaluation question

exercises. These activities are observable, and can be differentiated between P4C classroom activities and non- P4C activities.

In an effort to facilitate the process of collecting data, through observations a set of sub-questions were created. These sub-questions took into consideration the various classroom activities that are associated with a “P4C approach” to education. In particular, one sub-question was created for each of the four P4C conceptual themes (Community, Philosophical Inquiry, Student-Centered, Reflection). By framing these themes and their accompanying activities, in the form of questions, I, as a researcher became more prepared as I entered the field.

The sub-questions were:

- How are community activities (creating the community ball, intellectual safety, community reflection questions) impacting the experiences of the teacher/learners in the classroom observed?
- How are inquiry activities (plain vanilla, historical inquiry, the good thinker’s tool kit, inquiry reflection questions) impacting the experiences of the teacher/learners in the classroom observed?
- How are student-centered activities (plain vanilla, historical inquiry) impacting the experiences of the teacher/learners in the classroom observed?
- How are reflective activities (plain vanilla reflections, historical inquiry reflections) impacting the experiences of the teacher/learners in the classroom observed?
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By developing these, in addition to the central research question I was able to move closer to the “rigorous preparation” required of “scientific inquiry using observational methods” (Patton, 2003, p. 260).

Role of the Researcher

In his guide to qualitative research, Creswell (2007) warns,

To study one’s own workplace, for example, raises questions about whether good data can be collected when the act of data collection may introduce a power imbalance between the researcher and the individuals being studied” (p. 122)

In this study, I play an interesting role. I am researching a phenomenon at the school in which I formerly taught, and as Creswell (2007) put it, issues of power could arise between myself, and participants in the classrooms I am observing. In addition to these issues of power, as an insider to the context I am studying, I also bring biases and perspectives that will ultimately shape the way in which I observe the phenomenon being studied. An important task, as I positioned myself at various points in the study, became constantly checking in with myself or being “reflexive” (Patton, 2003, p. 299). For these reasons, the process of memoing (Creswell, 2007) was employed so that I could consistently record my internal feelings, biases, and observations about my relationship to the participants. These memos will be discussed in the analysis of data, as they provided insights into the

impact that I was having, as the primary instrument for data collection, on the study's findings.

What's additionally important to mention, is that at this point in time, I am not teaching at the school where this study takes place (I'm on sabbatical leave). This put me in a unique position to distance myself as an insider. Because of my sabbatical I was able to alleviate my relationship with the teachers being observed, as I could not assert power over their authority as the teacher in each of their classrooms. This meant that my observational notes could not be used to evaluate their practice, by myself or by administrators outside of the classroom. Accompanying my unique position this year, was the fact that I could select classroom contexts where students did not know who I am (both classes observed are of ninth graders who are new to the school). This allowed me to be introduced, to the classroom context, as a visitor from the University of Hawaii, who is interested in the teaching and learning going on in their class. It was with high hopes, that these small gestures eased some of the power issues that Creswell (2007) cautioned against.

In a positive light, the standpoint that research is a subjective, and "intensely personal endeavor" (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 46) helps to change the perspective that studying one's own backyard can only lead to methodological shortcomings. With careful scrutiny, it becomes apparent that an outsider to this research context could have had equivalent limitations. For example, gaining access to this site would be very difficult for an outsider, as it is blocked by a host of gatekeepers, which include the principals and classroom teachers. I was able to use my relationship with the school to gain access and to pledge that I would be able to authentically give back to the school in return. Another outsider obstacle could have been a cultural deficit. The types of language (Patton, 2003, p. 288-290), community references, and colloquial teenage slang used by most of the participants in this study, are unique to their cultural context and could present barriers to those outside of the community. My experiences, as an insider to Hawaii, and to this unique community, for the past eight years, provided a bridge to my understanding of these types of cultural particulars that would be otherwise hard to learn in the short time that the traditional researcher associates with the communities they observe.

There was an additional benefit to my position as an insider. In the field of qualitative research the researcher is seen as the "key instrument" (Creswell, 2007, p. 38). In this study, the background or insider knowledge that I bring to the context will allow me a better vantage point from which to observe the phenomenon of P4C. As was described earlier, P4C is not just a theoretical approach to teaching but also a series of classroom activities. Because of my "expert knowledge" regarding the identification and classification of these activities, I am able to observe the phenomenon when it is occurring in the research setting. Patton (2006) confirms, "A strength of naturalistic inquiry is that the observer is sufficiently part of the situation to be able to understand personally what is happening" (p. 236). If I were not an insider to this knowledge, as the central instrument to the study, I would have to be trained in identifying P4C activities and even then I would not be sensitive to the nuances of this approach to education. So, although there are many preconceived biases, and power issues that I bring to the table as

an insider to the context I am researching, the benefits of my insider perspective have the potential to balance out the playing field.

Finally, it is important to mention that just because I was an insider to this research I am in no way near being a participant observer (Patton, 2003, p. 265 – 257). My unique position this school year allowed me some distance from the classrooms I observed, and brought me somewhat closer to seeing things from the outside. In the end, what I have realized is that the real issue may not be with how close or far away one is from those they are studying. Instead, the bigger issue is in recognizing the overall effects that one has on the context that they are studying and “how to monitor those effects and take them into consideration when interpreting data” (Patton, 2003, p. 326).

Community Context

The high school in this study is located on the windward side of Oahu, in the state of Hawaii. It serves four communities that range from suburban to rural, and characterized by a broad socio – economic range – from low income to upper middle class. Within these communities are Hawaiian Homestead lands attributing to 55% (School Data Report, 2007) of the students, who attend this school, being Native Hawaiian, more than twice the state’s average (23.33%) of Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (The U.S. Proximity Census, 2000). The remaining students are of Asian descent (Japanese, Filipino, Chinese, Korean, Indo-Chinese) 22%, Whites 13%, and Hispanics/Latino 2% according to the 2003-04 MacSchool database. In general students from this high school tend to self - identify with two main communities- Kailua or Waimanalo (sometimes referred to as Nalo by students from both communities). Although these two communities are close in proximity, they do not share an intermediate or middle school. It is at this high school that students from the more affluent community of Kailua meet students from the more rural community of Waimanalo for the first time. In minutes from Parent Community Collaboration Day (October, 2007) participants rated “communities fighting communities- Kailua vs. Nalo mentality,” as one of the top five challenges facing Kailua High School. This helps to emphasize both the geographic boundaries that exist between the two communities as well as the socially constructed differences in self – identification that students from Kailua and Waimanalo bring as freshmen to the school campus.

In 2000, the U.S. Census data listed the median household income of the entire school community to be \$57, 623 as compared to the State of Hawaii’s average of \$49, 820 and at the same time the at – risk population¹ in the school community was 4.5%, more than double the State of Hawaii’s average of 2.1%. These figures are approximately the same now and around 45%² of the students receive free and reduced lunch. Academically, students have shown an increase in performance on the Hawaii State Assessment (HSA), given to 10th graders statewide every spring. It was in the 2006-07

¹ An “At – risk,” school aged child is defined as an individual, age four to nineteen, and living with his/her mother, who is not a high school graduate; single, divorced or separated; and subsisting below the poverty level.

