



CASE STUDY REPORT

Embedding philosophy in our community

Lucy Sayce and Lyn Bull

This study was originally published in 2010 as part of the 'What Works Well' initiative, part of the National Strategies for Education in England.

Abstract

Background: The purpose of the study was to investigate the worth of Philosophy for Children as a strategy for challenging able, gifted and talented pupils within a mainstream classroom environment.

Aims: The main aim of the project was to investigate the worth of Philosophy for Children as a strategy for challenging able, gifted and talented pupils within a mainstream classroom environment.

Methods: The project group consisted of teachers from both primary and secondary phases and two LA consultants, who were self-motivated to learn and had expressed an interest in learning more about P4C. The project used CPD sessions, peer coaching, observation, teacher assessment, and pupil consultation data to measure progress towards success criteria. Teachers reflected on their practice and communicated project work to colleagues.

Findings: The project found that P4C strategies can challenge able, gifted and talented pupils in a mainstream classroom environment. Evaluation showed a positive impact on pupil learning, teaching, and school organisation and leadership.

Implications: The findings of this project suggest that P4C can be used to challenge able, gifted and talented pupils in a mainstream classroom environment. It has had a positive impact on pupil learning, teaching, and school organisation and leadership.

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Keywords: Primary education; Junior education; Secondary education; Art; English - reading; English - speaking and listening; English - writing; History; Science

Introduction

What were your reasons for doing this type of development work?

Pupils are not always challenged to think as deeply in the classroom as they are able. This development work sought to investigate the worth of Philosophy for Children as a strategy for challenging able, gifted and talented pupils within a mainstream classroom environment.

The aims of the project were:

- to develop the teaching skills of the project group
- to develop expertise in using a community of enquiry so that P4C strategies are developed across the curriculum
- to develop oracy in the classroom

Who might find this case study useful?

- Assistant headteacher
- Deputy headteacher
- Headteacher
- LA adviser
- Leading teacher
- National Strategies consultant
- Senior leader
- Senior leadership team (SLT)
- Teacher

Description

What specific curriculum area, subject or aspect did you intend to have impact on?

- Art
- English - reading
- English - speaking and listening
- English - writing
- History
- Science

How did you intend to impact on pupil learning?

By encouraging learners to explore ideas and beliefs they are challenged to engage in higher order thinking . A small group of interested teachers formed the EPIC project (Establishing Philosophy In our Classrooms) to investigate the worth of Philosophy for Children (P4C) as a strategy for challenging able, gifted and talented pupils within a mainstream classroom environment.

What were your success criteria?

- Pupils use inference indicators in their speech
- Pupils accept and value differing opinions
- Pupils feel confident to contribute to a discussion
- Pupils can formulate enquiry questions
- Pupils have the opportunity to direct their own learning
- Other teachers in schools have experienced Embedding Philosophy in our Community (EPIC)

techniques

- An enquiry based approach is evident in the school

What information or data did you use to measure progress towards your success criteria?

- Logs or interviews
- Observation outcomes
- Pupil consultation data

Describe the CPD approaches you used

As part of an ongoing Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme for Leading Teachers in Able, Gifted & Talented an introductory session on Philosophy for Children (P4C) looked at how this might be used as a strategy to increase challenge for Able, Gifted & Talented learners. Many of the teachers who attended this session expressed a desire to study the approach in more detail and as a result a small scale action research project was set up.

Funding was allocated to the project to allow time-out for teachers to reflect and think deeply about their practice and the place of P4C within their classrooms. Individuals decided on their own specific focus under the umbrella of P4C and set their own hypotheses to investigate.

The formation of small peer coaching groups, as a method for embedding CPD and bringing about sustainable changes in practice, has been advocated by Joyce and Showers (1996) and this structure was therefore chosen for managing the project. The project group consisted of teachers from both primary and secondary phases and two LA consultants. Those involved had already expressed an interest in learning more about P4C and had therefore identified a personal need. They were, therefore, self-motivated to learn. Additional personnel were invited to provide P4C expertise as necessary.

