



Implementation of the Philosophy for Children Approach to Build Critical Thinking Skills: A Case Study in Elementary School

Diki Somantri*
Yusuf Tri Herlambang
Dinie Anggraeni Dewi

Master of Elementary School Teacher Education Study Program, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia,
Jl.Pendidikan No. 15, Cibiru Wetan, Bandung, West Java,Indonesia

*Corresponding author, E-mail: dikis@upi.edu

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Abstract

The 21st century demands critical thinking skills, a competence often underdeveloped by conventional elementary teaching methods. This creates a significant gap, particularly in contexts like Indonesia's Terdepan, Terluar, dan Tertinggal (3T) regions where students are vulnerable to misinformation. This qualitative case study thus aimed to analyze how the "Philosophy for Children" (P4C) approach, integrated within a Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model, can cultivate critical thinking skills in elementary school students. The research involved 10 sixth-grade students and the researcher as a teacher-facilitator. Data were collected over three learning sessions via participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model. The findings reveal that this P4C-PBL implementation effectively fostered critical thinking, manifesting in three central themes: (1) a cognitive shift from passive information reception to critical inquiry and skepticism towards media messages; (2) an evolution in thought from personal issues to nuanced ethical reasoning and collaborative action; and (3) the teacher's pivotal role as an architect of a democratic and humanist learning community. This study underscores the urgent need for a pedagogical paradigm shift in primary education to empower students with robust critical thinking capabilities.

Keywords: philosophy for children (P4C); critical thinking; elementary education

INTRODUCTION

Education in the 21st century is confronted with the challenge of preparing a generation capable of navigating the complexities of a world saturated with information and change (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Amidst an abundant flow of information, the mere ability to know facts is no longer adequate. What is most needed today are higher-order thinking skills, of which critical thinking is a central component (Lai, 2011). Critical thinking can be defined as the ability to analyze arguments, make inferences using inductive or deductive reasoning, and to evaluate and make decisions (Ennis, 2011). These skills are a fundamental asset for every individual to function effectively, both as a democratic citizen and as an adaptive worker (Asyha et al., 2024; Hendriani et al., 2020).

Unfortunately, conventional education systems are often trapped in a paradigm of knowledge transmission, where students are positioned solely as passive recipients of information (Freire, 2018). Learning models oriented towards rote memorization and standardized assessment have proven ineffective in nurturing critical thinking dispositions. Such dispositions include curiosity, healthy skepticism, and open-mindedness (Abidin, 2015; Paul & Elder, 2008). Consequently, many elementary school graduates grow up without a strong

foundation for analyzing the validity of information. This leaves them vulnerable to misinformation and facing difficulties in complex problem-solving (Novianti, 2020). This failure creates an urgency for a pedagogical shift towards methods that are more active, participatory, and reflective.

In this context, philosophy offers a robust framework to address this pedagogical deficit. This is because philosophy, as a discipline, is inherently focused on fundamental questions, logical analysis, and rational justification (Muktapa, 2021; Surip, 2014). Far from being merely an abstract discipline, philosophy has deep roots in education. John Dewey (1916), a progressive philosopher, long ago asserted that true education is a process of reconstructing experience that fosters intellectual growth and reflective thinking. This view also aligns with the school of constructivism, which regards learning as an active process of constructing knowledge, rather than passively receiving it (A. Faiz, 2021; Febrian & Safitri, 2024).

One of the most concrete manifestations of philosophy in elementary education is the "Philosophy for Children" (P4C) approach, pioneered by Matthew Lipman (1993). It is important to understand that P4C is not an attempt to teach the history of philosophy to children. Rather, P4C is a pedagogical model that uses philosophical material as a stimulus to create a community of inquiry in the classroom (Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyan, 2010). Within this community, students learn to listen actively, build arguments based on reasons, challenge assumptions (both their own and others'), and collaboratively seek deeper understanding (Zulkifli & Hashim, 2020). The P4C approach is rooted in Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the role of social interaction and dialogue in cognitive development. In this framework, dialogue becomes the psychological tool that mediates higher-order thinking.

