Implementing P4C in the primary classroom: Some fuzzy predictions

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Abstract

For a number of years the writer worked for a large rural Local Authority in England. During this time several schools were trained in the Philosophy for Children approach and yet very few were able to sustain this innovation. Teachers are the agents of change in the classroom (Hargreaves 1994; Stenhouse 1975) and therefore the writer believes that it is vital to understand 'the considerations which bear upon curricular action' (Stenhouse 1975, p. 111) when teachers are attempting to implement P4C. This research set out to test the veracity of Leat's (1999) claim that teacher efficacy (i.e. teachers' beliefs about their ability to positively influence student outcomes) '… is a measure of the chances of implementing change' (p. 399). The study employed teacher interviews to examine the factors which teachers perceived to determine the implementation of P4C in their own classrooms.

Key words: philosophical enquiry, Philosophy for Children, self-efficacy, teacher efficacy

Introduction

Philosophy for Children (hereafter P4C) is a thinking skills programme that utilises Socratic questioning and a dialogic pedagogy to develop the reasoning, creativity, social skills and ethical understanding of children. An abundance of research has established P4C's efficacy in achieving these aims (Colom, Moriyón, Magro & Morilla 2014; Doherr 2000; Gorard, Siddiqui & Huat See 2015; Newell-Jones 2012; Trickey & Topping 2004; Williams 1993; Topping & Trickey 2007). However, Leat (1999) asserts that, despite evidence of the effectiveness of thinking skills programmes, embedding innovative programmes like P4C into school practice is analogous to 'rolling a stone uphill' (p. 389).

The writer became a SAPERE (Society for the Advancement of Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education) Level One P4C trainer in 2008. At the time the

writer was an Educational Consultant working in the field of inclusion for a large, rural Local Authority in the north east of England. Whilst working in this capacity the writer facilitated whole school P4C training for 11 schools, cluster group training for 4 schools and 15 other P4C training events. Feedback from teachers and Senior Leaders about these events was overwhelmingly positive and enthusiastic and yet, despite this, P4C failed to become embedded into classroom practice in the majority of schools who had engaged in training. As a consequence the writer set out to test the veracity of Leat's (1999) claim that teacher efficacy (i.e. teachers' beliefs about their ability to positively influence student outcomes) is 'a measure of the chances of implementing change' (p. 399).

The research employed multiple interviews with eight geographically dispersed primary teachers in England in order to explore the factors which they perceive determine the implementation of P4C in the classroom. The research findings identified three distinct groups of P4C implementers: regular, intermittent and ceased. Analysis of the factors that teachers perceived to determine the implementation of P4C in the classroom revealed differing levels of teacher efficacy amongst these three groups and substantiated Leat's (1999) claim. Furthermore, analysis facilitated the formulation of fuzzy predictions about the likely consequences of decision-making on the P4C implementation process.

Rolling a stone uphill

Leat (1999) suggests that the implementation of thinking skills programmes in schools is analogous to 'rolling a stone uphill' (p. 389):

> Firstly… it is tremendously hard to overcome initial resistance and get moving at all … every inch of the way is a struggle against gravity … if you ever stop there is no status quo: you cannot stop for a rest and resume the upward path, the stone is inclined to hurtle back downhill … [and] is likely to bump into the distance, where it will be difficult to retrieve. (pp. 389-390).

Teachers are the implementers of change in the classroom (Hargreaves 1994; Stenhouse 1975). In order to provide effective support to schools the writer believes that it is vital that P4C educators better understand the factors that teachers perceive to determine the implementation of P4C in primary classrooms. Leat (1999) argues that teacher efficacy is 'a measure of the chances of implementing change' in the classroom 'as teachers are inclined to play safe and when external priorities press in on them, their experiments are likely to be crowded out' (p. 399). This research

explores the construct of teacher efficacy in an attempt to explain disparities in P4C implementation effects.

The construct of teacher efficacy

Three interrelated aspects constitute the construct of teacher efficacy: personal efficacy, outcome efficacy and teaching efficacy (Soodak & Podell 1996). The dimensions of each aspect of this construct will now be addressed in turn.

