Introducing P4C in Kindergarten in Greece

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Introduction

The movement of Philosophy for Children starts with M. Lipman in the early '70s. University professor Matthew Lipman noticed that his students lacked critical thinking skills. He suggested that, when students reach university age, it is rather late and difficult to teach them how to think.[1] It would be wiser to undertake such a task at a much earlier age. Thus, he proposed the introduction of philosophy in elementary schools.

Since then, Philosophy for/with Children (hereafter P4C) has been practiced all around the world. P4C takes up Socrates' methodology of provoking philosophical conversation (referred to as "Communities of Inquiry") by asking the right questions or telling compelling stories. P4C practitioners employ different versions of such a method.[2] The triggers tend to vary: some facilitators use Lipman's original philosophical novels; others use whatever story they find intriguing; others walk into the classroom with a direct philosophical question. The dialogue is also performed slightly differently: most practitioners prefer peer-to-peer dialogue, while others use a more structured practice, having students perform different tasks.[3] Nevertheless the basic idea is to rely on a trigger (a story or novel, a poem or song, a question or a thought experiment) in order to initiate discourse on philosophical topics. And the main purpose of this activity is to teach children to think and discuss.

Experience and studies have shown that P4C programs contribute to the development of critical thinking, the emotional flourishing of the child, the deepening of the relation between children with their peers and those between children and the adults (teachers and parents). Moreover, communities of enquiry also tend to cultivate democratic values.[4] Children learn to defend their opinions using arguments; they are tolerant to new ideas; they change their mind when they are convinced; they ask and give reasons for their views.

Despite all the data that support the introduction of such a practice early in ones' education, in Greece, a country that might be considered the fountainhead of democracy, P4C is rarely implemented. In fact, any coordinated attempts to include the teaching of philosophy to children have been limited to research programs. In this paper, we will describe such a research P4C-pilot-program, which we performed in two kindergartens, in Patras, Greece.

P4C Even in Kindergarten?

M. Lipman's first attempts to include philosophical dialogue in schools took place in elementary schools. However, the practice was soon expanded throughout the school curriculum, including kindergarten. Today, many books are written specifically for such a use in pre-school education,[5] while more and more practitioners

practice philosophy with four or five year old children.[6] Current research has reported significant progress in children's development of critical thinking and dialogue skills of children engaging in such programs, even in the age of four or five.[7] This is also evident in G. Mathews research.[8] Mathews records real dialogues with kids and vividly shows that children are natural philosophers from a very young age. They question things around them pretty much like philosophers do, and they struggle for adults' attention in their philosophical quests.

While having different pedagogical backgrounds that affect teaching modes (content or process driven, instructional objectives or learning outcomes), kindergarten curricula cater for overall, balanced development of young children's personality and thought. This implies that teachers have to move from teaching isolated facts to organizing learning in ways that foster higher-level thinking.[9]

Questions & Aims

When starting this research, we wanted to explore three main questions:

(a) First, we wanted to investigate whether a P4C program can be applied in kindergarten. Research suggests that children at the age of four or five are capable of discussing some general questions or assessing other people's behavior. Still, they are not often asked to do so. More specifically, we wanted to see if P4C could be implemented in a Greek kindergarten. Our teachers do not have the relevant expertise nor do they have much experience in similar projects. In the Greek kindergarten daily schedule, group discussion normally takes place at the "discussion corner;" children share experiences or work on their literacy activities; usually the teacher reads a fairytale and asks children some comprehensive questions. Thus, a typical discussion is restricted to questions that help children understand the story. We, however, wanted to see if children at the age of four or five can also make general evaluations, give reasons for the heroes' actions, put themselves in the heroes' shoes and argue what they would do and why. Also, we wanted to see if a typical kindergarten teacher, with our minor guidance alone, could perform such a program.

