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LEARNING VALUES AND CRITICAL THINKING: A P4C APPROACH FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

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Abstract: It is sometimes said that children are "natural philosophers." They are curious about the mysteries of the human experience and they have questions about the nature of identity, the meaning and purpose of being alive and whether we can know anything at all. Philosophical Inquiry can help transform classrooms from places that focus on correct answers into spaces where uncertainty is welcome. Philosophy is grounded in questioning and often it is the question that matters most, not necessarily reaching a final answer. Philosophy in schools supports cultivation of independent and critical thinkers. Engaging in philosophical inquiry trains young people to evaluate claims based on reason and analysis. It also facilitates an appreciation by students of the variety of perspectives the world can be viewed.
The aim of this pilot project was to expose Grade 3 children to a variety of thinking moves and to actively participate in a community of inquirers. Our endeavour was to teach them how to think critically, question ideas, make generalizations, support their claims with evidence and deepen their understanding all while investigating values such as respect, happiness, equity, friendship and responsibility. We believe that the program was successful and we encourage others to consider it when teaching critical thinking and values.

Keywords: thinking, inquiry, values, community, collaboration, caring, creativity, questioning, reflection, evaluation.

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ÎNVĂȚAREA VALORILOR ȘI A GÂNDIRII CRITICE: O ABORDARE DE FILOSOFIE PENTRU COPII (P4C) PENTRU ELEVI

Rezumat: Se spune uneori: "copiii sunt născuți filosofi". Ei sunt curioși în legătură cu misterele existenței umane și au propriile întrebări despre natura identității, scopul și menirea vieții, respectiv dacă putem cunoaște realmente ceva. Investigația filosofică poate să ducă la transformarea sălilor de clasă din locuri care se concentrează pe răspunsurile corecte în spații unde nesiguranța este binevenită. Filosofia se înrădăcinează în punerea de întrebări, iar adesea întrebările sunt cele care contează mai mult, nu neapărat găsirea unui răspuns final. Filosofia în școli sprijină cultivarea gânditorilor critici și independenți. Angajarea în investigații filosofice îi pregătește pe copii să evalueze opiniile pornind de la rațiune și analiză. Ea facilitează de asemenea aprecierea de către elevi a perspectivelor diferite din care poate fi contemplată lumea. Scopul acestui proiect pilot a fost să expună elevii din clasa a III-a unei varietăți de "mișcări ale gândirii" și să îi implice la participarea activă într-o comunitate de investigatori. Năzuința noastră a fost să îi învățăm să gândească critic, să chestioneze ideile, să facă generalizări, să își susțină opiniile cu dovezi și să își aprofundeze înțelegerea, toate acestea în timp ce investigau valori precum respectul, fericirea, echitatea, prietenia și responsabilitatea. Considerăm că programul nostru a reprezentat un succes și îi încurajăm și pe alții să îl ia în considerare atunci când predau gândire critică și valori.

Cuvinte-cheie: gândire, investigare, valori, comunitate, colaborare, grijă, creativitate, chestionare, reflecție, evaluare

1. Rationale

One of the main challenges of contemporary education is to teach our students to think. Only by mastering thinking skills can our new generations become prepared for the dynamic, flexible and rapidly changing society. Also, thinking is the most important skill that education can foster in children in our globalised world. As educators we believe that first and foremost understanding is the product of thinking. One cannot understand if he or she is not thinking. Students need to be taught thinking skills and processes explicitly and in context. Therefore they need ample opportunities to practice and reflect on the thinking process. All teachers will agree that children have an innate sense of wonder that should be cultivated, trained and developed. In order to do so, we must ensure that students acquire logical, critical and divergent thinking skills.

