



review 2

reviewer: tuukka tomperi

philosophy as the way forward

exploring primary school teachers experiences

of p4c in greece

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how to quote this article:

APA: Skavantzou, A., Janikian, M., & Armaos, Remos. (2025). Philosophy as the way forward: exploring primary school teachers experiences of p4c in greece. *childhood & philosophy*, 21, 1–30. <https://doi.org/10.12957/childphilo.2025.90318>.

ABNT: SKAVANTZOU, Areti; JANIKIAN, Mari; ARMAOS, Remos. Philosophy as the way forward: exploring primary school teachers experiences of p4c in greece. *childhood & philosophy*, v. 21, p. 1-30, 2025. Disponível em: [inserir link]. Acesso em: [inserir data de acesso].



overview

The manuscript is interesting and well-written, presenting an empirical study based on teacher interviews about the use of the P4C approach in Greece. It is clearly a good fit for publication in *childhood & philosophy*, as the topicality and relevance of the subject are well justified, and the manuscript reports a carefully conducted study. I am happy to recommend it for publication after minor revisions.

Below, I first present general comments on the text, followed by some minor points that could be considered, and finally individual passages that may warrant attention.

general comments

The literature review mapping the previous research field is carefully done and quite comprehensive. Not as a criticism, but rather as an additional perspective and side note, the following can be said: Almost all empirical studies conducted within the P4/wC framework so far have been rather small-scale and often self-reported (i.e., the person conducting the teaching experiment has also studied its effectiveness), and the results have varied. In other words, not all studies show such clear benefits as the authors might suggest. Even today, the message of empirical studies can be considered somewhat open (non-conclusive) – as is the case with most educational approaches – due to the diversity and multidimensionality of education and upbringing, which makes it difficult to obtain unequivocal evidence.

However, it is worth asking whether the empirically observed “effectiveness” of educational approaches is truly essential, especially when dealing with approaches that are more than mere methods – those that are broader, ethically and communally significant, and philosophically grounded educational practices, such as P4/wC. With this reminder, I mean that it is good to maintain a critical stance toward the current cult of effectiveness that dominates educational sciences. For a pedagogical practice like P4/wC, an educational-ethical justification is entirely sufficient: if there is an opportunity to guide children to “think for themselves” and to reflect – both individually and

collectively – on fundamental questions about identity and otherness, truth and falsehood, the interesting and the beautiful, good and evil, justice and injustice, etc., then educators have a duty to promote such opportunities.

The authors justify their research focus by emphasizing the significant role of teachers, stating for example (p. 3): “The seminal role of teachers in education is more recently starting to get recognized.” But it is also good to remember that this topic has always involved considerable cultural differences. For instance, in the German tradition of educational theory (Didaktik, Bildung), the role of the teacher has always been considered central. Similarly, the importance of teachers has been consistently recognized in the tradition of South American critical pedagogy (Paulo Freire). Likewise, in British educational sociology (Goodson, Hargreaves, etc.), it has always been clear that teachers play a decisive role in the success of educational reforms (curriculum implementation, school reforms). Certain trends in Anglo-American learning research, particularly in socioconstructivist learning psychology, have (when interpreted too simplistically) shifted the discussion too much toward emphasizing student self-direction and downplaying the teacher’s role. As the authors note in the quoted passage, it is therefore true that in English-language discourse, there has been a partial return from this, and over the past decade, a more balanced view has become more common.

The literature review provides a solid justification for the research topic. A foreign reader (which the great majority of us are) might still appreciate a bit more contextual information about Greek teaching. What kind of teachers teach (are qualified to teach) in Greek primary schools? Do they have a university degree in education/teacher training, or what kind of educational background do they have? Are they pedagogically specialized in classroom teaching, or do they (or some of them) specialize in a specific subject (subject teachers)? Do teachers teach different classes or the same group across multiple grade levels? Such background information would be helpful for readers unfamiliar with the Greek school system and could be included at the beginning of the article. It wouldn’t require much text.

Similarly, for contextualization, the reader might wonder whether some general information could be provided about the history of the P4C tradition in Greece. Is it roughly possible to estimate how long the approach has been known

in Greece, and is there any estimate of how widely it is currently known among teachers and schools? Also, on p. 4, it is stated that “An hourly philosophy course is optionally provided once per week only in secondary education.” This could be explained more precisely, referring to the curriculum and subject allocation: is philosophy an optional subject in Greece’s national core curriculum, and how extensive is the course (how many hours in total)?

The description of the research implementation is thorough, with data collection and analysis clearly detailed, and the process appears careful, which significantly strengthens the reader’s impression of reliability.

The subsection “Findings obtained from the classroom observations” does not appear to contain actual observational findings, but rather descriptions of the schools. This content would fit better in the subsection presenting the data. If there is something essential and interesting to say about the classroom observations, the authors could expand on that in the text. Conversely, if it seems that the observations themselves are not a significant part of the research content, the subsection could be omitted.

