

Exploring the Impact of Philosophy for Children Lessons on the Communication and Thinking Skills in a Primary School

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Abstract

This action research project investigates the views and experiences of two groups of learners of Philosophy for Children (P4C) sessions in the Spring and Summer terms of 2018. Both class groups were in Key Stage 2; one in Year 6 and one in Year 3, in a primary school with a mixed catchment in terms of socio-economic backgrounds and a Free School Meal (FSM) percentage of 38%. The research interest lay in examining learners' attitudes to their own learning, how they perceived themselves as learners and whether engaging in P4C made a difference to those attitudes. The results of the study, supported by quantitative and qualitative data, was very positive, showing that P4C did indeed have a positive influence on them.

This report also assesses the pedagogy of P4C in practice and how it links to the new Curriculum for Wales. It suggests that the desired learning outcomes of P4C support the ideals of the new curriculum and also provides a model for excellent teaching and learning within the context of the wider curriculum.

P4C is considered as a thinking skills programme. The research looked at quantitative data in terms of end of Key Stage levels for the Year 6 group, making comment on how percentages of Level 5+ in English oracy in particular have increased compared to previous trends.

The study is presented as an evaluation of P4C as a pedagogical approach in which the study of facilitation and the opinions of the facilitators are explored in terms of their professional development. It concludes that there is evidence that P4C sessions are successful in their own right; but not only that, in terms of developing a school curriculum, P4C is a valid pedagogical approach for raising learners' self-confidence and attitudes to themselves as learners. The new Curriculum for Wales has at its heart the four core purposes of developing: ambitious, capable learners; healthy, confident individuals; enterprising, creative contributors; and ethically informed citizens. P4C shares those principles.

Introduction

My specific case study is a primary school in a small town with a free-school meal percentage of 38% and will be referred to as *School A* throughout this report. In order to examine the effectiveness of Philosophy for Children (P4C) as a sound curriculum-wide pedagogy, I had the opportunity to conduct empirical research in *School A*. I was particularly interested in exploring P4C as a pedagogy which gave the learners some control over their learning in a spirit of collaboration and co-enquiry with their peers. Throughout the process of researching, I began to understand that P4C goes beyond a 'subject to be taught', more that it has at its heart the very elements which provide excellent pedagogical practice.

Two aspects of P4C are co-enquiry and critical thinking. The action research investigated the benefits P4C has on learners' confidence, oracy skills and to establish its place in the proposed new curriculum in Wales. I was also interested in how P4C could improve the range of teacher questioning and facilitation.

Based on my findings and from the reading of research in this area, I can see the research has implications for being developed within the cluster primary schools and across phase into the local secondary school. At present, P4C is not widely established in the local area and *School A*, where most of my research was carried out, has the opportunity to lead good practice and provide support to other schools.

To develop a sound pedagogy is extremely important within a school. Not only does it shape the learning opportunities for the pupils but also creates learning opportunities for the teaching staff in terms of their own knowledge and practice.

'Philosophy for Children is possibly the most positively evaluated thinking skills programme' (Wegerif, 2010).

Philosophy for Children is recognised as a thorough pedagogy with considerable academic pedigree. Professor Matthew Lipman and Ann Margaret Sharp who designed the concept of P4C in the 1960s, frustrated by students lack of engagement with learning and thinking, was influenced by educationalists and philosophers such as Vygotsky, Piaget, Dewey as well as the tradition of Socratic dialogue.

It is a pedagogical approach where learners participate in groups dialogues focused on philosophical issues. The issues are prompted by some kind of stimulus (for example an

object, film clip or story) and are based around a 'big question' usually with a moral focus. The purpose of P4C is to encourage children to become willing to ask questions, construct arguments and engage in reasoned discussions.

There is often a mis-understanding about what P4C actually is and why it is relevant and indeed important for children today to engage in philosophical enquiry. It is important here to state that P4C is not the teaching of philosophy. Learners are not being taught the musings of Plato and Socrates but are focussing on dialogic teaching. Learners are encouraged to use exploratory dialogue in the classroom. They are empowered and encouraged to explore the 'bigger picture', developing questioning and reasoning skills and encouraged to not just accept the first thought and solution. P4C is not intended as a strategy to improve maths, reading and literacy, but research has shown that improvements are evident in these areas. This research will be explored throughout this assignment. P4C is designed to prepare children and communities for their futures as critical citizens in a challenging society. Enquiry is not just about forming questions, rather an extended process which starts with questioning and then further relies upon reasoning to explore and evaluate answers. It is also not just another strategy to tick the pupil voice box which is a danger point in principle point 10 in chapter 5 of *Successful Futures* (Donaldson, 2015). Whilst it encourages a 'community of enquiry' where the participants (i.e. the teacher and pupils) develop ideas, it draws on interests, concepts and issues (Campbell, 1993). Children can offer insights into their learning (Rudduck & Flutter, 2004), but enabling children to choose their own topics without knowledge or experience can lead to a lack of rich learning experiences (Rutherford, 2016). They need a 'springboard for learning'. This is where the role of teacher-facilitator is hugely important. By teachers choosing the stimuli and focus for an enquiry, will extend the boundaries of the teaching and learning experience (Husbands & Pearce, 2012).

