Cultivating and nurturing a positive school culture and climate: Impacts of Philosophy for Children Hawai'i at Waikiki Elementary School

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Abstract

This study investigates the development of positive school culture and climate at a mid-sized public elementary school in urban Oahu, Hawai'i, over fifteen years. Researchers ask: what key people, initiatives, and programs positively impacted the school culture and climate at Waikiki Elementary School? Qualitative methods are applied to design and carry out a portrait study, which included interviewing 22 members of the school community. Analysis of the data reveals how one particular school initiative—philosophy for children Hawai'i (p4cHI)—had a positive impact. p4cHI helped create a school culture and climate characterised by intellectual safety, learner-centred inquiry, integration of experience, and a reputation to be proud of. While no one school community is the same, this study sheds light on the factors that might help cultivate and nurture a more positive elementary school culture and climate in other contexts.

Key words

elementary school, Philosophy for Children, school culture and climate, social emotional learning

Schools that successfully create a positive culture and climate ultimately promote students' ability to learn (MacNeil Prater & Busch 2009). Research has shown that the ways in which teachers and other staff members work together—or in some cases do not work together—to establish a shared set of beliefs, values, and assumptions can have lasting impacts on students, teaching practices, and the relationships between administrators, teachers, parents, and students (Louis, Dretzke & Wahlstrom 2010; Thompson, Gregg & Niska 2004). Generally, a school culture and climate characterised by collaboration (Kohm & Nance 2009), the disruption of inequity (Shah & Crespo 2018), and genuine inquiry (Le Fevre, Robinson & Sinnema 2015) has been found to build morale, foster stability, and produce positive student outcomes (Deal & Peterson 2016; Dumay 2009). But how are these qualities achieved? What approaches to teaching and learning can teachers and school leaders enact to authentically produce and maintain an overall positive school culture and climate? And how does a positive school culture and climate develop over time?

This study aimed to investigate how a positive school culture and climate developed at a mid-sized elementary school in urban Oahu, Hawai'i. Researchers asked what key people, initiatives, and programs positively impacted the school culture and climate at Waikiki Elementary School over the past fifteen years. They applied qualitative methods to design and carry out a portrait study (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis 1997), which included interviewing 22 key school community members. Analysis of the data revealed how one particular school initiative had a profound effect on school culture. Philosophy for Children Hawai'i (p4cHI)—an approach to teaching and learning—provided faculty, staff, parents and students with a framework for building and maintaining communities of inquiry throughout campus classrooms and activities. More specifically, p4cHI helped create an overall culture and climate characterised by intellectual safety, learner-centred inquiry, integration of experience, and a reputation to be proud of. While no one school community is the same, this study aims to shed light on the particular factors that might help to cultivate and nurture a more positive school culture and climate in other contexts.

Context

Waikiki Elementary School (WES) is a mid-sized public school in the Hawaii State Department of Education (HIDOE). Under the umbrella of one statewide school district,

WES is part of the Farrington-Kaiser-Kalani school complex. Located on the Hawaiian Island of Oahu, the school services students from the urban communities of Waikiki and Kaimuki. These students make up a multicultural and diverse student body and come from a number of different ethnics, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds.

In 2019, the HIDOE reported a total enrollment of 594 students K-5 at WES (Waikiki Elementary School 2019b). Twenty percent of students were English language learners, and 22% of students qualified for free or reduced-price lunch. In the same report, 6% of the students received special education services, while 42% received the services in general classes. Compared with the Hawaii State average student performance on statewide assessments, WES students performed: 27% higher in Language Arts, and 30% higher on Math, and 35% higher on Science (Waikiki Elementary School 2019b). In addition, 96% of third-grade students 'read near, at, or above grade level' (Waikiki Elementary School 2019b, p.1). In recent years, WES has been publicly recognised as a highly successful school in the State of Hawaii and has been twice awarded the national Blue-Ribbon School designation by the time of the research.

As early as 2001, Dr. Thomas Jackson, from the University of Hawai'i at Manoa (UHM), introduced the WES school community to philosophy for children Hawai'i (p4cHI). This was the start of a now twenty-year partnership between UHM and WES. Initially, p4cHI was practiced in a few teachers' classrooms as a weekly classroom activity. Today, as it is reported in the school's 2017-2020 Academic Plan (Waikiki Elementary School 2019a), p4cHI is now an essential approach to teaching and learning that is being used by the majority of WES teachers and students as they work together to nurture deeper and 'more thoughtful inquiry' (p. 2). Nowadays, at the WES, the p4cHI approach is being used to support students' counselling services, faculty meetings, and at some activities involving parents, other than its practice inside the classroom.

Literature Review

Scholars use the terms school culture and school climate interchangeably to refer to a 'school's unwritten rules and traditions, customs, and expectations' (Deal & Peterson 2016, p. 7) that the school participants create together. School culture, in turn, regulates how people interact with each other, their choices at school, their feelings about the

teaching and learning environment, and their collaboration towards the school's overall learning outcomes/goals. It is not a list of values on school bulletin boards that people are urged to follow. Instead, it manifests in perceivable and observable behavior patterns that are practiced by the majority of the school's participants. School culture and climate is something that people—especially newcomers—can see, feel and experience immediately upon entering the school and is something that becomes clearer the more one is immersed in the school environment (Barth 2002). Like a person's personality, which others can sense by interacting with the individual, the school culture is the collective personality of an institution that an outsider can feel right away after entering the school environment (Pashiardis 2000). In this study, school culture and climate refer to the school environment created by the shared values, norms, attitudes and beliefs of the participants that make up the school community.