The manuscript’s language is pleasant to read and generally understandable. In some places, non-finite clauses are used, which do not conform to English language conventions, and a few typos remain in the text. A light language check would therefore be advisable, but overall, the text is already of high quality.

minor points

Technical language use could be reduced where it doesn’t add real value – for example, mentioning percentage distributions is not always necessary when describing the background variables. A very minor detail: on p. 9 it is stated that “A diverse nationality range was obtained from the participants” □ As a qualitative/categorical variable, nationality doesn’t strictly speaking have a “range.” On the other hand, since the number of interviewees is not very large, could their nationalities be mentioned (unless doing so would risk identifying the participants)?

In the “Limitations” subsection, it would be worth considering the differences between the international (English-language) schools under study and regular Greek schools, particularly in terms of student populations.

On p. 16, it is stated (as also highlighted in the analysis) that “A highly repeated theme emerging from the thematic analysis includes children being ‘unburdened from subject knowledge’...” This reflects the interviewed teachers’ perspective, and it could be slightly problematized in the discussion. The topic has been widely debated within the P4/wC field, especially regarding the role of philosophical substance (concepts, history, positions, methods, etc.) in philosophical inquiry with children. Views differ: some emphasize the importance of content knowledge rooted in the philosophical tradition and discipline, while others focus more on the form of dialogical interaction. But in one way or another, the “philosophical” must be identifiable in order to claim that philosophical inquiry is being practiced with children. The teachers’ view of freedom from subject matter may therefore be somewhat unclear and problematic in this context. Perhaps this could be reflected upon with a few thoughts.

Similarly, the term “judgement-free expression” may be slightly misleading (at least to a careless reader). Based on the thematic analysis, it is clear that the teachers mean freedom from teacher evaluation and “correct answers.” However, Lipman’s P4C explicitly aims to develop judgement, so “judgement” is a central concept in the approach. In P4C, the goal is to practice making and justifying better judgements together with others – basically, this is also in the core of what constitutes higher-order thinking. Perhaps the authors could come up with another term to describe the thematic finding, so that it doesn’t get confused with this core concept.

individual comments

- (p. 1) The Dewey quote is cited from a secondary source, and the reference does not indicate which of Dewey’s works is the original source. Since many of Dewey’s works are available online too, it would be advisable to verify the quote from the original source and cite it directly.

- (p. 1) Nussbaum is a well-known theorist, so there is no real need to include additional information about her affiliation when mentioning her.

- (p. 2) PwC is nowadays more of a general term for several approaches that have developed alongside or after the original P4C, rather than a specific method. Therefore, I would not call it a “method”; as the manuscript itself notes, it is better understood as a name for a broad global field.

- (p. 2) The text first mentions the implementation of P4C in over 60 countries and later in over 100 countries. While the exact number is of course not known, these references should be made consistent.

- (p. 2) When referring to the EEF study: It would be helpful to include a direct source or website link, as some readers may not yet be familiar with this most extensive empirical intervention study on P4C to date. Also, it is not entirely accurate to say that the EEF aimed to demonstrate the approach’s effectiveness (“aiming at providing... evidence on the positive effectiveness”); rather, EEF’s comparative studies are open investigations into whether there is evidence of effectiveness for certain educational approaches or not.

- (p. 4) In one sentence, the phrase “yield valuable insights” is repeated twice.

- (p. 10) In the first section of the thematic analysis, it would be helpful to clarify the frequency notations for the reader, e.g., in a footnote: capital N refers to the number of interviews, lowercase n to the number of occurrences/mentions.

- (p. 10) Similarly, in the first instance where interview excerpts are quoted, it would be good to clarify that the reference (e.g., P8) refers to a specific interview/interviewee.

- (p. 12) The term “classroom management”: while this is of course a well-established and conventional term in this context, one might consider whether a different, less authoritarian term could be used – one that might better reflect the nature of P4C practice. After all, the issue here is the socio-emotional dimension, social dynamics, interaction, and process facilitation, and such, and not, for instance, disciplinary issues.

- (pp. 13–14) The main concept of the fourth thematic area, “the teacher practices”: I believe I understand what is meant here, and the topic is indeed broad, but the term itself doesn’t sound fully natural. It might be worth considering whether a more idiomatic English term could be found to capture the wide thematic scope discussed here.

- (p. 15) Footnote 1 partially repeats content already stated at the end of p. 2.
- (p. 16) The analysis notes that “the relatability of topics discussed was perceived as a factor that affects children’s engagement.” However, neither in the analysis nor in the discussion are any examples given of what this meant in practice from the teachers’ perspective: What kinds of problems or stimuli, what kinds of questions connected to students’ experiences were, in the teachers’ observations, examples of topics that sparked student engagement? If such examples came up concretely in the interviews, readers would be interested in hearing a few of them.

With these, in my view quite minor, revisions and additions, the manuscript can be finalized into a fine article that deserves to be published in *childhood & philosophy*.

I wish the authors joy in their work!