

# Making Sense of Evaluation of P4C

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In today's world, the word "Evaluation" has become a frequently used word in day-to-day conversation. Sometimes that word brings pressure or a burden to the people who are to be evaluated, and anxiety or uneasiness to the one who must conduct it. Nevertheless, generally there is a compelling need for people to evaluate in order to know whether the time and effort spent on someone or something has been worthwhile or generated the expected result or profit. For instance, in business, people conduct evaluation to find out how much the ROI (Return On Investment) of the time, labor and material cost in producing a product or service. The result of such evaluation would determine whether to continue the production. Similarly, teachers give a test to evaluate whether the time spent or pedagogy used in teaching has shown an improvement in his or her students' performance. However it is important to ask, can everything be evaluated in systematic ways that generate reliable results and show worth or effectiveness?

In promoting and developing philosophy for children or P4C in the schools in Hawaii, it has always been a great challenge to find ways to evaluate or measure its effectiveness, particularly on how it makes a difference to the students. Often, the aim of the evaluation is generating hard data to backup the substantial number of anecdotes that have been received over these years. The desired result has been evidence of how to show that P4C fosters the growth of thinking or reasoning skills and how that growth is quantitatively shown on students' academic performance, i.e. making a satisfactory improvement on their test scores. However, the question remains, does developing thinking or reasoning necessarily result in the improvement of test scores? Or is improvement of test scores necessarily due to the growth in thinking and reasoning skills? If the answer to the questions is "no" or "not sure", then it's important, especially for P4C, to consider whether spending effort doing evaluations to generate such "hard data" is appropriate.

## Evaluation—What and What's for?

Matthew Lipman states in his article '*Philosophy for Children and Critical Thinking*' that, through the community of inquiry, P4C is promoting critical thinking, which is: self-correcting, sensitive-to-context and leading to the making of judgements through reliance upon criteria.<sup>1</sup> This in-

volves strengthening children's ability to make practical judgments that are based on reasonableness and a sense of proportion. What does it mean to make a judgment that is reasonable? Can someone who possesses good reasoning skills make a reasonable judgment? According to John C. Thomas, "Being reasonable means something more than having reasoning skills. One who is reasonable has internalized the practice of reason and adopted it as a fundamental value for herself or himself. Hence they will begin to value the reasonableness of thinking, both in themselves and in others. In learning to value it, they learn to think for themselves."<sup>2</sup> To be able to think for oneself is to be sensitive-to-context and to make criteria based judgments. Sensitivity to context is obligatory in a community of inquiry, so that the uniqueness of particular contexts can be properly respected. Hence certain rules are not always followed if they are inappropriate to a given situation. Matthew Lipman states: "Thinking that is not sensitive to context is blundering and obtuse; thinking that is not self-correcting can easily become uncritical and unreasonable."<sup>3</sup> Thus, evaluation of P4C, instead of investigating the development of thinking and reasoning skills, should focus on how or whether students are developing ability to think for themselves and be reasonable.

Teachers in Hawaii who have practiced P4C with their students for some years state that P4C provides an environment where inquiry naturally takes place and students help each other to nurture the ability to think cooperatively and reflectively, rather than competitively. Through the community of inquiry, students are also provided a chance to learn not only how to think but also how to respect and care. Elaine Roumasset,<sup>4</sup> thinks that the kind of thinking that has been developed through P4C is "4C's thinking"—Critical, Creative, Caring<sup>5</sup> and Children thinking. After years of having P4C in their classroom, many teachers agree with Elaine. Especially when they witness for themselves chil-

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dren responding to problems or issues encountered in ways that indicate P4C has taught them not merely a set of thinking or reasoning skills, but something more complex as expressed by the concept of 4C's.

It has become apparent that P4C helps to develop thinking habits and dispositions, and not just skills. Thus, if P4C is not primarily aiming at teaching simply skills or knowledge of thinking or reasoning, then it is not appropriate to evaluate its effectiveness simply through an external skill-based measuring tool. Dr. Thomas Jackson also states that, "Social interaction dimensions of a reflective community of inquiry are completely missed by the test as are oral communication and carry-over into other content areas, all important indicators of whether the P4C has been successful."<sup>6</sup> Unlike learning a certain subject like Math or Physics which to know whether it's been mastered, students can be evaluated by testing, the ability to think, particularly to think for oneself can not simply be validated through testing or the increase of test score. Arthur L. Costa has rightly argued that, "To make a pattern of intellectual behaviors habitual, requires time—time beyond that required for one problem-solving task, one lesson, one unit, one class, or even one school year. Students must encounter, practice, and reflect on these numerous settings using a variety of contents and with adequate time for self-evaluation."<sup>7</sup> Therefore, evaluation cannot be a one-time effort with a single measuring tool that anticipates a particular result.