- One team member (the speaker) presents their problem/experience to the group
- Team members take turns to ask one question for clarification and the speaker responds
- Team members take turns to state one thing that has impressed them about what they have heard
- The speaker responds to the group reflecting on what has been said.

A "Transition Conference" was held to disseminate the project findings to a wider audience. EPIC project members acted as ambassadors to interested schools and Y12 students were trained up to help deliver sessions.

What CPD materials, research or expertise have you drawn on?

Philosophyfor Children

- Robert Fisher's books are excellent -Stories for Thinking (1996, Nash Pollock) etc.
- 'But Why? Developing philosophical thinking in the classroom,' Sara Stanley with Steve Bowkett. Network Educational Press, 2004. ISBN 1-85539-172-4. A resource aimed at teachers doing P4C with infants. Includes Phil, the philosophy bear and three story books.
- The Philosophy Club by Roger Sutcliffe and Steve Williams, ISBN 1-903804-03-5, is a detailed manual for setting up and running a P4C club in a school.
- Ian Gilbert's books are also really good, e.g. The Little Book of Thunks, and Little Owl's Book of Thinking. Brilliant in the primary or secondary classroom.

Coaching

- Johns, C. (2004). Becoming a Reflective Practitioner, 2nd edn., Blackwell Publishing, Oxford.

Relevant National Strategies resources: The NS Gifted & Talented Programme, in particular

Who provided you with support?

- Local authority staff

How were you supported?

The two LA consultants organised

- the initial CPD on P4C
- the project development and evaluation days
- communication channels

The local G&T lead school provided accommodation for CPD sessions

Impact

What has been the overall impact on pupil learning?

The evaluation shows the positive impact of the project work on all measures. The bold words below indicate the evaluation at the end of the project and the benchmark measure at the start of the project is in brackets:

- Pupils use of inference indicators in their speech - sometimes (sometimes/rarely)
- Pupils accept and value differing opinions - often (sometimes/rarely)
- Pupils feel confident to contribute to a discussion - often (sometimes/rarely)
- Pupils can formulate enquiry questions - sometimes (rarely/never)

Quotes you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

'Sometimes what others say changes your ideas and that's good.' (Y6 learner)

'I like sharing with everyone and being part of the discussion. I liked that everyone got to say their ideas and can change their minds without anyone forcing them to change their ideas.' (Y6 learner)

'As there are lots of different opinions you learn to change your mind more easily.' (Y4 learner)

'Teachers were often surprised by the quality of some of their responses.' (G&T leading teacher)

'Children communicated more effectively with each other and it was noticed that children listened more carefully to each other, accepting and processing someone else's idea or thoughts without prejudice.' (Y6 teacher)

Quantitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Periodic teacher assessment

Qualitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Observation outcomes

Describe the evidence of impact on pupil learning

Impact statements were drawn up at the beginning of the project based on desirable outcomes if change is effected. These were graded (e.g. always, sometimes, rarely, never) and the answers converted to a numerical total, Benchmarking the statements and then revisiting at the end of the project allowed for any change to be measured:

Benchmark: Scoring 0 for "never" and 3 for "often" gives a total score = 7/21 Possible improvement = 14/21 Final

score = 14/21 Improvement = 7 which is 50% of the total possible (14)(See P4C for Schools on What - Teaching approaches page for full details)

What has been the impact on teaching?

Schools and teachers involved in the project

- indicate that their range of skills in questioning and philosophical discussion has increased
- transferred the use of their new skills to other subjects and teaching contexts
- are more likely to relinquish control of discussion and offer more opportunities to children to take responsibility for their learning

Quotes you think are relevant to the impact on teaching

'(I have) seen some students in a new light because of their contributions to the discussions'

'My practice has developed, as it has challenged me to offer more opportunities for children to take responsibility and engage in their learning which can be difficult to manage'

'(I have gained) a deeper understanding of how to trust in the question and allow pupils to steer the discussion rather than stepping in'

Evidence of impact on teaching

- Evidence from observation and monitoring
- Teacher perceptions

Describe the evidence of impact on teaching

Individual teachers were asked to respond to a free-response questionnaire on the following questions:

What was most enjoyable about being involved in the project?

