



dossier "philosophy with children across boundaries"

philosophy as the way forward

exploring primary school teachers experiences

of p4c in greece

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abstract

Philosophy for Children (P4C) is an educational movement implemented in hundreds of schools worldwide; however, limited research has been conducted in Greece. This study explores primary school teachers' experiences with (a) philosophy in primary education and children's philosophical abilities, (b) the proposed benefits of philosophical discussions for children, (c) the challenges teachers and children experience during P4C, and (d) teachers' practices in philosophy education. A mixed-methods study design was implemented. This paper presents the qualitative findings obtained through semi-structured interviews with (N=10) P4C teachers. A thematic analysis was applied to interpret the data. The findings support philosophy in primary education. Teachers homogeneously endorsed the positive impact of P4C on children's fondness for P4C classes. Key themes identified included the enhancement of children's higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), emotional well-being, and democratic skills. Teachers reported challenges in managing their initial nervousness, navigating boundaries with children, and classroom dynamics. Students were perceived to face challenges in question-formulation, staying on-topic, and self-expression. Teachers expressed positive contributions of P4C in their

professional development, fostering cross-curriculum skills, and teaching strategy transference.

keywords: philosophy for children (p4c); primary education; teacher's perspectives; qualitative research; teacher research.

la filosofía como camino a seguir explorando las experiencias de los profesores de primaria con la fpn en grecia

resumen

La Filosofía para Niños (FpN) es un movimiento educativo implantado en cientos de escuelas de todo el mundo; sin embargo, en Grecia se han realizado pocas investigaciones. Este estudio explora las experiencias de los profesores de primaria con (a) la filosofía en la educación primaria y las habilidades filosóficas de los niños, (b) los beneficios propuestos de las discusiones filosóficas para los niños, (c) los retos a los que se enfrentan los profesores y los niños durante la FpN, y (d) las prácticas de los profesores en la educación filosófica. Se aplicó un diseño de métodos mixtos. Este artículo presenta los resultados cualitativos obtenidos mediante entrevistas semiestructuradas con (N=10) profesores de FpN. Se aplicó un análisis temático para interpretar los datos. Los resultados apoyan la filosofía en la enseñanza primaria. Los profesores refrendaron de forma homogénea el impacto positivo de la FpN en el gusto de los niños por las clases de FpN. Los temas clave identificados incluyeron la mejora de las habilidades de pensamiento de orden superior (HOTS) de los niños, el bienestar emocional y las habilidades democráticas. Los profesores informaron de los retos a los que se enfrentaban a la hora de gestionar su nerviosismo inicial, los límites con los niños y la dinámica del aula. Se percibió que los alumnos tenían dificultades para formular preguntas, no salirse del tema y expresarse. Los profesores valoraron positivamente la contribución de la FpN a su desarrollo profesional, al fomento de las competencias transversales y a la transferencia de estrategias de enseñanza.

keywords: filosofia para niños (FpN); educación primaria; perspectivas docentes; investigación cualitativa; investigación para profesores.

a filosofia como caminho a seguir explorando as experiências de professores do ensino fundamental do fpc na grécia

resumo

A Filosofia para Crianças (FpC) é um movimento educacional implementado em centenas de escolas em todo o mundo; no entanto, poucas pesquisas foram realizadas na Grécia. Este estudo explora as experiências dos professores do Ensino Fundamental em relação a: (a) a filosofia no ensino fundamental e as habilidades filosóficas das crianças; (b) os benefícios propostos das discussões filosóficas para as crianças; (c) os desafios que os professores e as crianças enfrentam durante o FpC; e (d) as práticas dos professores na educação filosófica. Foi implementado um projeto de métodos mistos. Este artigo apresenta os resultados qualitativos obtidos por meio de entrevistas semiestructuradas com (N=10) professores do FpC. Uma análise temática foi aplicada para interpretar os dados. Os resultados confirmam a importância da filosofia no Ensino Fundamental. Os professores endossaram, de forma homogênea, o impacto positivo da FpC no gosto das crianças pelas aulas. Os principais temas identificados incluíram o aprimoramento das habilidades de pensamento de ordem superior (HOTS), o bem-estar emocional e as habilidades democráticas das crianças. Os professores relataram desafios para lidar com seu nervosismo inicial, lidar com os limites das crianças e com a dinâmica da sala de aula. Percebeu-se que os alunos enfrentam desafios na formulação de perguntas, na permanência no tópico e na autoexpressão. Os professores enfatizaram que a FpC contribuiu de maneira positiva em seu desenvolvimento profissional, promovendo habilidades entre currículos e transferência de estratégias de ensino.

palabras clave: filosofia para crianças (FpC); professores/as; pesquisa qualitativa; educação primária; perspectivas dos pesquisa de professores.

philosophy as the way forward

exploring primary school teachers experiences of p4c in greece

introduction

Children are filled with wonderful “whys,” constantly questioning the world around them in search of meaning and understanding. Inquiry has long been recognized as a fundamental aspect of learning, yet contemporary educational practices do not appear to be aligned with the promotion and cultivation of children’s inquisitiveness and curiosity. In re-envisioning the purpose of education in schools, numerous scholars and educators share John Dewey’s call for educational reform. Advocating for an approach that prioritizes the development of critical thinking rather than the mere transmission of knowledge. As Dewey argues, education should not be a process of simply telling students what to think, but rather an active, constructive experience in which learners develop their own understanding through interaction and inquiry within a democratic environment (Dewey, 1961). Pedagogical approaches that prioritize inquiry and questioning empower students to explore their thinking abilities, engage their creativity, and to construct thoughts of their own.