(b) Second, we wanted to explore if the available material is sufficient for practicing P4C sessions; and whether the teachers could handle it properly. In Greece only very few philosophical novels have been translated.[10] We thus decided to rely on stories that one can easily find in a Greek bookstore. It is fairly easy to find stories, which, even though they are not written specifically for P4C sessions, raise questions that provoke philosophical discussion. Our hypothesis, then, was that we could use standard commercial material and, with a proper support, help teachers engage in some form of philosophical dialogue with young children.

(c) The last, but not least, hypothesis we wanted to explore was whether we would find evidence that P4C helps develop children's critical thinking skills. The problem here was to find some method of evaluating these discussions, so that we could measure if any progress was made concerning the child's ability to think critically. Daniel et. al have done similar research in kindergartens, and they provide us with some tools that can help evaluate progress in dialogue and thinking. We have been inspired by their methods of valuing linguistic cues,[11] types of dialogue[12] and types of thinking.[13] In this paper, however, we would like to introduce a tool of our own.

Methodological Framework

Sample

In our research the sample consisted of 30 children from 5 to 6 years of age (preschool) attending two all-day kindergartens (15 children in each class) in Patras (a city in Greece). Children had not participated in any P4C sessions before. In each classroom there were two teachers changing shifts every week, so the same teacher implemented the morning session every second week. One class was the experimental group and the other the

control group.

The students of the 75th Kindergarten of Patras were the experimental group. The 75th Kindergarten is a state school, placed in a low-to-middle class suburb of Patras. The control group was the Experimental Kindergarten of the University of Patras. Even though the Experimental Kindergarten is a state school, most of the students are middle- to- upper class. The choice of which students get admitted has, to this point, been made at random (by drawing names out of a box). However, the school is situated outside Patras, within the university campus, and it is where most educational research programs take place. Hence, this school is clearly different from the national average. It provides an authentic learning environment to innovate, conduct research and teaching practice; the teachers employed there are more qualified. For this reason, we decided to use it as a control group and let teachers read and discuss the stories without any intrusion from us. Children attending this kindergarten are better equipped to construct a community of enquiry (teacher and children share in the reading of a story and discuss about their own questions). We would consider it a success, if our intervention in the experimental group could match the results we would get from the control group.

Process

As was mentioned before, our research is exploratory and follows a qualitative approach. Since one of the aims of the research was to explore the possibility of the integration of a P4C program in the daily schedule of a kindergarten class, we chose to use eight illustrated stories that teachers could easily have access to and could be used in order to form a community of enquiry. We paid specific attention to the fact that the stories could challenge children's thinking, encourage them to raise questions and provoke interactions among them on the topics of friendship and diversity.[14] For example, one story was *Something Else*[15] where the hero tries to be like everyone else but all his attempts fail to help him fit in. When another extraordinary hero shows up, his experience made him accept the other's differences. In another story, *Elmer*[16] the elephant who was colored patchwork all over (and that differentiated him from all the other elephants that were gray) realized the joy of just being himself. In the story *The Lamb Who Came for Dinner*[17], the hungry wolf started to like the little lamb and found he couldn't resist caring for his new friend.

The teachers of each class implemented the sessions. We contemplated whether some of us should facilitate the sessions ourselves, since we were more trained in P4C, but we decided against it. We wanted to see if teachers could include it in their daily routine, and what kind of difficulties they might have. Moreover, we thought that if their regular teachers facilitated the sessions, the children would feel comfortable and free to express their ideas and thinking. In addition, the teachers would be more aware of the individual characteristics of the children as well as the dynamic of each group in order to facilitate communication and exchange of ideas.

Teachers of both the control and the experimental group had no previous experience with P4C. We provided no training in P4C for the teachers of the control group. We just told them that we would like to see if the children could discuss the stories we would give them. We asked them to read the story as they normally would and discuss it with the children. We were present while they read and discussed the story so that we could record the discussion. Yet, we did not provide any instruction or feedback to the teachers before or after the reading of the story, nor did we interfere with the discussion whatsoever.