² Students who receive free and reduced lunches increased from 27% in the 1995 –96-school year to a high of 45% in the 2003-04 school year. The increase in the number of students applying and receiving free or reduced lunch is directly related to the school’s concerted effort for all students to apply regardless of income.

school year that students met Adequate Yearly Progress under the No Child Left Behind Act. These descriptors provide some insight into the extraneous variables, cultural conditions and sources of personal identification that may or may not have had some impact on the findings of the study.

Method

Research Design and Tradition to be Used

The methods used for this study are qualitative because of the need to “obtain the intricate details about phenomena such as feelings, thought processes, and emotions” associated with the complexities of teaching and learning (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Using a more conventional research method would be inappropriate for a study like this one, which aims to uncover the human impact of an educational approach. Instead, the study of teaching and learning calls for a research paradigm supported by such basic assumptions like: listening to human dialogue is valued; observing and recording behaviors are rich data sources; and that the need to address the researcher as the main research instrument is essential to any inquiry. This is the qualitative paradigm. Essential to the study of humans, by humans, proponents of qualitative research are unafraid to admit to the subjective nature of research, and that researching is, “an activity that is an extension of who we are as individuals” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 25). This is contrary to the positivist tradition, which strives to separate researcher from the researched and who claim that objective methodologies are successful for seeking “truth.” In this study, the theory is, is that truth is not “out there.” Instead, answers to the research questions are embedded in participants observable behaviors and making meaning of those behaviors are contingent on my own understanding, as I am the main research instrument (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2003; Cole & Knowles, 2001; Seidman, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Considering the researcher as an instrument calls for reflexivity, and incorporating this need for reflexivity into the methodology is a hallmark of a rigorous qualitative approach.

In relation to being a qualitative study, a phenomenological approach was taken. “A phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 57 – 62). The phenomenon being studied is a P4C approach to education and through careful observation and analysis of data; commonalities between participants will be examined. It is the goal of this phenomenological study, to “reduce individual experiences with a phenomena [P4C] to a description of the universal essence” (Creswell, 2007, p. 58).

Participant Sample

This study takes place during the 2008 – 2009 school year, during which two teachers have been assigned to teach ethnic studies/philosophy at the high school visited for this study. Due to their unique positions, these two teachers were approached to be participants in this research, and through verbal consent agreed to engage in the study. One of the teachers, is 32, female and Japanese-

Hawaiian. She was one of two original ethnic studies course designers and has taught the course since 2004. This year, she was assigned four ethnic studies/philosophy student sections for the fall semester. She agreed to have me observe one of those sections of students. The section she selected had approximately fourteen students (on the days that I visited) and the period met from 9:35 am to 10:45 am. Of those fourteen students, seven were boys and seven were girls. The students' ages ranged from between fourteen to eighteen years. Their socio-economic and ethnic descriptions are representative of the students described in the contextual portion of this study.

The second teacher, observed in this study is new to his position as a teacher at the high school observed. He is a Portuguese-Hawaiian male who is twenty-five years of age. An important fact about this teacher is that he was a graduate of the high school himself, and chose the school to teach at because of his alumni status. This teacher has participated in two formal ethnic studies training courses and is currently being mentored by the female "expert" teacher previously described. This second teacher has three sections of ethnic studies and like the first teacher he selected the section that he wanted me to observe. The section that he selected has five students in the class (on the days that I visited) three of which were girls and two, which were boys. Like the female teacher's class, the students' socio-economic status and ethnic identifications are representative of the students described in the contextual portion of this study.

Of final note, it is important to mention that descriptions of the students are approximations due to the fact that IRB approval was not obtained for this study. Approval to observe these classrooms was given by the vice-principal of the school and by the teachers whose classrooms were observed. Therefore, individual and confidential student records were not obtained. This also meant that individual student work was not examined. These could be limiting factors for this study, and should be considered in the analysis of data.

Physical Setting

All observations took place in two classrooms, one for each teacher, at the high school campus where this study took place. These classrooms were located right next to each other, on the bottom floor of one of the school's main classroom buildings. The building where these classrooms are located houses all of the school's social studies classes, with the exception of special education students. The classrooms have two doors each, and louvered windows on two of the walls. The windows opposite the doors provide views of the back of the school, which consists mainly of trees and the neighboring farmers fields.

There is evidence of each individual teacher's style in each of the classrooms. In the first classroom, belonging to the experienced female teacher, there is an overwhelming amount of books and other instructional materials. She has decorated the walls with student work, state standard requirements, and instructional cues for the students, and posters. Most of the posters are related to Hawaiian issues and themes. It is also clear, when looking around her room that she teaches both ethnic studies/philosophy and world history. In her room, there is

a teacher desk at the front and the back of the room. All of the student seats are in rows in the middle of the room. While teaching, this teacher usually stood at the front of the room to give instruction, and circulated throughout the desks to help the students during class time. She also houses the department's mobile computer lab in her classroom. Of final note, her classroom is closest to the bathroom, and therefore she experiences the most student traffic passing by her classroom at any given time during the day.

The second teacher's classroom is a bit sparse. It is clear that he is a new teacher, and does not have the same amount of instructional materials as the other teacher. He has written a few things on the board, such as the classes' agenda, and state standards. There is evidence that in addition to ethnic studies he teaches psychology as well. There is some student work on the walls, mostly relating to ethnic studies. There is one desk at the front of the room, and one teacher computer. While I was observing he had made a small circle of chairs at the front of the room, for the students, and the rest of the chairs remained in rows. While teaching this teacher sat in the circle with the students and remained there with them throughout the majority of the class period.

Gaining Entrée to the Observational Setting

As was previously described, I have a relationship with the teachers at my observation site. When I first became interested in this project I mentioned it to the teachers in person. I explained to them that I had an assignment for a course at the University of Hawaii, and asked them what they thought about me coming to observe their ethnic studies classes. I was completely overt in explaining my reasons for wanting to observe their classrooms (Patton, 2003, p. 269 – 273). I described my research question to them, and explained that I would not be there to evaluate their teaching. Instead I was interested in the implementation of P4C and would be paying attention to the way in which it manifested itself into practice and impacted the students. I also explained, that if they wanted my observation notes after the study, I would make copies for them. They both agreed that it would be fine and I told them that I would give them more detail about the specifics of my visits. At this point I also asked the social studies department head what she thought about the possibility of my observations, giving her some of the same detail about my research question, and she agreed that it would be fine. After gaining approval from the department head, I sent a more formal e-mail to each of the teachers and invited them to participate. They both responded in writing, and gave possible dates for observation. The next time I saw them in person, we discussed when the best times for observations would be and arranged a schedule that we both agreed upon. It was at this point that they signed the consent forms for participation in the study.

