

## Philosophy for Children

Philosophy for Children (P4C) is an approach to teaching in which students participate in group dialogues focused on philosophical issues. Dialogues are prompted by a stimulus (for example, a story or a video) and are based around a concept such as 'truth', 'fairness' or 'bullying'. The aim of P4C is to help children become more willing and able to ask questions, construct arguments, and engage in reasoned discussion.

The primary goal of this evaluation was to assess whether a year of P4C instruction for pupils in Years 4 and 5 would lead to higher academic attainment in terms of maths, reading, and writing. The project also assessed whether P4C instruction had an impact on Cognitive Abilities Test results.

The evaluation ran from January to December 2013. Teachers were trained in P4C by the Society for the Advancement of Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education (SAPERE). On average, pupils received one period of P4C per week, although this varied across schools. A total of 48 schools across a wide range of English geographies participated. While these schools were in many ways diverse, as a whole they had above-average levels of disadvantaged pupils.

The project was delivered by SAPERE, funded by the Education Endowment Foundation, and independently evaluated by a team at Durham University.

## Key Conclusions

1. There is evidence that P4C had a positive impact on Key Stage 2 attainment. Overall, pupils using the approach made approximately two additional months' progress in reading and maths.
2. Results suggest that P4C had the biggest positive impact on Key Stage 2 results among disadvantaged pupils (those eligible for free school meals).
3. Analyses of the Cognitive Abilities Test (a different outcome measure not explicitly focused on attainment) found a smaller positive impact. Moreover, in terms of this outcome it appears that disadvantaged students reaped fewer benefits from P4C than other pupils. It is unclear from the evaluation why there are these differences between the two outcomes.
4. Teachers reported that the overall success of the intervention depended on incorporating P4C into the timetable on a regular basis. Otherwise there was a risk that the programme would be crowded out.
5. Teachers and pupils generally reported that P4C had a positive influence on the wider outcomes such as pupils' confidence to speak, listening skills, and self-esteem. These and other broader outcomes are the focus of a separate evaluation by the University of Durham.

## What is the impact?

- The evaluation found evidence that P4C had a positive impact on pupils' Key Stage 2 (KS2) progress in reading and maths. This is significant in that P4C was not explicitly focused on improving KS2 outcomes, yet managed to lift maths and reading attainment relative to 'business as usual'.
- It is also important to note that the gains in KS2 were greater in all subjects for students eligible for free school meals (FSM).

SAPERE

Independent Evaluator  
Durham University



Schools	Grant
40	£272,000

Themes

Di  
Developing independent learning

St  
Staff deployment & development



- Results on the Cognitive Abilities Test (CAT) showed mixed results. Pupils who started the programme in Year 5 showed a positive impact, but those who started in Year 4 showed no evidence of benefit. Taken together, the results suggested that P4C resulted in a small improvement in CAT scores; however, this should be treated with caution. FSM-eligible pupils did not appear to benefit relative to a comparison group of FSM-eligible pupils who received normal lessons rather than P4C.
- All of the gain in the CAT scores comes from the verbal subscale. There was very little difference between treatment and control groups in terms of quantitative, non-verbal, and spatial elements of the CAT.
- The duration of the programme – which exposed pupils to P4C for just under a year – may not have been long enough for the full impact of P4C to be felt. Previous UK research in which larger effect sizes were found examined a 16-month period (see Topping and Trickey 2007).
- There was no evidence of improvement at Key Stage 2 for writing. This was not a surprise, as the programme did not involve writing skills. It is worth noting that the writing results of the P4C pupils improved at least as much as those of pupils who received normal classes.
- Teachers reported that the overall success of the intervention depended on incorporating P4C into the timetable on a regular basis, or there was a risk that the programme would be crowded out by activities that appear to more directly address the national curriculum.
- Feedback from teachers and pupils also suggested a belief that P4C had a beneficial impact on wider outcomes such as pupils' confidence to speak, patience when listening to others, and self-esteem. Some teachers also perceived that P4C had a positive impact on general classroom engagement and may have resulted in some pupils asking more questions across all lessons.
- These and other broader outcomes are the focus of a separate evaluation by the University of Durham (see <http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/non-cognitive-im...>).

GROUP	TEST	EFFECT SIZE	ESTIMATED MONTHS' PROGRESS	SECURITY RATING	COST
P4C vs comparison group	Maths	+0.10	+2 months		
	Reading	+0.12	+2 months		
	Writing	+0.03	0 months		
Free School Meal Pupils: P4C vs comparison group	Maths	+0.20	+3 months	N/A	N/A
	Reading	+0.29	+4 months	N/A	N/A
	Writing	+0.17	+2 months	N/A	N/A

## How secure is the finding?

Findings have a moderate degree of security. The evaluation was set up as a randomised controlled trial with school-level randomisation. The study was classified as an 'effectiveness trial', meaning that it sought to test whether the intervention can work at scale. Before the trial started, there was a good balance of pupil characteristics between the group receiving P4C and those in the comparison group. No schools dropped out of the trial, and all results for participating students were available for the primary outcome (Key Stage 2 results).

## How much does it cost?

Financial costs for the programme were largely for teacher training. This involved two days of training before P4C was delivered, and ongoing support throughout the year. There were also small costs for stimulus books, website subscription, and SAPERE membership. Overall, the total financial cost to deliver this project in one school for one academic year was £3,940, or roughly £16 per pupil per year for a school of 240 pupils. Advanced level teacher's training would cost more, and is now recommended by SAPERE for at least some teachers in each school. However, the impact of this level of training was neither tested nor costed in

this evaluation. The programme imposed some costs in terms of teacher time. Two days were required for the initial SAPERE training. Teachers reported that additional time was necessary for them to prepare P4C lessons, although it was not clear whether this was simply the extra time involved because P4C was new to them.