Although there is no universal recipe, empirical studies shed light on possible key criteria and components for creating a positive school culture and climate. For instance, school leadership must take part in building a safe and orderly environment for everyone (Nettles & Herrington 2007); the working and learning environment needs to be caring and supportive (Peterson & Brietzke 1994); and stakeholders and community members need to be positively engaged (Negis-Isik & Gursel 2013). Leadership also plays a key role in setting the tone of the design and development of school culture (Barth 2002; Peterson & Deal 1998). This process must involve collaboration between the variety of stakeholders who make up the school community. Faculty, staff, students, families and caregivers need to work together to shape the school culture (Mutch & Collins,2012). The daily interactions and long-term relationships between all of these groups help to create either a toxic school environment or a collaborative one (MacNeil et al. 2009). Students, under the guidance of teachers and administration, can play a critical role in facilitating the evolvement of the school environment. Families and caregivers can also help support the development of positive school culture and climate through partnership, collaboration, and the sharing of resources.

Empirical studies also document well the ways a positive school culture facilitates and supports student learning outcomes (Johnson & Stevens 2006; Koonce 1998). This correlation is demonstrated in both qualitative and quantitative studies in many countries. Examples include the United States (Barth 2002), Turkey (Karadağ, Kiliçoğlu & Yilmaz 2014), Indonesia (Widodo 2019), and Belgium (Dumay 2009).

At the elementary school level, the development of positive school culture is critical. Primary education plays an essential role in a person's life, and 'continues to exhibit the highest social profitability in all world regions' (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos 2018, p. 446). It yields the highest private return for the individual and the highest social return for the society with the least unit cost among all levels of education (Mingat et al. 2003). Most importantly, primary education cultivates students' attitudes and approaches towards learning throughout their life (Lockheed & Verspoor 1991). In the elementary setting, positive school culture and climate support the development of students' intrinsic motivation for lifelong learning (Gottfried 1990), and moderates the classroom climate, which, in turn, regulates students' motivation while in school and beyond (Freiberg et al. 2005). This motivation then works jointly with students' aptitudes and social backgrounds to influence student achievement. All of these reasons—important impacts on students' academic and personal lives—make research into what promotes a positive school culture at the elementary school level crucial.

While there is ample scholarship demonstrating the positive impact of school culture and climate on boosting student achievement, not enough studies examine the programs and initiatives that can create and enhance positive school culture and climate. For instance, school safety is essential in cultivating a positive school culture (Melesse & Molla 2018), but what programs, initiatives, or key personnel help support the development of a physically, emotionally, and intellectually safe school culture? What do the programs look like? How might an array of initiatives work together? What types of professional development are needed to support personnel as they aim to implement these programs and initiatives? The purpose of these questions is not to propose that the same programs, initiatives, or key personnel will work in every school context and setting. However, identifying the key components that facilitate the development of positive school culture and climate, combined with the existing studies, may offer ideas or suggestions for elementary educators and administrators who are looking to develop positive school cultures of their own. The study presented in this paper aims to add to their toolkit.

Waikiki Elementary School, the school that served as a research site for the study, enacted a number of programs and initiatives designed to cultivate and nurture a positive school culture and climate. They are Habits of Mind (Costa & Kallick 2000), creative movement and dance (Payne 1990), Hawaiian Studies (Goodyear-Ka'ōpua 2016), peer mediation (Johnson et al. 1992), a school garden (Robinson & Zajicek 2005), and philosophy for

children Hawai'i or p4cHI (Jackson 2001). Given the emergence of p4cHI as a key research finding in the study, the school initiative is elaborated on below.

philosophy for children Hawai'i

Founded by Matthew Lipman in 1969, Philosophy for Children (P4C) is a global education movement. A Columbia University philosophy professor at the time, Lipman was deeply disenchanted with the US school system. He believed that children did not think as well as they could or should for life in a democratic society (Lipman 1988; Sharp & Reed 1992), and he was concerned that schools actually encouraged children to have a negative view of their own intellectual abilities. The 'standard paradigm of normal practice' in US schools, wrote Lipman (1991), 'drains' intellectual curiosity, critical thinking, and the ability to reason from perfectly 'curious, imaginative, and inquisitive' (p. 9) children and 'before long, [they] become aware that schooling is enervating and dispiriting rather than animating or intellectually provocative' (p. 10). To address these concerns, he created a curriculum that incorporated the skills of logic and reasoning found in the *activity of philosophy* to improve students' thinking in the K–12 setting (Lipman 1988, 1989, 1991, 1993a, 1993b). This was the birth of P4C—a now worldwide approach to education that 'cease[s] to treat children as passive blotters whose education consists merely of learning of inert data and instead stimulate[s] their capacity to think' (Lipman 1988, p. 110).

To extend Lipman's original curriculum and vision to a variety of geo-cultural contexts, innovative approaches to P4C are now practiced across the globe. Philosophy for children Hawai'i (p4cHI) is one of these culturally responsive offshoots of Lipman's early P4C program. It evolved in response to the tensions that arose while doing P4C in a multicultural community context, and from the way in which the Hawaiian concept of *aloha* is used to mediate these tensions and build community between diverse groups of people in the islands. Pukui and Elbert (1986) define *aloha* as meaning many things, including 'love, affection, compassion, mercy, sympathy, pity, kindness, sentiment, grace, and charity' (p. 21). In p4cHI, the creation of a community, in which participants engage in the deep practice of showing aloha for one another, is not just a classroom nicety. It is essential to inquiry and learning how to think.

