

Research Highlights

Philosophy for Children (P4C)



P4C is an enquiry based pedagogy, where students take the lead and the teaching style is facilitative. The foundations of P4C are creative, critical, caring, and collaborative thinking. P4C drives questioning, reasoning and independent learning skills and, as research shows, it accelerates academic progress.

P4C narrows the gap

“Philosophy sessions seem to work especially well for the children who are most disadvantaged.”

Professor Stephen Gorard, Durham University
School of Education

P4C raises attainment for all

“Philosophical discussions around topics like truth, fairness and knowledge can improve progress in maths and reading by an average of two months”

The Education Endowment Foundation

P4C improves social skills

“P4C had a positive influence on the wider outcomes such as pupils’ confidence to speak, listening skills and self-esteem”

The Education Endowment Foundation

P4C impacts the whole school

“Being part of the EEF Philosophy for Children project has transformed our school. It is a great teaching and learning tool”

Paula Moses, Assistant Head Millbrook Primary,
Greater Manchester

P4C improves outcomes for disadvantaged pupils

In July 2015, the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) published the results of a P4C project with over 3,000 children. The aim of the study was to determine if P4C would lead to higher attainment, build broader learning skills and help to narrow the attainment gap.

SAPERE trained teachers in P4C and pupils received an average of one period of P4C every week. There were 48 participating schools across five regions of England, most of which had high proportions of disadvantaged pupils.

The EEF evaluation showed that for less than £30 per pupil, P4C is a cost effective way for schools to spend their pupil premium and improve outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged pupils.

“Philosophy for Children is a long-established and well-respected programme. It’s absolutely brilliant that these results give us evidence of its positive impact on primary pupils’ maths and reading results. Given its low cost, teachers should use these results to seriously consider whether philosophy sessions and promoting philosophical thinking could work in their classroom.”

Dr Kevan Collins, Chief Executive of the Education Endowment Foundation

Independent evaluators from Durham University School of Education found that:

- 1** **P4C had the biggest positive impact on disadvantaged children** (those eligible for free school meals): they made an additional 4 months progress in reading, 3 months in maths, and 2 months in writing
- 2** **P4C enabled Key Stage 2 advantage for all pupils.** Overall, pupils practicing P4C made two additional months’ progress in reading and maths
- 3** **Teachers and pupils reported that P4C had a broader impact** including confidence to speak, listening skills, and self-esteem

“Philosophy hones skills that children need for general academic study, but it is valuable in its own right as well. The spirit of inquiry should infuse all of us.”

The Times (editorial), 10 July 2015

“If we want to immunize the next generation against sliding into the kind of moral catastrophes that marred the 20th century, our best bet is philosophy.”

Dr Stephen Law, Senior Lecturer in Philosophy, University of London

Areas where P4C can make a difference

Increase in cognitive ability

A longitudinal study to understand the long-term benefits of P4C was started by the European School of Madrid (ESM) over twenty years ago. Pupils received one P4C class per week from the ages of six to eighteen.

Over 400 hundred students in the P4C group and 300 in the control group were followed and assessed at three time points: 8 years, 11-12 years, and 16 years. Measures included cognitive abilities, basic personality traits, and academic achievement.

Preliminary results show that:

- P4C increases cognitive ability by ~ 7 IQ points
- P4C is especially advantageous for students at the lower end of the ability range

The Long-term Impact of Philosophy for Children: A Longitudinal Study (Preliminary Results), ANALYTIC TEACHING AND PHILOSOPHICAL PRAXIS VOLUME 35, ISSUE 1 (2014)

Enhanced social skills

From 2009-2012, the Council for Education in World Citizenship (CEWC), through the Wiser Wales project, supported the use of P4C in schools in Wales. The CEWC worked with 2,750 students trained over 1,000 teachers, with 124 teachers trained through SAPERE-accredited courses. Seven schools, both primary and secondary, were followed for a minimum of one year as part of this research.

The changes experienced include:

- Enhanced social skills were the most commonly reported impact, described as improved listening and speaking skills, increased confidence, increased concentration, being able to disagree respectfully, and strengthening relationships
- Development of critical thinking was demonstrated through pupils' increased questioning and discussion, and expressing a range of perspectives
- Impact on bilingual linguistic development, as P4C requires the ability to express feelings, share complex points, and respond with sensitivity

Wiser Wales: Developing Philosophy for Children (P4C) in Different School Contexts in Wales 2009 – 2012

Support wellbeing and mental health

Liverpool PCT identified the need to support wellbeing and mental health in schools. As part of a pilot programme run by the Liverpool Healthy Schools Team, three schools used P4C to develop skills for improving wellbeing and increasing community resilience.

Behavioural outcomes included:

- Increased confidence and self esteem
- Increased reflection
- Respect for others
- Wider contribution from quieter or reserved pupils

Social skills outcomes included:

- Accepting guidance
- Problem solving together
- Exploring feelings
- Increased feelings of inclusion

Given the period of measurement was relatively short, mental wellbeing will be tracked and measured over a longer timeframe.

Liverpool Healthy Schools, Philosophy for Children – Pilot Programme Evaluation Final Report, July 2013

Resilience to extremism

P4C was included in a large-scale research study into teaching methods that help build resilience to extremism.

Teachers noted that P4C:

- In sixth-form students, P4C helps them to become critical thinkers in a non-aggressive way
- In primary school children, P4C gives pupils the tools to communicate with each other, so they learn how to handle conflict through dialogue

Sixth-form students noted that P4C gave them the skills to:

- Listen to other people's opinions and allow these opinions to influence their own
- Handle differences of opinion

The research also noted that the ground rules provided by P4C give pupils a safe environment to discuss challenging topics.

Teaching approaches that help to build resilience to extremism among young people, OPM and National Foundation for Educational Research

P4C in secondary schools

Higher achievement in GCSEs

The project by Northumberland Raising Aspirations in Society (NRAIS) began with 22 schools in Berwick and then developed further when over £1 million was granted from the government's regeneration budget. A range of strategies were used of which P4C formed a central strand. Active learning and enquiry approaches were used to develop positive dispositions to learning, to improve collaborative skills and to boost attainment. The project was evaluated by researchers from Sunderland and Newcastle Universities. The project won an award in recognition for outstanding contribution to raising aspirations in 2005.

Findings from Northumberland Schools relating to P4C:

- In the five high schools using P4C at Key Stage 3, GCSE results were 24% better than predicted
 - 567 pupils achieved 5 or more A-C GCSEs in 2004 compared with 457 predicted

Gregson M. and Spedding T. 2004, 'NRAIS, Northumberland Raising Aspirations in Society.'

Additional Research on Philosophy for Children

1. Trickey S and Topping K.J. 2004, Philosophy for Children: a Systematic Review. *Research Papers in Education*. Vol 19, issue 3, pp 365-380
2. Williams, S. (1993). Evaluating the Effects of Philosophical Enquiry in a Secondary School. Derbyshire, England: Derbyshire County Council.
3. Dyfed County Council (1994). Improving Reading Standards in Primary Schools Project. Dyfed County Council, Wales
4. Liptai S 2004, The Braunstone Philosophy for Children Pilot Project.
5. School Inclusion and citizenship project, NWGEN report August 2005
6. SHINE Trust Better Thinking for Better Learning Project, 2004
7. Jones, H. (2008) Thoughts on teaching thinking: perceptions of practitioners with a shared culture of thinking skills education. *Curriculum Journal*, 19:4, pp 309 – 324.
8. Fields (1995) Empirical Data Research into Claims for Using Philosophy Techniques with Young Children. *Early Childhood development and Care*, pp 107, 115 –128

If you would like to know more

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