What have you learnt from the project?

Have you changed your practice in any way since taking part in the project?

How have you communicated the project work to your colleagues? If not, how do you plan to?

What are your thoughts on using an e-forum to complement the project?

If a follow-up project were to run next year would you be interested in taking part and why?

What changes could be made to a follow-up project to make it more successful?

Teachers were also asked to respond to the evaluation of the project using the impact statements drawn up at the beginning of the project. These were based on desirable outcomes if change is effected. These were graded (e.g. always, sometimes, rarely, never) and the answers converted to a numerical total. Benchmarking the statements and then revisiting at the end of the project allowed for any change to be measured.

The outcomes of these evaluations are described in the P4C document (see What or Summary page).

What has been the impact on school organisation and leadership?

All schools involved have started to disseminate the P4C approach beyond the initial teacher involved through

- staff meetings
- discussions with class teachers

- materials sharing
- planned training for interested teachers/subject G&T representatives

However, evaluations indicate that this is at an early stage:

Other teachers in school have experienced EPIC techniques - rarely (rarely/never*)

An enquiry based approach is evident in the school - rarely (rarely*)

* benchmarked measure from the start of the project in brackets

At least one secondary school is currently providing sessions for all feeder primary schools as part of their G&T transition programme.

Evidence of impact on school organisation and leadership

Schools report -

- Delivery of a staff meeting about P4C
- General discussions with teachers of the classes covered. Examples, sentence starts and notes from lessons given to staff for their perusal and use
- Staff meeting time as part of cross-curricular inset
- Each G and T subject representative will be trained and or/observed in the process
- Planned T+L session for interested teachers and modelling of P4C with a class for teachers who wish to observe

Summary

What is the crucial thing that made the difference?

- Time for teacher reflection
- Teacher learning community, peer coaching and support
- Teacher commitment

What key resources would people who want to learn from your experience need access to?

P4C in Schools: A cross phase planning toolkit for teachers, Lucy Sayce and Margaret McDonald, Reading Borough Council (See below)

If another individual or school was attempting to replicate this work, where would they start and what would the essential elements be?

- Establish a group of committed teachers with an interest in developing challenge in the classroom
- Gain an understanding of P4C and how it can be successfully delivered in the classroom. Consider inviting a local expert to deliver a CPD session, e.g. LA consultant
- Individual teachers/schools decide their specific approach
- Establish an online forum to enable ongoing peer support, exchange of ideas and materials, discussion of issues etc
- Provide an interim face to face session to maintain the momentum
- Organise a final day's CPD to share experiences, outcomes, learning and impact, as well as to finalise the project evaluation.

What further developments are you planning to do (or would you like to see others do)?

- Project schools are continuing to develop their unique approaches to P4C, and to expand to a wider group of teachers and classes
- Project teachers have expressed their appreciation of having time to reflect within a collaborative context - 'working with other schools has been really fulfilling'. Another project is consequently being planned to build on P4C and the supportive learning community which has been a feature of this project.

Supplementary Materials

This report is accompanied in the library by the following supplementary material:

- P4C in Schools: a cross-phase planning toolkit for teachers
- P4C in Schools (as on What - Teaching approaches page)

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About 'What Works Well'

This case study was originally published as part of the 'What Works Well' section of the National Strategies for Education in England. The National Strategies were professional programmes aiming for improvements in the quality of learning and teaching in schools in England. 'What Works Well' involved teaching practitioners from all phases and areas of education sharing accounts of real developments which had improved learning and teaching, and made a difference to pupil progress. 'What Works Well' case studies were designed to support practice transfer and include sufficient detail and resources to enable others to implement the effective practice described. They were reviewed by experts prior to publication as 'User Generated Content' (UGC) under a licence which encouraged reuse and derivative works, but which precluded commercial use.

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