Numerous studies have demonstrated the positive impact of P4C on various aspects of student development. These impacts include improved reasoning skills (Topping & Trickey, 2007), enhanced cognitive abilities (Gorard, Siddiqui, & See, 2017), and developed social and emotional skills (García Moriyón, Rebollo, & Colom, 2005). However, most of this research has been conducted in Western contexts. A significant gap exists in the literature regarding the practical implementation of P4C in the Indonesian educational context, especially in schools with unique challenges, such as those in Indonesia's *Terdepan, Terluar, dan Tertinggal* (3T) regions (comparable to remote, rural, and underserved areas globally) (Gaol et al., 2022). Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap. It will address the following research question: How can the implementation of the P4C approach, within the context of science and social studies (IPAS) learning, build the critical thinking skills of students in an elementary school? This case study will conduct an in-depth analysis of the process, dynamics, and impact of a systematically designed P4C pedagogical intervention.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. This design was chosen to obtain a deep, rich, and holistic understanding of the phenomenon of implementing the Philosophy for Children (P4C) approach within the real life context of an elementary school classroom (Creswell, 2014).

The research was conducted at SDN Pasirluhur, a public elementary school located in one of Indonesia's Terdepan, Terluar, dan Tertinggal (3T) regions—an area characterized by its frontier, outermost, and disadvantaged status, often equivalent to remote rural areas globally. This context was selected to examine the application of P4C in an environment with unique challenges, including limited resources and access to diverse information. The primary participants were 10 sixth-grade students selected to take part in intensive sessions, along with the researcher who also acted as the teacher-researcher. This relatively small sample size is inherent to the in-depth nature of a qualitative case study, allowing for detailed exploration of contextual dynamics, though it implies limitations in generalizability.

Data was collected intensively during two Natural Sciences and Social Sciences (IPAS) learning sessions, each lasting approximately 90 minutes, with the topic “The Snack Trail: Unpacking Labels, Revealing Facts!”. The learning process was systematically designed using Problem-Based Learning (PBL) modules that integrated P4C principles. Data collection was conducted through participatory observation in a dialogically designed classroom environment, as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. A P4C Learning

Figure 1. A P4C Learning Session in the 6th-Grade Classroom at SDN Pasirluhur. This photo illustrates the implementation of the PBL-based Teaching Module, where the researcher as a facilitator uses an interactive whiteboard as a visual stimulus, while students engage in discussion in a technology-equipped learning environment to support their inquiry process.

The data collection techniques used included

Data analysis in this study utilized the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman (1994). This analytical process consisted of three cyclical stages: (1) Data Condensation, where data from interview transcripts and field notes were organized and coded to identify key concepts such as "critical skepticism" and "ethical reasoning"; (2) Data Display, where the coded data were presented in thematic matrices and narrative form to facilitate pattern identification; and (3) Conclusion Drawing and Verification, where tentative conclusions were drawn and continuously verified against the raw data through source and method triangulation to ensure their validity. Data collection in this study was conducted as follows:

1. Participatory Observation: The researcher was directly involved in every P4C session, recording interactions, types of questions, argument quality, and discussion dynamics in descriptive and reflective field notes.

2. In-depth Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five purposively selected students (representing diverse levels of participation) after the series of sessions concluded. The interviews aimed to explore students' perceptions and changes in their ways of thinking.
3. Documentation: The researcher collected relevant documents such as the Teaching Module used, the learning presentation slides, and student work for analysis as evidence of the learning process.

Instrument

In this study, interviews and observations were conducted. The objective of the student interviews is to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences during *Philosophy for Children* (P4C) learning. This involves exploring their perceptions of any changes in their way of thinking after participating in the sessions, as well as identifying the specific aspects of P4C they found most memorable or beneficial. Furthermore, the interviews aim to gather the students' views on the challenges or difficulties they faced throughout the process. The following is the draft of the interview guide designed to achieve these goals.

