Voyaging to the Outer Limits of Education: Reflections on P4C in the Secondary Classroom

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The first day I attempted to practice P4C in my classroom the students revolted. The memory is clear in my mind—most potentially scarring events are. The students, all thirty-three of them, were seated in a circle which had already made them squirmy because it was not the five neatly aligned rows facing the teacher that by tenth grade they had all become accustomed to. I stood in the center of them all, as they exchanged glances with one another across the room, and began to explain how the community ball that we had made would be used during class discussions. "This is too hard," one girl whined using that perfected teenage pitch. "Yah, you're making us do college stuff," commented another boy. Although I was a novice teacher, merely attempting the fine art of student teaching, I recognized that if I didn't say something quick I would soon be buried in a shallow grave of adolescent rebellion. With conviction, I confidently replied, "This class will be different for most of you, but I know you are all excellent thinkers and capable of what we are about to do. Please take a risk with me and try something new." This pivotal moment opened the door that led to my quest, as an educator, to explore how the ingenious ideas behind P4C could change the face of public education in the state of Hawaii.

I could have easily resigned to my student's fears, as well as my own insecurities during the first few weeks that I experimented with P4C. I was student teaching at a Windward Oahu high school where I taught two tenth grade U.S. history classes and four senior political science classes. I had decided that I wanted to investigate how P4C could be applied in the secondary social studies classroom so I dove into a year-long action research project and took my students with me.

My students and I may have been taking our "maiden voyage," but the P4C route was not uncharted. Over the past thirty years teachers all over the world have experimented with Matthew Lipman's P4C curriculum in their own classrooms using "action research" to find ways to transform the fundamental ideas that center around P4C

into a classroom curriculum that fits both the individual practitioner's teaching style and, more importantly, the unique needs of their students (Cochrin – Smith and Lytle, 1993). Action research requires that teachers research and practice an existing curriculum, collect data from their experience, analyze the data and "improve the nature and specifics" of the curriculum (Oberg, 1990). The existing curriculum, in my case, was taught to me by Thomas Jackson when I participated in his P4C course at the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

I met Dr. Jackson while I was floundering in the open ocean of a Masters in Teaching education program at the University of Hawaii. Like most teacher preparation programs, no matter how liberal they seem, this one had thrown me into a vast sea of theoretical inquiry and then expected me to build my own pedagogical ship to stay afloat during my year of student teaching. Fortunately, as I attempted to construct a curriculum that matched my theoretical beliefs, I was introduced to processes that had already been created for students participating in P4C—Dr. Jackson's "Gently Socratic" method, incorporating the use of a "community ball, magic words, Plain Vanilla, and the Good Thinker's Tool Kit" (Jackson, 2001). Dr. Jackson's always-apparent enthusiasm and clearly articulated methodologies inspired me and provided me with actual techniques with which to experiment in my own classroom.

As my students staged their own version of "mutiny on the bounty," I knew that the life preservers of Dr.Lipman and Dr. Jackson would be by my side to catch anyone, including myself, if we were thrown over into the sea I described. Without giving away the story of my experience

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with P4C, I must admit there was an occasional community member thrown overboard. During my first year of student teaching my students and I both ran into unique challenges that might have ended our quest to change how we looked at teaching and learning. However, it was the experiences of each and every community that had practiced P4C before us that kept us above water—even soaring.

In my first year of student teaching, I was what veterans in the field of education referred to as a novice teacher. This meant that I was teaching six classes at the high school, conducting action research that would be used to write my Masters thesis, and concurrently attending teacher education classes. I had decided that I would be focusing my research on the success and failures that I experienced while practicing P4C. Naturally, I dialogued with Dr. Jackson frequently during this time. He and I collaboratively discussed the types of processes I could use in my P4C classes and helped me to develop effective ways to teach the students about the cognitive tools found in the Good Thinker's Tool Kit. The shared vision, conviction and passion for P4C that Dr. Jackson and I had, gave me the support that I needed to take the risk and try something new with my students. It was a good thing that I had his support because there weren't many other professional sources who were confident about what I was doing.