On the day of the observations, I visited the vice-principal of the school, as the principal was not available. I explained to him my interest in observing the ethnic studies classes and he agreed that it was fine. Each time I visited the school I was required to sign in at the front office as a visitor, and was given a clip on tag as a visual cue of my purpose on campus. Finally, on each day that I observed, I

would visit with the teachers before class started, find my place in the back of the room, and when class started the teachers would usually introduce me to the students. They would usually say something like, “this is Mrs. Strong, she used to teach here, and she is here to watch our class today.” Most of the students would usually wave to acknowledge my presence and then check me out periodically throughout the class period. For the most part the students were engaged in the interactions with their peers and teachers and would forget that I was observing. At the end of each observation, I would briefly debrief with the teachers, thank them and then return to the office to sign out to record my visit. If I ran into any other teachers, or students on campus that knew me, I would explain that I was doing a project for a class at the University.

Procedures for Collecting and Analyzing Data

After gaining entry into the research site, I decided to break the process of data collection and the analysis into two phases. Patton (2003) explains that, “data gathering and analysis flow together in fieldwork, for there is usually no definite, fully anticipated point at which data collection stops and analysis begins. One process flows into the other” (p. 323). However, it became apparent during the course of this study, that after two observations in each classroom, the data collected thus far, had to be analyzed to help focus the third and final observation in each classroom. In this way, the data and analysis process was seen as having two phases. The first phase consisted of the first (which was somewhat unfocused) and second (more focused) observation. This first phase also included the analysis of that first set of data. The second phase then applied the analyzed data to focus the third and final observation. Details of these data collection and analysis phases are described below.

Phase One:

I made preparations before going into my first observation. I began by creating a template for recording my observational data. On this template I had a place to mark down: the date; time of observation; the precise location of the observation; and the role assumed by the observer. After the first, observation, and right before the second, I added a place for my research question. I had reflected on my first visit and decided that I need to be constantly thinking about my research question as I made observations. This was one amendment to the template over the course of the study. All of this information was located at the top of the page. Below, I created a table with the following columns: descriptions, personal thoughts while observing, and reflections (notes about: hunches, my experience, my feelings, learnings). Patton (2003) explains that separating my descriptions from my thoughts was important.

At all times it is critical that the observer record participants’ comments in quotation marks, indicating the source-who said what?-so as to keep perceptions of participants separate from the observer’s or evaluator’s own descriptions and interpretations (p. 284).

This design helped me to distinguish, as much as I possibly could between my descriptive interpretations of what was going on, and my internal reflective dialogue. For the most part, this table was modeled after an example observation data log given by Creswell (2007, p. 137). This format for data collection was used throughout the study.

Next, before I went into the first observation I thought about how I wanted to collect data. I had done classroom observations before, and I remembered that writing down the direct quotes of the people I observed, helped me in remembering my experience at the site. Patton (2003) agrees, “field notes also contain what people say. Direct quotations, or as near possible recall of direct quotations, should be captured during fieldwork, recording what was said during observed activities” (p. 303). For these reasons, I went into all of my observations conscientious about collecting quotes from individuals. However, after the first observation, I realized that writing down everything that everyone said was close to impossible. It was at this point that I made the decision, for the second observation, to only write down the quotes that I thought most related to my research question, which was gathering data about the implementation of P4C. I focused my data collection by looking for examples of community, inquiry, philosophy, student-centered activities, and reflection. All of these components were outlined in my sub-questions at the onset of the study. This helped to alleviate some of the stress I experienced during the first observation.

The next thing that I became aware of, after my first observation, was that I needed to be more conscientious about describing the setting when I first got to my site. Patton (2003) explains,

The first-order purposes of observational data are to *describe* the setting that was observed, the activities that took place in that setting, the people who participated in those activities, and the meanings of what was observed from the perspectives of those observed (p. 262).

At the beginning of the first observation I jumped right into recording student and teacher behaviors and quotes without taking the time to map out what the classroom looked like. When I went home to look at my notes, after that first observation, I realized that it would have helped to have, had a drawing of the room and the placement of the teachers and students. Central to a P4C method is the set up of the classroom and the physical positioning between teachers and students. So, at the beginning of the next two observations, I drew a map of the furniture and people in the room. Then, throughout the observation, I recorded the movement of teachers and students by drawing lines of their paths. I also recorded the time in which they moved places.

In relationship to the content that I was looking for, I had to make adjustments to my observations, based off of my first time in the field. In this study, I am looking for the impact of P4C on students and teachers. At the beginning of the project, I got real clear about the planned activities (Patton, 2003) that I would be looking for. These were examples of students and teachers participating in classroom activities that related to: community, inquiry, being student-centered, and reflection. However, when I began my observations, I

couldn't help but notice all of the classroom management issues that were going on. I kept a record of a lot of the student and teacher behaviors and language surrounding the issue of classroom management. In addition, a lot of my personal thoughts while observing were related to classroom management and when looking at my first observation notes, it is clear that I am very irritated by the lack of classroom management in some of the settings. Later, when I reflected on my first visit I had to remind myself that I was not doing a general evaluation of the happenings in these classrooms. Instead, I was looking for P4C related events, and although some of the P4C ideologies relate to classroom management (intellectual safety and the community ball in particular), focusing on classroom management issues was not the purpose of my study. For these reasons, I made sure, as I went into the second and third observation, that I did not lose my focus, which was to examine the impact of P4C.

These reflections help to highlight some of the ways in which my experiences in the first observation helped to inform later observations. Most of these, "changes in focus" were due to obvious shortcomings of my first observation and entailed being more detailed and systematic in my data collection. In addition to these obvious changes that I wanted to make in the way in which I collected data, I began to realize that it would be important for me to analyze the data I had collected, during the first and second observation, before I went into my third and final observation. This "zigzag" process that Creswell (2007) talks about seemed essential for the qualitative methods I was employing. I wanted to use the first sets of data that I had gathered to inform my last visit to the field. I was hoping that I could find some emergent themes in those first two sets of data and then attempt to "saturate" the themes, in my final stage of data collection. This is how the first phase of data collection (observations one and two) was distinct from the second phase of data collection (observation three).

Phase Two:

Going into my last observation, I added additional focus to my observation collection template. I had analyzed the first two visits, using the methods of constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and found three emergent themes. These themes were:

- 1) Use of critical thinking language (Good Thinker's Tool Kit) by both teachers and students in an effort to foster deeper thinking in the class.
- 2) Use of the term "intellectual safety" without student behavior matching the theory behind this concept.
- 3) Student-centered and contextualized construction of knowledge.

I posted these themes at the top of my observation template. This prepared me to focus my last observations on looking for more evidence to those themes, in addition to any other observations that I made in relationship to my research questions. With this new lens, it was my third and final observation that was the most focused observation in the study.