Table 1. Semi-structured Interview Guide for Students of Grade VI (Participants Philosophy for Children)

Aspect	Question
General Experience of P4C Learning (Topic Snacks)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I would like to know, how did you feel during the discussion activity about food snacks and advertisements last week in the computer lab? Deepening: What did you like most about the discussion activity? What didn't you like? 2. What do you think is the difference between learning in a group discussion like yesterday compared to the usual way of learning in class? Deepening: Which one is better? Why?
Perception of the Impact of P4C on the Way of Thinking	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. After participating in the discussion about advertising and the content of snacks, has anything changed in the way you look at or choose snacks now? Deepening: Can you give an example? For example, when you see food advertisements now, what do you think? 2. During the discussion, we asked a lot of questions, gave opinions, and listened to our friends' opinions. Do you think such activities help you to think more carefully or critically about something? Deepening: In what ways do you feel you have become more conscientious/critical? Can you give an example from yesterday's discussion?
Perception of the Impact of P4C on the Way of Thinking	Of all the discussion activities we did (e.g. discussing ads, thinking about how to tell a friend, or label review), which part did you find most interesting or most useful to you? Why?
Challenges or Difficulties Faced	Was there anything that you found difficult or challenging during the P4C discussion yesterday? Deepening: What made it difficult? How did you overcome it (if any)?
Suggestions or Expectations	If we were to hold another discussion like this, do you have any suggestions to make it better or more exciting?

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The qualitative data analysis from participatory observations, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and documentation in the 6th-grade class at SDN Pasirluhur reveals significant transformations in students' critical thinking skills following the systematic implementation of the Philosophy for Children (P4C) approach through a Problem-Based Learning (PBL) module. The findings are organized into three primary themes, each supported by empirical evidence from the data collected. The following are the results of interviews with students:

Table 2. Identification of Interview Results

Student	Student Quote	Initial Code	Emergent Theme
Student 1	"It's fun, sir! I like it when we debate about advertisements. It's like being a real detective."	Positive P4C Experience Interest in Critical Debate/Discussion Feeling Actively Involved	Enhanced Engagement & Enjoyment in Inquiry
Student 1	"Now when I see food advertisements on TV, I think, 'Is this really tasty and healthy, or is it just made to look good?' I used to just believe it, and want to buy it."	Changing Perspectives on Advertising Increased Critical Skepticism Cognitive Impact P4C Reflection on Consumptive Behavior	Shift from Passive Acceptance to Critical Media Inquiry
Student 2	"So be more careful, sir. For example, yesterday I saw a new snack, so I looked at the package first, what was written on it. It used to just taste good."	Behavior Change (Choosing Snacks) Application of New Knowledge Increased Nutrition Awareness Practical Impact of P4C	Practical Application of Critical Thinking in Daily Life
Student 2	"Then I have the courage to speak my mind, sir. Although sometimes I'm still afraid of being wrong."	Increased Self-Confidence (Arguing) Overcoming Psychological Barriers Affective Impact of P4C	Development of Voice and Confidence in Expression
Student 3	"I was a bit nervous at first, sir, afraid of saying the wrong thing. But you said it was okay, so I got a little braver."	Initial Barriers to Participation (Fear) Teacher's Role (Creating a Safe Climate) Development of Student Participation	Teacher's Role in Fostering Psychological Safety
Student 3	"Maybe I'm more... thinking before I want to have a snack. I never used to think about what food contains. Now I'm a little curious."	Increased Reflexivity (Before Action) New Awareness (Food Content) P4C Cognitive Impact (Learning Interest)	Enhanced Reflexivity and Curiosity
Student 4	"I think more about the impact, sir. Not just for myself, but for others too. For example, if we offend a friend, it's not good."	Development of Ethical Thinking Development of Social Thinking Consideration of Consequences of Action Impact of P4C on Values.	Evolution Towards Ethical and Social Reasoning
Student 5	"I care more about the snacks in the school canteen. Yesterday, I paid attention to what was being sold. So I want to know, is it healthy?"	Increased Contextual Awareness (School Environment) Critical Observation of the Environment Motivated Learning from Context.	Contextualized Critical Awareness
Student 1 and Student 4	(Mentioning challenges) "Sometimes when other friends talk back and forth, I get confused..." / "Sometimes when the discussion is exciting, the time seems to run out quickly..."	Challenges in Discussion (Clarity of Friend Communication) Challenges in Implementation (Time Management)	Challenges in Discussion Management