I have conducted my own action research this year on the effects of P4C on pupils' well-being and attitudes to learning and I will explore that later in this assignment.

Literature Review

“To my mind, education is the spirit of enquiry, the ability to keep one’s heart and mind open to beauty and goodness, indeed all that surrounds us; to be able to think and judge for oneself.” (Gandhi, 1976)

This report aims to consider the opportunities and challenges for developing Philosophy for Children as a pedagogy to deliver the Curriculum for Wales by examining research and literature to support its case. I also explored how it fits into the recommendations proposed by Donaldson in his review (Donaldson, 2015). It also examines the impact P4C has had on pupil attitudes to learning and their well-being as well as the impact on teacher facilitation and questioning.

The need for change and the reasons why pedagogy needs to be addressed has been discussed in research by Fullan and Langworthy. Their work highlights the problems currently facing the education systems around the world and these are echoed in Wales, hence the need for change (Fullan & Langworthy, 2013). They show that education systems generally need to consider what it is they want as their ultimate learning goals, also considering what approach they will use if effective change is to occur and all learners are able to achieve high standards. These goals should go far beyond the ‘traditional’ elements of literacy and numeracy – encompassing new skills fit for the future, new approaches to teaching and learning or in their words “a new pedagogy”. Defining pedagogy is difficult as there are many conflicting views as to what’s best and how learning is supported by each. This is supported by Mortimore (Mortimore, 1999) and later Waring and Evans (Waring & Evans, 2014). It could be argued that unless a new pedagogy is adopted, our learners will become increasingly bored and teachers increasingly frustrated. Coupled with the fact that technology is developing at pace and its usefulness as a tool to create new learning possibilities is huge, there is a danger Wales will be left behind in global development.

Pedagogy and its impact is not new. Much discussion has occurred as to why changes have not been actioned given the amount of research behind its importance (Francis, 2011) and (Barrett, et al., 2015).

It is important to examine what pedagogy is and why it needs to be addressed in association with the development of a new curriculum for Wales. Alexander sums up the importance of

'talk' as being one of the '*essential tools of teaching*' with talk being '*arguably the foundation of learning*' (Alexander, 2006).

This research proposes that P4C and Thinking Skills development is a sound pedagogical approach which I believe enables teachers and learners to fully engage with teaching and learning in an authentic context. I have also examined how P4C fits with Donaldson's pedagogical principles and core purposes.

Wegerif's research concluded that the teaching thinking is important and that reports from around the world indicate that those higher-level skills such as problem solving, creativity and learning to learn are crucial for future economic growth e.g. World Bank, 2011 (Wegerif, et al., 2015).

'Beyond this, there is also widespread recognition that dispositions required for good thinking such as resilience, tolerance, creativity and reasonableness are also essential to personal and collective well-being in an increasingly globalised world.'

(OECD, 2014).

Carol McGuinness examined the importance of developing a thinking skills curriculum. The Department for Education and Employment in October 1998, commissioned a review and evaluation of research into thinking skills. They did this by analysing what is meant by thinking skills and their role in the learning process; identifying approaches in developing children's thinking, evaluating their effectiveness; considering how teachers might be able to integrate thinking skills within their subject and cross-curricular; and identifying the role of ICT to promote a positive approach to thinking skills and to evaluate the general direction of research in this area. They came to the conclusions that there should be a framework for thinking skills and that they should be made explicit in the curriculum through collaborative learning and creating dispositions and habits of good thinking as well as infused across the curriculum; and that the more successful programmes have a strong theoretical history with explicit pedagogy and good teacher support (McGuinness, 1999).

McGuinness argues teaching and allowing students the opportunity to develop their thinking skills in specific subjects and their application across the curriculum is very important as they develop a person's thinking to a qualitatively higher level. She states that learners should be taught explicitly how to do it. She highlights specific results of the importance of including thinking skills in the curriculum where learners become active

creators of their knowledge; thinking supports cognitive processing which makes for better learning. It enables learners to go beyond the information given, deal systematically and flexibly with problems and to adopt a critical attitude to information. There are implications for the teachers as high-quality thinking comes from designing learning opportunities which are open-ended and with some degree of uncertainty to allow learners to explore meaning and produce multiple solutions. It is also essential for teachers to allow time to think. This is something teachers often do not allow, demanding quick responses. McGuinness states that increasingly it is recognised that pupils' thinking has positive effects on teacher thinking and for developing a positive ethos in schools as learning communities. Therefore, by introducing a 'thinking' based pedagogy not only benefits the learners, but also has positive effects on the teachers.