The teachers of the experimental group were handled differently. We met with them twice before we launched the program, and we talked to them at length about the P4C movement: its history; its aims, its methods, and its expected outcomes. We thus provided a short training program of P4C before the teachers started practicing it. On top of that, we discussed with them twice every week during the program, before and after each session. Specifically, we met with the teachers of the experimental group a couple days before each session. We discussed the story they would read and contemplated how they would handle it. Moreover, we always provided a handout, which reminded them of our basic instructions. Our instructions included (a) some general guidelines and

(b) some suggested questions.

(a) In the guidelines we reminded them of our purpose. For example, we would say that teachers should provide enough time for children to think before they speak; children should be encouraged to express their opinions, explain and justify those opinions; peer-to-peer dialogue should be initiated; kids should be offered a chance to put themselves in the shoes of the story's heroes and defend their points of view; children should be able to focus on different aspects of the story.

Then, (b) we addressed the several philosophical topics of each story. Using *Something Else*, for instance, we suggested that the group might focus on different concepts: friendship, diversity and similarity or fear (among others). And last, we offered some suggested questions per topic. For example:

 If the group focuses on friendship, you may ask the children:

- How do they choose their friends?

- What makes a good friend?

- Should one be similar to us in order to call him / her a friend?

- In what aspects do we expect our friends to be similar to us?

- Have you ever felt that other children don't want to play with you? What did you do to make them change their mind?

- If the group focuses on diversity / similarity, you may ask the children:

- Ask a couple to stand up and describe their similarities / differences: Are you all the same?

- Show the twins (there were two identical twins in the classroom) and ask the rest if they are the same person or/and what things differentiate them.

- Are all people alike? Do you think being different from each other is a good thing? Why?

- If you changed clothes, would you become someone else?

- Would you like it if all people liked exactly the same things (eating only the crumb of the bread or the leg of the chicken)? Would it cause any problems?

- If the group focuses on fear, you may ask the children:

- When was the last time you were frightened?

- What makes you afraid?

- What is similar to all the stories you just told us;

- Is it always a real threat;

Apart from the training and the instructions for each session, we were also present during the session. We recorded it and provided feedback afterwards. We believe that, with our help, those teachers managed to facilitate P4C sessions quite competently.

The P4C sessions took place each week between February and May at the same hour in the morning schedule. The experimental group facilitated 10 sessions (1 for deciding the rules, 8 in which they discussed the stories, and 1 for the concluding activity), while the control group facilitated 9 sessions (8 for discussing the stories and one for the concluding activity).

In the very first session, the experimental group discussed how they should all behave in order to facilitate group discussions and provide better conditions for thinking. Encouraged by their teachers, the children proposed a number of rules. These rules are an essential part of the philosophical enquiry since they keep the discussion organized and focused. The rules expressed by the children in the experimental group were:

- Do not make fun of other children.

- Listen closely to other children.

- Do not harm other children.

- Raise hands when someone wants to talk (so one person is to talk at a time).

- Be polite and use the words "thank you," "please," and "sorry."

- Respect other children's opinions and not say they are correct or incorrect.

- Do not interrupt other children when they speak.

- Do not misbehave.

- Do not lie.

After children decided the rules, they drew some of them, with the encouragement of the teacher. The drawings were tagged to a table so that the children could "read" the rules and refer to them when they thought that one is not respected. Establishing these rules help children learn to reason in a disciplined way, understand that different views should be respected, and to try reaching consensus and enjoying working collectively. Only the experimental group had established rules. The teacher would present the table with the rule-drawings every time right before the session; hanging the rules from the table was the signal that P4C was about to begin. The children knew that they were now going to listen to a story and then discuss it, following those rules.

The duration of the sessions varied according to children's concentration and interest or the ability of the teacher to invite children to ask questions, make comments, compare or justify. Each session was tape-recorded (in experimental group the sessions were also video-taped) and transcribed in full. The names of the children and of the teachers were coded in the transcripts to ensure confidentiality.