Student	Student Quote	Initial Code	Emergent Theme
Student 2 and Student 5	(Mentioning memorable aspects) "I liked it when we analyzed snack packs..." / "When we discussed advertisements, we realized that advertisements can 'lie'..."	Memorable P4C Aspects (Practical Analysis) Memorable P4C Aspects (Critical Awareness Discovery)	Memorable & Impactful Learning Activities

Epistemological Shift: From Passive Recipients to Critical Inquirers

Prior to the P4C intervention, observations indicated that students largely accepted information, particularly from media sources like advertisements, without significant scrutiny. For instance, initial informal conversations revealed a general belief in the veracity and health claims of popular snack advertisements.

During the "Unpacking the Label, Unveiling the Facts!" activity, which commenced with visual and narrative stimuli (e.g., contrasting appealing advertisements with actual nutritional information), a notable shift in student engagement was observed. The learning module deliberately presented information designed to create a discrepancy with their preconceived notions. This led to moments of clear cognitive disruption, evidenced by verbal expressions and facial cues during classroom discussions.

A pivotal moment occurred when Student 4 vocalized his immediate reaction: *"So, it's like we're being lied to, Sir?"* This statement, recorded in field notes, marked a departure from passive acceptance to an explicit questioning of media intentions. Further evidence of this shift emerged from post-session interviews. Student 1 reflected on her change in perspective regarding advertisements: "Now when I see an ad... I think, 'Is this really as delicious and healthy, or is it just made to look good?' Before, I would just believe it right away."

Beyond merely questioning, students also demonstrated a change in their information-seeking behavior. Student 2, for example, reported a new habit: *"So be more careful, sir. For example, yesterday I saw a new snack, so I looked at the package first, what was written on it. It used to just taste good."* This indicates a direct application of the skills practiced during the P4C sessions to real-life consumer choices. The analysis of student work and classroom interactions consistently showed a growing tendency to scrutinize claims, seek supporting evidence, and verbalize skepticism towards unsubstantiated information.

Moral and Social Scaffolding: An Evolution Towards Ethical Reasoning and Collective Action

The P4C sessions, particularly those involving debate and problem-solving scenarios, revealed a progressive development in students' moral and social reasoning. Initially, students' arguments regarding health and snack consumption often centered on individualistic concerns. For instance, early discussions commonly featured statements such as, *"We need to eat healthy so we don't get sick,"* primarily focusing on personal well-being.

However, as the discussions progressed, especially when confronted with more complex ethical dilemmas, a clear shift towards considering broader social implications was observed. This became particularly evident during the debate-triggering issue introduced by the teacher: *"School canteens should only sell fruits and vegetables."* This problem statement moved students beyond factual recall to the realm of normative deliberation.

During these debates, students began to articulate arguments that demonstrated an increased capacity for perspective-taking and the evaluation of alternative solutions. One group, for example, presented a counter-argument: *"My group disagrees... because in our view, it's the advertisements for children's snacks that should be restricted, not requiring every school canteen to sell fruits and vegetables."* This response, captured in observation notes, indicated a move from addressing symptoms to identifying more systemic root causes, such as manipulative advertising practices.

The evolution in thinking extended to practical ethics and empathetic considerations. A significant moment was recorded when Student 2 posed a reflective question regarding communication strategies: *"how do we tell them without being preachy or offending them?"* This query transcended a simple "right-or-wrong" dichotomy, revealing a nuanced concern for the feelings and autonomy of others, which suggests a developing ethical sensitivity.