First, I was frequently challenged to justify my decision to use P4C in the classes that I was taking from the college of education. In particular I remember when we were introduced to the fine art of lesson planning. Our professors stressed that one of the main reasons for lesson plans was to "set an agenda" to eliminate any "down time" with our students. The course instructors stressed that "a novice teacher should plan for each minute that we shared with our students," and then have a back up plan just in case the students got finished with their assignments early. Upon reflection I realize that this was good advice. The underlying assumption however was that an unplanned moment for any teacher would eventually lead her into the abyss of a classroom management nightmare. Therefore, the P4C discussions that I was "planning" to consume the entire seventy minutes of the class period were discouraged by some teacher educators. Also, most of the other novice teachers in my program, fearful of the uncertainty of class discussions, shied away from incorporating them into their developing curriculums. I must admit that the fear of thirty–five out of control raging sixteen year olds did put fear in my heart. However, I knew that in order to really have student–driven discussion–based inquiry, I would have to take the risk of that unplanned classroom moment.

Besides the classroom management issues, other educators voiced concerns about the lack of content that I would be covering by using class discussions as a method of teaching. My mentor teacher, as he corrected 180 fill-in-the-blank Civil War vocabulary tests, joked, "so what will your class be discovering in the Kumbaya circle this week?" His perception was that because discussions allowed my students to explore issues of their choice, in a non–traditional setting compared to most other high school history courses, that my students would not have the time to "know everything that they needed to know" about U.S. history. Other teachers had similar concerns as they wondered how I would be able to cover all of the chapters in the U.S. history book. Many of my colleagues believed that if I took the time for students to actively engage in a dialogue about the writings of Fredrick Douglas or President Lincoln, for example, I would never reach the Gulf War by the end of the school year. It was at this early point in my decision to use P4C that I began to rigorously question my own belief systems about learning.

The concerns voiced by the community of educators described above initiated questions that guided the perpetual discussion in which I was engaged about the meaning of schooling. Traditionally, learning is measured through standardized tests by the quantity of facts that students can recall, the accuracy of their memory, their ability to identify the standard conventions of English and apply mathematical procedures. Keeping the foundations of modern schooling in mind, I wondered what exactly was it that today's students "should know" and what "should they know how to do" as result of participating in the courses that I designed? I had not yet established where I wanted my students to be at the end of the school year as a result of experiencing a discussion based class and I must admit that the outside pressures voiced by the contingency for traditional teaching did make me wonder if my students would end up "behind" their other classmates because of the nature of discussion–based inquiry. With all of this in mind I worked hard during that first year to create learning goals for my students and I learned to appreciate how the critical voices that surrounded me would serve as catalysts for challenging my own thinking.

During that first year I also wondered how could I, or my students for that matter, measure learning that occurred as a result of discussion-based inquiry? At the same time I also asked the question: how could the learning that took place within the four walls of our classroom be shared with the larger community that we belonged to? So, I began to create the tools my students and I would need to measure our learning. These tools consisted of daily oral assessments, rigorous seventy minute discussion debriefs that required students to use evidence from all of our discussions to critique our discussion community, writing rubrics that evaluated the student's ability to apply the thinking skills we practiced during our discussions to the rest of their class work, and finally I began to develop a test to measure the effects of P4C over the course of a year for the following school year.

With the use of my assessment tools I collected evidence documenting what was really going on in our classroom. This evidence allowed me to become confident in my ability to share the successes and concerns I was having about P4C with people who were unfamiliar or even critical

of the program. In that first year of experimenting with P4C I relentlessly documented the success of the existing P4C methodologies with which I was experimenting, the innovative curriculum that I was forging, and most importantly I made sure to record the voices of my students. My documentation revealed much and allowed my students and I to reflect on our practice. By the end of that first year I was able to articulate what was working in regards to P4C and identify concrete areas of my developing curriculum that needed to be improved.

First, I did have classroom management challenges. After all, previous to their exposure to P4C, the students had rarely been asked to speak in class. I was now requiring them to take ownership of their learning by letting them ask their own questions based on the readings I initially selected, choose their own topics of inquiry, speak freely in an intellectually safe environment, inviting them to act as members of a democratic community and most importantly, teaching them to challenge their ability to think critically—which often meant that they would challenge me. My students who were now seeing "education as the practice of freedom" tested their new boundaries with one another and myself, which often erupted in passionate discourse (Freire, 1989). They had extreme difficulty listening to one another, and struggled to craft their verbal responses to the discussant that spoke before them. Quite often, during those first few months, "shut up" flew out of some student's mouths and I found myself reclaiming the community ball from the group to signal that the shouting match that was occurring needed to end.