**Evaluation—Part of the Inquiry process**




Dr. Jackson, who utilizes the steps of inquiry in the




community referred to as "Plain Vanilla" or "Ordinary Rice," has put "Evaluation" as the last step. However, this step is essential not in terms of finding how well students have mastered the inquiry process or whether the inquiry process has resulted in any desired outcome, but emphasizing self-reflection of the community on its sessions together. This practice of reflection, which makes possible self-correction, is the real essence of evaluation. It means that through evaluation people systematically reflect on their own learning process. In this sense, evaluation is no longer seen as an external tool to inspect the effectiveness of the process, but a way to make the process more effective. Therefore, it's imperative for the teacher or facilitator to devote sufficient time to do the evaluation at the end of each P4C session. In that process children are given a chance to exercise and internalize reflective thinking through recalling how they were doing in the session. There are two major elements they evaluate in P4C, one is **Community** (listening, participation and being intellectually safe), the other is **Inquiry** (maintaining focus, scratching beneath the surface, learning new thing, challenging the thinking and being interesting).<sup>8</sup> This process is very powerful especially in helping children to be more aware of how they are supposed be in a community of inquiry and by recalling these criteria, they gain deeper self-knowledge. Joann Soong,<sup>9</sup> teacher at AlaWai Elementary, always starts her P4C session by picking one or two of the evaluation criteria to discuss in the community. She sees the importance of having the children decide for themselves or develop their own definition on what constitutes a good community of inquiry. To start a session, she usually invites the stu-




**Chart 1.1 — P4C Student Evaluation**

Student's Name (optional): Gill Grade: 1  
 School: Waikiki School Teacher: Ms. Tam

1. I enjoyed doing philosophy (P4C) in class this year.  
    
 Explain with reasons or examples:  
I enjoy doing P4C because it helps me learn better things and write new words.

2. Philosophy has helped me become a better thinker.  
    
 Explain with reasons or examples:  
It helped me think better because we can think and talk in P4C. It helps me to become a better reader and thinker too.

3. Philosophy has helped me to respect others and their ideas.  
    
 Explain with reasons or examples:  
I think I can respect other people's ideas, because they may not think what you like, and what they like.

4. Philosophy has helped me become a better listener.  
    
 Explain with reasons or examples:  
It has made me a better listener, because it helped me to listen to Ms. Tam better.

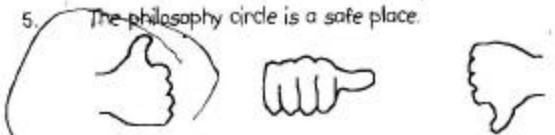



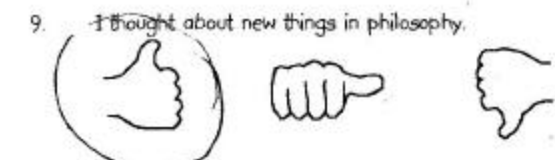
<p>5. The philosophy circle is a safe place.</p> 	<p>Explain with reasons or examples:  <u>I think its a safe place</u>  <u>because every person gets a turn, and</u>  <u>I feel good to speak to other people.</u></p>
<p>6. I have used/talked about philosophy outside of class.</p> 	<p>Explain with reasons or examples:  <u>I think its so so because</u>  <u>we dont talk about philosophy</u>  <u>really that much out side</u></p>
<p>7. Philosophy has helped me understand things about myself.</p> 	<p>Explain with reasons or examples:  <u>It helps me learn about</u>  <u>my body parts. Because some</u>  <u>parts I didnt know yet.</u></p>
<p>8. Philosophy has helped me participate in class discussions.</p> 	<p>Explain with reasons or examples:  <u>It helps me participate</u>  <u>because it gives me more</u>  <u>ideas in class.</u></p>
<p>9. I thought about new things in philosophy.</p> 	<p>Explain with reasons or examples:  <u>I think that I thought</u>  <u>about new things is P4C</u></p>

Chart 1.2

### Evaluation—End of School Year Evaluation

dents to come up with a rubric or parameters of certain evaluation criterion. For instance, she would ask, “How do we *listen* to others or how do we know others *listen* to us?” or “How do we know that we are in a *safe community*?” or “What makes a topic of discussion *interesting*?” When answering those questions, students give reasons or examples. In that process, students internalize the evaluation criteria and apply them throughout the session. Hence at the end of the session, they can better judge and reflect on what has gone well and not so well, what are the reasons and how it can be improved next time. Laurie Tam,<sup>10</sup> teacher at Wai-kiki Elementary, also reinforces the importance of the evaluation criteria in P4C session by calling her students' attention to each criterion when she notices either good examples or lapses during the session. For instance, she would say, “I like the way Brandon repeated what Mitchell said. That means he was *listening*” or “I think what Sophia just said is *very interesting*, does everybody agree?” or “I don't think we are *maintaining focus* here, what do you think?” These efforts help students see the importance of each criterion and build the habit of self-reflection and the ability to be self-corrective. “Authentic evaluative acts involve action of valuing, which includes reflection on what is valued, which implies evaluating what is valued as an expression of concern for it.”<sup>11</sup>