Further evidence of this shift from an egocentric to a sociocentric perspective was provided by Student 4 in an interview. He stated, *"I started to think more about the impact, Sir. Not just for myself, but for other people too."* This personal reflection highlights an internalization of considering the collective good and the consequences of actions on the wider community, including peers and the school environment.

The culmination of this moral and social scaffolding was the spontaneous emergence of ideas for collective action among students. Discussions concluded with proposals such as *"creating posters and short plays"* to raise awareness about healthy eating and critical media consumption within their school. This readiness to translate newfound understanding into proactive, community-oriented solutions signifies a robust development in their critical thinking applied to social responsibility.

The Facilitator's Role: Architect of a Democratic and Humanistic Learning Space

The qualitative data consistently revealed that the substantial cognitive and social transformations observed in students were intrinsically linked to a fundamental shift in the teacher's role during the P4C sessions. The teacher adopted a facilitative stance, moving away from being the sole source of information to a guide who carefully curated the learning environment.

A key observation was the teacher's deliberate effort to establish psychological safety within the classroom. This was evident through explicit verbal assurances, such as the repeated phrase, *"there are no wrong answers,"* used at the beginning and throughout the discussions. This reassurance visibly reduced students' apprehension to participate.

Furthermore, the physical arrangement of the classroom was intentionally modified. Students were observed engaging in discussions while seated in a circular arrangement, as depicted in Figure 1, rather than traditional rows. This seating configuration promoted face-to-face interaction and symbolically removed hierarchical barriers between the teacher and students, as well as among students themselves.

The impact of this safe and egalitarian environment on student participation was tangible. Students who were initially hesitant or quiet began to contribute their thoughts. Student 3, for

example, admitted in his interview, *"I was a bit nervous at first, sir, afraid of saying the wrong thing. But you said it was okay, so I got a little braver."* This quote directly illustrates how the teacher's approach fostered increased confidence and willingness to engage.

Beyond creating a comfortable atmosphere, the teacher actively functioned as a strategic modeler and prompter of higher-order thinking. When discussions occasionally became superficial or veered off-topic, the teacher intervened with carefully crafted questions designed to deepen analysis. An observed instance included the question: *"Now, let's think, if we continuously see ads like that and are tempted, what is the impact on us? Besides health..."*

This type of questioning effectively directed students to consider multifaceted consequences—spanning economic implications (wasteful spending) and social pressures (peer influence)—beyond initial health concerns. The teacher's capacity to pose such thought-provoking questions ensured that the inquiry remained rigorous and pushed students towards more comprehensive critical reasoning.

Discussion

This section provides an in-depth interpretation and analysis of the findings presented in the 'Results' section, connecting them with relevant theoretical frameworks and existing literature. It explores the 'why' and 'how' behind the observed changes, and discusses their broader implications for elementary education.

Interpreting the Epistemological Shift

The observed epistemological shift from passive information recipients to critical inquirers represents a fundamental transformation in students' cognitive approach. This transformation was not spontaneous but was strategically engineered by the P4C approach, particularly through the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) module's design. The initial exposure to contrasting information, which created cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), was highly effective. By presenting a direct conflict between attractive advertisement imagery and objective nutritional facts, the module deliberately challenged students' existing mental schemas. This discomfort served as a powerful catalyst, moving students beyond rote memorization towards an active engagement with the validity of information. Student 4's poignant question, "So, it's like we're being lied to, Sir?", exemplifies this moment of critical awakening. This response signifies a shift towards critical media literacy (Buckingham, 2007), a crucial competence in navigating the complexities of the digital age where misinformation and persuasive messaging are rampant, even for young audiences (Riska & Puspita, 2025; Nisa, 2024). Through P4C, children learn to deconstruct media messages and analyze their underlying intentions rather than merely consuming them, thereby fostering resilience against manipulative content (Nurfazri & Irwansyah, 2024; Ariyani & Prasetyo, 2021; Fitria et al., 2024). These findings resonate with growing concerns in Indonesia regarding digital literacy and misinformation, especially among younger generations (Nisa, 2024; Susanti, 2024). Studies in Indonesia similarly highlight the urgency of fostering critical thinking and media literacy from an early age to combat the spread of hoaxes and disinformation (Riska & Puspita, 2025; Nurfazri & Irwansyah, 2024).