Findings

Summary of the Observations

Before summarizing the findings it is important to clarify, at the beginning of the study, there were two distinct teachers, and classes of students that were observed. Both teachers and their classes were selected because of their use of the P4C approach to education. When I went in for my third observation the two teachers had decided to merge their class and team-teach. This means that the teachers brought all of their students together for the first period of the day, and then took turns giving instruction throughout the class period. In the following section, I am going to summarize my observations. Organizationally, in the first two summaries, observations of each teacher will remain separate, while the third summary will contain observations of both teachers as they co-taught.

Observations of Teacher One- Novice Male:

On the first day that I visited, a small circle of chairs had been set up at the front of the classroom. As students trickled into the class, they chose a seat in one of the chairs in the circle, and when the bell rang the teacher joined them by sitting in the circle as well. For the remainder of the period, the teacher and students (five) sat in this configuration as they engaged in small group discussion related to the class objectives. On this particular day the students were beginning an inquiry project titled, “My self- concept from the perspective of ethnic studies.” The beginning of the class was spent examining the Hawaii Content Standards related to the project, the project requirements and the personal reasons why the students themselves would benefit from participating in the project. Next, the teacher provided an example of a “self-concept essay,” written by a Native Hawaiian scholar. This example essay was similar to the essays that the students were going to be required to produce at the end of the project. The students and teacher read through the essay and analyzed it for domains of the author’s identity. While going through this process both the students and teachers constructed a discussion around those themes. Here is an example of an exchange during this process.

Teacher: ok from here what is she talking about.

Student: people are loosing their culture, she’s Hawaiian but she is having to do American stuff and she doesn’t like that part of herself, she wants to learn more about Hawaiian culture.

Teacher: anything else you can think of. All right, so what are some things we have learned about her?

Students: she is curious about her culture and ethnicities...

Teacher: ok let’s pause there was a lot in that paragraph, what do you think they meant by ‘hapa haole’

Students: maybe she wasn’t taught hula in the traditional way...maybe by like Hawaiian songs by Americans.

Teacher: maybe hula that is Americanized and not traditional. Ok what did she mean by sexual vulnerability, ok so now we are getting a better ideas about what time period this took place in? Ok what is she saying that she doesn't like about this kind of hula

Student: that its sexual and that she is dancing for guys.

Teacher: ok that she is there to entertain the men, but why is that bad?

Students: because that is not what hula was all about, and maybe it is disrespecting the culture.

Teacher: so if a woman is dancing to please men...

Students: it makes her a slut.

Teacher: maybe but how do you think it makes her feel.

Students: uncomfortable, that she is...I don't know the word for it. That she is being treated like a ...sexual object...

Teacher: so who is she fighting for?

Student: females

Teacher: have you heard of the word feminist? So how does this relate to her identity? And don't just write this because I said it.

Student: she is a strong woman because she is standing up.

There was much evidence of the teacher prompting the students' discussion with open-ended questions, and from time to time the students would solicit questions of their own. The class ended when the bell rang, one hour after the class had started.

On the second day that I observed, the classroom was still set up in a circle that the students (five) and teacher sat in during the class period. At the beginning of the class the teacher stated, "So what we are going to be doing today is we are going to be writing actual questions." The students were reminded about creating their Good Thinker's Tool Kit³ pamphlets last class, and about the purpose of the inquiry that they are engaging in. Then, the teacher modeled, on the white board at the front of the room, the format that the students were to use while taking notes during the inquiry. All of the students copied the format into their journals. Then the teacher explained that the students would need to create Good Thinker's Tool Kit questions about themselves, based on the ethnic studies terms that they had learned at the beginning of the semester. He then explained that the students were going to use these questions to collect data during their inquiry. The teacher then modeled what a question could look like by giving examples like, "what are the reasons Hawaiians are racist towards Haole?" This got the students started and they worked collaboratively throughout the remainder of the class period to create questions about themselves. The students were writing their questions in their journals and made sure to verbalize when they were having a hard time phrasing a

³ Created by Thomas Jackson (2001) the good thinker's tool kit consists of seven indicators for critical thinking which are: **W**- what do you mean by that? **R**- what are the reasons? **A**- what is being assumed? Or what can I assume? **I** – can I infer ____ from ____? Or where are there inferences being made? **T**- is what is being said true and what does it imply if it is true? **E** – are there any examples to prove what is being said? **C** – are there any counter-examples to disprove what is being said?

question. Some of the student questions were: “Is it true that my family came from Tonga for a better life? Can I assume that since I am Hawaiian people are biased towards me? Can I assume that since I was baptized Catholic that I am still a Catholic?” This process allowed the students to generate ideas about questions from one another. By the end of the class period, most students had written at least seven questions that addressed the criteria provided at the beginning of the class.

Observations of Teacher Two- Experienced Female:

On the first day that I observed this class, the student desks were organized into rows and the teacher stood at the front of the room to give instructions during most of the class period. The students (fourteen) were being required to make a small pamphlet titled, “My Good Thinker’s Tool Kit.” After they had each folded a set of blank pages, to make the book, the teacher structured the class by requiring the students to take notes organized in the following fashion: 1) the students would write a letter of the Good Thinker’s Tool Kit (WRAITEC), given by the teacher; the students would write the definition of that letter of the tool kit, given by the teacher; and finally the students and teachers would collaborate on coming up with examples of questions that applied each letter of the tool kit. Although the class stuck to the task at hand, quite often this process was interrupted by students’ inappropriate remarks. Here are some examples.

Teacher: fold it down; make sure the opening is on the bottom, listening, you are going to rip from the top to the bottom. So everyone should have a large puka in the middle. Fold it in half and then fold it down

Student: it is a little book.

Student: You are so stupid...

Student: shut up...you are so stupid...

Teacher: now write on your cover, My Good Thinker’s Toolkit (name, date period, #, course name). So open your book and on the left write W questions, clarifying questions” “Look at what _____wrote” “W questions, they are clarifying questions, and what does clarifying mean?”

Student: to make clear

Teacher: ok so now I am going to give you some examples.

Students: do we need to write this down?

Teacher: yes.

Student: why are we doing this?

Teacher: to make you a better thinker. What W question do you not see here?

Student: why.

Teacher: good we are going to save that. Now I would like everyone to write a W question as an example.

Student: What do you mean by intellectually safe?

Student: What do you mean by doing work?

Student: What do you mean by doing work?

Student: What do you mean by Viagra?

The class lasted for one hour and by the time the bell rang the students had each completed a booklet that contained each letter of the Good Thinker's Tool Kit, definitions of those letters and examples of questions that used each letter of the tool kit.