In the first few months of P4C they also tested my professional "position of authority" by introducing topics for discussion that were extremely controversial and which they might have previously thought to be were taboo in school settings. For example, they often wanted to talk about things like drug legalization or sexual identity issues. On the day that one girl used genital mutilation in Africa as a counter example to the statement that "everyone is free," the class erupted in inappropriate laughter. In the beginning, the natural tendency for teenagers to want to talk about socially controversial issues affected classroom management because the students didn't necessarily know how to have a critical discussion about some "hot topics" and their immaturity would result in teenage silliness that could sometimes be harmful to certain community members. However, whenever my students did push the topical boundaries I made sure that we responsibly addressed various sides of the issue and made sure that our community remained intellectually safe.

These challenges with classroom management drove my mentor teacher wild. He kept his students in impeccably straight rows and created lessons that required the students to engage in mostly silent individual work. During some particularly difficult discussions in the beginning of the school year I could see him cringing in the corner of the classroom evidently holding in his immense desire to put my students in their place. His feedback frequently questioned my decision to let the students be so vocal during class time when they obviously weren't prepared for this type of classroom setting. It was also obvious that I was navigating my way through experimental territory not really knowing what my students could and couldn't do before I tried something with them.

The easy way out during those first months of P4C would have been to simply silence my students as my mentor teacher alluded to. He was right—they obviously had never learned how to critically engage in a dialogue with their peers. However, I didn't become a teacher because I thought it would be easy. I knew that I would have to work hard if things were going to change in Hawaii's public schools. So, as a result of his feedback and my own assessment, I did realize the need to make changes in the curriculum. It was at this point that I began to develop a curriculum that would teach my students how to think critically for themselves and to brainstorm instructional strategies that would give them the necessary skills to be responsible members of a democratic classroom.

With regards to the classroom management issues, I developed listening games and challenges that required the students to think before they blurted out their comments. These exercises also included lessons that taught students how to listen to constructive feedback from their peers and required that they demonstrate their listening by changing their behavior. I also decided that when I introduced P4C to the seniors at the beginning of the new semester I would devote time to discuss with them what the difference is between a dialogue and a monologue. (Reed & Sharp, 1992). This assured that the class had a concrete, operational definition before they experimented with discussions themselves. Finally, we also learned how to discuss "hot topics" in responsible ways. It was during these discussions that I witnessed my students really engage in a school activity unlike they probably had ever done before—it gave me chicken skin.

Slowly, over the course of the year I began to see a change in the way students approached their peers during class discussion. I particularly remember a discussion that centered on a recent school shooting in California. The seniors, after reading an article about the student who had committed the crime, chose to discuss the possibility of gun related violence at our school. The question that they chose to discuss required that the class uncover the different cliques that existed at our school and examine the implications of these cliques as they were forced to socialize with one another on campus. It should be noted that school violence is common on our campus, where fighting between different social groups occurs on what seems to be a daily basis. So, naturally when the students chose this question I began facilitating with trepidation, not wanting to instigate an in class brawl. After all, in the beginning of the school year the students had been very confrontational with each other about issues that didn't necessarily require them to draw

upon evidence this close to home.

As students began talking, their candor and willingness to take intellectual risks with one another eased my discomfort in not knowing what direction the discussion would take. It was in a discussion like this, at the end of the first year, that they demonstrated their internalized conception of what it meant to be a community of inquiry. They pulled examples from one another regarding times when particular groups didn't resolve conflict in a non-violent way. They were brave enough to look at the reasons why the specific groups that they were discussing, and of which they were also members, didn't get along. By the time the bell rang the students were brainstorming the ways in which they ensure peace in their own school community.