Furthermore, Student 1's reflection on her changed perception of advertisements powerfully illustrates the development of an intellectual habit of questioning—a core disposition of critical thinking (Costa & Kallick, 2008; Ennis, 2011). This disposition, characterized by healthy skepticism and open-mindedness, is actively cultivated through the dialogical nature of P4C, encouraging students to challenge assumptions and seek evidence for claims (Herawati, 2025; Nurfazri & Irwansyah, 2024). The process implicitly fostered metacognition (Flavell, 1979), as students became more aware of their own thinking processes and the necessity of evaluating information sources critically.

The practical application of these skills, such as Student 2's new habit of inspecting snack labels, demonstrates the successful transfer of learning (Perkins & Salomon, 1989). This transfer of critical thinking skills from the classroom to real-life decision-making underscores the functional and enduring impact of the P4C intervention. For students in 3T regions, where access to diverse and verified information might be limited, cultivating such skepticism and information-validation skills is paramount for navigating an increasingly complex information landscape. The ability to transfer these skills is further amplified by P4C's emphasis on real-world problem-solving, making learning directly applicable to students' daily experiences and decision-making processes (Nurfazri & Irwansyah, 2024). The effectiveness of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in cultivating critical thinking in Indonesian elementary school contexts has also been well-documented (Ariyani & Prasetyo, 2021; Sari et al., 2022; Fitria et al., 2024), further affirming the synergistic potential of combining PBL with P4C principles. This finding strongly supports a pedagogical paradigm shift in primary education, advocating for methods that empower students with intellectual autonomy and practical critical literacy.

Analyzing Moral and Social Development

The P4C community of inquiry, carefully integrated within the PBL framework, demonstrably served as a powerful mechanism for cognitive and social scaffolding. As posited by Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, social interaction and dialogue are fundamental for the development of higher mental functions. In this context, the structured debates and collaborative problem-solving sessions allowed students to engage in more complex levels of thought, moving beyond what they might achieve individually. This dialogical interaction within a community of inquiry provides a rich environment for co-construction of knowledge, where diverse perspectives are shared and negotiated, leading to deeper understanding and more sophisticated reasoning (Fuadi et al., 2025; Komariyah, 2025; Mariyono, 2024; Nugraha, 2024).

This progression was initially observed in the shift from self-centered arguments (e.g., individual health benefits) to arguments that considered broader societal implications and alternative perspectives. The deliberate introduction of a debate-triggering issue by the teacher effectively bridged the gap from descriptive analysis ("what's in it?") to normative reasoning ("what should we do?"). This pedagogical strategy encouraged students to move beyond surface-level observations to a deeper ethical and social deliberation.

The ability of students to formulate counter-arguments, such as advocating for restricting snack advertisements rather than solely focusing on canteen offerings, exemplifies a critical skill in problem-solving: evaluating alternative solutions and identifying systemic root causes (Paul & Elder, 2008). This demonstrates an enhanced capacity for complex analytical thinking,

where students can differentiate between symptoms and underlying issues, a hallmark of advanced critical thought. Moreover, engaging in such complex deliberations strengthens students' abilities to engage in constructive disagreement and collaborative decision-making, essential skills for democratic societies (Murwaningtyas et al., 2025; Sulistianingsih et al., 2024). This aligns with calls for civic education in Indonesia to move beyond mere knowledge transmission towards fostering active, democratic citizens capable of collaborative problem-solving and ethical deliberation within their communities (Murwaningtyas et al., 2025; Sulistianingsih et al., 2024).