Directly in line with the culturally responsive teaching movement (Gay 2002), p4cHI practitioners emphasise the creation of 'intellectually safe' (Jackson 2001, p. 460)

communities of inquiry in which participants' cultures, languages, histories, socio-economic backgrounds, and other aspects of their identities are included and validated during the building of relationships and the co-construction of knowledge (Castagno & Brayboy 2008). As a result, practitioners of p4cHI don't rely on Lipman's original texts as the starting point for inquiry. Instead, they use what they know about their students' varied backgrounds to actively select philosophically rich stimuli (e.g. fiction and non-fiction texts, multi-media resources, and outdoor learning trips) that both mirror the diverse backgrounds of their pupils and provide windows into people and places that are different. This emphasis on authentic and meaningful relationships between p4cHI teachers and their students is at the heart of the approach. p4cHI teachers listen to children, learn from them, engage in co-inquiry (Jackson 2001), and make teaching an 'expression of their own intelligent observations' (Dewey 1916, p. 168) in the context that they find themselves teaching in.

Also unique to p4cHI is the way in which it responds to the overall culture of schooling found in most American State Departments of Education. Rarely practiced as a stand-alone school program, p4cHI is now thought of as a 'philosopher's pedagogy' (Makaiau & Miller 2012, p. 8) or as an approach to teaching and learning that can be used by classroom teachers to incorporate the 'activity of philosophy' (p.10) into required 'school subjects' (Lewis & Sutcliffe 2017, p. 202-203). In addition to six teacher commitments (see Makaiau & Miller 2012, pp. 11-17), a conceptual base and a set of classroom practices define the philosopher's pedagogy. The conceptual base is made up of the four pillars of p4cHI: community, inquiry, philosophy and reflection. These four pillars are fundamental, and function as the theoretical framework from which p4cHI classroom practices and assessments are built upon. Among the teachers, the most popular of these classroom practices are (Jackson 2001):

- Creating *Intellectual Safety* (p. 460) to make sure that *all* participants in the community feel like they can ask any question or state any point of view as long as they are being respectful of everyone in the group.

- Making a *Community Ball* (p. 461) to help mediate turn taking during classroom dialogue and inquiry. This yarn ball is created by students and teachers on one of the first days of class. The rules of the community ball are: (1) only the person with the community ball speaks, (2) the person with the community ball chooses who speaks next, and (3) you always have the right to pass. These rules distribute power

in the classroom and ensure that all of the classroom participants listen and have the chance to be heard.

- Using the language of the *Good Thinker's Tool Kit* (p. 463) to articulate questions, claims, and thinking in general.

- Participating in *Plain Vanilla* (p. 462) discussion-based inquiries that use the following structure: question, vote, inquiry, and reflect. It is named Plain Vanilla because it is the most basic format for structuring this type of classroom inquiry. As teachers become more experienced in the process, they often design their own variations of the strategy.

- Using *Magic Words* (p. 461) to support student facilitation during the Plain Vanilla inquiries. Examples of Magic Words include: OMT (One More Time), IDUS (I Don't Understand), and POPATT (Please One Person at a Time).

- *Reflecting on the Community of Inquiry* (p. 464) with a set of evaluation questions to help measure progress.

Always sensitive to context, and hence rarely, if ever, enacted in the exact same way across diverse cultural and institutional settings, the translation of p4cHI from theory to practice depends on the professionalism and values of K-12 teachers who must adapt the philosopher's pedagogy so that it can meet the needs of their teaching context.

In contrast to Lipman's original approach, the success of p4cHI does not rely on the presence of an academic philosopher in the K-12 teacher's classroom. Instead, p4cHI classroom teachers develop a philosopher's pedagogy of their own by engaging in professional development with experienced p4cHI practitioners. Described in detail by Makaiau and Lukey (2013), this three-part professional development model includes: (1) an initial educative experience, (e.g. an Introduction to Philosophy with Children college course or professional development workshop), (2) the ongoing support of a philosopher in residence (i.e., an experienced p4cHI practitioner/coach who participates in p4cHI sessions lead by the teacher), and (3) regular engagement in a professional p4cHI community of inquiry. This community-based and participatory approach to professional development supports K-12 classroom teachers thinking together about the best ways to integrate—into both their classrooms and overall school culture—the rigorous thinking and reasoning that the activity of philosophy affords. It also explains

why classroom-based strategies, like the Good Thinker's Tool Kit, were developed to support K-12 teachers who were eager to experiment with p4cHI on their own.

While the worldwide P4C movement has evolved in different global regions over the years, research and scholarship designed to measure P4C's impact has also developed. Among the most respected studies is the work of Trickey and Topping (2004) who, in their systematic analysis of P4C, reviewed a series of experimental studies that utilised pre-post measurement and control groups. After eliminating research with measurement flaws, eight highly-regarded experiments demonstrated that P4C has a positive influence on students' academic and social development. This study aims to contribute to the current discourse by taking a closer look at the nuanced impact of p4cHI on students, faculty, and school communities in Hawai'i.

p4cHI at Waikiki Elementary School

p4cHI is a vibrant, and now longstanding initiative within the WES school community. As reported in WES's 2017-2020 Academic Plan (2019a), 100% of the teachers have incorporated p4cHI in their teaching practices. p4cHI sessions take place mostly once a week for each class, as recommended by Jackson (2001). These sessions are used to teach various subjects, such as English, science and physical education. When practicing p4cHI, the teacher uses the Community Ball, Intellectual Safety, the Plain Vanilla inquiry format, and the Good Thinker's Toolkit (Jackson, 2001) to promote constructive dialogue and inquiry. Consistent use of the p4cHI approach, including strategies and tools across grade level and disciplines, ensures that all students at WES have the opportunity to think and to talk responsibly within a classroom community of inquiry on a regular basis.

Assessment of student learning is an additional key component of p4cHI at WES. At the end of each p4cHI session, students and teachers engage in an evaluation of the self and the community. The teacher will ask students three main questions: 'did you listen with empathy during today's P4C session?', 'did you think deeply?', and 'did you feel safe talking in the circle today?' Students provide a 'thumbs up' if the answer is positive; a 'thumbs flat' if the answer is neutral; and a 'thumbs down' if the answer is negative. For the students who place their thumbs flat and down, the teacher asks them to explain what makes them feel this way and how the class can improve during their next p4cHI session.

