

Reflections from a p4cHI Teacher: David Kaniaupio

My name is David Kaniaupio, and I teach 10th grade US History at Nanakuli High and Intermediate School. I start every day with the statement, "Today I get to change the world." My journey to become a teacher started in 2001 with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. A couple years and several odd jobs from high school, I jumped at the chance to get paid summers and to work as an educational assistant at Kailua High School. My most distinct memory as an educational assistant was when a riot that broke in the school. I saw kids attacking teachers. I even had a couple of students jump on me, families of these children arrived to join in the melee, and it wasn't until cops got there, that the violence was stopped.

Flash forward to 10 years later, I found myself graduating from the UH college of Education with a specialization in Social Studies, where I met Dr. Amber Strong Makaiau. Through the College of Ed. I was introduced to philosophy for children, and I had the opportunity to do my observation and practicum as well as my student teaching, back at Kailua High School. What I saw at Kailua High School blew me away. It was like one of those movies where the world is this dark ominous place and the hero triumphs and the world transforms to this bright and lush oasis. Not only did Kailua High School feel safer there, but the evidence was all around. For example, students left their backpacks unattended all over campus as if the idea that a theft could occur was foreign to them. The sense of tension that I felt in my early years was replaced with a real sense of community and solidarity. In the classrooms, I saw students discussing deep issues across multiple disciplines and grade levels. The role of a teacher seemed to be more of a facilitator, and the students passionately learned on their own through inquiry and the use of philosophy. Throughout various class periods I saw students reflect and connect on what they have learned through their investigation to their real life experiences, making the new content a part of them and how they see the world. Seeing the striking contrast between my previous experiences at Kailua High School and what I have seen in my student teaching, only confirmed what I already believed to be true. This confirmed the power that the application of p4c can have on a school and the surrounding community.

On November 2017, I was presented with an opportunity to share a little bit about what I have learned about p4c with Catholic School teachers at their Annual Conference for Catholic School Educators. In my breakout session, I shared a little about the experience that I just discussed, the pillars of p4c, and I had them participate in a Plain Vanilla. Many of them were excited about what they experienced and some even requested to have more information. The highlight of the presentation was using a random name picker to select participants to share their reflection with the group. Each participant that was selected to share was awarded a unique community ball to take with them as a physical representation of the tools that they just received.

As a history teacher we are often aware of how moments in our lives can have a reverberating effect that changes the world. Implementing p4c in my classroom has allowed me to have a profound impact on students. I truly believe that our students are the future leaders of our world and they deserve the right to create the democracy that we should have. Philosophy for children continues to open doors for my career both inside and outside of the classroom. It is clear that as a teacher, we really can change the world.