Personal efficacy

Personal efficacy refers to the beliefs that an individual holds about their ability to effect positive change. The writer believes that it is both an individual and a social construct; personal efficacy is often achieved in a social context and is mediated by social as well as individual factors. The social factors that appeared to influence personal efficacy in this research included: the extent and quality of the professional development experience designed to effect change; the organisational capacity to implement and sustain change; and levels of collaboration within the organisation to support the change process. At an individual level the factors that appeared to influence personal efficacy in this research included: the context for change; teaching histories; and personal attributes (e.g. confidence levels, risk-taking, persistence in the face of difficulties, flexibility etc.). Sometimes these individual factors are interrelated: for example, the younger teachers participating in this research were trained during a period in which there was a heavily prescribed curriculum. These teachers (excepting one who had a philosophy degree) reported lower levels of confidence in their ability to facilitate communities of philosophical enquiry than older colleagues who, despite similar levels of training, had previous experience of more autonomous 'child-centred' practice in the classroom.

Outcome efficacy

Fullan (2007) states that during the '… early implementation stage, the people involved must perceive both that the needs being addressed are significant and that they are making at least some progress towards meeting them' (p. 89). Outcome efficacy refers to a belief that the strategies employed will achieve the desired objectives and is manifested in levels of motivation and commitment. The interrelated factors that appeared to influence outcome efficacy in this research

included: the compatibility of the innovation with teachers' own beliefs and expectations; pupil responses to initiated changes; and the costs and benefits that were perceived to accrue from such changes. For example, as explored in more detail below, the intermittent implementers of P4C, despite recognising the benefits of P4C as a useful tool for enhancing teaching and learning, all struggled to find time to fit this approach into what was regarded as an already overcrowded curriculum and also experienced difficulties with pupil engagement during philosophical enquiry which, at the time of interviews, they were unable to resolve satisfactorily.

Teaching efficacy

Teaching efficacy refers to the belief that one can 'overcome all the problems that the teaching environment poses' (Leat 1999, p. 399). The problems faced by the teachers in this study appear to arise mainly from the difficulties of implementing a pedagogical approach that runs counter to the prevailing 'banking' concept of education in which the transmission of curricular content is paramount and classroom practice, dictated by a culture of high stakes accountability and control is linear, predictable, objectives-based and focussed on the achievement of short term outcomes. As a consequence time, curricular constraints, performativity pressures and established classroom cultures were all problematised by the introduction of P4C. Teaching efficacy can be gauged by the responses employed to address these issues and the level of implementation success achieved by the teachers in the study.

Methodology

The central question of this research was qualitative in nature as it assumed that teachers' understanding of the factors determining the implementation of P4C in the classroom would be 'personal, subjective and unique' (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2005, p. 6).

The research took the form of a longitudinal study and was 'concerned both to describe what the present relationships are among variables in a given situation and to account for changes occurring in those relationships as a function of time' (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000, p. 169). Multiple, semi-structured interviews were conducted by telephone with eight geographically dispersed primary teachers in England who had implemented the P4C approach in their own classrooms. Five of these teachers taught in schools in areas of relatively high socio-economic disadvantage, three of which were situated in urban areas and two in rural locations.

The remaining teachers taught in schools in relatively affluent areas, one of which was situated in an urban area and two in rural locations.

Prolonged contact in the field was maintained through scheduled interviews and regular email correspondence, which was used to corroborate data analysis and emerging themes with participants, to discuss points of disparity and to garner further information where necessary. Five participants were interviewed three times and contact was maintained with these teachers over a thirty-seven month period. Three teachers (due to personal circumstances) were interviewed twice, and contact was maintained over a thirty-two month period in the case of two of these teachers, and a twenty-four month period in the case of one teacher.