On the second day that I visited the classroom was still set up in rows. The students (fourteen) each took their seat and at the beginning of the class the teacher gave instructions from the front. She reminded the students that during the last time that they had met, they had started to develop Good Thinker's Tool Kit questions about themselves, using the ethnic studies terms as prompts. She then explained that by the end of this class period, the students would need to create fifteen questions like the ones that they had talked about last class. However, before the students were set free to work on this objective, the teacher wanted one example, of a question that met the criteria, from each student. She elicited these questions, from each individual student and wrote them up on the board at the front of the room. Some examples of student questions were: 1) what are some examples of my family being discriminating to other people? 2) What are some examples of my family immigrating? 3) Can I assume that my family has been disenfranchised of their rights? What are some reasons for racism towards me? By going through this process the teacher was able to assess which students were struggling with creating their questions and which were able to work more independently. She then explained to all of the students that they could use their classmate's questions as examples to help them make the remainder of the fifteen questions that they were required to ask by the end of the class period. For the rest of the period, the teacher circulated throughout the classroom and helped individual students to construct their questions. The teacher was observed asking the students to re-think the way they had asked their questions. This included helping the students clarify what they had written and making sure that the students' questions were personally meaningful. At the end of the class the teacher instructed the students to work on answering their questions for homework. The students were encouraged to interview family members and use introspection in this process.

Observations of Co-Teaching:

On the final day of my observations the two teachers had combined their classes. When the school bell rang at 8:15 am, the novice male teacher brought his five students over to the experienced female's classroom. The room has been set up with all of the student desks in a circle. When the class finally settled down into their chairs, there were twenty-two students, two teachers, and one student teacher from a nearby university. Both teachers and students sat in the student chairs. The female teacher spent most of the class period in her chair with the students, only to get up periodically to circulate around

the class to answer questions and make sure that all of the students were working on their writing. The male teacher, once the class started writing, went up to the front of the classroom and wrote with the students on the white board. He too circulated the room throughout the class period to help students with their work.

The topic of today's class was an analysis of the novel, The Tattoo, by Chris McKinney. The students had read the prologue to the novel during their last class and this class period they were learning how to do the homework assignment that accompanied the book. For this assignment, the students were to use five of their vocabulary words, from their student glossaries to analyze the book. The five vocabulary words selected were the five indicators of violence in their community, based on a study by the Asian Pacific Islander Youth Violence Prevention Program. These words were: moodiness, impulsivity, substance abuse, sexism, and victimization.

To analyze the text the students, after defining the words, were required to find an example, in the form of a direct quote from the book, of each of the words. Next they had to think on their own, how could the character have handled the situation in the book differently? They were then required to write their explanation. Finally, each student had to create three Good Thinker's Tool Kit questions that they would want to discuss with their peers. To learn the required analysis process, the class went through this exercise together. Sitting in a large circle, they were expected to use the community ball⁴ to take turns sharing examples of their answers of each stage of the analysis. Word-by-word, the class would find quotes together, and the male teacher would write them on the board. Then the students would brainstorm and write their solutions on their own. Using the community ball, they then took turns sharing their solutions. For the most part all of the students were engaged in the activity, however it was very challenging for them to use the community ball to wait to speak. Here are my notes:

Teacher: all right, so next column, what changes could have been made by the characters so that a more positive outcome could have come. So what could the character have said, be specific (students start to yell out). Wait and write it and then we will discuss after. Who wants to share a positive outcome?

Student: he could have been polite and asked him to look away.

Teacher: All right pass the ball to someone else who wants to share. (Pass the ball to boy) Christian is going to share.

Student: instead of swearing at the guy he could have said, who you brah? (Some kids miss his answer because they are talking amongst themselves)

Teacher: come on we want to participate and share (no one volunteers for the ball). All right are we ready for impulsivity. Ok find an example in your book

Student: the part where he killed the Filipinos.

Teacher: we want to be intellectually safe, so no rude gestures (one student apparently made a gesture to another student about him being Filipino).

⁴ The community ball is a yarn ball that is created by the class on their first day together. The community ball is used during large class discussions. The rules of the community ball are: 1) only the person with the ball can speak; 2) the person with the ball gets to choose who speaks next; and 3) once given the community ball, the person always has the right to pass (Jackson, 2001).

In the last ten minutes of class the students were then required to write out their three Good Thinker's Tool Kit questions that they wanted to talk about with the class. Then they selected the question they most wanted to talk about and wrote it on the board. At this point the students ran up to the board, excited to share their questions. The class ended with the male teacher reading through all of their questions and the students and teachers applauding because they had asked such good questions.

Analysis of the Data

Patton (2003) writes,

Getting close to the people in a setting through firsthand experience permits the inquirer to draw on personal knowledge during the formal interpretation stage of analysis. Reflection and introspection are important parts of field research. The impressions and feelings of the observer become part of the data to be used in attempting to understand a setting and the people to inhabit it. The observer takes in information and forms impressions that go beyond what can be fully recorded in even the most detailed field notes (p. 264).

When moving into the analysis stage of this study, I was reminded of how my role, and my relationship to phenomenon that I was studying, not only impacted what I observed, but the way in which I interpreted the data. Not only was I familiar with the setting, and the teachers I observed, but I also was intimately familiar with the curriculum that they were teaching. This made me constantly aware of both what I was observing and what I wasn't observing. Again Patton (2003) explains,

If social science theory, program goals, implementation designs, and/or proposals suggest that certain things ought to happen or are expected to happen, then it is appropriate for the observer or evaluator to note that those things did not happen (p. 295).

I found myself not only looking for the impact of the P4C approach on the classroom environment, but because I had practiced P4C years, I was well aware of instances when a P4C strategy was missing and could have positively affected the classroom environment. Both examples of the P4C approach's impact, and examples of when a P4C approach could have been utilized will be included in my analysis of the data. As I describe the three main themes that emerged from this data, I must warn you that my personal lens, especially my teacher perspective, played a tremendous role in shaping the thematic outcomes.

I. Evidence of Critical Thinking

The first theme to emerge from the data was evidence of "critical thinking." Critical thinking is one of those buzz words that is constantly thrown around in education, and yet rarely is it explicitly observed in actual classroom practice. One of the reasons that critical thinking is hard to observe is because the term is elusive. P4C aims to address the issue of critical thinking by providing teachers and students with the language to identify some critical thinking tools. The Good Thinker's Tool Kit is one P4C teaching strategy that in theory is meant to foster critical thinking. Throughout the observations it

became clear that students and teachers used the Good Thinker's Tool Kit. This made it easy, for me as an observer, to find examples of when both teachers and students were thinking more deeply about the topics being covered.

Observations to support this theme came at different times during my visits. To begin with, I observed a lesson where the students were actually learning about the Good Thinker's Tool Kit.

Teacher: next page which is going to be your right side, I, inferences, what could inferences mean?

Student: to infer you got to relate.

Teacher – so inferences are guesses with prior knowledge with facts. So we are going to say things like, can I infer _____(guess) from _____ (fact)?

Student: can you give us an example of this?

Teacher: Ok here is an example, Can I infer that Rusty will always be disruptive due to his behavior in class today.

Student: can I read out my example...Can infer that ____ is on the football team because _____ is wearing a football jersey?

In this exchange it is clear that the students are acquiring new vocabulary that enables them to articulate when they are making inferences. This demonstrates how the Good Thinker's Tool Kit makes more complex thinking transparent to students, as they now have the language to identify their own thinking, and it makes it help the teachers to identify when their students are engaging in more complex thought processes.