This is the 'self-corrective' community of inquiry that Matthew Lipman wrote about extensively in his original publications (Lipman 1988, 1991, 1993a, 1993b, 1995; Lipman & Sharp 1978, 1985).

The remarkable thing about WES is that it is not only students and teachers who engage in the p4cHI practices listed above. The same language and educational infrastructure are used within the WES student counselling services. As the counsellor Thomas Yos (2012) reflected in publication, 'the giving and receiving of love was being lived, experienced, modeled, and most powerfully taught' (p. 56). p4cHI during the counselling session was not about seeking a definite answer for a question, instead it served as a way to connect people who would not have opportunities to open their heart to each other outside the circle. In addition to counselling, p4cHI is also used during WES faculty meetings and with parents during gatherings at the school (Waikiki Elementary School 2019a). In summary, p4cHI is a central and integrated part of the Waikiki Elementary School culture and climate.

Research questions and design

Drawing upon the theoretical frameworks and research described above, the purpose of this study was to explore the development of the Waikiki Elementary School community over time and to compile a 'portrait' (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis 1997) that documents the key people, initiatives and programs that have positively impacted the school culture and climate. Through qualitative interviews with staff, teachers, community partners, and former students from WES who are knowledgeable about the school's history, researchers aimed to obtain comprehensive knowledge of the people, initiatives, and programs that have contributed to the development of the school culture at WES. The research question used to guide this study was:

- What are the key people, initiatives, and programs that have positively impacted the school culture/climate at Waikiki Elementary School?

Methods

Portraiture is a qualitative method of social science inquiry that has been used by educational researchers to document and make sense of the phenomenon of schooling (Lawrence-Lightfoot 1983). This methodology has been applied in a variety of educational settings, including educational leadership (Hackmann 2002), problem-based learning (Belland 2010), teacher-led schools (Nazareno 2013), rural virtual schooling (Barbour 2007), and early moral sensibility of students (Wright & Bartsch 2008). Devised by Lawrence-Lightfoot, this methodology 'blurs the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience and organizational life' (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis 1997, p. xv). The methodology also aims to move away from focusing on what is wrong in schools, to what is working:

Portraiture resists a tradition-laden effort to document failure. It is an intentionally generous and eclectic process that begins by searching for what is good and healthy, and assumes that the expression of goodness will always be laced with imperfections. The researcher who asks first 'what is good here?' is likely to absorb a very different reality than the one who is on a mission to discover sources of failure (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis 1997, p. 9).

An ideal methodology for capturing the development a positive school culture and climate over time, the researchers in this study leaned on the theoretical foundations of portraiture methodology to launch their inquiry.

To carry out their research, key investigators worked with both the Institutional Review Board at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa and the Hawaii Department of Education to gain necessary permissions. Next they collaborated with WES faculty and staff to identify possible participants, and from there applied a snowball sampling methodology (Creswell 2012) to recruit for the study. Once participants were identified, qualitative interviewing methods (Patton 2014) were used by researchers to gather the voices and lived experiences of the faculty, staff, community partners, parents, and a former student of WES. These semi-structured interviews were guided by an interview protocol that included a set of pre-determined questions. Interviewers were also encouraged to use active listening to generate new questions and probe deeper into the insights offered by participants. Each interview lasted from 30 minutes to more than one hour, depending on the willingness of each participant.

Participants

Participant recruitment for this study was initially done at a faculty meeting at WES. The research team presented about the study, and then followed up with those faculty members who showed interest in participating by leaving their contact information. Following a snowball sampling method, 22 participants in total enrolled in the study and fully completed the interview process. They included staff, teachers, community partners, former students, and parents from WES who were knowledgeable about the school's history over the past 10-15 years. In total, there were: three community partners, three staff, two parents, 13 teachers, and one former student. Two of the teachers and one of the staff members from this group were also parents. Twelve of the participants are male while the other 10 are females. Ethnically diverse, the participants self-identified as: Caucasian, Hawaiian, Japanese, Hispanic, Chinese and 'mixed'. They also reported a wide variety of ages, from 26 to over 60. Out of the 22 total participants, only three did not mention p4cHI in their interview responses. Therefore, the majority of data reported on in the findings came from the 19 participants who did describe the ways in which p4cHI contributed to the WES culture and climate. The overall interview process took place in 2018 and 2019. Each participant attended one interview. To protect the confidentiality of the participants, all names mentioned in this article are pseudonyms.

Data sources

The primary source of data in this study are the twenty-two interviews that were digitally recorded and transcribed by the research team. This totaled about 153 pages of single-spaced raw data and approximately 110,000 words of interview dialogue. Secondary sources of data included the WES website, HIDOE reports, and media coverage about the school.

Analysis of the data

To analyse the data, methods of constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss 1967) were applied in three phases. In phase one, the research team worked individually to develop initial open codes. Then they came together as critical friends (Miles & Huberman 1994). They shared their open codes and worked collectively to develop an initial set of theoretical codes and analytic themes (Charmaz 2006). In phase two, the team worked individually to further develop their initial set of theoretical codes and analytic themes.

Then they came back together and, through dialogue methodology (Lunenberg & Samaras 2011, p. 844), created a final list of analytic themes. This culminated in the development of four main themes and one sub theme. In phase three, the team wrote up the findings and collaborated to further revise and refine their thinking.