Questioning fosters not only the independence of thought but also social awareness. A society can only be shaped by actively engaged individuals who are capable of agency. As Martha Nussbaum (2010) declares, “by emphasizing each person's active voice we also promote a culture of accountability. When people see their ideas as their own responsibility, they are more likely to see their deeds as their own responsibility” (p. 54). Engaging students in questioning through dialogue promotes not only independence of thought but also trains children’s minds to process complex concepts, issues, and principles within a societal context. As Dewey (1961) demonstrates, education, society, and democracy exist in a symbiotic relationship, where education is an integral process that cultivates citizenship and democratic values. In this light, reclaiming philosophy as a social practice equips future generations with the skills they need to think and act critically, creatively, and in community, while addressing the complexities of contemporary societies. However, in contrast, education nowadays appears

entrenched in a relentless pursuit of academic attainment. Characterized by a meticulous process of spoon-feeding that stifles children's curiosity, excitement, and initiative-taking, frequently leading to a loss of interest in learning (Lipman, 2003).

philosophy for children

One pedagogical approach exhibiting increased prominence in nurturing children's curiosity and intellectual autonomy is Philosophy for Children (P4C). Originally developed by Matthew Lipman and Ann Margaret Sharp more than 50 years ago, P4C has grown into a worldwide educational movement that has been implemented in more than 60 countries (Ab Wahab et al., 2022). Designed as an instructional method whose main purpose is to "help children learn how to think for themselves" (Lipman et al., 1980, p. 53), a simple yet rigorous premise. P4C targets the fostering of critical, creative, and caring thinking (Lipman, 2003). Lipman and Sharp were the first to attempt the development of a comprehensive curriculum, designed to engage children and adolescents in philosophical inquiry, yet numerous pedagogical approaches share similarities. One widely used approach includes Philosophy with Children (PwC), and consists of a broader, global movement that stems from Lipman-Sharp's pedagogies (Oyler, 2016). Such pedagogical approaches demonstrate the age-appropriateness of philosophy in primary education, while research empirically supports its implementation in school curricula. Resembling the process of "Socratic questioning" and thinking, by using dialogical practices, P4C practitioners aim to cultivate "communities of inquiry" (CoI), also referred to as "communities of philosophical inquiry" (CoPI) (Anderson, 2016; Lipman et al., 1980; Striano, 2020). CoI/CoPI constitute the main pedagogical tool facilitated by teachers in P4C classes, which serve as dialogical spaces for students to collaboratively explore philosophical questions raised. Students learn to express their thoughts, question their beliefs, and understand different viewpoints. Through these inquiry-based discussions, students cultivate the essential intellectual and moral foundation for engaged citizenship, underpinning the seminal role of education on an individual and social level.

Since 1974, when Matthew Lipman and colleagues (1980) began the P4C approach, philosophical inquiry has been introduced in thousands of schools around the world. In the UK in 2016, the “Education Endowment Fund” provided the amount of almost \$2 million to fund P4C pilot programs across 200 schools, conducting comparative studies to examine whether evidence supports the effectiveness of this approach (Education Endowment Foundation, 2016). In the UK, P4C has been practiced for more than 20 years. A variety of national organizations per country undertake the training of schoolteachers in the P4C practice. It is important to note that such a provision of training is not available in Greece. One widely used training program in the UK is the Society for the Advancement of Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education (SAPERE), which was founded in 1992 to support the promotion of the school-based implementation of P4C. Organizations such as SAPERE provide different levels of P4C training (SAPERE, 2023). A crucial factor to be aware of is that SAPERE provides merely guidelines of practice for the facilitation of P4C classes.

interventions & research

When examining the research surrounding P4C, one emerges with results indicating a holistically diverse range of developmental and educational benefits for children. There is substantial evidence from empirical research and studies that indicates measurable and specific benefits for the inclusion of P4C programs in schools. Notably, the most investigated topics include fostering cognitive skills, including critical and creative thinking and reasoning, and their contribution to increased academic attainment (Colom et al., 2014; Karadağ & Demirtaş, 2018; Kilby, 2019; Rahdar et al., 2018; Ventista, 2018; Zulkifli & Hashim, 2020). According to Bloom’s taxonomy, such skills may be defined as “higher-order thinking skills (HOTs)” (Zulkifli & Hashim, 2019). Yet, P4C’s proposed benefits go far beyond cognitive skill development or scoring increased levels of academic achievement. Current literature shows the positive effectiveness on children’s social-emotional skills, including community building (Burroughs & Barkauskas, 2017; Colom et al., 2014; Giménez-Dasí et al., 2013; Ventista, 2019; Trickey, 2007) and promoting ethical development and intercultural awareness (Ab Wahab et al., 2022;

Burroughs & Tuncdemir, 2017). Additional studies have focused on the emotional and mental health benefits of P4C, including improvements in students' self-regulation, self-esteem, and empathy (Gorard et al., 2015; Leng, 2020; Siddiqui et al., 2019; Trickey, 2007; Trickey & Topping, 2004).