Besides being able to talk about "hot topics," my students demonstrated growth in other areas as well. As I reflected on what my students accomplished during the first year, many mini–movies of my students' discussions played out in my mind. I had been so impressed with how the students, who had put on such a great performance resisting P4C at the beginning of the course, challenged their thinking and begged for "discussion Friday's everyday" at the end of the school year. I had observed tenth graders who could barely read demonstrate how intellectually safe our class had become as they sounded words out loud just so that they could create a question for their peers to think about. By the end of the year the tenth graders were stopping into class early to find out what topic we would be reading about so that they could be thinking about it before they came to class. Some students would even bring in articles of their own that they thought would be of interest – these were the same students who never took text books home, barely remembered to bring a pencil to class and hardly turned in homework.
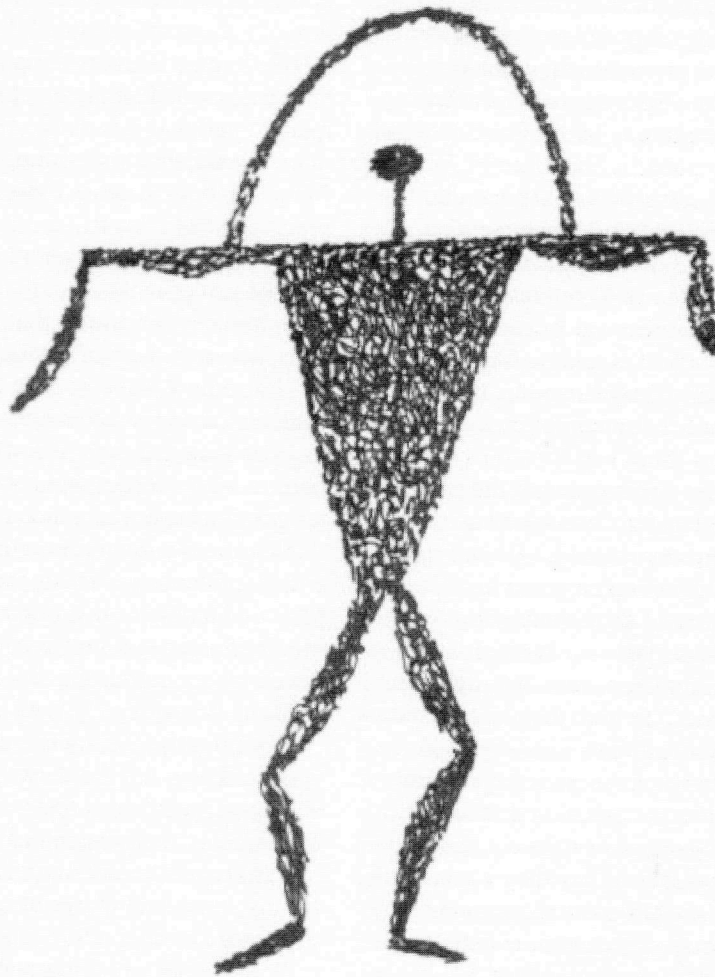
I reveled in the seniors' ability to use the assessment criteria to give feedback to their peers and was even more overjoyed when that feedback initiated changes in the students' behavior. I witnessed students who had been intimidating and domineering in the beginning of the year pass the community ball to quieter students as they used our new discussion language to ask the less vocal student, "what do you think about what has just been said?" Quite often with the encouragement from their peers students who I had not been able to coax into giving a verbal response during discussion time would speak when invited by their classmates.

I rejoiced on the day when one girl complained, "we never have the answer when the bell rings." It had been a particularly deep discussion about the difference between what is real and what is ideal. The class had spent the majority of the discussion grappling with criteria and by the time the bell did ring they had not come to a consensus. I had repeatedly told the class that we were not trying to find the one right answer as a result of our discussion. However, many of the students thirsted for certainty as they exited the classroom. On this particular day as the girl I described above left the room complaining I also heard her classmate answer, "yah, well we have lot's of answers and at least we know the reasons behind those answers." I couldn't have said it better myself.

I was ultimately convinced of my students' growth on the day that the Lieutenant Governor to the State of Hawaii sat in and participated in a Philosophy for Children discussion. It was a bright sunny Hawaiian day—one of the last days of the school year. While most Seniors were busy cutting their final day of class, all twenty–nine of my stu-

dents, plus the Lt. Governor and her entourage sat crammed in our discussion circle creating one final question that they wanted to talk about with their peers. On this last day of class, I explained to the group that the question could be about anything that they wondered about in life—something that they wanted to think about with their classmates before they ended their high school journey. The Lt. Governor was included in the group and I gave her a pencil and paper to write down her questions as well.

When the group finished constructing their questions, with out my prompting one student rose and took the position by the chalkboard that I had filled at the beginning of the school year. With this visual cue the students went around the circle and read their wonderings out loud while the student poised by the chalkboard transcribed the classes' jewel like questions for the group to see. I remember thinking that their ability to articulate their thinking in the form of a question mimicked Socrates and his disciples. However, in this class it was hard to tell who was Socrates and who were the disciples.

When it was the Lt. Governor's turn to ask her question she looked to the camera, which was held by a member of her group and stated, "I wonder how all children in the State of Hawaii can have access to an excellent education?" The students watched as her question was put on the chalkboard next to theirs and one student raised his hand for the community ball. She passed him the ball, and in an attempt to clarify her question he asked, "why don't you go ask the governor? Isn't this the type of thing you should have been talking about with the governor and legislature the whole time you've been in office?" His tone was inoffensive but serious. With a politically correct smile she took the community ball back from the student and passed it to the next student beside her. With a flurry of small butterflies in my stomach I waited to see how the class would react.