In the *Successful Futures* review of the Welsh curriculum, Professor Graham Donaldson touched on the subject of pedagogy in chapter 5 (Donaldson, 2015). He makes it clear in his review that he is not advocating a specific pedagogical approach and that decisions about teaching should be taken by the teachers themselves. Indeed, as Alexander states, a variety of approaches allows for a variety of objectives in teaching (Alexander, 2008). However, I feel it is important for schools to adopt specific pedagogical styles. Teachers rarely have the opportunity, or perhaps desire, for researching methods and will often rely upon approaches they have always used regardless of their effectiveness. Action research is seen as innovative as discussed by Dimmock and encouraged by Stenhouse many years before, (Dimmock, 2016) and (Stenhouse, 1975). Schools need to empower and encourage teachers to undertake research and reading so they can choose an approach suitable for the learners in their communities. To get a return, schools need to make an investment in their staff (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013). This time to train and reflect is very important and provides the value-added measure considered by Donaldson himself (Donaldson, 2010). In *Successful Futures*, Donaldson has since put forward twelve pedagogical principles which he believes are essential components of a whole school pedagogical approach.

From developing P4C in *School A*, and from observations in other settings, I suggest that adopting P4C and a thinking skills pedagogical approach readily incorporates eight of his recommendations explicitly.

Principle 3: *‘Good teaching and learning means employing a blend of approaches including those that promote problem solving, creative and critical thinking.’* (Donaldson, 2015)

The OECD and Donaldson recognise that the curriculum should give emphasis to:

‘developing the ability of children and young people to critically evaluate information, make connections, develop deep conceptual understanding and transfer knowledge and skills to new situations to solve complex problems in a creative way.’ (OECD, 2008).

Principle 4: P4C is indeed a pedagogy that makes full use of wider skills within and across each Area of Learning and Experience, particularly problem solving, creative and critical thinking. It is a way to activate powerful learning for our learners. This is important in raising an excitement for learning so that we do not see a trend for disaffected learners and teachers (Fullan and Langworthy 2013).

Principle 5 and 6: Mick Waters describes good teaching as bringing ‘the world into range’. It is important that children and young people see the relevance in their learning to the world beyond the school gates and that opportunities are taken to forge links to that world (Waters, 2013).

This leads onto **principle eight** where Donaldson believes that one of the defining features of twenty-first century education will be the ability to make connections and transfer knowledge and understanding across different contexts in order to address unfamiliar problems (OECD, 2013).

Principle 10: ‘Metacognition, or ‘learning to learn’, can help learners to take greater control of their own learning’ (Trust, n.d.). Robert Fisher’s research concludes that dialogic enquiry is a primary thinking skill from which other skills follow, that Philosophy for Children approaches provide effective methods for dialogic teaching that can support and develop children’s capacities for cognition and metacognition (Fisher, 2007).

Principle 11: P4C allows learners to explore local and global issues, the ‘big picture’ encouraging ethically, informed citizens to develop. Good teaching and learning should support positive social and emotional development promoting good relationships. P4C research supports the OECD report’s recommendation ‘... learning cannot – and should not – be understood as a purely cognitive activity: practitioners need to be aware of and

responsive to students' emotions and motivations for successful learning to happen... They need to feel competent to do what is expected of them and learn better when they experience positive emotions' (OECD, 2013).

Principle 12: The ability to function effectively as a member of a team is one of the key skills regularly cited by employers as essential in the modern workplace and is an important feature of the Review's proposals. Cooperative learning is also very important. Hattie's research concludes that, '...cooperative learning is effective'. He cites a range of research evidence that highlights the positive effects of peer learning on motivation, problem solving and achievement (Hattie, 2009). Again, P4C relies heavily on cooperative learning, listening to each other and therefore learning from each other.

The 4Cs are a concept which are explored in P4C. They talk about 'Collaborative', 'Caring', 'Critical' and 'Creative' thinking. The participants are encouraged to explore and analyse their thinking in these four ways. It also gives the teacher/facilitator to focus on specific types of thinking too.

Research and studies from Jenkins and previously Willms involving many countries show within the secondary sector, less than 40% of upper secondary students are intellectually engaged (Jenkins, 2013) and (Willms, et al., 2009). Related to this trend, signs of teacher frustration and low morale are growing. Evidence from their research show that in the U.S. for example, the percentage of teachers who are satisfied with teaching has plummeted from 65% to 38% from 2008 to 2012. They claim that 'teachers and students are psychologically if not literally being pushed out of school'.

I have confidence that the new Curriculum for Wales has the power to turn the trend of disaffected learners, and indeed teachers, around. The aim with the new curriculum is to prepare our young people with the skills they need to be life-long learners; creative, connected and collaborative problem solvers; healthy and ambitious, able to make ethical and informed decisions. Fullan highlights 'deep learning' skills which are echoed in Donaldson's Successful Futures. What is needed is a 'new pedagogy' to allow this deep learning to occur.

I have shown in the table (*fig .1*) below how the two are inter-related:

Donaldson 4 Core Purposes	Fullan's Deep Learning Skills
Healthy, confident individuals	Character education — honesty, self-regulation and responsibility, perseverance, empathy for contributing to the safety and benefit of others, self-confidence, personal health and well-being, career and life skills.
Ambitious, Capable learners	Communication — communicate effectively orally, in writing and with a variety of digital tools; listening skills.
Enterprising, creative contributors	Creativity and imagination — economic and social entrepreneurialism, considering and pursuing novel ideas, and leadership for action.
Ethical, informed citizens	Citizenship — global knowledge, sensitivity to and respect for other cultures, active involvement in addressing issues of human and environmental sustainability; Collaboration — work in teams, learn from and contribute to the learning of others, social networking skills, empathy in working with diverse others.