Findings

The analysis of the data revealed that, out of all the programs and initiatives implemented at WES over the past 15 years, philosophy for children Hawai'i (p4cHI) had the biggest impact. As one participant put it:

> *Right now, p4cHI definitely is the most valuable project … we have people come from all over the world [to learn about p4cHI at WES] and sometimes I feel my classroom is a bit like an airport or train station … we welcome anyone with an open door and an open heart so we can learn from each other.* (Susan, a teacher, 2018)

In the section to follow, the four main themes that emerged out of the qualitative analysis of the data and that build on this overall finding are revealed. These themes help to shed light on the ways in which p4cHI positively impacted the school culture and climate at WES. These themes are intellectual safety, learner-centred inquiry, an integrated experience, and a reputation to be proud of.

Intellectual safety

At the foundation of the p4cHI approach is intellectual safety—the agreement that all participants in both the classroom and school community feel like they can ask any question or state any point of view as long as they are being respectful of the other participants (Jackson 2001). Fostered by all p4cHI practitioners at WES, intellectual safety was a term that surfaced in many of the participant interviews in this study. In their interviews, the participants explained how intellectual safety helped to cultivate and nurture a positive school culture and climate at WES.

Unlike traditional classrooms and schools, where teachers lead conversations, p4cHI and the concept of intellectual safety affords all participants with the power and authority to talk. Thus, teachers become facilitators rather than instructors, which creates a learning

environment where students are encouraged to express their ideas in an open environment. Here is how one teacher explains it:

> *The person who has the ball is able to speak, which instantly gives the person who is speaking the floor without having to compete with other people to talk. Everybody else sits and listens calmly and quietly. And that allows the students to be able to express their ideas and exchange information in a very open and free environment … There is nothing that prevents a student from sharing exactly how he or she is feeling, which is a critical aspect of the learning process.* (Serena, a teacher, 2019)

In addition to promoting an open environment for dialogue at WES, participants also shared how the cultivation of intellectual safety impacted everyone's ability to listen. Max shared,

> *… [we] have p4cHI. The children learn to have that very important value of respect. I listen to you now. You listen to me, and I question. And I wonder, and I listen to your wondering. And from there, we evolve. So those two different things are the anchor. And over the years … they just keep combined together into what we have now.* (Max, a teacher, 2018)

Other participants shared how this type of environment benefits students and teachers alike. 'p4cHI has really helped me … be self-reflective and figure out what I can do' (Linda, a teacher, 2019). Amongst the WES faculty and staff, p4cHI helped to create a pervasive culture of trust, risk-taking, and overall sense of being valued as a unique member of the school community.

As a result, intellectual safety helped to foster an environment that values diversity. One teacher, Amelia pointed out,

> *I've seen some kids; they might struggle to get through the day … And then they really shine in p4cHI. I have some kids in special education, and in p4cHI they are crazy in deep thought. It's like their place to share thoughts and ideas. Yeah, you wouldn't really see that side of them.* (Amelia, a teacher, 2018)

Intellectual safety was seen as developing a deep respect for diverse learners. It was described as helping to foster an overall culture of care.

Joyce was one of the teachers who reflected on the ethic of care fostered by p4cHI at WES. While thinking about new students who enter the WES environment, she shared:

> *… [at first] they were not being able to speak or express themselves … but p4cHI gives people a voice and gets them talking in the classroom … It's all those things about p4cHI … you get to create a community. Once you sit together and everyone has a chance to participate in a shared experience, they care more about each other. And if you have those protocols, respectful behavior, there's certain rules that you follow. It's not just free for all. It just helps. It gives everybody the safe environment.* (Joyce, a teacher, 2019)

A number of other participants also made a link between the safe environment cultivated and nurtured by p4cHI, and its impact on student learning.

> *… intellectually safe, emotionally safe. You can ask any question. You can state any point of view. And there was so much respect and care for each other. This is a condition if you really want to get to the depth of understanding. It's not just about abstract ideas, which is one of the problems with philosophy, academic philosophy … much of what we learn in school is profoundly personal. And that is what is happening over and over in the classrooms here.* (Daniel, a community partner, 2019)

As a result of the creation of an intellectually safe school culture and climate, students at WES were observed having the freedom to wonder, ask questions, and pursue answers instead of being reliant on a teacher or textbook for knowledge. In these ways and more, the practice of intellectual safety became an effective component to creating a school culture and climate that is characterised by active engagement in the learning process and, ultimately, learner-centred inquiry.

Learner-centred inquiry

Analysis of the data revealed the number of ways in which p4cHI fostered a school culture that valued questions, exploration, investigation, research and study. As one participant put it, students and teachers alike 'believe that it's okay to question things and that it's not about what to think but how to think' (Emma, a teacher, 2018). One explanation given by the participants was the decision by faculty and staff to have p4cHI practiced from kindergarten through fifth grade. 'We kept p4cHI all the way through,

which has helped a lot and keeping the kids grounded in inquiry base' (Ava, a teacher, 2018). By having consistent p4cHI experiences throughout their WES journey, students became accustomed to learner-centred inquiry as the primary approach to education, schooling, and interacting with one another and their teachers.

As a result of this school-wide practice, teachers were observed developing a common disposition towards children and learning. Collectively, they shared the belief that all children can learn, and that by applying the tools of p4cHI they were confident in their ability to support students' intellectual growth and development. Here is one example:

> *When I do summer school, sometimes with children and they are just coming in, and we do p4cHI, you know, they don't really know what's going on and what's expected. But I feel like children are children. So like when we went to Japan, and we did p4cHI with them, they were very similar in their questions. Their inquiry. And you know it was great to see that they have the same wonderings that children here have and children in other schools have. Even though there's just the difference in what are the expectations on what is this thing. There's still basically the same kinds of curiosity and the same kinds of wondering, and that that remains the same.* (Emma, a teacher, 2018)

With an emphasis on primal wonder (Jackson 2001), p4cHI asserts that all children are born with a sense of wonder and that it is the role of teachers is to nurture the child's innate curiosity.