Recent scholarship demonstrates that the P4C pedagogy contributes positively to the professional development of teachers. Research conducted by Lam (2021) suggests that P4C contributes to improving teachers' classroom effectiveness, their ability to facilitate dialogical practices and inquiry thinking, and the development of appropriate teaching materials. Additionally, it encourages engagement in self-reflective practices and recognition of students' ability to construct knowledge through dialogic inquiry. Skills gained through P4C allow for the cross-curriculum transference of teaching strategies and support the identification and analysis of philosophical concepts in the school syllabus. Anderson (2016) also suggested this finding. Furthermore, results from Zappala and Smyth's (2021) wide-scale study suggest that teachers and educators who implement a philosophical or CoI approach with their students can exhibit increased levels of reflection and engagement in critical thinking skills and ethical reasoning. In relation to this, it is important to be aware of Wikeley's (2000) suggestion of the "mirror effect" in teachers, indicating that teachers may cultivate the same traits that they aim to develop in their students. In support of this, Baumfield (2016) showed that P4C teachers who engage in philosophical inquiry with their students might also develop curious, reflective, and experimental skills. While existing studies substantiate the constructive role of P4C in fostering teachers' professional development, this area has received considerably less academic scrutiny than the well-documented benefits for children.

Research on the implementation of P4C highlights the heterogeneous difficulties experienced by both students and teachers. Recent systematic literature review (SLR) recently by Ab Wahab et al. (2022), aimed to address the lack of SLR research on P4C. Their findings revealed three main challenges faced by teachers: optimal methods, classroom management, and a deficiency of ideas. On the student's part, the three main challenges included learning difficulties, lack of interpersonal skills, and lack of knowledge, including vocabulary limitations.

Other studies have focused on the challenges teachers face during their P4C training (Çayır, 2018).

the teacher's role in education

Conceptualized in contemporary educational literature as both agents of change and pedagogical toolmakers, teachers are justifiably positioned at the forefront of educational discourse and research (Kilby, 2019). Regarding reforming educational practices, it is crucial to be aware that teachers' values and beliefs guide not only their practices but can also affect policy implementation. As Kilby (2019) stated, research focusing on these areas can yield valuable data for school leaders, P4C academics, and policymakers. Most importantly, such data can offer substantive guidance for the planning and implementation of educational goals heading towards an educational reform (Zoabi & Lobont; 2022). For instance, a mixed-method study conducted by Klibavicius (2023) aimed at exploring the implementation of philosophy in primary, secondary, and tertiary education, and its inclusion in the national curriculum of Wales. Results suggest that teachers view philosophy as an essential part of other subjects, rather than as a distinct academic subject. In a recent phenomenological study by Zengin (2022), examining teachers' perceptions revealed that teachers support the implementation of philosophy in primary education in Turkey. In another study, Zappala and Smyth (2021) yielded valuable insights by investigating P4C teachers' perceptions of the impact of the P4C curriculum on children. Limited studies have been carried out with teachers. Thus, research suggests that there is an increasing need to deeply understand classroom teachers' experiences, as these dynamically affect their perceptions, values, and beliefs that guide their P4C teaching practices and affect policy implementation.

philosophy & research in greece

It is significant to outline the status of philosophy in the Greek education system. Although the science of philosophy can be traced back to ancient Greece, in contemporary pedagogical practices it remains largely neglected and under-prioritized within the national curriculum. In Greece, primary education

(grades 1–6) is taught by university-trained teachers who study both subject content and pedagogy. Most are generalist teachers, qualified to teach a range of subjects—from language and mathematics to art and physical education—while a few specialist teachers cover areas such as music, foreign languages, or physical education. Teachers typically stay with the same group of students throughout the day, providing continuity in learning and support. Philosophy, however, is not included in the primary curriculum, and in secondary education appears only as an optional course in the final year of upper secondary school (Grade C of Lyceum). The course is taught by specialist teachers in philosophy or the humanities, with 2 hours per week, totaling around 66 hours per year (Eurydice, 2025). Noticing the current state of schooling practices in Greece is crucial since the present research aims to gather insights from the primary school teachers' experiences and perceptions of teaching P4C in Greece.

Despite substantial empirical evidence supporting the introduction of P4C practices in early education, limited research has been conducted in Greece. Promising findings have emerged from studies carried out with students in primary, kindergarten, and secondary school settings. Therefore, it is a context that is worth exploring and can yield significant insights. Results from Ventista and Paparoussi's (2016) experimental research involving 20 primary school students in a P4C intervention, suggest that children can engage in philosophical thinking and dialogical practices. Research findings from Gasparatou et al. (2020) showed promising effectiveness of PwC inspired material to teach kindergarten children the living/non-living distinction in a biology class. Gasparatou and Ergazaki (2015) examined the perceptions of 16 teenagers, following an 8-week period of P4C intervention. Gasparatou and Kampeza (2012) introduced P4C in a kindergarten, with 30 preschoolers participating in the study, showing positive effectiveness on children's critical thinking. In a recent study Nikolidaki (2022) engaged twenty-two kindergarten children in the city of Heraklion, at the island of Crete, in a dialogue based on "Frog in Love," a picture-book by Max Velthuijs. Although still at an early developmental stage, the children displayed the ability to engage in and sustain dialogue—an outcome that, according to Nikolidaki (2022), can be linked to the simplicity of the dilemma under discussion.

purpose of the present study

The present study investigated teachers' experiences and perceptions regarding the implementation of P4C in Greece. In line with the purpose of the study, four main research questions were identified: What are teachers' experiences and perceptions of:

- (a) philosophy in primary education and children's philosophical abilities?
- (b) the proposed benefits of philosophical discussions for children?
- (c) the challenges teachers and children experience during P4C?
- (d) teaching practices in philosophy education?

This initial investigation aimed to explore the prospect of philosophical inquiry with children in Greek primary schools. Limited research has been conducted with teacher populations, while to the researchers' knowledge no study focusing solely on P4C teachers had been implemented in Greece at the time of the present investigation.

methodology

design

This study is a mixed-methods research design, implementing both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. An expansion rationale (Greene et al., 1989; McCrudden et al., 2021) was adopted offering a broader understanding with regards to the perceptions of primary school teachers in Greece.