The class respected her right to pass and simply continued with the Plain Vanilla procedure that they had used during discussions all year (Jackson, 2001). They finished gathering questions from the rest of the students, and initiated the voting process to select the question that they wanted to talk about. I clearly remember the content of the question that they chose. On that final day they wanted to know why they could successfully communicate and disagree with one another within their classroom community—yet, when they were outside of class they would fall back into their cliques and barely acknowledge each other's presence. The discussion was unforgettable as they used examples from their own life to scratch beneath the surface of a universal issue regarding contradictions that are found in human behavior. As the bell rang they were wondering why sometimes national harmony could exist and concurrently internationally turmoil would erupt in world wars. I often like to remind myself that these are the types of things high school students choose to talk about.

It was days like the one described above that exemplified the success of P4C in my first year. The students demonstrated good thinking, an ability to respect the members of their classroom community no matter how long that person had been with the group, and their ability to use discussion as a format to challenge the status quo. My students were truly practicing the skills needed to be a member of a democratic society and I had become confident that P4C was a necessary component of the secondary social studies classroom.

At the end of that first year, while using P4C in the courses I taught, I also internalized many of my own teaching philosophies that had merely been theoretical at the beginning of the school year—hypothetical foundations in my beliefs about education prior to my hands-on experience in the classroom. I had witnessed social constructivism in action, students learning in accordance with Vygotsky's notion of a "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978). Jerome Bruner, along with other social learning theorists, explained that people learn as members of a community, and that it is during this community-based learning that they are able to develop their social identities as they figure out how to act in those groups (Bruner, 1996). By practicing P4C I concluded that I was not only teaching my students academics. My students were developing as people and not just as isolated individuals. I witnessed my students grow and craft identities that allowed them to participate as conscious members of our collective human social group.

I also now had evidence to support my initial belief that students could rise to any challenge that I put in front of them as long as I understood the learning steps they would need to take in order to meet that challenge. Teacher expectations do shape what students can do and their ability to think critically. I completed my year of student teaching with confidence in the capabilities of my students. Their profound ability to overcome challenges as a community of inquiry during that first year inspired me to look forward to developing a more refined P4C curriculum for the following school year.

Besides the confidence that I developed in my students' abilities I also left that first year feeling confident in my ability as a teacher to foster a classroom culture that truly matched my theoretical ideals about education. I now knew that if I created curriculum focused on my desired outcomes for my students they could rise to the standard. I was maturing as a teacher and establishing for myself what it meant to be a teacher who incorporated discussion-based inquires in her classroom. I adjusted the way I managed my classroom, cultivated my ability to practice the art of facilitation, reflected constantly on my practice and ultimately invented new ways to teach students how to monitor their own thinking and behavior. With great expectations in mind, I began to formalize a P4C curriculum for the following school year.

In the summer before my second year of teaching I made a mental list of all the P4C activities and assessments that I wanted to work on. First, I wanted to create a measurement tool that would measure cognitive and affective

effects of P4C, about which Lipman had written extensively (Reed & Sharp, 1992). Keeping the desired outcomes for my students that I described above, I developed a pre/post test to measure the cognitive and affective effects of P4C in my classroom. I collaborated on this project with Meredith Ing, a middle school English teacher who also practiced P4C and who had been my partner while writing our Masters thesis on our experiences with P4C. We finalized the test with Dr. Jackson at the University of Hawaii and used his feedback to make adjustments to this new assessment tool we were creating.

At the beginning of the school year, my second year of teaching, I gave the pre-test to my four tenth grade U.S. history classes. At the end of that year all four tenth grade classes took the same post-test. I had also made sure, during this second year of teaching that another tenth grade U.S. history class that was not practicing P4C took the pre and post-test as well. Currently, I am analyzing the results of these tests.

Besides creating the pre/post test during the summer before my second year of teaching, I also began to brainstorm how I could extend the original P4C curriculum I practiced during my student teaching. Keeping my previous experiences with P4C in mind, I decided to focus on creating a curriculum that centered on teaching students how to facilitate their own P4C discussions. There were many reasons for this decision.

First, students explicitly wanted to know about facilitation. When I started doing P4C with the tenth graders they wanted to know why I could talk without holding the community ball. Understanding their concern, and addressing the major issue of fairness plaguing most teenagers, I explained the dynamics of facilitation. We began with a definition. Facilitate simply means, "to make easy," and by utilizing specific skills the facilitator helps to keep the discussion alive (Webster, 1987).