A 'framework analysis' methodology was used to analyse the data (Ritchie & Spencer 1994). After thematic summarising and synthesis of interview data, descriptive analysis facilitated the identification of the key influences challenging the successful implementation of P4C in the classroom, recurring patterns of P4C implementation, and the construction of analytical typologies that characterised the P4C implementation behaviours of the teachers studied. In the final part of the analysis the researcher tested Leat's (1999) theory by applying it to the P4C implementer typologies identified in the descriptive account.

Research findings

The overall picture that emerged from the data appeared to suggest that successful implementation of P4C faces challenges from: the extent of P4C professional development and support available to most teachers attempting to implement this innovation in the classroom; varied motivation and commitment to implementing P4C in the classroom; and tensions between the educational assumptions embedded in the practice of P4C and the requirements and assumptions of the prevailing educational context.

The data revealed three distinct groups of P4C implementers: teachers who continue to facilitate P4C on a regular weekly basis; teachers who continue to facilitate P4C on an intermittent basis; and teachers who ceased P4C facilitation altogether. The writer will now discuss the factors that appear to differentiate between the three groups of P4C implementers identified.

Group 1: Regular (weekly) P4C implementers

The regular (weekly) implementers of P4C included Louise, Rose and Lisa. Rose and Lisa worked in the same school. Louise taught in lower key stage 2 (8-9 year olds) and both Rose and Lisa taught in upper key stage 2 (10-11 year olds).

All of the regular implementers were operating in a context in which P4C had been initiated as part of a school-wide drive to develop a more creative curriculum. In the case of Louise's school, P4C was also initiated in response to the changing requirements of the national Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) framework for school inspection (Ofsted 2009), as P4C was perceived by the Head teacher to 'meet the things that Ofsted look for in developing the child as a whole', like spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and the development of skills that will contribute to future economic wellbeing (e.g. the ability to collaborate and work as part of a team). As a consequence, whole school P4C professional development activity was undertaken in both of these schools and opportunities for mentoring and coaching in this approach were also provided for staff. Although there were significant differences in the extent of P4C training undertaken by the regular implementers, the capacity to further develop teacher skills in P4C was fairly substantial within each of their educational settings; both schools included a P4C enthusiast who had not only accessed a significant level (more than 60 hours) of SAPERE P4C training but were also willing to collaborate and provide further support to other members of staff.

All of the regular implementers experienced initial difficulties facilitating P4C in their classrooms and each admitted that their first experience of enquiry fell below their expectations. In all cases interview responses revealed a determination to persevere with P4C, although the factors driving this differed between teachers. In the case of Louise, external drivers (i.e. support and encouragement from the Head teacher) appeared to facilitate her commitment to keep going despite initial misgivings: 'the Head teacher has a big grin on his face when he sees us doing it he believes in it passionately … it's good to get feedback … like the Head teacher to say "It's good you're doing P4C" … you know it gives you a bit of a boost… want to do it a bit more often.' Fullan ((2007) states that:

> Principals' actions serve to legitimate whether a change is to be taken seriously (and not all changes are) and to support teachers both psychologically and with resources. (p. 95)

Louise was also resourceful; this was manifested in her self-initiated use of the internet and other sources of information to seek solutions to the problems she was experiencing. For Rose, her motivation to persevere with P4C appeared to stem from her teaching history; not only did her P4C training refresh and extend skills which she had employed prior to the introduction of the National Curriculum, it also reinforced the value of these skills for deep learning. In addition, Rose took a long-term view with regards to her own professional development in this area; she recognised that her initial difficulties implementing the P4C approach were partly due to her inexperience and she believed that her facilitation skills would develop gradually with time and practice '… knowing what to say and when to say it … that comes with experience'. Enthusiasm for P4C fuelled Lisa's determination to persist with P4C despite initial difficulties. This enthusiasm was associated with a latent desire to provide opportunities for in-depth discussion and deeper learning in her classroom and was sustained through collaboration with her colleague Rose. In all these cases, perseverance was rewarded with reported improvements in confidence levels as these teachers' P4C facilitation skills developed.