In addition to helping students become better thinkers, the Good Thinker's Tool Kit was also observed to help teachers facilitate deeper thinking during class discussions.

Teacher: Ok what's one assumption that we can make about her from this paragraph?

Student: she's Hawaiian

Teacher: what are the reasons we know she is Hawaiian?

Student: she's dark, she lives in Hawaii, and she listens to Hawaiian music.

Teacher: can we make assumption about what time period she is living in?

Student: when was the Hawaiian monarchy overthrown? Ok I think it takes place in the 1800's.

Student: but her last name is white

Teacher: do you have to have a Hawaiian last name to be Hawaiian? (Read more) Ok what can we assume from here? What language does she speak?

Student: English but her grandma speaks her Hawaiian.

Teacher: so can your language define who you are?

The teacher could have helped the students dig a little deeper into these topics, like if it is true that someone has those qualities, does it always mean that they are Hawaiian? This could have led to a deeper discussion about, what does it really mean to be a Hawaiian. Nevertheless, this dialogue does demonstrate some effort by the teacher to make the dialogue "scratch beneath the surface." In my experience, most new teachers, and veteran

teachers, do not have classroom discussions because they feel uncomfortable with their role as a facilitator. However, in the case of the new teacher observed during this classroom discussion, it seems like he is using the Good Thinker's Tool Kit to support him as he makes efforts to get his students to think for themselves in complex ways.

The use of the Tool Kit was both prompted by the teachers and used spontaneously by the students. Prompted use included students being asked to generate questions about their own self-concept,

Student: Mr. would a question be what are the reasons my family immigrated to Hawaii?

Teacher: yes that is a good question because it searches for the reasons that your family moved here.

Student: for religion, could it be a who what when where question.

Teacher: but remember but if you use a w question how many answers do you get?

Student: one

Teacher: so would it be better to ask another type of question.

Student: can I assume that since I was baptized Catholic then I am still catholic?

And for stimulus during class discussion,

Teacher: We want to see some examples of people's questions (four students leap out of their chair and run to the board to write their questions). (Examples of question on the board: what are the reasons for Cal killing his wife? Can I infer that because Nu'u has life he regrets killing the two Filipinos? Can I infer that Cal is weak because he killed his wife? Can I infer that people stereotype Cal because of his swastika tattoo?)

Student: write mine, what are the reasons ken is in jail? (Teachers are still circulating and helping the students create better questions).

However, in addition to being prompted, by my third observation, the students were starting to incorporate the language into their conversational discussions. In one student exchange, a girl offered an example that was contradictory to the ones being offered by her classmates. They began to harass her about it and she answered them by saying, "well that was a counter-example." This spontaneous use of the toolkit seems to imply that the students are beginning to internalize the language and apply it to novel contexts.

Without analyzing the degree to which these students and teachers are thinking critically, it is clear that the P4C approach is providing the class with tools for developing thinking. Examples to support this conclusion were plentiful. Use of the Good Thinker's Tool Kit was observed in every single visit, was seen in both teachers independently, and in a variety of students. This overwhelming amount of evidence made it safe to conclude that a P4C approach has a positive impact on the way in which students and teachers thinking is developed and encouraged in the settings I observed.

II. P4C Classroom Strategies Went Underutilized

The second theme to emerge from the data was the notion that P4C teaching strategies were underutilized. In relationship to the main research question, this seems to suggest that in instances when a P4C teaching strategy could have been used, and wasn't students were negatively impacted. Negative impacts, to be examined include: loss of

instructional time due to classroom management issues; general frustration by both teachers and students; and small scale bullying in the form of put-downs. It is my belief that these observed behaviors could have been decreased if one of the essential theoretical underpinnings of P4C, community, had been reinforced by teaching strategies related to *intellectual safety* and *the community ball*.

In many cases, it was observed that students had become familiar with the term intellectual safety,⁵ and teachers had become comfortable using the term when addressing inappropriate student behavior. Two examples, from my field notes, one from each teacher demonstrates this.

One of the students is making comments to the other student (who is Filipino) about eating black dog and then he makes comments back to the other student about eating horse (the Tongan). They get in an exchange and the teacher says, “This is not intellectually safe. (Teacher redirects students who are talking about homecoming).

And,

Teacher: Ok find an example in your book.

Student: the part where he killed the Filipinos.

Teacher: we want to be intellectually safe, so no rude gestures (one student apparently made a gesture to another student about him being Filipino).

This demonstrates the teacher’s recognition that the type of classroom discourse, seen in the two quotes, was not intellectually safe and it was also apparent that the reference to the term changed the students’ behavior. However, many student behaviors, like the ones described above occurred over the course of my observations. This implies that the students had not internalized for themselves, what it really means to be intellectually safe. This observation warrants a concern that the concept of intellectual safety was not effectively reinforced at the beginning of the course. If this is true, then it seems that both students and teachers would benefit from revisiting the concept before the course moves forward.

The reasons for such a stern recommendation is found in further observations that point to the real importance of an intellectually safe classroom in a course about race and ethnicity. Of more importance, is the fact that the course was started under the guise of a violence intervention? This makes it especially important for teachers to take the time to make sure that students really understand what it means to be intellectually safe. Here is an example to illustrate my point from a class discussion about the novel The Tattoo.

Student: so what Ken is saying is all of those all those Haoles just take things from other people’s cultures.

Student (a Caucasian boy says): I don’t do that.

Student; don’t take it personally.

Teacher: ok where are some examples of victimization...

⁵ Intellectual safety is a frame for student thinking, behavior and emotions that is established on the first day of class when a P4C approach is employed. Intellectual safety is the ground rule that “all members of the classroom community, teachers and students, have the right to ask virtually any question or make any statement as long as respect for ALL persons is honored” (Jackson, 2001).

Student: when cal got his throat cut, when he killed his wife.

Teacher: let's try not to take it personal (in response to the same haole boy's squirming and comments), it is just a book and we are trying to learn from the book.

Student: you are not the only white person in here.

Student (the same Caucasian boy): I'm the only fully white person (teacher circulates the room and looks for examples of the students writing).

This student/teacher exchange would have been an excellent place for students to revisit the concept of intellectual safety. It is clear that the Caucasian boy, while analyzing the book felt uncomfortable. When he read the book, he identified with the references to Caucasian people and took offense to the book's contents. Other students in the room attempted to comfort him by explaining that the book was not talking about him in particular but he still felt threatened as the class moved on with the analysis. P4C has in place the idea of intellectual safety so that situations like these can be prevented or addressed as they occur. When the teacher did not utilize or reinforce the idea of intellectual safety in this circumstance it negatively impacted the class. By addressing the Caucasian boy's feelings, in relationship to the idea of intellectual safety, the class could have progressed in their understanding of the concept situated in a real life classroom experience. Fortunately this example was not too extreme but highlights the reasons for establishing, maintaining and reinforcing the intellectually safe concept.