However, the current paper specifically focuses on the qualitative findings. Qualitative research aims at gathering in-depth data from small sample sizes, revealing the subjective experiences and perceptions of individuals (Greening, 2019). Leveraging the advantages of qualitative methods of data collection, semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain in-depth data on P4C teachers' experiences

participants

This study explored the experiences of (N=10) primary school teachers practicing P4C in Greece via semi-structured interviews. All teachers who participated in the interviews were female from two international schools in Athens. Due to the rarity of the topic in Greece and following the objectives of this research, a criterion sampling strategy was implemented (Palinkas et al., 2015). A set criterion for the teacher's participation included working in primary education for a minimum of 5 years and practicing P4C for a minimum of 2 years. All data obtained from the semi-structured interviews occurred from the region of Attica. All interviews were carried out in person in English, since all participants teach in international schools, with English as the main language spoken.

instruments

All instruments were developed by the researchers. Since this study did not utilize standardized material for data collection, it is important to note the development process of the tools that the researchers followed. A semi-structured interview guide was developed based on the literature reviewed. The instruments were reviewed and revised by experts in the field and underwent multiple revisions. The demographic questionnaire, and the semi-structured interview guide were reviewed by (n=2) experts in the field. Both experts had engaged in research on P4C in Greece, with years of experience in the field and shared a similar teaching background. Both experts were contacted via e-mail and invited to act as review experts on the instruments.

procedure

ethical approval

This study commenced post approval and after having been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the American College of Greece. The tools utilized adhere to the ethical and professional standards for conducting psychological research with adult populations. No related risks were identified in conducting the study. The voluntary consent forms informed the participants of the research purposes, their right to withdraw at any moment in time, and of the anonymity maintained. Specifically, the confidentiality of the participants was

ensured by informing them of the coding of the responses and of the storing of the data in a secure location. An audio release form was provided to the participants prior to instigating them in the interview process, to inform them of the audio recording, of the confidentiality of their responses and the deleting of data after the transcription process has been completed. Additionally, the consent form informed the participants of the time required to complete the semi-structured interviews, approximately 45 minutes. Upon completion of the interview, all teachers were thanked for their time and participation and were presented with a debriefing statement. The researchers' contact details were included in both voluntary informed consent and debriefing forms.

semi-structured interviews

The recruitment process was initiated by identifying schools practicing P4C via Google search engine. Three international schools were identified in Greece; all located in Athens. All schools were contacted by e-mail invitation to participate in the research within the month of April 2023. Two out of the three schools expressed interest in being part of the study, and an online meeting was arranged between the researchers and senior members of the school's management from each primary school. Information about the purpose of the study, clarifications and the study process were carefully and clearly outlined. All interviews apart from one, occurred in-person on the school's premises within the months of May-June 2023. To ensure the confidentiality of the participants, each session took place in an empty classroom with only the researchers and the teacher present. One interview took place at the participant's house.

informal meetings

Two meetings were held with one senior member of the school's management from each school. Each meeting was conducted in an informal manner and targeted at gathering more data into the application of P4C on a systematic level, gaining insight from the perception of individuals working in higher levels of the school's administration. Additionally, information about each school's approach and years of implementation was gathered during the meetings.

data analysis

Two methods were used to analyze the data obtained: descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Descriptive statistics were implemented to provide further insight into the interviewee's socio-demographic data. Thematic analysis (TA) was implemented to analyze the data obtained from the semi-structured interviews and report on the teacher's experiences. This study followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) inaugural approach to TA by implementing a six-phase analytical strategy as also outlined in other studies (Byrne, 2022). A deductive approach for theme identification was adopted, since specific research questions guided the data collection process (Boyatzis, 1998). The prevalence of each theme was determined primarily based on the number of times it appeared within a data item and across the whole data set. Themes were also determined in relation to the research questions of this study, thus capturing important meanings across the data set.

results

socio-demographics

The sample of the semi-structured interviews consisted exclusively of 10 female teachers (100%) and of no male participant (0%). The participants' ages ranged between 25 – 61+ years of age ($M=52.30$, $SD=17.23$). Participants represented diverse nationalities, while 5 had a bachelor's degree (50%), 5 had a master's degree (50%). The participants' teaching experience included 1 with 5-9 years (10%), 1 with 9-14 years (10%), 2 with 15-19 years (20%), 2 with 19-24 years (20%), and 4 participants with 25+ years (40%). Some of the participants had experience teaching more than one grade. Specifically, of the participants included in the interviews, 2 had taught 1st grade (20%), no participant had taught 2nd grade, 3 had taught 3rd grade (30%), 4 had taught 4th grade (40%), 2 had taught 5th grade (20%), and 4 had taught 6th grade (40%). With regards to the subjects, all the participants recorded having experience teaching more than one subject.

Most of the participants reported having received training in P4C ($N=8$, 80%) while the minority did not receive any form of training ($N=2$, 20%). Of the participants that received training ($N=8$), all of them completed the SAPERE – Level 1 teacher training (80%). Some of the participants had experience teaching

P4C in more than one grade. Specifically, of the participants included in the interviews, 3 had taught P4C in the 1st grade (30%), 1 in the 2nd grade (10%), 3 in the 3rd grade (30%), 4 in the 4th grade (40%), 2 had taught 5th grade (20%), and 3 had taught P4C classes in the 6th grade (30%). The participants' experience in teaching P4C ranged between 2 to 7 years, with 1 participant having 2-3 years (10%), 4 participants having 4-5 years (40%), and 5 participants having 6-7 years of experience (50%).

thematic analysis

a) Findings obtained from the teacher's experiences and perceptions of philosophy in primary education, and children's philosophical abilities.