Seated in a circle with their teacher, students are invited to ask questions during p4cHI sessions. Teachers encourage the students to ask questions about the things they really care about; ideas, observations and wonderings that they want to think about with their peers and teacher. Over the course of this study, students were observed asking questions such as: Why would North Korea want to bomb Hawaii? What might happen if I become invisible? Should we even try to do something that we know is impossible to achieve? Deeply personal, and often tied to both subjects of study and everyday experiences in school, students at WES came to see that their thinking mattered and that their original thoughts were valued as a starting point for learning.

As a stimulant for inquiry, p4cHI helped to shape the culture of teaching and learning at WES. It gave teachers tools for ensuring that their pedagogy was student-centred. For

some teachers, becoming a part of this learner-centred school culture and climate was a journey. Here is one teacher's story about coming to embrace this particular aspect of the WES community.

> *For me, I think p4cHI [is a huge part of our success]. Because specifically, that to me was something that was just like so different than anything I've seen in the schools. I had been teaching prior [to coming to WES] and [as soon as I got here, I observed] the efforts of p4cHI, like, oh my gosh, these kids are really smart. Like they must be much smarter than other kids in other schools. And I realise like if you allow kids to talk about things that are interesting to them, a lot of them have intellectual thoughts about things. And so I think that also has to do with them feeling more like equals to their teachers like I mentioned earlier because they're being taught to question not just say okay, okay, yes, sure. So sometimes, as a teacher, I get frustrated. I'm like why you have to ask me why we do this? Like yeah, that's what I want them to be asking and not just always just listen and do it because someone tells you to do it. So I think it really shapes the environment in a very specific way because they're being taught to ask questions and look deeper instead of just someone told me to do this, so that's why I have to do it.* (Amelia, a teacher, 2018)

In some school environments, this questioning attitude and openness to challenging the ideas of people in positions of authority might be seen as disruptive to the daily functioning and overall cohesiveness of the school system. This is not the case at WES. As one participant, Lily (a teacher), stated, 'it's the exploring, the collaboration, exploratory learning, collaborating with other children, asking questions amongst one another, asking questions to teachers really uninhibited' (2018) that is so successful at WES. Further analysis of the data helped to expand WES's notion of success, and further define what the WES community meant by success.

Engagement, deep thinking and academic success

Student success at WES was seen in the students' genuine desire to engage deeply with subject area concepts and content, their ability to think critically, and their overall academic performance. Here is one teacher's explanation of how p4cHI impacted student success at CES.

> *So I believe that program [p4cHI] has made a huge difference. I hope it's made a difference in the students' learning … Just in terms of anecdotal, we see improved writing skills, citing evidence going deeper, being clearer. And it's impacted my ability to teach other subjects like science. Because if I want to get a concept across, I sit everybody in the circle, we passed the ball. And that format already calms everyone down. And we can sort of gives the cue that it's time to think deeply about this subject.* (Jacob, a teacher, 2018)

Another teacher seconded these ideas by explaining how p4cHI slowed down the pace of learning and provided the necessary structures for authentic student engagement.

> *So you know the student as a person, talking about what their interests are and what are their goals in life? And they enjoy doing rather than feeling like it's a pressure they have to learn certain things, more working with what you have, given them the tools to think independently, you know, given in the space and time to explore their own thinking and without so much pressure.* (Brown, a teacher, 2018)

To build on this idea of how p4cHI helped to create a school culture and climate of engagement and success, a number of participants shared about the impact of one particular p4cHI strategy. This strategy is the Good Thinker's Tool Kit (Jackson 2001). Used in various ways across the WES campus, the Good Thinker's Tool Kit provides common language for encouraging students to clarify, give reasons, examine assumptions, play with inferences, question truth, provide examples, and challenge their thinking with counter-examples. Embedded in the data were reasons why the Good Thinker's Tool Kit is valued by teachers.

> *I love the p4cHI thinking tools [found in the Good Thinker's Tool Kit] … they're pretty scholarly. They're great for the test. p4cHI helps me do great on the standardised test. And my students are showing a very high success rate. I think they're eighty percent or better on meeting all the standards as a class. So, these thinking tools are a great start.* (Susan, a teacher, 2018)

With that said, the teachers at WES did not simply see p4cHI as a tool for test preparation. Above all, teachers at WES found more meaningful reasons for appreciating the impact of p4cHI on the WES school culture and climate. In reflection, one teacher said,

> *Later on, it comes out, you know, they've become better thinkers, also their ownership. And I guess it teaches them that they have the power to make decisions and to, you know, decide what they want to talk about and where that conversation is gonna lead.* (Emma, a teacher, 2018)

p4cHI helped to create active and engaged student citizens who were confident of their place in the world and their ability to become agents of change.

An integrated experience

In addition to the first two themes, another way in which p4cHI positively impacted the WES school culture and climate is that helped to create an integrated experience for students and teachers. Often, schools have a number of programs and initiatives that they implement for different reasons (e.g. a reading program, a social emotional learning program, character education, etc.). WES was no exception. Sometimes, with so many programs and initiatives running at the same time, the schooling experience for students and teachers can feel overwhelming and disjointed. The analysis of the data in this study revealed how the implementation of p4cHI at WES helped to bring all of the school's programs and initiatives together and create an integrated experience.

One example of this was seen in the ways in which the participants talked about the cohesiveness between p4cHI,and another school initiative called Habits of Mind (Costa & Kallick 2000).