Fig. 1

It is clear that the new Welsh curriculum core purposes have been born out of an understanding that research into learning is important.

Methodology and work plan

In order to examine the effectiveness of P4C as a sound curriculum-wide pedagogy, I conducted empirical research in *School A*, a primary school in a small town with a free-school meal percentage of 38%. The school is currently working towards the Sapere 'silver award', so P4C has been established for about four years. At the launch, all staff were trained to level 1, but due to staff changes, new staff are yet to be trained. Two members of staff who lead P4C are trained to level 2b.

There were two main objectives to this project:

1. To investigate the impact of P4C on learners' oracy, creative thinking, 'closing the gap' between boys' and girls' achievement, FSM pupils and those not in receipt of FSM. It would also assess the impact on attitudes to learning and learners' self-esteem.
2. To improve my own delivery of enquiry-based approaches and use of higher order questioning.

Current school data showed that boys and FSM pupils underperform and the School Development Plan targeted increases in numbers at Level 5 at the end of Key Stage 2.

I decided to focus on two classes, Year 3 and Year 6 where there was a need to increase oracy levels and more particularly the learners' attitudes to their learning and self-confidence. I was particularly interested in exploring P4C as a pedagogy which gave the learners some control over their learning in a spirit of collaboration and co-enquiry with their peers. Two aspects of P4C are co-enquiry and critical thinking. The action research investigated the benefits P4C has on learners' confidence, oracy skills and to establish its place in the proposed new curriculum in Wales. I was also interested in how P4C could improve the range of teacher questioning and facilitation. The P4C sessions were conducted by a teacher with the Year 3 class and an HLTA in the Year 6 class.

1. Initially I carried out an initial analysis of data: Free School (FSM), More Able and Talented (MAT), Additional Learning Needs (ALN), oracy levels as baseline data preparation.

I audited current practice within the school to see where P4C could be embedded in teaching and learning in a meaningful manner.

Pupils completed 'How I see myself' questionnaires; Data was analysed and scored;

I delivered input in staff and governors' meetings to outline to project.

2. I arranged a learning visit to a school on the 'Going for Gold' Sapere pathway – a school similar in nature to *School A* in terms of its socio-economic background. Here I was able to observe P4C being delivered throughout the school and interview pupils from Year 2 – Year 6.

Weekly P4C sessions were delivered, variety of evidence gathered in terms of questionnaires completed by all pupils, photographs, planning, samples of work, evaluations and observations.

3. Finally, analysis of all data and post-intervention data capture from pupils, teachers and facilitators was carried out. Feedback to the staff and Governors will occur on completion of this report.

The questionnaires and all work were analysed within Ethical Guidance for Educational Research outlined by the British Educational Research (BERA, 2011). All data and references to specific schools and pupils have been anonymised and no sensitive personal data was captured; Teacher/facilitator confidentiality and anonymity was maintained throughout; letters were sent out to all parents of the target groups to inform them the research would be carried out, giving them opportunity to opt out when/where necessary; pupils were made aware they could withdraw from the study at any point if they wished; digital permission forms were sent to parents/carers before any recordings were made; raw data was stored on encrypted devices only accessible to myself as the researcher and was destroyed at the end of the project.

Within the Year 6 class were a particular group of girls whose self-esteem was of particular concern to the class teacher. It did not reflect their actual abilities. This is evident from the analysis of the initial questionnaire (*see Appendix 1*). Class size - 26; FSM - 31%; boys - 10; girls - 16; ALN - 5 pupils.

The Year 3 class were also chosen to assess the effects on attitudes to learning of transition from the Foundation Phase into Key Stage 2. It also provides a baseline for further tracking

and research as the cohort moves throughout the phase. Class size - 24; FSM - 37.5%; boys - 9; girls - 15; ALN - 7 pupils.

The project took place during the Spring and Summer terms of 2018. The initial data analysis of baseline information, e.g. FSM, MAT, SEN details were carried out first and a programme of specific P4C sessions were planned for both classes and delivered weekly in the Summer term. P4C however is well-established in *School A*, having been introduced 4 years ago and, at the time, all staff trained to Sapere Level 1.

The timeframe for this specific research has been relatively short to be able to assess a true picture of the overall impact. It is very difficult to quantify feelings, well-being and attitudes to learning, and it is certainly something which can be best measured over a long period of time, following the same cohort through whole phases. In this study, the staff involved in facilitating the sessions were well-trained and both held a strong belief in the validity of P4C as a sound pedagogical method. The difficulty in adopting it as a whole school strategy is the turn-over of staff, keeping training up-to-date and teacher confidence in delivering sessions which allow the pupils more independence.

Examples of the questionnaire and the children's responses can be found in *Appendix 3*. *Appendix 2* highlights some of the subjects discussed and formulated by the children themselves.