In relation to teachers' experiences of philosophy in primary education, and children's philosophical abilities, the following 4 themes emerged: 1. Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS), 2. Emotional Well-being, 3. All Children Can Do Philosophy, 4 Democracy (see table 1a).

table 1a: emerging themes and subthemes of teachers' experiences and perceptions of philosophy in primary education and children's philosophical abilities.

Themes	Subthemes
1. Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS)	• Growing trend • Life skills • Oracy and self-expression skills • Philosophy as a thinking practice
2. Emotional Well-being	• Unburdened from subject knowledge
3. All Children Can Do Philosophy	• Philosophical abilities depend on developmental stage • Use of age-appropriate stimulus
4. Democracy	• Questioning the teacher • Free from judgmental behavior

Source: Authors

A total of 16 initial codes were identified, with the most emphasized and repeated codes being; 10. Relieves pressure of providing right answers (N=10,

n=23)¹, 11. Philosophy challenges children's beliefs (N=9, n=17), 15. Children can start at any age depending on the stimulus (N=8, n=12). From the initial codes identified, the following 9 subthemes emerged; 1. Growing trend, 2. Life skills, 3. Oracy and self-expression skills, 4. Questioning the teacher, 5. Free from judgmental behavior, 6. Unburdened from subject knowledge, 7. Philosophy as a thinking practice, 8. Philosophical abilities depend on developmental stage, 9. Use of age-appropriate stimulus. Sample quotes from the initial codes are provided below:

It sort of sets them free is because there's no right or wrong answer. You know, they they, whatever they say, is acceptable. (P8)²

Really, I don't really know if I see it as philosophy, it's more of a thinking practice where children are put on the spot, so to speak, where they have to actually stop and think which is something that's lacking I think in today's society, because everything's moving fast. And I believe that a lot of children express ideas and views which are not necessarily their own without much thought put into it. (P9)

Anything, anything as I said, I like chocolate. It can be philosophized, you know. You know, chocolate is the best candy in the world. It can be if you can philosophize you know they will come up with things. (P4)

b) Findings obtained from the teacher's experiences and perceptions of the proposed benefits of philosophical discussions for children.

In relation to teacher's experiences and perceptions of the proposed benefits of philosophical discussions for children, 6 themes emerged; 1. Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) 2. Emotional Well-being, 3. Democracy, 4. Divergent Rates of Benefit Visibility, 5. P4C Topic, 6. Learning Differences (see table 1b).

¹ Capital 'N' denotes the total number of interviews, whereas lowercase 'n' indicates the frequency of mentions.

² The code 'P' followed by a numeral (e.g., P8) designates a specific interview participant.

table 1b: emerging themes and subthemes of teachers' experiences and perceptions of the proposed benefits of philosophical discussions for children

Themes	Subthemes
1. Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS)	• Oracy fosters self-expression and thinking skills • Life benefits • Fostering children's natural curiosity • Thinking benefits extend beyond the classroom • Cross-curriculum benefits • Questioning Skills • Evaluating Skills
2. Emotional Well-being	• Confidence and self-expression • Children express enjoyment during P4C
3. Democracy	• Respect and citizenship • Ethical Skills
4. Divergent Rates of Benefit Visibility	• Benefits are visible at divergent rates
5. P4C Topic	• Relatability of topic affects children's engagement
6. Learning Differences	• Children with learning differences can participate

source: Authors.

A total of 27 initial codes were identified, with the following being the most prominent and repeated codes; 24. Children love philosophizing (N=10, n=24), 8. Respecting different viewpoints (N=8, n=14), 16. Thinking skills permeate all subjects (N=7, n=18). From the initial codes identified, the following 14 subthemes emerged; 1. Oracy fosters self-expression and thinking skills, 2. Life benefits, 3. Fostering children's natural curiosity, 4. Thinking benefits extend beyond the classroom, 5. Respect and citizenship, 6. Confidence and self-expression, 7. Ethical Skills, 8. Cross-curriculum benefits, 9. Benefits are visible at divergent rates, 10. Relatability of topic affects children's engagement, 11. Children express enjoyment during P4C, 12. Questioning Skills, 13. Evaluating Skills, 14. Children with learning differences actively participate. Sample quotes from the initial codes are provided below:

They love that they love when they philosophize things. The children are really enjoying P4C lessons. I guess they really look forward and if I cancel it a week they're like "ohh." I think every child likes talking about themselves. (P4)

It benefits other subjects, because they can become better listeners, they can reason their answers so reasoning. Evaluation as well as skills. Yes, they can think out-of-the-box. They can think broader, which also you know can benefit the other subjects a well, yeah. (P7)

I think they're actually a lot more respectful during the PC classes. We have very certain rules and very specific rules like we don't interrupt each other, which happens during all the other classes you know. It's a respect towards the community that's having that inquiry in that moment. (P10)

c) Findings obtained from the teacher's experiences and perceptions of the challenges teachers and children experience during P4C.