As part of the effort to know and understand what needs further improvement in P4C materials and methods so as to help students and teachers, Dr. Jackson has also designed an “End of School Year Evaluation” form. The form is a written extension version of the verbal evaluation conducted at the end of each P4C session (See sample of the form at Chart 1-1 to Chart 1-3). In the evaluation form, students are not only asked to rate themselves through circling the thumbs' sign, but also offered the opportunity to give reasons and examples in writing. The rating results provide a rough quantitative idea of what the students think in general about P4C and give an overview of the areas that need attention or improvement in the future (See the sample of the rating tabulation at Chart 1-4). The written answers provide an understanding of the reasons behind the rating tabulation. They also give evidence of how the students are able to incorporate the Good Thinker's Toolkit or the evaluation criteria for community and inquiry into their thinking processes. In addition, their writing provides further evidence of the students' ability to make reasonable judgments and think for themselves. Yet another contribution from the written answers is an opportunity to discover the thinking of some students who have not been talking or sharing during P4C sessions.

In evaluating early elementary grade students who have not yet learned how to write, teachers collect evidence





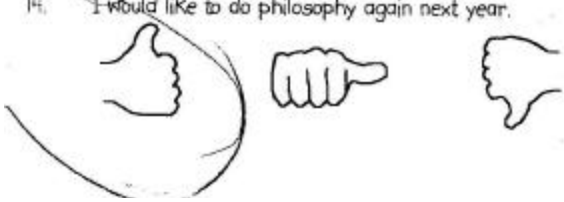
<p>10. I thought about things in a different way in philosophy.</p> 	<p>Explain with reasons or examples:  <u>I did so because</u>  <u>I think most things</u>  <u>that people say in P4C.</u></p>
<p>11. Philosophy showed me how people can think together.</p> 	<p>Explain with reasons or examples:  <u>I picked so because</u>  <u>sometimes people go of the</u>  <u>subject.</u></p>
<p>12. Philosophy is a good thing for kids to do in school.</p> 	<p>Explain with reasons or examples:  <u>I picked good because it</u>  <u>helped me think better and</u>  <u>to write more things in</u>  <u>my journal.</u></p>
<p>13. It was helpful having a philosophy teacher (Chip, Dr. J, Jung-Yeup, Ben...) come to our class.</p> 	<p>Explain with reasons or examples:  <u>I picked good because</u>  <u>they help us learn new</u>  <u>things.</u></p>
<p>14. I would like to do philosophy again next year.</p> 	<p>Explain with reasons or examples:  <u>I picked good because</u>  <u>it helped me do more</u>  <u>things. It is also fun to do</u>  <u>because it helped me</u>  <u>think better.</u></p>

Chart 1.3

through paying close attention to the interactions in the classroom and record these observations in a journal. For upper elementary, Year-end Evaluation can be done by asking the students to write a short essay. The students are asked to describe in the essay what they think of P4C. Their essays often reveal the extent to which they have internalized the evaluation criteria, i.e. listening, intellectual safety, scratching beneath the surface, thinking harder, etc. (See sample of the essay at Chart 2-1). Some teachers ask their students to keep a journal from the beginning to the end of the school year. From these journals, the teachers know what the students think about P4C and evaluate the progress of their thinking or reasoning by comparing the content of their writings. (See sample of the journal's comparison at Chart 2-2 and 2-3).

### Conclusion

In P4C, "Evaluation" is meant to be something that students both enjoy doing and benefit from. For instance, students will spontaneously evaluate themselves not only during P4C sessions but also in other subjects and even into their own lives. Hence "Evaluation" is not simply an external measurement tool, but a habit-building tool that works to anchor student's mind on the value of reflective thinking

and self-knowledge.

### Endnotes

1. Lipman, Matthew, "Philosophy for Children and Critical Thinking", *Philosophy for Children: Where We Are Now: Supplement Two* (Montclair: IAPC, Montclair State University), p. S12.
2. Thomas, John C. "Development of Reasoning in Children", *Studies in Philosophy for Children: Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*, Ed. Ann Margaret Sharp & Ronald F. Reed (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), pp.102-103.
3. Lipman, p. S12.
4. See Elaine Roumasset's article in this issue.
5. P4C emphasizes the concept of Caring Thinking, see Matthew Lipman, "Caring Thinking"
6. Jackson, Thomas E., "1990-1991 Evaluation Report of Philosophy for Children in Hawaii", *Thinking: The Journal of Philosophy for Children*, Vol.10, No.4, p. 36.
7. Costa, Arthur L. & Bena Kallick, "Building a System for Assessing Thinking", *Developing Minds: A Resource Book for Teaching Thinking*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed., Ed. Arthur L. Costa (Alexandria: ASCD, 2001), pp. 518.
8. Thomas E. Jackson, *A Guide for Teachers* (Unpublished Manual) pp. 16.
9. See Joann Soong's article in this issue.
10. See Laurie Tam's article in this issue.
11. Bernstein, Juan Carlos Lago, "Toward an Understanding of Matthew Lipman's Concept of Caring Thinking", *Thinking: The Journal of Philosophy for Children*, Vol.16, No.3, p. 18.