Meanwhile, thinking on its own may lack meaning and purpose if it is not linked to values. Therefore, we decided to attempt a pilot-program in Grade 3 that teaches thinking skills and values simultaneously using an adapted methodology of Philosophy for Children. In order for Philosophy for Children to help students strengthen their abilities to monitor habits of thought, feeling and action, we as teachers need to ensure that it is done through authentic ethical inquiry and we must maintain a commitment to varying viewpoints. Valuing the contribution of all participants helps to foster empathy and positive behaviour which is the essential foundation for values education. Children's daily experience in the classroom and on the playground is full of ethical concerns and issues though they may not always be aware of it.

Through a collaborative teaching and learning approach, we transformed the classroom into an inquiring community. The emphasis was placed on creative, caring and critical thinking and the development of both cognitive and social skills, abilities and dispositions.

We have been encouraged to pursue this project based on research that correlates the impact of students participating in

Philosophy for Children programs and their school achievements. Schwartz and McGuiness in their analysis of "Developing and Assessing Thinking skills" for the International Baccalaureate Organisation, made references to a series of rigorous research evaluations done by Trickey and Topping who concluded that there are "positive effects of participation on the quality of the children's discussions, on post-test measures of their reasoning abilities and on measures of achievement such as reading comprehension"[1] and that students who participated in Philosophy for Children programs in primary schools "maintained their reasoning skills advantage as they progressed to post-primary school two years later." [2]

2. Educational background

The educational philosophy background and the chosen practical approach have been drawn from John Dewey and Matthew Lipman models of inquiry using Phil Cam's thinking moves "toolkit". Phil Cam, who is currently an Associate Professor at the Australian NSW University, was a student of Matthew Lipman (who was himself a disciple of Dewey). Amongst other projects and books on philosophy for children, he designed a set of 20 thinking tools with the belief that we all need to have them "at our command if we are to think effectively in everyday life"[3]. One other very important aspect that we have learnt from the three educationists mentioned above is that the school and the classroom need to be treated as communities, as they represent the cells of what creates democratic citizens and democratic societies. Thus, we correlated the thinking skills that our students need to develop with values that are essential for a democratic citizenship.

3. Context

Through its 2017-2018 strategic plan, the Franconian International School in Erlangen, Germany, has decided that two major prio-

rities that the school will embrace under the development of "Learning Experiences" will be that "lessons are planned, taught and evaluated to ensure authentic learning, inquiry, creativity and deep thinking" and the need of having a "culture of ongoing collaboration, professional dialogue and reflective practice to meet the needs of all learners".[4]

Thus, the school has appointed a coordinator/coach for "Cultures of Thinking" with the main responsibilities being to coordinate the critical thinking, pedagogy, cross-curricular activities and interdisciplinary projects throughout the school. The coordinator will also help teachers make links between academic demands of children and their personal knowledge instilling in them the appreciation of a diversity of perspectives, critical self reflection for purposeful actions and raising the awareness of the ethical implications of acquiring knowledge.

In addition, the school has joined a standards based German School Association, "Looking over the Fence"[5] that has four pillars, listed below, which our "Teaching Thinking and Values through p4c" pilot program resonates with:

1) Meeting the Needs of the Individual – Individual Encouragement and Challenge
2) Alternative Learning – Upbringing Instruction, Transmission of Knowledge, Education
3) The School as a Community: Learning and Living Democracy
4) The School as a Learning Institution – Reforms "from Within" and "from Below"

In order to accomplish this, we focused on aligning our program with the standards set out by the above mentioned association. As learning occurs essentially as an individual, active and holistic process, talents of the students are both challenged and encouraged.

4. The "Program"

The class was a grade 3 group of 12 students. Each lesson, 40-45 minutes in duration, had an objective, 1-2 thinking moves addressed and one value investigated. The students sat together in a circle for

discussions and split in small groups when necessary pending on the activity required. All lessons had an individual work component in order to be able to track their progress and to encourage them to reflect on their own learning. We had 6 formal lessons, many preparation/planning meetings and a reflection session after each lesson. We are planning to have four more formal lessons by the end of the school year. The students came up with the name ***"Hard Thinking"*** to describe how they felt about the program. A partial evaluation was done at the end of the first semester and some of the students' responses about their feelings regarding these lessons can be found at the end of this article.