Concerning teacher's experiences and perceptions of the challenges teachers and children experience during P4C, 6 themes emerged; 1. Navigating Boundaries, 2. Overcoming Nervousness, 3. Classroom Facilitation, 4. Children Challenges with Higher-Order Thinking Skills, 5. Individual Challenges, 6. Language Challenges for ESN students (see table 1c).

table 1c: emerging themes and subthemes of teachers' experiences and perceptions of the challenges teachers and children experience during P4C

Themes	Subthemes
1. Navigating Boundaries	Teachers struggle with navigating boundaries
2. Overcoming Nervousness	Overcoming initial nervousness
3. Classroom Facilitation	- Facilitator role challenges - Classroom dynamic varies - Maintaining students' engagement - Implementing management strategies
4. Children Challenges with Higher-Order Thinking Skills	Children struggle with question formulation and staying on-topic
5. Individual Challenges	- Children's personal background - Children struggle with self-expression due to fear of judgment
6. Language Challenges for ESN students	Level of Language for non-native speakers

source: Authors

A total of 18 initial codes were identified, with the most emphasized and repeated codes being; 15. Children need guidance to stay on-topic (N=8, n=14), 12. Awareness of group dynamic and individual needs (N=8, n=13), 1. Feelings of

stress and anxiety in the beginning of teaching P4C (N=8, n=11). From the initial codes identified, the following 10 subthemes emerged; 1. Teachers struggle with navigating boundaries, 2. Overcoming initial nervousness, 3. Maintaining students' engagement, 4. Facilitator role challenges, 5. Implementing management strategies, 6. Classroom dynamic varies, 7. Children struggle with self-expression due to fear of judgment, 8. Children struggle with question formulation and staying on-topic, 9. Children's personal background, 10. Level of Language for non-native speakers. Sample quotes from the initial codes are provided below:

It's definitely something that you can do it's a lesson you can do successfully with the younger ones. It's harder and I'm somewhere in the middle like I'm grade four and even there they struggle at questions. And all that mainly the year 6's from the feedback I've been getting with mine, it's sometimes it's like if I don't guide them which I know I'm not supposed to do, we go off it can we'll end up like talking about football. (P5)

As I say, you even get some classes that are better than others. OK, because you have certain children who, you know, act as a good as a stimulus and you know and push the other children on and then you get some classes that you have a few more silly children or you have a few more really quiet children who, you know, don't even seem to have an opinion never mind are able to express it. (P2)

I feel once you get over the nervousness that you've got them going on the right track and that they work with you. If it's going well, I am incredibly happy with what I hear. (P1)

d) Findings obtained from the teacher's experiences and perceptions of teaching practices in philosophy education.

Regarding teachers' experiences and perceptions of teaching practices in philosophy education, 6 themes emerged; 1. Teacher Training, 2. Positive Emotions Experienced, 3. Non-Directive Role Positive Aspects, 4. P4C Skills Transference, 5. Teaching Flexibility, 6. Curriculum Challenges (see table 1d).

table 1d: emerging themes and subthemes of teachers' experiences and perceptions of teaching practices in philosophy education

Themes	Subthemes
1. Teacher Training	• Knowledge and training necessary for meaningful lesson facilitation • Training is not necessary • P4C teacher training optional vs mandatory
2. Positive Emotions Experienced	• Rewarding & Satisfying emotions experienced by teachers
3. Non-Directive Role Positive Aspects	• Facilitator role positive aspects
4. P4C Skills Transference	• Cross-curriculum application of P4C strategies
5. Teaching Flexibility	• Flexibility of topics discussed • Flexibility of stimulus used
6. Curriculum Challenges	• Fixed Vs non-fixed curriculum • Frequency of Classes • Time-restraints

source: Authors

A total of 22 initial codes were identified, with the most emphasized and repeated codes being; 7. Sharing of resources between teachers (N=10, n=22), 17. Rewarding class to teach because of the variety of things children express (N=8, n=10), 16. Frequency of classes works well with the curriculum (N=8, n=9). From the initial codes identified, the following 11 subthemes emerged; 1. Knowledge and training necessary for meaningful facilitation of lesson, 2. Training is not necessary, 3. P4C Training Optional vs. Mandatory, 4. Cross-curriculum application of P4C strategies, 5. Flexibility of topics discussed, 6. Flexibility of stimulus used, 7. Fixed vs. non-fixed curriculum, 8. Time-restraints, 9. Frequency of classes, 10. Rewarding and satisfying emotions experienced by teachers, 11. Facilitator role positive aspects. Sample quotes from the initial codes are provided below:

We find our own and you know, as a Y3 group, we always work together. So we look at things together. So that's a good thing. On my own, definitely it would be quite difficult. (P3)

I wouldn't say it's a difficult lesson to teach. I would say it is the most rewarding lesson to teach because children open up, you know, you know, I the stories I hear about what goes on in their families and you know, all this

and it's it's not therapy. This isn't psychotherapy, but it gives them the opportunity to to be able to express things within the context of a lesson and to look at it from a different perspective rather than an emotional one, and actually also to get empathy as well. (P8)

I think that if you do it once a month but you do it properly once a month it is enough. And then, like I said, if you can be incorporating it into other lessons too, I think that's the most important thing. (P10)

findings obtained from the informal meetings

Table 2 outlines factual data about the similarities and differences in the P4C programs implemented between the two schools. For anonymity purposes, all identifying information is obscured and thus throughout this paper each school is to be referred to as “School A” and “School B.” Specifically, both schools are international following a British curriculum. Both schools employ the same frequency of P4C classes on a weekly or bi-weekly basis, using a mixed method, and have been implementing the program in the curriculum for the past 7 years. It is important to note that the teachers in “School A,” had received mandatory formal training from SAPERE in opposition to “School B,” with the proportion of the P4C teachers being significantly higher (n=18, n=2). Additionally, in the former case P4C is being taught across primary school, whereas in the latter case it is currently being implemented in Grades 3 – 6.