Taking into consideration that the evaluation instruments that were used by other researchers concerned older children[18] or classes that implemented P4C for a long time[19], we decided to use a data collection instrument inspired by previous research but more appropriate for our group of children. Because our intervention was rather brief, we decided to use some marker-words (hereafter markers) as evidence that P4C helps develop children's critical thinking skills. Analysis of the transcripts brought to light the use of these words: why, because, in order to, since, namely, hence. We used these words as a list of criteria for analyzing classroom practice that indicate posing questions, reasoning, justification or explanation.

Results

The study shows that children aged 5-6 are capable of developing critical thinking skills as they used the markers many times in their responses. We present the results that emerged from the analysis conducted within the framework of this research. It is worth noting that children in both classes participated with enthusiasm and vivid interest.

Illustrations of exchange conducted by the children are presented in the following examples:

1st Example

Child 3:...in the deep sea.

Teacher: Why?

Child 3: **Because** he didn't like being in the fishbowl.

Teacher: Why didn't he like the fishbowl?

Child 3: **Because** he lived there all alone.

One of the things we wanted to see is whether children could justify their views. Here, we see that the child tries to justify her views (about the hero's action) when encouraged by the teacher. This provides her peers the opportunity to think about whether they agree or disagree.

2nd Example

Teacher: Look how nice that little lamb is.

Child 2: The wolf wants to eat it...**since** I see that he is licking his tongue.

Teacher: Is there a chance he is having a toothache (teacher showing her teeth) and...

All children: No!

Teacher: No, uh? He wanted to eat her

Child 2: He wanted to cook her.

Teacher: Can the wolf and the lamb be friends? The wolf wants to eat the little lamb. How can

they become friends?

Child 13: **Because** his heart was beating and he wanted to be friends with her (the lamb). And

because he had no other friend.

Teacher: How can they be friends, the lamb is afraid of the wolf? Tell us child 5 (child 5 raising

his hand).

Child 5: The lamb, if she was afraid... I would try to do something in order to help her (the

lamb) stop feeling this way.

In the above transcript, we can see the child's effort to provide an explanation for his point of view and the teacher's "trick" to help the other children get interested in his perspective. In addition, stimulated by the story, the children discuss the possibility of the two-seemingly unpaired-heroes becoming friends and they provide reasons for their opinion. In the last sentence, we see the child adopting the point of view of the wolf (the child says that if she were the wolf, she would try to help the lamb stop feeling scared) in his effort to find a solution to the problem under consideration.

3rd Example

Child 1: If I throw a punch in ...(name of child) we won't be friends any more, hence I will be

sad.

Teacher: You will be sad but then, whose fault is it?

Child 1: Me.

We note that the child is offering a hypothesis connecting her action with a result and also this result with the way she is feeling.

In the following table we present an analysis that accounts for the number of words generated by the children in both classes during the 8 sessions concerning the stories used to initiate discourse.

Table 1

Number of markers generated by the children participating in the experimental and control group.

Markers	Because	Why	In order to	Hence	Namely	Since	Total:
Experimental Group	61	77	7	0	7	2	154 (56,62%)
Control Group	33	68	15	1	1	0	118 (43,38%)

More exchanges indicating critical thinking in the experimental group have been noticed (a difference of 13,24%). Even though this is an informal test and the data were not sufficient for a thorough statistical analysis, one must not forget that in our control group, at least some of the students were above average. Specifically, we observed a total of 154 dialogue exchanges in the experimental group. The majority of the markers concentrated on the words 'because' and 'why' that indicate attempts for justification and posing questions. It is also worth noting that children in both groups used the words 'in order to,' which reveals their effort to make their responses more understandable and clear.

Having in mind that the interaction between teachers and children is important, and the fact that the way the children respond is often affected by the way the teachers pose their questions, we sought the degree that teachers used the markers as shown in the following table.