We have targeted the following thinking moves and values:

Thinking skills: Questioning, Reasoning, Generalizing, Concluding, Analysing, Identifying patterns, Classification according to criteria.

Values: Fairness/Equity, Friendship, Respect, Happiness and Responsibility (in two lessons) We still need to address: Community, Balance and Achievement/Success.

The class discussion rules, such as listening and respecting other opinions, referring to the stimulus when sharing their ideas, asking questions and speaking clearly were well established before the program by the classroom teacher and reiterated at the start of each lesson.

According to Lipman (Teaching Times) the community or group work aspect of P4C is of equal importance to the philosophical inquiry. By expressing their thinking as a group within the parameters of inquiry, the children learn how to think reasonably and cooperatively. In fact, Lipman talks of the 4C's of P4C – the development of Critical, Creative, Co-operative and Caring thinking skills. Thus, we planned all our lessons within this framework and in our after-lesson teacher reflection, we looked for evidence for each of the 4 C's. The following is a brief explanation of those 4C's (Applied Educational Systems website):

Caring - understanding others and being respectful of different opinions

Collaborative - finding solutions together

Creative - making connections and thinking of new ideas
Critical - understanding what we think and why

5. Lessons outline

All of our lessons were structured in the same way. They began with the presentation of a stimulus which took the form of a story, picture, or a short video clip. From this stimulus, the students shared their thoughts and formulated questions. As a group, they chose one overarching question that the discussion would focus on. Students explored the concepts and formulated arguments in a socratic circle which concluded in returning to the initial thoughts with further comments. This led to the final part of the lesson which gave students time to reflect on the theme and their understanding.

The stimulus material is one of the most important elements of the lesson for Philosophy for Children. It must be directly correlated with the community of inquiry. Together, they help to develop the children's cognitive ability to create hypotheses, clarify their terms, support their opinion with valid arguments, formulate questions and draw inferences.

As teachers, it has been our role to guide the children through the inquiry as well as model the development of the skills we are targeting and ensure an understanding of the values. With increased exposure to this type of modelling, it was evident that children started to monitor their thinking processes and internalize these habits into their daily learning. We emphasized that finding solutions or answers to questions is not the ultimate goal. Instead we aim to foster dialogue which goes beyond a simple discussion so that the children have the tools to adapt, adjust, reinterpret and formulate new ideas.

A brief outline of the first three lessons on Friendship, Happiness and Respect can be found attached to the article, in Annex 1-3.

6. Challenges

As with most pilot programs, it is inevitable that challenges would arise. Upon reflection, we identified and addressed them with potential solutions. For example, formulating open-ended questions was one of the skills we realized needed explicit instruction and practice. We found that using Phil Cam's Question Quadrant technique helped the children understand what an open-ended question is and how to formulate one[6]. This quadrant is a simple scheme for classifying students questions; closed vs open ended questions and textual vs intellectual questions. We also found that some children were participating more than others which meant we had to find a way to make their contributions more consistent and equal. Using the app Equity Maps seemed to remedy this problem as it gave a quick visual representation of who was speaking and who wasn't. We could then focus on encouraging students to participate more frequently. An integral part of the lesson, was having the children record their thinking before and after our Socratic circle discussion. As writing is an area where they are still developing their skills, we noticed that this posed a challenge for some of them.

7. Benefits/ successes

How do we measure or observe the impact of this program? A number of indicators were helpful in analyzing the success of our p4c lessons. The children's disposition to change their prior ideas after the class discussions was in fact a key element in gauging the success of the use of the socratic dialogue approach. This was evident in their reflection at the end of the lesson when they added and/or changed their original ideas to their "I Used to think…" and "Now I think" recording sheet. One obvious observation we made was the increased capacity that students displayed to move into deeper thinking such as understanding complexity for causes of certain events leading into a range of explanations for the same event.