The value ascribed to P4C differed markedly between the three regular implementers and appear to be related to teaching roles and histories. Louise felt that P4C embodied the principles of inclusion, an agenda with which she was heavily involved in her capacity as Special Educational Needs Coordinator. For Rose, P4C was reminiscent of teaching before the National Curriculum and represented a shift back to cherished child-centred ideals: 'it was more as I remember teaching when I first started … you can sort of go … where the children take it'. In contrast, Lisa, a teacher trained after the introduction of the National Curriculum, viewed P4C in both instrumental and emancipatory terms: P4C helped her to recognise the importance of discussion and exploration for learning but, equally as important, she felt that P4C also helped to develop her professional autonomy and confidence to step away from the 'script'. In all cases the value ascribed to P4C appeared to be significant in terms of addressing perceived development needs related to classroom practice.

In the case of the regular implementers, the tangible benefits perceived to accrue from the implementation of P4C also appeared to outweigh the costs, and the perceived benefits extended beyond the time prescribed for this activity. All of the teachers in this group reported that P4C had enhanced the quality of pupil learning in the classroom as elements of the P4C enquiry process transferred into other areas of the curriculum. In the case of Louise, this was initiated spontaneously by the

pupils; they began to use the language of enquiry, ask questions and offer their own opinions on matters under discussion in other lessons. In the case of Rose and Lisa, elements of the enquiry process were consciously employed in other lessons and initiated by the teachers themselves as Lisa stated: 'more actually having private thinking time with the particular topic … those sorts of strategies in other areas of the curriculum … more time to discuss amongst themselves.' Quite apart from the wider benefits, other more specific benefits for these teachers were also perceived to accrue from P4C practice; both Louise and Rose felt that P4C enabled them to gain a deeper knowledge and understanding of the pupils in their class; Louise enjoyed the encouragement and positive acknowledgement from the Head teacher that P4C implementation conferred and appreciated the lack of marking; and Lisa felt that P4C required minimal planning and was easy to resource. In addition to this, each of these teachers recognised and exploited the opportunities that P4C provided for developing and assessing pupils' speaking and listening skills.

All of the regular implementers adopted a fidelity approach to change, that is to say that P4C was implemented according to the recommendations of SAPERE which meant that time was allocated on a weekly basis specifically for enquiry; teachers followed the P4C sequence and employed Socratic questioning to promote and extend pupil thinking. In order to achieve this, these teachers embedded philosophical enquiry into the existing curriculum (primarily literacy) and used resources linked specifically to the content of the curriculum as a means of overcoming time and curricular constraints. In addition, Rose and Lisa made a conscious decision to facilitate enquiries at the beginning of the week so that P4C didn't get 'frozen out' by other demands on their time. However, despite high levels of commitment and the employment of strategies which appeared to be effective in facilitating the regular implementation of P4C, this innovation was still vulnerable to the effects of performativity pressure, particularly in upper key stage two (10-11 year olds): Rose and Lisa reported suspending P4C activity for a substantial period of time in the spring term (in Lisa's case the whole of the spring term) to make space for national Standard Assessment Tasks (SATs) preparation. Lisa stated, 'every single literacy lesson was either a planning … a writing or an editing of practice questions for SATS.'

For the most part, this group of teachers were successful in overcoming the problems that the teaching environment posed, and P4C professional development, which included opportunities for school-based mentoring and coaching, supported the growth of their personal efficacy in this approach. However, the evidence suggests

that, particularly in the case of Rose and Lisa, the perceived value of and benefits ascribed to P4C were particularly significant motivating factors driving commitment to regular implementation of this approach in the classroom.

Group 2: Intermittent P4C implementers

The intermittent implementers of P4C included Jane, Clare and Ann. Both Jane and Clare taught in upper key stage two and Ann taught a mixed upper key stage 1 (7 year olds) and lower key stage 2 (8-9 year olds) class.