Table 2

Number of markers generated by the teachers participating in the experimental and control group.

Markers	Because	Why	In order to	Hence	Namely	Since	Total:
Experimental Group	18	189	29	43	33	8	320 (63,24%)
Control Group	7	126	26	1	14	12	186 (36,76%)

Teachers in both groups used the markers often. We have to note here that all these words are common everyday words, frequently used in Greek language as causal connectives, and preschool children are able to understand and use them in their conversations. However, the control group's teachers used the markers to a far lesser extent than the experimental group's teachers. Teachers in both groups mostly used the word 'why;' yet, the teachers in the experimental group used all the other markers more and especially the words 'hence' and 'namely.' We believe the experimental group teachers used those markers more, due to their P4C training. Specifically, teachers, in accordance with our guidelines, asked children to give reasons for their opinions, justify and explain their thinking. Our instruction and guidelines enhanced the use of these markers by the teachers who integrated them in their interaction with the children.

Considering the above tables, one could claim that it is possible that the children in the experimental group were just mimicking the teachers when using those words. At this point of our research, we don't have enough evidence to support or contradict this view. However, even if this is the case, one should keep in mind that mimicry is a way that young children learn, so using these words affect the way they are thinking and talking. Providing children with good thinking skills (explaining, justifying etc), increases the possibility they would practice the same ways of thinking successfully themselves.

Discussion

According to Fisher[20] the aim of P4C is "to develop the ability to go beyond the information given and to exchange with texts at an analytical and conceptual level." Results of our study show more exchanges in the

experimental group, despite the fact that the children participating in the control group were more qualified to perform the task. In the dialogues above, we see the children of our experimental group starting to philosophize. Their engagement in philosophical dialogue underlines the positive effect of P4C in the development of critical thinking.

Specifically, our first hypothesis is verified. The experimental group teachers were responsive to our instruction and guidelines and managed to perform the sessions quite competently. They encouraged children to discuss amongst themselves, explain and justify their opinions. The fact that the teachers of the experimental group used the markers more often than the teachers of the control group is an indication that the discussions that took place in the 75th kindergarten were of a different type than the typical reading of a story.

P4C sessions were successfully integrated in the daily schedule of the Greek kindergarten. In the experimental group, the discussion was more disciplined since children had established specific "rules" concerning the behavior they should exhibit during the sessions (e.g. "we don't interrupt each other, we listen closely to other children and respect their opinion"). Moreover, the teachers encouraged the children to take some time to think about what another child said; thus they facilitated the expression of agreement or disagreement and even the drawing of distinctions, explanations or inferences. Thus, the children could take part in the discussion at their own levels and develop their abilities to reason with others.

Children in both experimental and control groups were able to take part in a dialogue, think about the heroes' actions, argue what the heroes should do and why. In addition, the teachers in the experimental group faced no particular problems or difficulties incorporating such an approach in their practices. At first, they felt a little anxious that this kind of interaction with children was more demanding on their part. Also they were worried that it would be more time consuming than an ordinary reading of the story, since there are many points and issues to be discussed. As time passed, however, they thought the discussion added an interesting dimension to their usual mode of teaching.

Our second hypothesis was also verified. The selected stories provided a stimulus for thinking; they succeeded in having the children's attention focused on the particular topics (friendship and diversity). Also, they gave the children the opportunity to express their viewpoints and engage in discussion – with the help of their teachers. It is evident in the results of our study that even in the control group there were many exchanges using the markers, and this is probably because children found those issues interesting.

The results also verified our third hypothesis concerning the promotion of critical thinking skills in early childhood education. From the examples presented above, it is evident that children started to think critically: they gave reasons for their opinions; they made judgments and evaluated their ideas; they even drew inferences. The guidelines and the questions given to the teachers in the experimental group enabled them to provide conditions of argumentation in their classrooms and stimulate critical thinking. So, even though the children in the control group were more experienced in discussing various topics, they used lesser marker words than the children in the experimental group. We should also keep in mind that for kindergarten children the communication process is still under development; therefore, they can't become automatically active participants in a community of enquiry.