> *I would say they complement each other. I think Habits of Mind is really a vision of what a person is. And the function it serves is that it gets people focused on a broader vision of what a child can be. p4cHI, as another teacher put it, Habits of Mind are like the car and p4cHI is like the engine. p4cHI is a way of teaching that develops many of those qualities and characteristics. So, they complement each other. I would say, Habits of Mind are more of a vision piece, but p4cHI has that too.* (Alex, a staff member, 2018)

Another teacher shared the same sentiments:

> *Habits of Mind are a set of character skills; things that successful people demonstrate daily in their lives. We all practice and live the Habits of Mind. And in my opinion, p4cHI is a way of putting those practices of Habits of Mind into*

> *action. When we sit in dialogue as a community through p4c, we see each other as human beings. And then it's so much easier to work well with others. When we made that connection as a human, a thinker, the respect, and the mindful behaviors follow naturally.* (Susan, a teacher, 2018)

In both of these quotes it is evident that the applied practices of p4cHI helped to translate the concepts embedded in the Habits of Mind program from theory to practice. As a result of the pairing of these two initiatives, the students and teachers experienced a cohesive school program.

This finding is important because quite often the implementation of well-intentioned school programs comes off as contrived if they are implemented without meaningful integration into the whole school program. If this occurs, these well-intentioned programs have the potential to negatively impact the school culture and climate. In this study, we learned how both the theoretical foundations and practical strategies and practices of p4cHI made other programs like Habits of Mind more meaningful.

> *The way that [both programs] … values their abilities and their reasoning and the way they think, who they are, cultivating them … Because you're doing them both. There are so many integral parts of the culture. So, you can't be having sort of a p4cHI circle without having some empathy, without having some risk-taking. I mean, they all sort of fit together.* (Jane, a teacher, 2019)

As a result of this integrated and meaningful school culture and climate, WES achieved positive regard in the broader community and established a reputation to be proud of.

A reputation to be proud of

The final theme to emerge out of the analysis of the data is the ways in which p4cHI has helped to bolster the positive reputation of WES in the community at-large. Each year, a large number of families apply for geographical exceptions so that their children can attend WES, and a number of the applicants refer to p4cHI as one of their reasons for applying to the school. Much of this recognition has come from word of mouth, positive press about p4cHI at WES (Fujii-Oride 2019; Gallagher 2011), and the school's annual Strive HI School Performance Report (Waikiki Elementary School 2019b) that publishes the average percentile of state assessment scores of WES students. As many of the participants in this study explained, p4cHI has definitely helped to paint a positive

picture of the WES culture and climate to prospective families, HIDOE officials, and the citizens of Hawai'i.

In addition to having an outward impact, the positive impact of p4cHI on the reputation of WES also helps to boost morale amongst teachers at the school. Amelia, a WES teacher who started out as a teacher candidate on campus, explains,

> *I love the school so much. For one thing, p4cHI initially drew me into the school from day one. The first day I met my first mentor teacher, she told me about it. I saw it and thought this is the best thing! I had never seen anything like it. I remember the topic was, 'Is it true that boys and girls are really that different from each other'? I just remember thinking it was super interesting that these kids would want to talk about this. And then the conversation was just very philosophical and intellectual, and this was for fourth-grade students at the time. I thought that's really cool. And then as I learn more about it, I thought it was amazing … I think it is an initiative there that really stands out and makes a big difference.* (Amelia, a teacher, 2018)

Another teacher had a similar experience:

> *I did student teaching at WES. That was in 2004. I was in the sixth-grade class. And I saw p4cHI in the sixth-grade class. And I was just really amazed by how these kids sat in a circle and talked, and it was just so nice. And I tried to do a little bit of p4cHI with my second-grade class. And that was the best thing I did when I was at the school with the kids*. (Joyce, a teacher, 2019)

As it is seen in the two participant responses above, p4cHI helps to attract and retain good teachers at WES.

Another important impact of p4cHI at WES is that the school has now earned its reputation as a model school of the University of Hawai'i (UH) Uehiro Academy for Philosophy and Ethics in Education. As a model school, WES has UH faculty who regularly work with students and teachers to help create a more thoughtful, compassionate, and ethical educational experience for the students of WES. In partnership with teachers, the UH faculty help run p4cHI professional development classes at WES, support p4cHI in WES classrooms, and bring visitors from all over the

world to see p4cHI being done with children. Here is one teacher's description of the collaboration:

> *I've done professional development classes here on p4cHI and now I host in a lot of things with p4cHI whenever we have visitors. We have had probably, at least, a couple hundred visitors to our school this year to see p4cH!* (Alex, a staff member, 2018)

In collaboration with UH, WES also sends teachers to Japan each summer to model p4cHI to Japanese schools and educators. This international reach of WES elementary school teachers greatly enhances the reputation of the school in the broader community. It is for these reasons and more that p4cHI has helped to cultivate and nurture a positive reputation that WES students, faculty, staff, and families are proud of.

Discussion

To cultivate and nurture a positive school culture and climate in the elementary school setting, educators and administrators must identify key people, programs, and initiatives that will support the development of a physically, intellectually, and emotionally safe community of learners (Edmondson, Fetro, Drolet & Ritzel 2007). This study's findings reveal how p4cHI helped to do just this by creating a positive culture and climate at Waikiki Elementary School. Data revealed how shared language around intellectual safety, the common practice of learner-centred inquiry across classes and grade levels, and p4cHI's connections to other school initiatives made students, educators, and families proud of WES. In addition to pride, the findings illustrate the numerous ways in which p4cHI contributed to teachers' professional satisfaction, students' academic success, and the overall social-emotional well-being of the entire school community.