In the case of two of the intermittent implementers, P4C professional development appeared to be the result of happy chance as opposed to forward planning by their respective schools: Jane was invited to attend an external one-day P4C training event which was 'actually … an offer from another school', and this opportunity coincided with the school's plans to develop a more creative curriculum and promote the development and assessment of pupils' speaking and listening skills. Although Ann had experienced a twilight P4C training session at her previous school, her substantive P4C training was the result of participation in a Creative Contexts for Learning Arts led cross-curricular initiative run by the Local Authority. This provided staff at her current school with the opportunity to observe a SAPERE accredited trainer facilitating philosophical enquiries with their children: '… we were all so inspired by her that my Head decided we had one free inset day left … and so she came in and did … a days' training'. Clare, on the other hand, worked in the same school as Louise and received whole-school training in the P4C approach as part of planning for creative curriculum development.

The organisational capacity to support and sustain teachers' change efforts differed substantially between this group of teachers. Jane had no access to coaching and mentoring and was responsible, after only one day of training, for cascading the P4C approach to staff in her school. Ann received some coaching and mentoring support from an outside specialist as part of a whole-school training package and later completed a master's thesis in this area. Clare had access to mentoring and coaching from an experienced SAPERE Level Two trained teacher based in the school. The data suggests that teacher uncertainty about what constitutes a good philosophical enquiry is more likely in circumstances where teachers have received minimal face-to-face training experience (particularly if this is not accompanied by school-based mentoring and coaching) and may result in misapplication of this approach in the classroom. For example, Jane's one day of P4C training appeared to concentrate

mostly on the development of pupil questioning from nursery to the end of primary school: 'just getting them in foundation stage to ask questions about anything and then developing that up towards the end of school'. As a consequence, Jane was unsure about what constituted a good enquiry, employed a limited repertoire of strategies in philosophical enquiry, and expressed a desire for further training in this area.

All the intermittent implementers recalled a positive response to P4C training. P4C was perceived as a useful 'framework' or 'tool' for enhancing teaching and learning with regards to the development of questioning and discussion skills in the classroom and teachers felt that their training provided them with strategies to move closer towards their ideal vision of a 'good teacher'. However, interview responses indicate that what they valued from their P4C training contradicted (in the case of the two younger teachers) perceived accountability expectations. Both Jane and Clare expressed anxiety about not producing written evidence of pupils' achievements in philosophical enquiry, as exemplified by Jane in the following comment: 'I think you get so hung up on wanting to have written evidence of what they know … writing down some of the comments which are more valuable … you can let the discussion really unfold … knowing it's not a waste of time.' It is therefore unsurprising that the time spent on philosophical enquiry by these two teachers fell far short of the time recommended by SAPERE.

Like the regular implementers, both Ann and Jane recognised and exploited P4C as a vehicle for developing and assessing speaking and listening skills. In addition to this benefit, Ann felt that P4C facilitated greater pupil independence and collaboration in the classroom and Jane felt that P4C was a vehicle for developing creativity and increased her understanding of the pupils in her class. Clare, on the other hand, felt that P4C gave her 'permission to allow children more time for thinking and questioning'. However, the benefits of P4C implementation appeared to be tempered by the disadvantages perceived to accrue from P4C practice. All these teachers voiced concerns about finding the time to fit this approach into what was regarded as an already crowded curriculum and P4C was vulnerable to performativity pressures, especially in the final year of primary school. Jane stated, 'you want to make sure that you've prepared them enough for secondary school … [P4C] sometimes falls by the wayside.'

This group of teachers also experienced difficulties with pupil engagement during philosophical enquiry which, at the time of interviews, they were unable to resolve satisfactorily. In the case of Ann, the evidence suggests that some of her 'more

logical-mathematically minded pupils' found it difficult to adjust to the changed expectations within the classroom and were more comfortable with a didactic pedagogical approach. Other more individual factors also impacted on motivation: Clare felt that it was difficult to qualify the impact of P4C on pupils and that organising the classroom for enquiry was time-consuming; and Ann believed that P4C exacerbated popularity issues within her class and increased the vulnerability of some of her pupils who had disclosed what she believed to be potentially sensitive information about family circumstances during enquiries. Ann also wondered: 'Is it possible that the removal of P4C could be more dangerous by removing it than if it had never been available to those pupils in the first place?' This remark is significant in that it suggests that P4C is operating in a context where the development of pupils' intellectual autonomy runs counter to prevailing educational practice of transmission teaching and narrow testing and raises questions about the ethics of developing pupil expectations about processes of learning which may be challenged at a later stage in their education.