Analysis and Findings

The initial data from the 'How I See Myself' questionnaire showed interestingly, the pupils scoring lowest on the questionnaire from both year groups (score ≤ 60) are all girls. There are more Year 6 girls ($n=5$) than Year 3 ($n=3$). None of the girls in this group, from either class, fall into the FSM or ALN category. On examination of their responses to the P4C questionnaire however, all of these girls stated how much they enjoy the sessions and how they feel more confident during these sessions than in other lessons. There is no apparent correlation between pupils in receipt of FSM or ALN and how they perceive themselves as learners in either year group. All captured data is presented in a spreadsheet and can be viewed in *Appendix 1*.

After the P4C sessions were complete, the pupils were given a questionnaire to gauge their opinions about P4C; if they enjoyed the sessions and why, what activities they particularly enjoyed, how confident they felt during the sessions, what makes a good thinker and what difference does it make to your confidence and learning if you are a 'good' thinker?

My findings supported the research highlighted in the literature review. The vast majority of pupils really enjoy P4C. Out of the total sample size of 50 pupils, 47 pupils really enjoy P4C lessons, 2 expressed they did not and 1 did not know. The main themes of why they enjoyed P4C sessions were common from both groups and are as follows:

- Calming
- Fun
- Give own opinions
- Share ideas
- Be yourself
- Express your feelings
- Makes you smarter
- Makes you think
- Brings everyone together
- Relaxing
- Express opinions
- Learn something new
- Play games
- Everyone can join in

It would seem that the pupils who enjoy P4C appreciate the opportunity to be able to express their feelings and opinions in an environment where there is no wrong or right answer. They enjoy the collaborative approach of an enquiry and gain confidence in talking and discussing in front of their peers. They also appreciate that you can learn from each other and will often change their opinions based on what they have heard and discussed. Staff agree that pupils' oracy skills improve.

It became clear from interviewing *Teacher A* (who is trained to Sapere Level 2b) that whilst being very sceptical to start with about the possible plausibility of P4C as an approach to developing pupils' attitudes to learning and oracy, she noticed how much the children loved the sessions and how 'in-depth' their discussions became. In terms of assessment, she noticed that not only their oracy levels improved 'dramatically', but also their 'confidence in sharing ideas, discussing and reasoning...'

Teacher B is an HLTA who delivers P4C sessions weekly to the target Year 6 group. From her experience with this group it became obvious how much she advocated it as an excellent approach. She has found that during these sessions, those children who would normally be reluctant to participate in class or speak out in front of their peers had much more confidence in P4C. She also noted how behaviour improved during these sessions. The interview transcripts for both teachers can be found in *Appendix 4*.

From the School Development targets and Estyn recommendation, *School A*, were aiming for at least 32% level 5+. After examining the 'End of Key Stage' data for English level 5+, the percentage for this Year 6 is 62% overall, with 70% achieving Level 5+ in just their oracy for 2018. This year group have been participating in P4C sessions since its introduction to the school 4 years ago.

As part of my action research I was able to visit a school which is currently working towards its 'gold award' from Sapere. It is a school whose work with P4C is regarded as a pedagogical approach throughout the school. P4C is delivered as a discrete lesson weekly, but elements of the P4C approach are also integrated into other subjects so that the pupils are able to apply their skills and not just view them as stand-alone skills which they only use in the context of a formal enquiry. Feedback from the school is that the learners exhibit an increased readiness to learn from before the introduction of P4C. The learners (from Year 2 to Year 6), without exception when questioned, said how much they enjoy P4C and the opportunity to discuss topics in a non-judgemental environment. This supports the findings of the research I have conducted in my own school. Indeed, the school places an emphasis on the importance of P4C, not just as a 'lesson' to be taught, but as a pedagogical approach to underpin the school's ethos. There is a section on their School Development Plan for teaching, learning and assessment where they strive to develop a culture of innovative,

reflective and creative teaching. Within this they highlight the importance of consistency and clarity in delivering initiatives – of which P4C is a part.

Thinking Maps are used in all areas of the curriculum in *School A*. Hyerle and Alper have shown how these visual tools help students organise their thoughts. Circle maps are used at the start of each new topic to facilitate child-led learning (Hyerle, 2011). Bubble maps for describing has had a real impact on the pupils' written work and the descriptive language they use. Evidence shows that these maps have become an essential tool in children's work and they are now associating the language of the maps and independently choosing and using these maps to complete their work. Thinking maps are also used as part of the P4C lessons.

Appendix 2 lists some of the questions developed by the children during P4C sessions. These are some of the questions that the children have discussed. Sometimes the questions children come up with are not always philosophical, but it has been amazing how they develop their thoughts. The concepts discussed are quite complex and some of the children's ideas and thoughts are outstanding.

Appendix 3 summarises the pupils' responses from the questionnaires. There is so much scope to continue the research given the positive results from research evident in literature.

Conclusions

The research and analysis I have been able to conduct has supported the reading and research in the literature review. There is no question that P4C is a positive pedagogical approach to teaching and learning.

To conclude, from the sample, 94% pupils stated how much they enjoy P4C lessons. They stated that they felt they grew in confidence during these lessons and that they enjoyed the fact that they had 'a voice'. The End of Key Stage oracy and overall English results for the Year 6 group show an 100% increase. End of Key Stage data for Year 3 is not yet available, but it would be very interesting to monitor if the Year 6 result is mirrored here.