The more frequent use of the word "because" after their statements, was proof that they became more familiar with the importance of providing evidence to back up their opinions. The children began to speak without raising their hands, which showed that they were becoming more active listeners and able to contribute to the discussion without interrupting or speak over someone else. In addition to our observations, the feedback from the children themselves, which is outlined at the end of the article, convinced us that this program was successful and worthy of continued practice.

8. Some examples of thinking in action and class dialogue

In the lesson on **Friendship** an argument followed by a counter argument occurred as follows:

A. - I have become friends with my own tablet. But my tablet could not become friends with me when I put too many apps on it because after a short time the charge in the battery is gone. If my tablet has to many apps, it lost charge very fast.

P. - My iPad is friends with me even if I have 34 apps.

Teacher - How do you know that your ipad is friends with you?

P. - Because I asked Siri! And she said yes I like you!

Teacher - Does that mean that if someone tells you that they like you, they are your friend?

D. - I have a question - How can you be a friend with something? How can you do things with it, like you would if you were friends with a person?

E. - A person is different to an actual thing because a thing you can just be friends with it but you can just pretend it can talk in your mind. It's like an imaginary friend.

A. - If someone or something helps you in many different ways, and you help them in many different ways, they become your friends altogether. If an ipad helps you and you help them by charging them at the right time. Then they can become friends with you that's because you do the right thing. It's connected to morality and friendship.

P - I think that your ipad can still be your friend whether you charge it or not. You can play on it and if it's uncharged it can still be your friend.

K- But if you don't charge it let's imagine it was a really person, if you don't give it food or water it will die and if you don't charge it - that's like the food and water, it will die.

In the lesson on **Happiness,** the students managed to come up with generalizations about what makes a person happy and if wealth plays any role in it.

A. - Being rich as the key to making you happy is not true. Happiness lies in *the simplest of things* is true. I read a story called *The Fisherman and his Wife* and in the end they said that happiness lies in the simplest of things.

K- What I think rich means is that I am rich in happiness. Maybe some people may think that rich is all money but some poor people are rich with love and by that I mean happiness.

If you are rich, you have everything, but the most important thing of all is your friends.

D- To answer the question can you be rich and poor at the same time. Well, the poor people can be rich of friends and poor of money and the rich people could be poor of friends and rich with money.

K- People are not happy when they see that other people are poor

In the lesson on **Respect**, the students independently identified the importance of reciprocity.

P.- If someone is not nice to me, I do not want to be nice to them. They should know how someone else feels when they don't respect them.

D. -Yeah, but if they don't respect you and you don't respect them, then it will always go on like that and you will never actually be friends.

In the lesson on **Fairness,** the students explored in depth the fairness of an exam and they acknowledged the difficulty in setting criteria to make an assessment fair.

8. Reflections and recommendations

It has been overwhelmingly clear that when our students were given the opportunities to be part of a community of inquiry, they showed how creative and original their thought processes can really be. They were actually thinking! Organically, they seem to take on different roles within the discussion; some asking questions, some stating opinions, some making connections to their own experiences.

As each of these roles posed different challenges, we noticed that through explicit teaching of the skills, the students were able to back opinions with facts, to engage in conversations, understand others' perspectives and refine their ideas. It was obvious that an *interdependence*, as Lipman called it, was developing.

Also, they consistently showed a significant improvement in their listening skills. They began to understand that many problems may have more than one solution and that they need to question their own views. Overall, it was positive encouragement that the program works and that it should be continued.

Our findings match the conclusions of a Greek study done which says that: "Despite the many limitations of our research program, we believe there is some initial evidence which suggests that students can benefit from the inclusion of P4C programs. It would be ideal if attempts like those discussed here were to become mainstream in the future" [7].

Also, another study on P4C programs found that "The mean effect size was 0.43 with low variance, indicating a consistent moderate positive effect for p4c on a wide range of outcome measures".[8]

The best diagnostic of our pilot-program has been given by the students themselves. We asked them at the end of the first semester, what they think about the p4c lessons, which they call **"Hard Thinking"** and here are some of their responses:

"We get to think about things we don't normally think about in class."