Perhaps the most significant development was the emergence of practical ethical reasoning. Student 2's question, *"how do we tell them without being preachy or offending them?"*, vividly illustrates a nuanced understanding that transcends simplistic right-or-wrong dualisms (Gilligan, 1982). This indicates a move towards considering empathy, the ethics of communication, and the social impact of their actions, pointing to a form of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997) where students not only gain new knowledge but also reflect on and modify their fundamental perspectives and frames of reference regarding social interactions. This cultivation of empathy and ethical sensitivity is a cornerstone of P4C, enabling children to navigate moral dilemmas with greater understanding and compassion (Asgari et al., 2023; Gray, n.d.; Kristensen, 2024).

Student 4's reflection (*"I started to think more about the impact, Sir. Not just for myself, but for other people too"*) further solidifies this shift from an egocentric to a sociocentric perspective, aligning with the goals of civic education. The culmination of this scaffolding process was the students' initiative to propose collective actions, such as creating posters and short plays. This underscores that P4C, particularly when embedded in a PBL context, fosters not just critical thinkers but also proactive, solution-oriented citizens (Sari et al., 2022) who are prepared for democratic deliberation and active engagement in their community. Such initiatives exemplify how P4C can empower students to become agents of positive change within their immediate environment, bridging the gap between classroom learning and real-world civic engagement (Kenyon, 2021). The development of such social and ethical reasoning is particularly vital in 3T regions, where community cohesion and collective problem-solving are often crucial for sustainable development.

The Centrality of the Facilitator's Role

The profound cognitive and social developments in students were inextricably dependent on the teacher's transformed role, epitomizing the shift from a "sage on the stage" to a "guide on the side" (King, 1993). This redefinition of the teacher's function was critical in establishing a democratic and humanistic dialogical space essential for P4C's success. The teacher ceased to be merely a dispenser of knowledge and instead became an architect of a learning environment where inquiry and collaborative thought could flourish. This facilitative role is paramount in inquiry-based pedagogies like P4C, where the teacher's capacity to guide without dictating fosters genuine intellectual exploration and student ownership of learning (Barreneche, 2025).

A cornerstone of this facilitative role was the consistent cultivation of psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999). Observations underscored that when students feel secure enough to take intellectual risks—such as questioning ideas, proposing tentative thoughts, or disagreeing

respectfully with peers—their participation and critical engagement significantly increase. The teacher's repeated verbal affirmations, like "*there are no wrong answers*," were not merely encouraging words; they were deliberate pedagogical interventions that directly addressed and ameliorated students' initial fears of error or judgment, as evidenced by Student 3's testimony. Creating such a trusting and non-judgmental atmosphere is essential for encouraging student voice and promoting a culture of open inquiry, where mistakes are seen as opportunities for learning (Anuli & Djafri, 2025).

The physical arrangement of the classroom, specifically the adoption of a circular seating pattern, played a crucial symbolic and practical role in fostering an egalitarian environment (F. Faiz et al., 2024). This configuration physically dismantled traditional classroom hierarchies, promoting direct eye contact and equal access to the discourse, thereby enhancing the collective ownership of the learning process. Such an environment is vital for nurturing the dialogical teaching philosophy where every voice is valued (Alexander, 2008). This spatial re-arrangement, coupled with the teacher's facilitative stance, reinforces the notion of a 'community of inquiry' where all participants are equally invested in the pursuit of understanding (Dalbani et al., 2022).

Beyond providing a safe space, the teacher's expertise as a facilitator was evident in their strategic interventions as a modeler and prompter of higher-order thinking. Rather than giving direct answers, the teacher employed Socratic questioning techniques, particularly when discussions showed signs of superficiality. By posing questions such as, "Now, let's think, if we continuously see ads like that and are tempted, what is the impact on us? Besides health...", the teacher effectively scaffolded students' thinking, pushing them to consider multiple perspectives and deeper implications, a critical aspect of reflective and complex reasoning. These targeted questions are crucial for extending students' thinking beyond surface-level responses, guiding them towards more complex analyses and fostering independent thought (Prakoso et al., 2024; Sastradinata, 2023). This strategic questioning demonstrates the teacher's role in guiding students into their Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978), enabling them to achieve cognitive leaps that would otherwise be beyond their individual capabilities. The facilitator's ability to pivot discussions, introduce new ethical dimensions, and encourage systemic thinking transformed potentially simple exchanges into profound opportunities for intellectual and moral growth.