As I continued to clarify the idea of facilitation, I used examples from our past discussions to describe how my actions as a facilitator were fueled by a desire to make inquiries "easier." Making discussions easier meant constantly thinking about how I could help our discussions "flow," scratch beneath the surface of our initial question and always look for ways to help our community maintain a standard of intellectual safety (Jackson, 2001). While I was coaxed by their own inquisitiveness to define what it really meant to be a facilitator, I uncovered the second reason I wanted students to facilitate their own P4C discussions: to be consistently engaged in students' thinking through listening attentively, which I found to be essential from my own experiences facilitating. As a facilitator, after all, I realized I had to continually serve as a reflective voice regarding the community's successes and weaknesses. This meant taking the risk to confront particular students' behaviors tactfully and create opportunities to praise the community when things were going well. Being a facilitator forced me to imagine what direction the discussion might go as a result

of the communities' individual personalities interacting with the reading I selected. At the same time, facilitation required that I make contemporaneous decisions during our "live" discussion. In summary, facilitating class discussions required that I continually challenge my own thinking about community and inquiry.

My facilitation skills grew exponentially over the course of that first year and I began to clearly define what it meant to be a good facilitator. This is when I hypothesized that if it was true that facilitation fostered all the skills I described above in myself, then wouldn't my students develop those very same skills if they were required to become class facilitators themselves? This guiding question, if true, had many implications and inspired further questions. If all my students were effective facilitators wouldn't all our discussions become better in general? I imagined the students becoming better listeners, more engaged in each others' thinking, and this final step of requiring students to facilitate would encourage them to take complete ownership of their learning. I envisioned students choosing their own reading, creating possible questions for the inquiry, establishing roles they would play during class discussions, thinking on the spot, self–assessing their successes and taking the risks to assess their peers. With all these learning goals and expectations in mind I remembered I would have to create learning opportunities that would provide my students with the skills to achieve these goals. The second voyage that I was about to take with my students was preparing to set sail.

I decided that a senior level political science class titled "American Problems" would be the perfect setting to experiment with student-led discussions simply because of the nature of the course content. This is not to say that student-led discussions could not be fostered in other courses, but because this course would focus on current events, I believed it would be easier for the students to locate articles regarding topics of their choice. The course was a semester long, and I had also decided that in the first quarter the students would be looking at global issues that involved the United States and in the second quarter the students would be required to select an internal American problem that they felt would be important to inquire about in a discussion with their peers. Having determined that American Problems would be the setting for my experiment, with a clear vision of what I wanted my students to be able to do and with the conceptual foresight of what I wanted them to understand, I began to rigorously design a discussion–based inquiry curriculum for the course.

The first step in developing a novel curriculum was to examine which aspects of P4C that I had already practiced would be relevant and useful with regards to the newly established learning goals that I had set. Keeping the new culminating activity in mind, student–facilitated discussions, I reviewed my already established P4C lesson plans. At this point I realized that despite the fact that I had established a new standard of where I wanted my students to be at the

end of the school year, most of the P4C activities with which I had experimented in the first year were still relevant. Over the course of the entire second year of teaching I refined the P4C activities from the previous year and guided changes with the question – what do my students need to learn how to do next in order to become facilitators themselves? Finally, by the third quarter of that second year, I had established a solid foundation for my new curriculum. The curriculum was clearly outlined in the following four distinct learning stages:

A) Establishing a Framework for Discussion–Based Inquiry
B) Building the Background by Practicing Discussion–Based Inquiry
C) Deepening the Understanding of Discussion–Based Inquiry through Role Playing and Peer Assessment
D) Culminating in Students as Facilitators for their own Discussion–Based Inquiries

In the first stage of the curriculum, a foundation for learning in P4C is established by the students and myself. In other words, throughout the rest of the year all other learning opportunities during discussion-based inquiries require that students have the base knowledge provided during this first stage in order for them to grow as philosophers and members of a community of inquiry. The lessons in the first stage provide students with "scaffolding, a temporary structure around the 'construction' of the student's learning that helps hold concepts together during the early stages of" learning about the skills required for engaging in P4C (Oakes & Lipton, 1999). In this first segment of the curriculum students take the P4C pre–test; uncover the difference between dialogue and discussion; build their community of learners; discuss intellectual safety; are introduced to the Good Thinker's Tool Kit; and learn about "Plain Vanilla."

In the second stage students reinforce the skills, and procedures, and try out the concepts from the stage one as I facilitate a series of discussion–based inquiries. For each of these discussions I select the article and provide challenges that include various experimental exercises with the Good Thinker's Tool Kit. Besides encouraging use of the Good Thinker's Tool kit in their questions, I have also created a series of thinking games that focus on a particular letter of the Tool Kit.