Another P4C teaching strategy that went underutilized was the community ball. The entire purpose of the community ball is to build classroom community through respectful discourse, which includes listening to the person that has been elected to speak. On so many occasions, the students were observed yelling out of turn and having side conversations when a student or teacher was speaking in front of the class. Here is one observation.

(Teacher begins circling the room and seeing what the students are writing on their papers). "Shut up...I can't ignore him he is so irritating..." (Louder voice) Teacher – Ok people give me some of your reasons. (Students go off on a tangent about the football team. Teacher sits at the front of the room and waits. The students are still yelling shut up no you shut up).

This would have been an excellent opportunity for the teacher to employ the use of the community ball. Instead, instructional time was wasted and the students and teacher became frustrated with one another.

In other examples the teacher attempted to use the community ball but because the rules of the community ball were not reinforced, the desired classroom outcomes were not observed. Here are two examples of this.

Teacher: (they have lost use of the community ball) Christian what if the Filipinos were skilled at using knife.

Student: he could have just threatened them? (Some of the students are having small talk on the side)

Teacher: All right Kirsten has something to share. (The students gave her the ball)

Student: she could have thought harder about a better Tattoo.

And,

Teacher: who has the ball? Who wants to share? Who has a positive outcome? Pass the ball.

Student: - he could have just walked away and not bothered with killing the Filipinos

Student: but what if they could have "shanked" him from the side?

Teacher: well what else could he have done besides walking away, what about calling the police (students are all talking out of turn and yelling)?

These examples show that use of the community ball was attempted and in some cases restored positive discourse in the classroom setting. However, without consistent reinforcement on the teacher's part, like how intellectual safety needs to be reiterated, the P4C teaching tools go underutilized and have negative impacts on the classroom environment. Perhaps teachers, once they recognize the value of these tools, could become more effective in teaching students to use them and a more positive classroom climate would be observed.

III. Student-Centered Contextualized Learning Environment

The final theme to emerge from my observations was the idea that P4C fostered a student-centered, contextualized learning environment where students actively participated in the construction of knowledge. In multiple observations teachers were seen starting their lessons by addressing the students' previous knowledge in effort to teach the students something new. For example, when students were first learning about the Good Thinker's Tool Kit they were required to come up with examples from their own life – questions that were contextualized in their prior knowledge. This approach emphasized building off of student interests and knowledge.

Another example is when the students were first learning how to analyze the novel The Tattoo. Built into the assignment was an approach where students were required make their own interpretations of the text as long as they had evidence to back up their claims.

Student: oh can we share. When he was on the toilet.

Teacher: what page?

Student: page four third paragraph down.

Teacher: read the example (student reads the example)

Teacher: why is that an example of moodiness?

Student: because he could have said...

Teacher: ok, lets find another instance of moodiness in the prologue.

Student: oh I know when Nu'u said what the fuck are you looking at?

Teacher: ok can everyone find that part?

Student: page five fourth paragraph

Teacher: in the middle, someone want to read that part (student reads)? Why is that moody?

Student: because he could have said...

This demonstrates how teachers and students are working together to make meaning out of the material they are studying. In a less student-centered approach the teacher would provide the students with her version of the “correct” answers and these answers would not be nonnegotiable.

In addition to these first two examples, other observations demonstrated how the classroom curriculum revolved around each individual student’s interests, abilities and particular life context. This was best seen as the students began to create questions about themselves for their self – concept inquiry. In this research process the students were required to answer the question, “what is my self-concept from the perspective of ethnic studies?” Before starting the assignment the teacher and students discussed the relevance of the project.

Teacher: ok now who needs some more time reflecting on your identity? No one ok, so let’s move on...Let’s think about some reasons that this inquiry will be good for you? You can write it down first and then we can talk about it with each other.

Student: so you can understand yourself.

Teacher: All right, do you think all adults understand themselves?

Student: no it is probably something that changes.

Teacher: let’s discuss it what are some of your ideas. Everyone is going to give one.

In this exchange it becomes clear to the students that in this project there is no one answer that has predetermined (even adults haven’t figured it out). Students discover that they will be constructing meaning in this inquiry, and to do so they will start by asking questions about themselves. Here are some exchanges to demonstrate how the inquiry starts with student questions and not teacher questions.

Teacher: so what are these questions going to be about? Do you remember? So what you have to do is you have to ask questions to your family, who ever you live with, that pertain to our words?

Student: so could we ask what are the reasons Hawaiians are racist to Haole?

Teacher: you could ask what are the reasons my family is racist to haole?

Student: I don’t want to say that?

Teacher: but remember that this is not a research paper about Hawaiians; this is a research paper about you and your family? (The students start firing out a bunch of questions and the teacher helps them turn them into questions that are about the students.) Remember you want to connect these ethnic studies concepts or terms.

Student; can we ask questions that relate to why am I boy? I want to be curious?

Student: (The students are continuing to ask questions in their journal. Some of them are asking each other for help, they appear to be genuinely engaged in the activity) Is Hawaii an example of multi-culturalism?

Teacher: you tell me what the term means and then let’s think about it. Remember you need to make a question that pertains to you.

It is clear that the teachers had to push the students, in some cases to own their questions and make them specifically about the students themselves. Regardless, this approach

demonstrates that the learning in the inquiry project started with the students' questions that they found interesting and that were contextualized in their own life.

Discussion

Themes Related to the P4C Phenomena

At the beginning of this study four defining features of the P4C approach were listed: 1) building community; 2) fostering inquiry; 3) creating student-centered classrooms; and 4) encouraging reflection. Two of these four defining features were observed and highlighted as themes in the findings section. These two findings, evidence of inquiry and student-centered classrooms, demonstrate that some of the theoretical underpinnings of a P4C approach to education have been effectively translated into actual classroom practice. What's more, is these classroom practices are seen to be having a positive impact on both teachers and students.

For example, in many of the classroom observations, students and teachers were seen using the Good Thinker's Tool Kit. The Good Thinker's Tool Kit is a P4C classroom strategy, linked to the theoretical idea that classrooms should foster inquiry. Students and teachers were seen asking questions that helped to clarify what was being said, identify underlying assumptions and draw inferences based on evidence. In an era of schooling that revolves around standardized testing, teaching students skills for inquiry, so that they can construct their own knowledge has taken the back burner for some teachers. So concerned about getting their students to pass a test, some teachers have resorted to focusing all classroom instruction on test taking skills and less on learning for the sake of learning. As an educator, this is hard to understand. In our interdependent world, it would seem that critical thinking and inquiry would be necessary skills for navigating the intersections of disciplines and peoples. Instead, the direction of U.S. public education is quite opposite as high stakes tests, intended for increased accountability, have stifled the fostering genuinely complex thinkers in today's classrooms. Theoretically, a P4C approach to education is meant to counter this current trend in education, and as was observed in these two classrooms, students and teachers were moving towards becoming better thinkers.