Using P4C as a pedagogical tool to deliver the new curriculum fits well with the four core purposes. Research has shown that it has a positive effect upon learner confidence and their ability to reason and problem solve. A study by Williams examined the effects of regular P4C lessons on reading comprehension, reasoning skills and intellectual confidence. Pre and post-test comparison showed that the P4C learners made significantly bigger gains than the control pupils. The P4C group also made improvements in reasoning behaviour compared to their 'control group' peers (Williams, 1993). More recent research has supported Williams's research findings. The development of pupils' thinking skills increases their attainment.

'Compared to those in similar schools, Thinking Schools' pupils show the equivalent of an additional grade of GCSE and SATS growth above what was expected of them...'

(Walters, 2018)

Main Messages

For the new Curriculum for Wales (Donaldson, 2015), to be successful, it is vital that schools are on-board with the changes and begin to develop their school curriculum. The school curriculum should reflect their pupils' needs and communities where they are. The four purposes of the new curriculum form the basis for all future decisions about national and local educational priorities and underpin all teaching and learning in Wales.

It is also vital that schools prioritise which initiative they wish to explore and allow time for it to develop in their practice, so that results can be seen and measured. So often new

initiatives are introduced, but appropriate amounts of time are not given for those initiatives to bear fruit.

In order for any pedagogical approach to have an impact, all staff need to implement the strategies and believe wholeheartedly in the benefits of the approach. For this to occur, time and money needs to be invested in quality staff training and a long-term plan for continual updating of knowledge and skills. This is especially the case in *School A* due to the turnover of staff since all staff were trained to Level 1 in P4C five years ago. Close monitoring also needs to occur to ensure there is a consistency of approach and a regularity of delivery of P4C lessons, whether explicit or cross-curricular. However, there is a level of good practice within the school which raises opportunities for peer – peer working and within the cluster.

In our cluster, it is important for our school to share its good practice and results of the research. If consistency can be developed across the cluster, all learners in our community will benefit.

Research carried out by Sharon Friesen and David Scott in 2013 concludes that enquiry-based learning approaches positively impacts on the learners' ability to understand core concepts and procedures, creating a more engaging learning environment (Friesen & Scott, 2013). As a result, 'good' schools are focussing on attitudes and skills which they perceive to make for better understanding by encouraging learner questioning. The approach of 'Essential Questions' encourages a focus on the big ideas which lie at the heart of a topic or subject (McTighe & Wiggins, 2013). These questions are fundamentally the ones P4C aims to elicit from the stimuli used. In terms of traditional subjects, the essential questions seek to examine more open-ended points for discussion.

However, this project has aimed to highlight P4C as a sound pedagogical approach, steeped in research and development. An approach which does adopt a 'blend' of approaches through games, visual stimuli, group, pair and individual work as well as in-depth discussion and enquiry. The approach of P4C I have championed, shows that a philosophical teacher will model and teach good questioning, supporting Furlong's ideals. Learners who have the opportunity to enquire and explore concepts freely will be inspired to become even better learners and members of society. Donaldson's four core purposes demand that learners are

ambitious and capable, enterprising and creative, healthy and confident and ethical and informed. Learners who are encouraged to question, think, debate and reason, in my opinion, achieve those four core purposes and not only have a valuable place in society, but are prepared for a positive and successful future.

P4C is ultimately a way for learners (and it's important to make clear learners of all ages – not just children) as Lipman stated, 'to develop their own philosophy, their own thinking about the world' (Lipman, 2008). I would suggest that every teacher should aspire to philosophical teaching. It's more than just a sound pedagogical approach, it is a way for teachers to practise critical and creative reflection, taking a view of the purposes of their teaching, reflecting on and in their practice. Sutcliffe argues that 'all teachers are better teachers for trying to be more philosophical; it is also that to be a philosophical teacher is, by definition, to aim to be a better teacher' (Sutcliffe & Lewis, 2017). Not only that, but the pupils themselves enjoy it, learn from each other and in the words of an OECD report of 2014:

'Beyond this, there is also widespread recognition that dispositions required for good thinking such as resilience, tolerance, creativity and reasonableness are also essential to personal and collective well-being in an increasingly globalised world.' (OECD, 2014).

Reflections and Next Steps

The process of action research has been extremely valuable to my own practice. It has enabled me to look closely at a specific area of my teaching and the teaching within *School A* particularly and assess its impact and importance to the pupils learning. I do not believe teachers have time or often the inclination to read research and literature into what is expected of us as practitioners to deliver. It is so important to assess the impact of new initiatives on teaching and learning, and to understand the research and finding behind that research. It is for the individual schools and teachers to then critically assess whether those methods fit in their context.

The research has also encouraged me to be more reflective in my own practice. I have had the privilege of visiting excellent schools which has shown me the importance of reflecting and reading literature.

In terms of the pupils, they gain massively from engaging in P4C and learning through its pedagogical approaches in other subjects, becoming deeper thinkers and gaining confidence in exploring concepts. Staff who are involved in facilitating P4C have also benefitted from being part of a community of enquiry – allowing their pupils to have a say and carrying the learning forward in a more independent way.