In the third stage the classroom set up changes dramatically. In the first two stages students had been accustomed to the room set up with chairs placed in a giant circle. In this third stage the room is set up with the chairs in a "fish bowl." This means half the chairs are in a circle in the middle of the room and the other half of the chairs are organized around the center circle. The primary goal of this third segment is to foster meta–cognition where students are thinking about their own thinking during class discussions.

During the third stage the students' discussions improved dramatically in terms of community functioning and the increased ability to scratch beneath the surface. After using the fish bowl technique one or two times students demonstrated increased concentration and practiced appropriate codes for a discussion because they knew that their peers would "call them" on their behavior. Some competition was initiated by the students themselves as they attempted to "out perform" the discussion group that had gone before them. The inside group served as a window for the outside group to look through to examine their own thinking and behaviors during discussions. Most students, who previous to this sort of reflective exercise and my own feedback had not self–corrected their thinking and behavior, quickly began to grow as critical members of our communities of inquiry.

In the fourth stage students are introduced to the requirement that they will become co–facilitators of an inquiry. I began by reviewing what it meant to be a facilitator and at this point laid out specific criteria of "good facilitation." The students then used these criteria to write down examples of good facilitation as they observed me facilitate a discussion with their peers. After I modeled good facilitation, to the best of my ability mind you, we debriefed the discussion as a class. I then explained that the criteria I was providing for good facilitation would be the same criteria their groups would be expected to meet and be assessed by.

My students were successful—beyond my wildest dreams. And you know how I explained that most potentially scarring events stick out in your memory? Well, amazingly, wonderful events do as well. Where do I begin? First of all the students, on their own, picked a variety of dynamic topics. We had discussions about the Hawaiian sovereignty, the possibility of male pregnancy, a patient assisted suicide bill coming up for consideration in the legislature, the right to choose graduation attire, one group even chose an intimidating article concerning the relationship between science and religion. When the students were required to choose what they believed were "American Problems" they were able to do it independently from pre–determined course content thus taking complete ownership over their learning.

When the students were asked to anticipate their strengths as co–facilitators they gave the following answers. Our strengths are:

Summarizing and clarifying because we know a lot about the topic we are choosing.

Asking open–ended questions to make the environment safer, which makes it easier for the group to participate and communicate. We will be able to invite participants by using questions that should be easy to answer and challenge their thinking.

Selecting a dynamic topic is one of our strengths because the discussants will be able

to relate their during/after prom experiences to the conversation/discussion. Inviting all discussants to participate will be one of our strengths because we are all curious and interested in what everyone has to say.

It is evident from the students' anticipatory responses that they were thinking about the possible implications of their actions. The uncertainty of how their discussions would unfold, even though they expressed that they felt they were prepared, surfaced in their responses as one of their potential weakness.

Here is what a couple of students had to say about their group's potential weaknesses. Our weaknesses are:

> Everyone's opinion will be different because of the different experiences they went through. We won't be able to anticipate everyone's thoughts.

> If the topic is not interesting it's hard to make everyone participate.

> Demonstrating our own willingness to challenge our thinking because the people in our group are not always willing to participate in discussions. We might not make great questions but will try to make questions that everyone will give input to.

It was interesting to read what the students thought of their weaknesses, which truly were the groups' fears because they were the same things I would worry about as a facilitator. The transformation of students from discussants to facilitators allowed them to consider all members of the community – to really think about the ways members of their community might think about the topic they selected at the same time they were working hard to challenge their own thinking about the topic they had chosen.

When the students finally led their discussions, class participation was at it's highest, everyone seemed engaged, and the group's ability to scratch beneath the surface of the topics they had chosen was prevalent. I kept a journal during some group's discussions and my comments at the time demonstrate the students' success. The following excerpt is from the group's first peer facilitated discussion. The topic that the group had chosen was underage drinking.

> Wow! I was very impressed with the discussion. The facilitation was good because of the open–ended questions, they did an excellent job clarifying all of the difficult words, summarizing what people had said and inviting other students into the discussion. I could tell that they were thinking on the spot because at first they started to read a question that they had planned and then they decided that the class had already addressed the topic so they skipped the question and moved on. The thing that I was most impressed with however was the skills that the discussants demonstrated. Leonard, Mitchell, Makani, and Frankie constantly used parts of the article to support what they were saying. They got everyone to read the portion of the article and then they began to ask many inferential questions themselves. Leonard asked if learning about drinking was like learning about history – if only particular things are taught then do we only have a certain perception of things? Tamara began to wonder if our behavior about drinking (binge drinking) is shaped by societies perceptions or attitudes. So, because we can't talk about drugs and alcohol it shapes how people behave – like binge drinking. The class also then began to talk about religion and how religious beliefs contribute to drinking.