"We can learn about someone while they are speaking."

"I like that we can share ideas and learn from each other."

"It involves our brain to start working and I like that we don't need to raise our hands when we want to share."

"We also talk about our Personal Goals."

"We share ideas, that's the best part of this cooperation circle. We get to share ideas and answer questions in our own way."

"We get to put our minds on and really think."

Notes

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ANNEX 1.
LESSON #1 - FRIENDSHIP

Objective: Support claims with evidence
Skill: Reasoning
Value: Friendship
Stimulus: "The owl and the Moon" story, by Arnold Lobel
Teaching Strategy: *Visible Thinking Strategy, "I used to think…... Now I think"* (Before the children listened to the story, they recorded their first thinking about friendship. They were asked to write a recipe for friendship and include all of the ingredients that they think are important in a good friend. This would be referred to at the end of the lesson after the Socratic circle.

Have the group come up with questions about the story and then vote on the one they would like to discuss as a group. Then we had a Socratic circle discussion around the most popular question.

Evidence of Learning: Change of thinking and evidence to back their claims. The children referred back to their first "think" and using a different colour pencil, added or made changes to their initial friendship recipe using ideas and opinions from the group discussion (I used to think…..Now I think)

Teacher Reflection: Many of the children added more ingredients to their initial ideas which demonstrated their reasoning skills and strengthened their ability to support their claims with evidence. The theme of happiness and helpfulness dominated our discussion as we inquired into friendship and these two qualities were what many of them added to their recipe at the end of the lesson. We felt that the friendship recipe was developmentally appropriate for this age group and a good way for them to make personal connections to the topic of friendship.

ANNEX 2.
LESSON #2 - HAPPINESS

Objective: Formulating questions
Skills: Questioning
Value: Happiness
Stimulus: Picture and preliminary group discussion. The image we showed the class was split in two - one side depicting a poor neighborhood and the other side illustrating an upper class neighborhood.
Teaching Strategy: See, Think, Wonder and Vote with your Feet
The following questions were read to the class and a copy of each questions was placed in each corner of the room:
Would you have more friends if you were rich or poor?
Who is more likely to say, "Money is not everything" – rich people or poor people?
Can you be rich and poor at the same time?
Does being rich make you happy?
Have the group do a "Vote With Your Feet" activity where they move to the corner where the question that interests them most is and have a group discussion about the respective question with the other students who chose it. Ask a representative or two from each group to share their thoughts and the main points of the group discussion.
Socratic Circle Discussion on the question that is most popular for the group
Evidence of Learning: Children added their own additional questions to the ones that were originally posed and were able to distinguish between philosophical questions and ones that have simple factual answers such as "Where was the picture taken?" or "Who took the picture?"
Teacher Reflection: We discussed that part of the reason why the children had difficulty formulating open-ended questions is because often times they have not been exposed to enough examples. In order for them to develop this skill, they need more experience in discussing questions about which people can have different point of views.

ANNEX 3.
LESSON #3 - RESPECT

Objective: Learning to categorise/group using criteria
Skill: Identifying Patterns, Formulating generalizations
Value: Respect
Stimulus: Nine images were presented to the class depicting ways we could respect nature, people and rules.

Teaching Strategy: *Think, Pair, Share* activity in small groups. The class was split in two and the children discussed how to group the pictures as they made generalizations with evidence to support their ideas. One group came up with two categories - Respect for the World and Respect for the Environment. The other group came up with three groups - Respect for People, Respect for the Environment and Respect for Rules. They discussed the patterns they saw in the pictures and why they chose those categories and then shared with the other group.

Evidence of Learning: The groups did not change their original thinking however they were able to provide evidence for their generalizations and ask reasonable questions to each other to clarify why pictures were put into certain groups.

Teacher Reflection: The students were able to engage in an ethical discussion about what respect looks like and some concluded that no matter what we show respect even if we don't get it in return. They managed to agree as a group and justify the use of the respective criteria when grouping the types of respect: environment/world, people, rules.