Whilst working on this project, I have had the opportunity to contribute to a chapter in a forthcoming book on teaching thinking, commissioned by SAGE as well as having collaborated with my university mentor, Dr Helen Lewis, UWTSD, to co-write articles for 'Teach Primary' about P4C lesson ideas (published in January 2018).

I also worked with University of Wales Trinity St David PGCE student teachers in developing the concept of P4C. I was able to be part of a 2-day event where students were introduced to P4C; took part in an enquiry; I presented my action research project to them and then organised a day where they were able to visit *School A* and observe good practice and facilitate a session for themselves. I am grateful for the support and guidance given to me by the university throughout this project, particularly Dr Helen Lewis.

I was also asked to lead a workshop at the Thinking Schools International annual conference where I was able to talk about my research findings and share good practice with colleagues

from a range of educational settings from around the world. Feedback from this workshop was very positive.

As a result of this research I am encouraged to continue with my research and rolling it over whole academic years and phases to fully assess the impact P4C can have on pupil well-being and attitudes to learning. I am interested to also develop links within the cluster of primary schools and transition with Key Stage 3 in terms of P4C and within the ITE sector. As secondary P4C is largely underdeveloped, I would certainly be interested to research how P4C can be developed further in the secondary context and therefore assess its impact on teaching and learning.

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Appendices

Appendix 1:

In the following tables, scores ≤ 60 are highlighted in yellow.

How I See Myself Questionnaire

1. *I'm good at doing tests.*
2. *I like having problems to solve.*
3. *When I'm given new work to do, I usually feel confident I can do it.*
4. *Thinking carefully about your work helps you do it better.*
5. *I'm good at discussing things.*
6. *I need lots of help with my work.*
7. *I like having difficult work to do.*
8. *I get anxious when I have new work to do.*
9. *I think problem solving is fun.*
10. *When I get stuck with my work, I can usually work out what to do next.*
11. *Learning is easy.*
12. *I'm not very good at solving problems.*
13. *I know the meaning of lots of words.*
14. *I usually think carefully about what I've got to do.*
15. *I know how to solve problems that I meet.*
16. *I find a lot of schoolwork difficult.*
17. *I'm clever.*
18. *I know how to be a good learner.*
19. *I like to use my brain.*
20. *Learning is difficult.*

Each question is assessed by the pupils and rated a, b, c, d, e according to how they feel.

a = Yes, definitely true about me

b = Yes, a bit true about me.

c = Not sure. Sometimes true and sometimes not.

d = Not very true about me.

e = No, definitely not true about me.

The answers are then scored according to published matrix of how the answers are weighted.

*Tables of data and scores from the questionnaires.***Year 6**

Pupil Number	Year group	Gender	FSM	MAT register	Score	SEN	EOKS levels oracy
1	6	F			39		5c
2		F			59		5c
3		F			59		5b
4		F			59	Y	4a
5		F			60		5b
6		F	Y		61		4a
7		F			63		5c
8		F			64		5b
9		F			65		5b
10		M		Y	72		5a
11		M		Y	73		5a
12		F			73		5c
13		M			74		5c
14		F	Y		75		4a
15		F			76		left school - no result
16		M			76	Y	4a
17		F			76		5c
18		M			77		5c
19		M			79		5b
20		M			80	Y	3a
21		M		Y	80		5a
22		F		Y	83		5a
23		M			84		4b
24		F			85		5b
25		F			86		left school - no result
26					no score		4b

Year 3

Pupil number	Year Group	Gender	FSM	MAT register	Score	ALN
1	3	F			47	
2		F			53	Y
3		F			57	
4		F			57	
5		F			60	
6		F			64	Y
7		F	Y		65	
8		F	Y		67	Y
9		F		Y	67	
10		F			68	
11		F			75	Y
12		F	Y		78	
13		M	Y		79	Y
14		M			79	
15		M			79	
16		F	Y		80	Y
17		M			82	
18		F			86	
19		M			87	Y
20		M		Y	88	
21		F			94	
22		F	Y	Y	96	
23		M			98	
24		M		Y	100	

Appendix 2:

Questions asked and discussions during P4C sessions:

- ▶ Should only men be in charge?
- ▶ Do we need a Royal Family?
- ▶ Is homework important?
- ▶ What is 'bravery'?
- ▶ What is 'bullying'?
- ▶ Is it still important to study handwriting in school?
- ▶ What makes a good friend?
- ▶ What would you change in the world?
- ▶ Would we still have wars if there was no religion?

Appendix 3:

Year 6 Results: Sample size: 26 pupils

Do you like doing P4C? Can you explain why?

Yes: 23; No: 2; Don't know: 1

Reasons:

- Calming
- Fun
- Give own opinions
- Share ideas
- You can be yourself
- Makes you think
- Brings everyone together
- Relaxing
- Express opinions
- Learn something new
- Play games

What activities do you like? Why do you like them?

- Fruit salad
- Drama / acting out
- WMG
- Discussions

Why?