The intermittent implementers appear to have adopted an evolutionary approach to P4C implementation in that the innovation was transformed by these users to fit their circumstances. Philosophical enquiry was facilitated where time permitted and, in the case of Jane and Ann, elements of the P4C approach were embedded within other subject areas. Therefore they perceived philosophical enquiry to be occurring 'implicitly' on a far more regular basis. However, the data suggests that what was occurring in these classrooms 'implicitly' on a regular basis was good classroom discussion (i.e. following a teacher-directed agenda and focused on specific outcomes related to curricular content as opposed to philosophical enquiry focused on a search for better understanding of the common, central and contestable concepts which underpin all human experience).

Although all of the teachers in this group included P4C in short-term subject planning and facilitated enquiries using resources linked to the content of the curriculum as a way of addressing time and curricular constraints, these strategies were only partially successful in facilitating the implementation of P4C in their respective classrooms. In the case of Jane, extremely limited P4C training which focused for the main part on the development of pupil questioning, coupled with the performativity pressures associated with teaching a year six class (11 year olds), appear to be the key factors determining her approach to P4C implementation. For Ann, difficulties related to pupil engagement and wellbeing perceived to arise as a consequence of philosophical enquiry, coupled with a belief that P4C was

'embedded in the ethos of the classroom' and 'implicitly … going on all the time' appear to be the main contributory factors influencing her approach to P4C implementation. Providing pupils with opportunities to ask questions and discuss a particular topic further was perceived by Ann to fulfil the requirements of philosophical enquiry. Clare's case is significant in that it illustrates 'within-school variance' (Fullan 2007, p. 103) of P4C implementation. For Clare, despite the affordances provided through her school to build personal efficacy in this approach, the questionable benefits of P4C and difficulties with pupil engagement in philosophical enquiry coupled with time, curricular and performativity pressures appear to be the main factors impacting upon her motivation to implement P4C in the classroom.

Group 3: Ceased implementers

The ceased implementers of P4C included Lily and Nick. Lily was responsible for teaching a full key stage 2 class (8-11 year olds) and Nick taught in upper key stage 2 (10-11 year olds).

Both Lily and Nick attended externally based P4C training instigated out of personal professional interest, and both were working in contexts where the organisational capacity to support their efforts to implement change in this area were negligible: P4C was unrelated to whole school development and neither of these teachers had access to school-based mentoring and coaching. Lily had one day of P4C professional development and, like Jane, this left her feeling inadequately prepared for facilitating philosophical enquiry with her own class. Although Lily felt that her training 'cemented a lot of thought about questioning techniques … and accepting the maturity of thought that children already have and enabling that to come out', she was critical of the fact that her training precluded opportunities for her to experience a community of enquiry first-hand before 'trying it out in my classroom.' At the other extreme, Nick, a philosophy graduate, felt more than adequately prepared for facilitating philosophical enquiry in his classroom as his circumstances permitted access to both SAPERE Level One and SAPERE Level Two training. Nick felt that his P4C professional development experiences provided him with a structure for classroom discussion and stated that opportunities for engaging in communities of enquiry first hand gave him the 'confidence to have a go' in his own classroom.