In addition, many observations demonstrated that the P4C classrooms observed were student-centered. Student-centered classrooms are believed important as they address individual learning needs and provide each student as they engage in their own unique learning process. Student-centered classrooms help to address the diversity found in students (gender, ethnicity, culture) by allowing students to start their learning process with their own prior knowledge. Student-centered classrooms also help to motivate students as they value the interests of the learners. It would seem that most classrooms would benefit from being student-centered but again this is not as common as one would think. Most recently, the State of Hawaii has observed severe budget cuts to education. As resources become limited, both human and material, the system becomes less concerned about the individual needs of each student and more focused on producing graduates (regardless of what they have actually learned). Therefore, because the system fails to do so, it is the role of teachers to create student-centered learning opportunities. In the classrooms observed, it was evident that these teachers were doing their best to create

a learning environment that capitalized on the knowledge and interests of their students. In addition, the P4C approach observed was empowering students with the skills to construct new knowledge.

On a different note an interesting thing to come out of this study were the observations that some P4C classroom strategies had gone underutilized. This finding is different, because more than other interpretations of the data, my own frame of reference, as a P4C teacher helped to create this understanding. There were many occasions, throughout the observations, when I observed frustration in both the teachers and students. Most of their frustration revolved around students being disrespectful to other students. Some might give the explanation that these types of behaviors are typical of high school students and I would not disagree. However, in a class that is built on making students and teachers more tolerant people, these behaviors needed to be addressed more often than they were.

One of the most fundamental aspects of a P4C approach to education is that classrooms must start by establishing an intellectually safe community of learners. The idea is that intellectual inquiry will not progress unless people feel safe to express themselves within the group they are constructing knowledge with. Therefore, P4C classroom strategies have been developed to manifest these theoretical beliefs. One of these strategies is the use of the community ball. This strategy is designed to teach students to respect and listen to others. In a class that was designed to prevent violence it seems that learning to be respectful of one's peers would be of utmost importance and this is why I conclude that certain aspects of P4C went underutilized. This particular finding is helpful. It emphasizes the point that just because someone, a teacher in this case, intellectually understands a concept it does not mean that they are effective in applying that concept in everyday practice. This takes time, personal reflection, and feedback from observations like these. However, I did not go into these observations as a teacher evaluator. Therefore, only if my participants request a transcript of my findings, will I be in a place to provide my interpretation of their practice.

On a final note, it was very difficult for me to observe the fourth aspect of P4C - reflection. I am not quite sure if this was due to an absence of reflection or whether it was too difficult for me to document reflection using the methods of observation. Patton (2003) writes,

Observations are also limited in focusing only on external behaviors-the observer cannot see what is happening inside people. Moreover, observational data are often constrained by limited sample of activities actually observed (p. 306).

In any case, it is important to point out that the domain of reflection was not observed and perhaps, if interviewing were to be employed as another method in this study, the presence or absence of reflection in these classrooms could be investigated.

Ethical and Practical Issues

Throughout this write up I have discussed some of the ethical and practical issues that came up. Most prevalent were the ethical and practical issues related to my role as an observer. Practically, it might not always be the best idea to "study one's own backyard." I was definitely not a stranger on campus and my presence was constantly questioned. I

usually replied that I was doing an assignment for a class and this was a satisfactory explanation to most. Other than that practical issues were not prevalent.

Ethically, I can find more problems with my role as an observer. To begin with, I was constantly aware of my biases towards the P4C approach to education. This means that at times I found myself noticing only the classroom behaviors that confirmed the positive impacts of P4C. Then, when I did interpret some of the classroom observations as negative, my interpretation was that it was an absence of P4C. Ethically, upon reflection, I don't know if I am the best person to be doing this type of research.

In addition to personal biases, I also felt the need to give feedback to teachers when I saw ways I believed their classroom practice could be improved. When looking at my observation notes there are many personal notations that describe the type of feedback that I would have given, but because my role in this study was as an observer, I refrained. This presents an ethical concern. If students could benefit from the feedback, is it not my duty as an educator to provide it? I most certainly am not harming anyone by keeping my feedback to myself, but it then seems as if I am doing research for the sake of research and not for the betterment of the profession- what's the point? The ultimate question being, at what point does the observer step out of their role as observer if they believe they can help the situation they are observing? I am resolved in thinking that *it depends* on the observer and what they think is the best thing to do *depending* on the situation.

Final Reflections

This project was an authentic learning experience. I was able to engage in a topic that I was interested in, and able to experiment with analyzing that topic through a qualitative lens. As a part of my job, I am required to observe teachers and students. However, I have never been as focused as I was in this study. It was helpful to go through the process of designing a research question and then using that research question to guide observation. I must admit that in my first observation I neglected to think about my research question as much as I should have but as this was reiterated during class time I got more focused with each visit to the field. Embedded in my learning to focus my observations was the practice of zigzagging. I benefited immensely from analyzing my first two sets of observations before engaging in my third. I think that my third and final observation really gave me a taste of what it means to be a qualitative researcher. I had analyzed data, and then used those findings to build my theories as I went back into the field. For example, after my first two visits I had developed the theme that the classroom strategy, intellectual safety had gone underutilized. So, as I went back into the classrooms I was looking to see if this was true. What I realized was not only was intellectual safety being underutilized but also the use of the community ball. This new observation caused me to change my emergent theory so that it would be more general – P4C strategies going underutilized. Then in my findings I was able to provide two examples to support this theme.

Finally, this project really helped me to examine my role as the researcher. I remember looking at this section requirement “role of the researcher” for my dissertation, and thinking it would be a breeze to write. Now, after this project I realize that the role of the researcher is probably one of the most important issues in qualitative studies. The

researcher is the instrument, and it is the responsibility of the researcher to acknowledge where they fit into their study as they fundamentally shape how data is collected and interpreted. At the beginning of this project I was somewhat put off by the notion that we shouldn't study our own backyard. However, I really got to experience, by going into my backyard to study the P4C phenomenon, that I brought just as many issues, regarding the quality of the data I was collecting, as someone who was unfamiliar with my research context. For one, I feel that my findings are totally biased towards seeing P4C as a positive approach to education. Perhaps someone not so familiar with P4C would have been a little more open minded in his or her inquiry. In addition, I helped to write the curriculum that I was observing and so sometimes it was hard to separate the intentions of the curriculum with what was actually being practiced in the classroom. I think the biggest thing I realized is that it is so important to be reflexive throughout the research process and to document your own thinking. Through documentation, the thoughts of the researcher can be included in the write up and will provide readers with a more honest interpretation of the data. This came out in my theme about underutilized P4C strategies and at least I could be transparent in how I came to that theme. In general, I leave this project being more aware of the real issues involving being "close" to what you study and plan on being more thoughtful in selecting my research settings.

In closing...thank you for the opportunity. It was really good practice. I liked having to analyze the data for themes and to build a theory, or findings out of that data. As I make my journey towards becoming a qualitative researcher, I know that these skills are necessary and as a result of this project I feel a bit more efficacious in my ability to execute them.

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