- Get to work with different people
- Games
- Talk about different themes
- Sharing ideas
- Get to move about
- It's fun

Are there activities you don't like? Why don't you like them?

No, like them all – 15

Yes: Drama -2

Fruit salad 3

Writing 2

Sitting by the teacher 1

Why? Fruit salad – because it moves us from our friends

Do you feel confident to discuss in front of the class group?

Yes: 14; No: 6; Sometimes: 6

What makes a good thinker?

- Answering any question sensibly
- Listen, respect (not laughing at others)
- Sitting and closing eyes
- No talking
- Good imagination
- Communication
- Work as a team
- Good brain
- Good person
- Concentration
- Someone who is calm – not copy
- Having time on your own to think
- Maths and Science
- Learning new things
- Sharing ideas and expressing their own opinions
- Thinks of others' opinions
- Hard work
- Confidence
- Truth
- A good idea

What difference does it make to your confidence and learning if you are a 'good' thinker?

- A little – I get to work at my full effort
- Listen to the ideas
- Helps you
- no difference
- boosts it
- you can speak in front of others, not shy or afraid
- helps you link ideas
- get lots of things done quicker
- learn better
- makes you more calm
- get good ideas from others
- makes you more confident in yourself
- helps say a speech, write a poem and write a report

Year 3 Results: Sample size: 24 pupils**Do you like doing P4C? Can you explain why?****Yes: 24; No: 0; Don't know: 0****Reasons:**

- Calming
- Fun
- Give own opinions
- Share ideas
- Express your feelings
- Makes you think
- Everyone can join in
- Makes you smarter
- Express opinions
- Learn something new
- There's no right or wrong you can say how you feel

What activities do you like? Why do you like them?

- Fruit salad
- Discussions
- Work with different people
- Pass the squeeze and last to sit games
- Sharing ideas

Why? Get to move about, work with different people, it's fun**Are there activities you don't like? Why don't you like them?**

No, like them all - 18

Yes - 3

Pass the squeeze -2

Fruit salad 1

Why? Fruit salad - because it moves us from our friends; pass the squeeze - people squeeze you too hard**Do you feel confident to discuss in front of the class group?****Yes: 20; No: 2; Sometimes/a little bit: 2****What makes a good thinker?**

- Use people's ideas
- Listen, respect (not laughing at others)
- Reading books

- Good imagination and having imaginative thoughts
- Communication
- Makes you smart
- Good person
- Concentration
- Having time on your own to think
- Sharing ideas and expressing their own opinions
- Thinks of others' opinions
- Confidence
- Saying what's in your mind
- A good idea

What difference does it make to your confidence and learning if you are a 'good' thinker?

- A little – I get to work at my full effort
- Listen to the ideas
- Helps you
- no difference (TM)
- boosts it
- you can speak in front of others, not shy or afraid
- helps you link ideas
- get lots of things done quicker
- learn better
- makes you more calm
- get good ideas from others
- makes you more confident in yourself
- helps say a speech, write a poem and write a report

Appendix 4

Transcript of Interviews:

Teacher A:

Interviewer: What were your feelings and attitudes towards P4C at the very beginning?

Teacher A: *I was very sceptical at the beginning, thinking it to be just another gimmick to fit into the ever-growing curriculum. But the response from the children sold it to me!*

Interviewer: How did the children respond to the sessions?

Teacher A: *They loved the sessions and their responses to some quite in-depth ideas was brilliant and very thought-provoking.*

Interviewer: Have you noticed any impact P4C has had?

Teacher A: *On an assessment level, their oracy skills have improved dramatically. But for me it was the confidence they started to get from sharing ideas, the discussions and reasoning they had between each other, showing that they could disagree with each other's ideas but still be friends.*

Teacher B (HLTA):

Interviewer: What have been your experiences as a teacher/facilitator of P4C?

Teacher B: I love it!

I have found it is a positive way for all children to be praised which in turn has an effect on their emotional awareness and thinking skills.

*Normally, children don't talk together about situations. However, in these sessions I have recognised that all children are influenced by their peers to a far greater extent. – in a positive way. I have noticed that the children's behaviour is **much** better in P4C sessions due to improvements in their listening and communication.*

Interviewer: Apart from differences in behaviour and listening, are there any other skills which you feel improve during, or as a result of, P4C sessions?

Teacher B: *It teaches reasoning and positive arguing skills, expressing concerns and opinions. It gives massive opportunities for reluctant speakers to participate in sessions. These children are the ones who would not answer in other lessons. Everyone tries to understand everyone's opinion respectfully. It helps them develop confidence, self-esteem and understanding which benefits our children who struggle with confidence.*

Interviewer: What elements of the sessions do the children enjoy?

Teacher B: *They love asking and answering questions – having the chance to agree and disagree. They love to explore values, assumptions and concepts like justice, truth and knowledge. They enjoy the format of sitting in a circle, so they can see each other and maintain eye contact. It allows the children to work individually, in pairs, in groups and as a whole class, varying the learning experience. It mainly focusses on a verbal approach, but when the children do write, it's on large sheets which I find motivates those reluctant writers and those who struggle with writing.*