Finally, I knew that the curriculum had been a success when I read the students' facilitation self–assessment forms. Among other things they were required to reply to the following statement – describe one new thing that you learned from being a facilitator and one new thing that you learned from the group you facilitated. The following are vignettes from their responses.

> I learned that being a facilitator requires a lot of listening. If you miss one answer you could be left out of the whole rotation of opinions. I learned to listen no matter what, so you don't have to stress later on. I learned from our group that I was wrong to assume that everyone was interested in alcohol consumption. Of all people I thought Kahai would be interested and want to participate. It turned out that this topic wasn't relevant to his life at all. That's what I learned from the group I facilitated today.

> …I also learned that everyone in the group has different points of views for their responses so I have to accept them all – from Rob's religious points of view to Mitchell's own experiences.

> I learned that it is not easy to be a facilitator

because you have to keep the discussion flowing.

I learned that being a facilitator isn't easy. You have to do so much you end up forgetting what your job entails. I learned that the group you facilitate will always come up with a question that will really make you think, and you won't always think of all of their questions.

You have to have confidence in your topic and questions and have control of the students. There are always a lot of assumptions being made by people.

It's sort of hard to facilitate, I will be more grateful to my teachers.

Are these the voices of a student led revolt against discussions? No, in fact, by the end of the year, when they were required to co–facilitate their own discussions, they were diving head first into the challenge. Was it "too hard," like one girl had complained the first time I experimented with P4C? Well, it was hard but as I explained, when my students were given the right steps to achieve a standard that was set for them it wasn't "too" hard as evidenced in each of their co–facilitated discussions with their peers. Was I "making them do college work," like another boy had whined at the beginning of this effort? Maybe, it was college work because intellectual discussions are at the heart of a college education. However, being able to have an effective discussion with the people that you live with in the world goes beyond college.

In our daily lives oral communication is the most prevalent form of human interaction. On any given day we discuss a variety of topics with our families, friends, the people we work with, government officials, the guy at the counter of a convenience store, the people we love and the people that we experience the most conflict with in our lives. In so many of these contexts people in general, let alone teenagers, feel thwarted in their ability to solve problems or really express themselves. This is why practicing discussion, and the art of facilitating good discussions is a crucial practice for the classroom teacher. Inquiry–based discussions provide the most relevant learning because they mirror the reality of our social world.

From my colleagues, I eventually heard a lot less criticism and instead more dialogue about how P4C has developed in our school community. I knew things had changed when a science teacher sacrificed her measly thirty–minute lunch break to visit my classroom. "What are you doing with your students?" I had been accustomed to a culture of negativity and as I was about to ask her for clarification she replied. "They always come to science on Friday, after your class, passionately dialoguing about some deep social issue.

Tell me how you get them so excited." This is when it became clear that P4C was changing the face of our school culture. Could this enthusiasm about bettering the way we look at schools grow beyond the chicken wire fences of our country school? I was beginning to think so.

The more that I work on facilitation of discussions with teenagers, the more I realize how important my job is. If teenagers are the next generation to change the world, don't we want them to have the skills to talk about the world's issues with one another? Most centers of power in our world operate within a context that requires their participants engage in discussions. For example, the United Nations is one of, if not the most important forum for world change and the global positioning of nations. Members of the United Nations must be able to have effective discussions in order to resolve world conflict. An example more specific to our country is the political ideal of democracy, and discussion is a requirement for the perpetuation of this ideal. Keeping these two examples of discussion–based realities in mind, I wonder, why is it that within our own communities, especially our schools, we rarely give our students a space to critically discuss issues?

Discussion-based classrooms will change the world— for the better. P4C provides the essential framework to make this change happen. However, it is up to teachers to take this program, and experiment with it in their own unique classrooms. Today's students, diverse as they are, must have a common language that allows them to talk about their differences with one another in an intellectually safe and rigorous way. As individual teachers like myself draw on the foundations that P4C has to offer, we can provide our students with the tools to change the world that they so desperately desire. Just as I strive to change certain aspects of the Hawaii State School system I know my students are already changing certain aspects of Hawaii in general—for the better. One thing to keep in mind as you embark on your own journey with your own students: they might revolt at first, but keeping my story in mind, remember—with a little encouragement anyone can go anywhere.

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