In both cases, P4C resonated strongly with and reinforced core values about teaching and learning. Although the value attributed to P4C by these teachers appeared to reflect their teaching histories, both suggested that P4C represented a more satisfactory educational paradigm than the one promulgated through national policy initiatives. Lily, an older teacher on the verge of retirement, felt that P4C was 'child centred … developing pupils' … thinking and autonomy … verbal skills as well' and reported feeling angry 'that I was supposed to be teaching in a very limited way and not flying with these children.' Nick, a teacher trained after the introduction of the National Curriculum, felt that P4C was important for developing 'the tools of discussion' and P4C confirmed his view that 'spreadsheets were not necessarily the answer for being a better teacher.' Both teachers were optimistic about introducing philosophical enquiry into their classrooms, and their initial experiences of enquiry did not challenge their expectations. In terms of tangible benefits, both Lily and Nick agreed that P4C facilitated a broader perspective of pupils' interests, abilities and thinking processes and they both used this information to their advantage in other areas of the curriculum. In addition, Nick felt that 'school is a lot about guessing what the right answer is … what the teacher wants you to say' and he believed that P4C had helped his pupils to think for themselves and 'answer some of those inferential questions … the … reading comprehension.'

Both Lily and Nick implemented the P4C approach as a stand-alone session. Although links to the curriculum were recognised, P4C was not embedded into any curriculum area and resources chosen as a stimulus for enquiry were unrelated to the content of the curriculum. Instead resources were chosen because of their broad appeal to a full key stage 2 age range (in the case of Lily) or their philosophical content (in the case of Nick) and reflected the teaching context and personal history of these respective teachers. P4C was not included in these teachers' short-term plans and pupil progress was not assessed either. Interview responses revealed a belief, in both cases, that thinking skills were, as Lily stated, 'not very measurable'. Although both Lily and Nick perceived the needs being addressed through P4C as being personally significant to their own practice in terms of increasing understanding of the pupils in their classrooms, they were situated in a policy context which values what can be measured above all other considerations. Unlike the other P4C implementers in this study, Lily and Nick did not employ P4C as a vehicle for developing or assessing pupils' skills in areas of the curriculum that were subject to statutory assessment, and as a consequence they were in a position where they were less able to justify continued P4C implementation when faced with increasing time and performance pressures.

Lily was an intermittent P4C implementer prior to ceasing this approach and the evidence suggests that after a reduction in her hours due to a falling pupil roll (fewer and fewer pupils were admitted to the school each year as the rural population declined), her approach to P4C implementation made it difficult to overcome problems related to time constraints and curriculum coverage; this was implicitly acknowledged when she admitted 'if I'd thought about it a bit more I could've fitted it in.' In contrast, Nick had implemented P4C regularly for an extensive period of time prior to ceasing this approach, indicating high levels of motivation and commitment. Due to school circumstances Nick, along with the rest of his colleagues, experienced increasing pressure to raise pupil achievement in core areas of the curriculum and as a consequence he ceased philosophical enquiry with his class. However the evidence suggests that, like Lily, his approach to P4C implementation may have been a contributory factor in his inability to overcome these performativity pressures.

Some fuzzy predictions

Bassey (2001) asserts that 'wherever possible the outcome of empirical educational research should include fuzzy predictions' (p. 17) because users of research, for example, policy makers, managers, teachers and the like, usually want to ascertain 'what may happen in their situation if a particular action is taken' (p. 12). Fuzzy predictions are tentative claims that something *may* be true and are predicated on the notion that the 'thick description' intrinsic to qualitative research enables readers to make an informed judgement about the 'relatability' (Bassey 1981, p. 85) of the research findings to their own context.

Before summarising the factors which appear to determine levels of teacher efficacy amongst the groups of P4C implementers studied, the writer would like to emphasise that although the sample size is small, several points emerge from the analysis which the writer believes may be of practical value to others involved in the process of P4C implementation. Many of these points assume the form of fuzzy predictions which readers may apply to their own contexts to make judgements about the likely consequences of particular courses of action on the P4C implementation process. The writer will now address the key factors that appear to determine teacher efficacy in the P4C approach in turn.