table 2: variables concerning the similarities and differences in the p4c programs implemented between the two schools

Variables	School A	School B
Frequency of P4C Classes	One Session / Weekly or Double / Bi-weekly	One Session / Weekly or Double Session / Bi-weekly
Grades P4C is implemented	Grade 1 - 6	Grade 3 - 6
Years of Implementing P4C	7	7
P4C Method Implemented	Mixed	Mixed
Learning Environment	Indoor	Indoor & Outdoor
Total Number of P4C Teachers	18	2
No. of P4C Teachers Interviewed	8	2
Formal Training Received	Yes	No
Teacher Mandatory Vs Voluntary Training	Mandatory	Voluntary
Method of Training	SAPERE – Level I	-
Future Training Desired	SAPERE – Level II	-
International School	Yes	Yes
Curriculum followed	British	British

source: Authors

limitations

It is important to acknowledge several limitations of the current study. First, it consisted of a small qualitative (N=10) with a relatively homogeneous socio-demographic background. This study aimed not at the generalizability of the findings but to provide an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences through semi-structured interviews. Second, the participating schools were international, English-language schools, which may differ from regular Greek schools in terms of student population, resources, and teaching practices. Consequently, the findings may not fully reflect the experiences of teachers or students in the broader Greek educational context. Finally, the researchers'

inherent views and biases could have influenced both the formulation of the interview questions and the analysis of the data obtained.

discussion

The present study aimed to explore P4C primary school teachers' experiences of (a) philosophy in primary education, and children's philosophical abilities, (b) the proposed benefits of philosophical discussions for children, (c) the challenges teachers and children experience during P4C and (d) teaching practices in philosophy education.

The essence that derives from this study's findings can be summarized into a positive and supportive stance towards P4C by primary school teachers. These findings are in support of the existing literature in Greece (Gasparatou et al., 2020; Gasparatou & Kampeza, 2012; Nikolidaki, 2022). Teachers consistently endorsed philosophy in primary education, aligning with current research that highlights its role in challenging children's beliefs, fostering cross-curricular benefits, and equipping students with essential life skills. Specifically, in terms of promoting critical thinking, questioning, self-expression and self-reflection (Colom et al., 2014; Karadağ & Demirtaş, 2018; Kilby, 2019; Rahdar et al., 2018; Ventista, 2018, 2019; Zulkifli & Hashim, 2020). Notably, teachers affirmed that all children are capable of philosophical inquiry. A highly repeated theme emerging from the thematic analysis includes children being "unburdened from subject knowledge," as it relates to the theme of "emotional well-being." In line with previous research in Greece (Ventista & Paparousi, 2016), teachers expressed that P4C relieves students from the pressure of providing the right answer as expected in other subjects. However, this sense of freedom should be balanced with attention to philosophical content, so that the dialogue retains its substantive philosophical character.

Teachers also reported that P4C promotes freedom of expression in children, while reducing the fear of receiving judgmental behavior from their peers, and encouraging the re-evaluation of perspectives. These findings are in line with the literature indicating P4C cultivates safe spaces and promotes democratic values (Ab Wahab et al., 2022; Leng, 2020; Zappala & Smyth, 2021).

Additionally, these findings may be related to current research on the emotional and mental health benefits of communities of philosophical inquiry (CoPI) (Malboeuf-Hurtubise et al., 2021; Leng, 2020; Trickey & Topping, 2006;) specifically in terms of releasing stress. Therefore, these findings indicate that the lack of pressure in providing the right answer combined with the promotion of judgment-free expression may constitute two of the key features of fostering safe classroom environments that promote children's self-expression.

Results regarding the proposed benefits of P4C are in line with existing literature findings. Teachers unanimously expressed a beneficial perception of P4C specifically concerning children's fondness during classes (Barrow, 2015; Dunlop et al., 2013; Ventista & Paparoussi, 2016). Additional research exploring children's enjoyment of the program in the curriculum could be implemented to yield in-depth findings into the factors that promote satisfaction with P4C. Furthermore, dominant themes that emerged include benefits in children's higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), emotional well-being, and democratic skills (Ab Wahab et al., 2022; Colom et al., 2014; Giménez-Dasí et al., 2013; Rahdar et al., 2018; Siddiqui et al., 2019; Ventista, 2019; Zulkifli & Hashim, 2019). Teachers' reported philosophy education as "fostering children's natural curiosity," and having "life benefits." The emerging themes and subthemes are in alignment with the educational goals of P4C, and the inquiring nature of philosophical discussions (Oyler, 2016; Lipman, 2003).

With regards to students' participation, the perceived relevance of discussion topics emerged as an important factor influencing engagement. Teachers' responses indicate that when ideas resonate with children, they are more likely to engage deeply in reflective thinking, often extending the discussion beyond the classroom – for instance in conversations with friends and family members. Topics closely connected to students' lived experiences, such as friendship or conflicts with close friends, were reported to particularly foster this type of engagement. Some teachers also noted that the impact of P4C varies depending on the degree to which children will actively engage in thinking. This is also supported by pre-existing studies proposing the use of stimuli that allows for the exploration of topics relating to children's lived experiences, thus

reinforcing their engagement (Haynes, 2008; Murriss, 1992 as cited in Ventista & Paparousi 2016). Results also suggest that the benefits and stimulation of students' thinking extend beyond the subject and classroom, demonstrating cross-curricular effectiveness. Teachers further reported that P4C offered students with learning differences (LDs), such as dyslexic learners, the opportunity to engage and participate in dialogue. In contrast to previous research (Ab Wahab et al., 2022), students with LDs exhibited an increased level of participation compared to other subjects.