These positive results should not go unnoticed. Since 2016, survey results from Teaching Tolerance (Southern Poverty Law Center 2018) indicate that feelings of fear and mistrust—and incidents of bias and bigotry—are on the rise in American Schools. The organisation cites the increasing diversity of the American student body, the re-segregation of schools, bullying (and other school climate issues), generalised societal frictions around issues of diversity, the so-called achievement gap, school 'reform', and the Trump Effect (Costello, Cohen & van der Valk 2016) as major contributing forces to

the overall decline of positive school culture and climate across the US. Hage (2012) argues that white exceptionalism and supremacy, inherent in many school structures and systems, is the root cause of this problem. And until historic injustice and institutional racism is addressed in schools, school culture and climate in American schools will not improve. Combined with the far-reaching negative impacts of a global pandemic on education, as the National Association of State Boards of Education states (Lang 2020), 'for COVID-19 recovery efforts', and social justice to be achieved, 'school climate matters now more than ever' (p.1).

This study sheds light on the current context by outlining and describing the types of programs and initiatives that are needed for creating a positive school culture and climate in a multicultural and diverse elementary school setting. As it is cited in previous research studies, school culture and climate can enlarge the achievement gap between students from different backgrounds (Choi et al. 2020; Condron 2009; Mattison & Aber 2007). For example, Pittman (2010) found that white male students tend to dominate a class discussion if schools do not intentionally implement initiatives designed to support diversity, equity and inclusion. As the findings in this study reveal, p4cHI is a culturally responsive approach to social justice education (Makaiau 2017a, 2017b) that can combat this type of systemic racism in schools. It creates an equitable learning environment that welcomes students from various cultural backgrounds (Nishina, Lewis Bellmore & Witkow 2019). Additionally, when practiced in every classroom, across grade levels and educational settings, p4cHI has the power to dismantle inequities typically found between special education and the mainstream classroom (Lindsay 2007; Pivik, McComas & Laflamme 2002). By cultivating and nurturing a collaborative civic space (Makaiau 2015), p4cHI can provide democratic structures for both the classroom and schoolwide setting, which can ultimately lead to a culture of engagement, shared decision-making and collaboration (Makaiau & Lukey 2013).

One overall outcome of a more just and equitable school culture and climate, created by initiatives like p4cHI, is increased Social Emotional Learning (SEL) well-being. Previous scholarship documents how schools that fail to support the social and emotional needs of students negatively impact student achievement, especially for underserved students (Hamedani & Darling-Hammond 2015). In p4cHI circles, the teacher and the students work together to create a warm and welcoming learning environment where the SEL needs of students are incorporated into academic learning. Embodied in the practice of

creating intellectually safe communities of inquiry (Jackson 2001), p4cHI cultivates a 'feeling of trust in oneself and one's community to honestly and genuinely engage in thinking together' (Butnor 2012, p. 31). This particular aspect of p4cHI, as Yos (2012) puts it, 'is so important because it purposefully cultivates what many of today's schools are unwisely leaving too far on the fringe: the loving, caring, fun-filled human relationships which are at the core of human flourishing' (p. 52).

Another overall outcome, revealed in this particular study, are the effects of student-centred teaching and learning on the creation of a positive school culture and climate (Armbruster, Patel, Johnson & Weiss 2009; Brown 2008; Garrett 2008). While some schools in the world utilise a teacher-centred approach (Dole, Bloom & Kowalske 2016) or an exam-oriented curriculum (Kirkpatrick & Zang 2011), p4cHI provides school communities with the theoretical foundations and practical strategies for enacting learner-centred inquiry across a school's grade levels and subjects. Relative to school culture and climate, learner-centred pedagogy invites students' interests and supports the connection between real life experiences and what is learned in school. This approach improves not only the retention of knowledge but also SEL development and positive social relationships (Froyd & Simpson 2008). Introduced into the American schools by twentieth century progressive educators such Francis Parker, John Dewey, William H Kilpatrick and Caroline Pratt, a school wide focus on learner-centred inquiry provides students with the opportunity to experience school as 'a model home, a complete community, an embryonic democracy' (Parker 1901). An accessible approach to progressive education, p4cHI supports educators and school communities in constructing a school culture and climate that grows in students the tools they need to create a better future society (Dewey 1916).

The 20 years-long practice of p4cHI at WES has made an indelible impact on the school and the community it serves. Educators, pre-service teachers, researchers, scholars, and members of the community at large visit WES to experience p4cHI. When they visit, they see and feel (Barth 2002) the positive impact of p4cHI on the school environment and describe participation in the school culture and climate as a transformative experience. At the very core, p4cHI is part of the school's personality (Pashiardis 2000) and ethos. As one teacher stated, 'not only do I practice p4cHI, I live it'. So how might other educators live p4cHI? How can they replicate the impact of p4cHI in their own school context? How can they apply what they've learned about p4cHI at WES to cultivate and nurture a

positive culture and climate in more schools? It is the hope of the authors of this study that they will apply the findings presented, wrestle 'with the conditions of the problem at first hand ... [and] find their own way' (Dewey 1916, p. 188).

Conclusion

The purpose of this study is not to provide a ready-made school program or initiative that will seemingly fix or create a more positive elementary school culture or climate where teachers and staff work. Instead, it aims to provide educators with an example of small public urban elementary school that has used the p4cHI approach to support the development of a positive school culture and climate so that educators can design an approach that meets the needs of their students, faculty and staff, families, community, and overall school context. Through in-depth qualitative inquiry, the research presented paints a portrait for others to view and learn from. Portraiture, as a methodology, 'has an underlying philosophy and process that enables the illumination of real people in real settings through the 'painting' of their stories. It is a complex methodology in which the researcher attempts to illuminate meaning of personal stories and events presented as narrative' (Cope, Jones & Hendricks 2015, p. 1). Now it is the task of educators to take this narrative and plant the necessary seeds for growing more progressive approaches to thoughtful school practices (Kohn 2017) like p4cHI. This is how p4cHI grew in Hawai'i. 'It began elsewhere, but it has grown in new and exciting ways—influenced by all that is best about our island home' (Jackson 2012, p. 3). How might it grow in yours?

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