Beyond providing a safe space, the teacher's expertise as a facilitator was evident in their strategic interventions as a modeler and prompter of higher-order thinking. Rather than giving direct answers, the teacher employed Socratic questioning techniques, particularly when discussions showed signs of superficiality. By posing questions such as, "*Now, let's think, if we continuously see ads like that and are tempted, what is the impact on us? Besides health...*", the teacher effectively scaffolded students' thinking, pushing them to consider multiple perspectives and deeper implications, a critical aspect of reflective and complex reasoning. These targeted questions are crucial for extending students' thinking beyond surface-level responses, guiding them towards more complex analyses and fostering independent thought (Prakoso et al., 2024; Sastradinata, 2023).

In essence, the teacher's role transcended mere instruction; it embodied a commitment to fostering intellectual autonomy and communal learning. This research highlights that the

effectiveness of P4C, particularly in contexts like 3T schools where educational support systems might be limited, is profoundly reliant on a skilled facilitator who can consciously design and manage a learning space that is both democratic in spirit and humanistic in its approach to student development. Ultimately, the teacher's proficiency in creating and sustaining a genuine community of inquiry is the linchpin for unlocking the full potential of P4C in developing robust critical thinking and ethical reasoning skills among elementary school students (Gray, 2010; Motherway, 2020).

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

This comprehensive case study unequivocally concludes that the structured implementation of the Philosophy for Children (P4C) approach, seamlessly integrated within a Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model, is profoundly effective in cultivating and enhancing the critical thinking skills of elementary school students. This efficacy is demonstrated even within the challenging context of a school situated in a 3T region, underscoring the adaptability and robustness of the approach despite resource limitations.

The thematic findings, rigorously presented in the results and critically discussed, illuminate a significant pedagogical transformation. Specifically, the research reveals three interconnected and pivotal outcomes: (1) a marked epistemological shift where students evolve from passive recipients of information to proactive, skeptical inquirers, demonstrating a heightened ability to question and evaluate media messages; (2) a profound moral and social scaffolding that propels students' reasoning beyond personal issues towards complex ethical considerations and a collaborative orientation for collective action; and (3) the indispensable role of the teacher as a transformative facilitator, who skillfully architects a democratic, humanistic, and psychologically safe learning community, thereby enabling these profound cognitive and social developments.

The implications of this study are substantial. It strongly advocates for a fundamental pedagogical paradigm shift in primary education, moving away from conventional transmissive models towards more dialogical, reflective, and inquiry-based methods. This shift is crucial for empowering students with the essential critical thinking competencies required to navigate the complexities of the 21st century, particularly in underserved regions where fostering intellectual autonomy is paramount for societal progress. This research not only affirms the theoretical underpinnings of P4C but also provides practical, empirical evidence for its successful implementation in diverse educational settings.

Recommendations

This study's findings provide a strong foundation for both future research and practical applications in educational settings.

For Future Research

Future investigations could expand upon this case study by employing a mixed-methods approach to quantify the impact of P4C on critical thinking skills across a larger and more

diverse sample of 3T schools, including control groups. Longitudinal studies would also be beneficial to track the sustained development of critical thinking over a longer period. Additionally, exploring the specific training models for teachers to effectively adopt the 'architect of learning space' role is a crucial area for further inquiry, especially considering its identified centrality in P4C implementation.

For Educational Practice and Policy

The compelling evidence for P4C's effectiveness, particularly in challenging educational environments, strongly advocates for its integration into elementary school curricula, especially in 3T regions. Policymakers should consider developing tailored teacher training programs that emphasize facilitative teaching methods, dialogical strategies, and the creation of psychologically safe learning communities. Schools are encouraged to adopt pedagogical approaches that empower students as active inquirers rather than passive recipients, fostering intellectual autonomy and critical media literacy from an early age.

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