Encouraging justification and explanation triggers the utterance of the markers, both by the teachers and the children of the experimental group; P4C inspires the group to discuss, provide explanations, reasons and conclusions. The use of those markers show that children started to internalize the rudiments of arguments. This could partly be due to the imitation of their teachers; or because of the way the teacher posed a question. Yet, this does not suggest that they couldn't have done otherwise. In any case, the fact that, when encouraged by their teachers, they did start to argue, reinforces our claim that P4C promotes critical thinking.

The study was a pilot; therefore, there were significant limitations. First, the program was very short. The longer a P4C programs lasts, the greater the benefits for the community of enquiry. Secondly, we did not have the time to train the teachers fully in P4C methodology; as a result, sometimes they would not ask for justification when they should. Notwithstanding certain peculiarities of Greek education, however, we believe the results of this program can be used as evidence to show that more kindergartens should include such programs and that more teachers should become involved in P4C. We should note that the Greek school curriculum includes philosophy as an optional course, but only in secondary school[21], for one hour per week. Students are taught theories of philosophy through its history; trained philosophy teachers are rarely employed and so a literature teacher usually teaches the class.

So, even though P4C programs are flourishing all over the world, in Greece there are no official attempts to practice P4C; only a few research programs, such as ours, have tried to practice it and only for a few weeks at a time. The kindergarten setting is arguably the most effective way to start including P4C programs for two reasons: (1) the kindergarten curriculum describes aims and goals that are in line with P4C practice (2) kindergarten teachers are freer to implement new projects than teachers in other levels of education, who are constrained by strict curricula.

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 in kindergarten. It would be ideal if attempts like that discussed here were to become mainstream in the future.

Endnotes

1. Lipman, M. 1982.
2. For a quick overview see UNESCO 2011a&b.
3. Tozzi, M. 2012; Goucha, M. 2007, p. 28.
4. See Lipman, 1982; UNESCO 2011a; Fisher, R. 2008; Haynes, J. 2008; Daniel, M.F. & Delsol, A. 2005; Daniel, M.F. & Gagnon, M. 2011; Daniel, M.F.et al.; Topping, K.J. & Trickey, S. 2007; Vansieleghem, N. & Kennedy, D. (eds) 2011 among many others. Also see SAPERE: http://sapere.org.uk/ (last accessed on 24/7/2012).
5. Philosophical novels, such as Sharp, A.M. & Splitter, L. J. 1999, *The Doll Hospital and Making Sense of my World* but also books proposing other kinds of philosophical trigger such as games, for example Stanley, S. & Bowkett, S.2004.
6. For an overview, see UNESCO 2011b.
7. See for example: Fisher, 2008; Daniel & Delsol, 2005; Daniel & Gagnon, 2011; Daniel et al. 2011.
8. Mathews, G. 1980.
9. Yelland, N. et al. 2008.
10. Among them the only one suitable for pre school age is Sharp & Splitter's *The Doll Hospital and Making Sense of my World* (published in one volume together with the instructions' for teachers' manual).
11. Daniel & Gagnon, 2011; Daniel et al. 2011.
12. Daniel & Delsol, 2005; Daniel et al. 2011.
13. Daniel & Gagnon, 2011.
14. Haynes, 2008.
15. Cave, K.1998.
16. Mckee, D. 1989.
17. Smallman, S. 2007.
18. Fisher 2008.
19. Daniel & Gagnon, 2011.
20. Fisher, 2001, p.67
21. The Greek school system includes 9 years of basic education (1 year in kindergarten, 6 years in elementary school and 3 years in high school – or *gymnasium* as we call it) and 3 of compulsory education (3 years either in technical school or secondary school – or *technical lyceum* and *general lyceum,* as we call it).

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