Teachers reported that the positive effects of P4C manifest at varying rates among students. For instance, while some children exhibit noticeable progress as they progress through school grades, others— particularly those who are shy or introverted—tend to show gradual development in their ability to express themselves and engage in classroom discussions. As indicated in other studies, the duration of the program can also affect the yielding of benefits (Fair et al., 2015a, 2015b). Additionally, findings suggest that children's maturity varies across groups and grades. This variability indicates that the impact of P4C may be influenced by individual differences in personality, developmental factors or learning styles.

Findings suggest that students face challenges with specific HOT's skills including question formulation and staying on topic, individual difficulties including self-expression, (Zulkifli & Hashim, 2019) and language difficulties for English as a second language (ESL) students. Extremely limited research has been undertaken with regards to the impact or challenges of P4C on ESL students (Tian & Liao, 2016). Teachers reported the facilitation of divergent tools to enhance the classroom participation of ESL students such as the use of interactive activities. In contrast to pre-existing study findings, learning differences, lack of interpersonal skills or knowledge of vocabulary were not reported by the teachers as constituting a challenge for the students (Ab Wahab et al., 2022). Teachers also noted that a student's personal background could hinder their development of an open-inquiring mindset. Specifically, religious, spiritual, family, or other background factors may prevent children from engaging in conversation and diving deeper into philosophical discussions. Few research endeavors have

addressed the potential confusion and anxiety children might experience when asked to question and defend their beliefs (Gregory & Oliveiro, 2018). As previously indicated (Barreneche, 2024), students' background and personal characteristics may influence the effectiveness of P4C programs. Consequently, facilitating P4C classes requires careful consideration, particularly in international schooling environments, to ensure that students feel emotionally and intellectually safe participating in philosophical dialogue.

As supported by pre-existing studies, classroom facilitation is a dominant challenge experienced by teachers (Ab Wahab et al., 2022; Gorard et al., 2017; Rahdar et al., 2018; Siddiqui et al., 2019). Overcoming initial nervousness and navigating boundaries with children also emerged as recurring themes (Barreneche, 2024; Murriss & Haynes, 2011). Specifically, teachers reported difficulties when topics became personal or controversial, and expressed concern for being perceived as "politically correct." Adopting a P4C methodology, which prioritizes open-ended discussions and collaborative learning, can be challenging and disruptive for teachers. Thus, additional targeted support and training may help teachers transition from conventional teaching methods into the facilitator's role and adapt to this dialogical pedagogy.

Regarding teaching practices, participants reported a high level of satisfaction with the program, highlighting that the classes were emotionally rewarding. Aligning with prior research, key themes relating to the positive impact of P4C in teachers' professional development. These themes include the cross-curriculum transference and applicability of P4C skills, and strategies, including the promotion of a more flexible and non-directive teaching approach (Baumfield, 2016; Lam, 2021). This underscores the multifaceted advantages of integrating P4C into teacher training and development programs. Furthermore, several subthemes emerged during analysis including whether P4C training should be an optional vs. mandatory choice for teachers, particularly relating to the teachers' professional capacity and background. Teachers that perceived P4C training as not being necessary reported their own personal background and professional experience in the humanities as being sufficient in facilitating P4C classes. This finding is in line with previous studies suggesting that philosophical

inquiry should be implemented by teachers with a strong liberal education (Kennedy, 2004; Ventista & Paparousi, 2016). Consequently, current findings indicate that the personal and professional experiences of teachers play a crucial role in guiding philosophical discussions with children. Future studies can explore the teacher's personal and teaching background, as well as their teaching style as factors that may influence the delivery and effectiveness of the program, and as factors for consideration with regards to the nature of the P4C training.

Current research findings highlight a significant challenge encountered by teachers: time restraints in delivering the class. As students' progress across grades, and their oracy skills advance, teachers reported facing increased difficulties in conducting the class effectively. Some teachers reported occasionally needing to skip the class, to meet the rest of the curriculum requirements since P4C is offered as an optional and not a mandatory course in the national curriculum. These challenges align with existing literature indicating that educators' workloads may hinder their ability to fully cover the syllabus (Gorard et al., 2017; Siddiqui et al., 2019). Time restraints consequently, can negatively affect the overall quality of the class delivery and hence the effectiveness of P4C classes. The findings therefore suggest that additional time might be necessary to effectively engage older students in philosophical discussions, and that P4C is not given equal priority in the curriculum, especially when teachers face time limitations.

conclusion

Overall, the present study findings provide compelling support for the inclusion of philosophy in primary education. This initial investigation aimed to explore the potential of philosophical inquiry with children in primary schools. Despite abundant research in educational literature on P4C, studies specifically examining teacher populations are limited. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, no prior study focusing on P4C teachers had been conducted in Greece at the time of this investigation. The current study findings yielded a rich insight into the P4C teachers' experiences from two international primary schools in Greece. In re-envisioning an educational reform and the inclusion of philosophy

education in Greek primary schools, there is an increasing need to deeply understand classroom teachers' experiences as these dynamically guide their P4C teaching practices and can influence the implementation of educational policies. While acknowledging the current limitations and lack of philosophy classes in the national curriculum, future research should broaden the scope to a nationwide cohort of primary school teachers to more effectively inform efforts to integrate philosophy into Greek primary education.

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