The development of personal efficacy in the P4C approach appears to be best supported when teachers have the opportunity for extended professional

development that includes school-based mentoring and coaching. Furthermore, the data suggests that opportunities for extended P4C professional development, which includes school-based mentoring and coaching are more likely to happen in circumstances where P4C is instigated as part of a whole school development agenda. In the schools where P4C was implemented regularly, school-based P4C enthusiasts with substantial training and experience of this approach acted as positive change agents, collaborating with and supporting colleagues through the implementation process. Conversely, the research suggests that in circumstances where personal efficacy in facilitating philosophical enquiry was limited due to insufficient training and support, then teachers were more likely to implement this approach intermittently. The assumption of implicit practice was also another factor which appeared to determine intermittent P4C implementation; in two cases teachers believed that because elements of the P4C approach were embedded in other curricular areas P4C was therefore being implemented on a far more regular basis. This suggests that misinterpretation and partial application of the P4C approach may be a further consequence of limited professional development.

Outcome efficacy appears to be strengthened in circumstances where P4C is perceived to contribute to whole school agendas and areas of the curriculum which are subject to statutory assessment. In the case of the regular implementers, P4C was implemented as part of creative curriculum development and each of these teachers recognised and exploited the opportunities that P4C provided for developing and assessing pupils' speaking and listening skills. Likewise, two of the intermittent implementers recognised the contribution that P4C made to the creativity agenda and also exploited opportunities arising in P4C for assessment of skills in other areas of the curriculum. However, P4C originated as an approach for developing multi-dimensional thinking and a lack of attention to the progression and development of these skills may be detrimental to the implementation of P4C in the longer term.

The value and benefits ascribed to P4C appeared to be related to the school development context, teacher roles and experience. However the evidence suggests that P4C is more likely to be implemented regularly in circumstances where the advantages ascribed to P4C outweigh any perceived disadvantages. Two of the regular implementers were hard pressed to identify any disadvantages of P4C but this was not the case for intermittent implementers. For this group the benefits of P4C appeared to be tempered by the disadvantages perceived to accrue from P4C practice. All the respondents in this group experienced, and were unable to resolve at the time of interviews, difficulties related to pupil engagement during

philosophical enquiry. In the case of the younger teachers who were intermittent implementers, P4C also appeared to conflict with underlying beliefs about perceived accountability expectations.

Finally, although all the teachers in this study worked in the same policy context and experienced similar time, curricular and performativity pressures, some teachers were more effective than others at overcoming the problems which this presented for P4C implementation. The way in which P4C was implemented may be the explanatory factor for this. When P4C was implemented through existing areas of the curriculum, using resources related to the content of the curriculum as stimuli for philosophical enquiry, teaching efficacy appeared to be strengthened and the strategies adopted were, for the most part, successful in supporting the continued implementation of this approach in the classroom. In contrast, where philosophical enquiry was implemented as stand-alone lesson unrelated to the content of the curriculum, teaching efficacy appeared to be weakened and, when circumstances changed, P4C implementers were unable to withstand the time, curricular and performativity pressures which the teaching environment posed.

Conclusion

Analysis of the data from this research appears to support Leat's (1999) thesis that teacher efficacy is 'a measure of the chances of implementing change' (p. 399) in the classroom. In the case of the regular P4C implementers, the context for and extent of professional development and support, the perceived benefits of P4C, and effective strategies for incorporating P4C into the existing curriculum were sufficient to enable continued P4C implementation. Although the intermittent implementers benefited variously from some of the affordances available to regular implementers (for instance all members of this group adopted the same strategies as the regular implementers for incorporating P4C into the existing curriculum) other factors (like assumptions of implicit practice and perceived disadvantages) impacted upon the time teachers were willing to make available for this innovation. The key factors preventing the continuation of the P4C approach for the ceased implementers appeared to be the context for their P4C training (both were lone implementers in their schools) coupled with the strategies they employed to implement P4C in their classrooms which, when circumstances changed, made it difficult for them to overcome the problems which the teaching environment posed in terms of time, curricular and performance pressures.

This research was based on a small sample size of eight primary teachers and whilst the findings are rich in detail they are context-specific and therefore convey limited generality. However, the writer believes the rich detail and context specificity of this research facilitates analysis of the 'relatability' of these findings to other primary classroom contexts and provides a valuable starting point for further enquiry into a hitherto neglected area of research into P4C.

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