

A Philosophical Approach to Teaching and Learning

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Philosophy in Schools Project

Project Specificity

- The first systematic study that assesses the effectiveness of a Philosophy in Schools (PIS) programme in promoting children's thinking and English competence in Hong Kong

Duration of Project

- From 1 September 2015 to 31 August 2018

Source of Funding

- Quality Education Fund

Amount Awarded

- HK\$1.12m



Outline

- Problem and Significance
- Objectives and Researchers
- Questions, Participants, Instruments, Design, and Procedure



Problem of This Study

- According to the English Language Education: Key Learning Area Curriculum Guide (Primary 1 – Secondary 3), teachers in Hong Kong are expected to foster independent and lifelong learning in students through developing their generic skills, especially **critical and creative thinking**.
- Research shows that although teachers are often good at teaching language forms and skills, many are less confident about the cognitive interventions required to develop specific thinking skills (Fisher, 2001).
- This results in many teachers engaging students in **monologic** – typically teacher-led and question-and-answer – rather than dialogic discussion. Such a monologic approach does not facilitate the improvement of thinking skills but mainly encourages the retrieval of information and other low-level cognitive activities.

Problem of This Study

Worrying Situation in Hong Kong

- Research has indicated that local English language teachers regularly deprive their students of the time and space for critical and creative thinking, due to their application of **ineffective questioning techniques** (including short wait-time and a predominance of lower-order questions) and **product-oriented pedagogy** (disregarding self-expression and originality in writing), respectively (Mok, 2009).
- A recent external school review, involving 140 local primary and secondary schools, concludes that despite the frequent use of questioning in class, “it is not common for teachers to probe or seek to extend students’ responses or raise a range of questions to stimulate in-depth thinking” (Education Bureau, n.d., p. 34).

Mok, J. (2009). From policies to realities: Developing students’ critical thinking in Hong Kong secondary school English writing classes. *RELC Journal*, 40 (3), 262-279.

Education Bureau. (n.d.). *QA inspection annual report 2009/10*. Retrieved July 31, 2013, from <http://www.edb.gov.hk/en/sch-admin/sch-quality-assurance/reports/insp-annual-reports/index.html>



Significance of This Study

For Students

- Research on PIS has shown that philosophical inquiry in the classroom is conducive not only to fostering such **thinking skills** as information-processing, inquiry, reasoning, creative thinking, and evaluation skills (Fisher, 2001), but also to helping students become **competent English** readers, writers, speakers, and listeners (Williams, 2012).
- Furthermore, evidence suggests PIS is **inclusive** in the sense that it can have a positive impact on the achievement of all students, irrespective of gender and ability (Haynes, 2008).

Fisher, R. (2001). Philosophy in primary schools: Fostering thinking skills and literacy. *Reading*, 35 (2), 67-73.

Haynes, J. (2008). *Children as philosophers: Learning through enquiry and dialogue in the primary classroom* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.

Williams, S. (2012). P4C in English. In L. Lewis & N. Chandley (Eds.), *Philosophy for Children through the secondary curriculum* (pp. 38-52). London: Continuum.

Significance of This Study

For Teachers

- Due to the emphasis it places on the development of teacher questioning as well as student questioning, PIS can meet the professional development needs of teachers for **effective questioning techniques**, the lack of which, as illustrated above, has long been identified as a weakness in school inspection reports in Hong Kong.
- More generally, according to a recent survey of teachers of English as a second language, most of the respondents indicated that they needed continuing **professional development** in the domains of improving teaching and learning (91%), fostering student creativity (79%), and teaching thinking skills (76%) (Mak, 2010).

Mak, B. (2010). The professional development needs of Hong Kong ESL teachers. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 11 (3), 397-410.



Objectives of This Study

Purpose of Project

- To determine to what extent a PIS programme facilitates the development of thinking skills and English competence in English as a Second Language (ESL) students in Hong Kong.

Research Objectives

- To determine how students do philosophy in different contexts
- To assess the efficacy of PIS in promoting critical and creative thinking
- To ascertain the attitudes of students and teachers towards doing philosophy in the classroom
- To evaluate the effectiveness of PIS in developing English language proficiency



Researchers of This Study

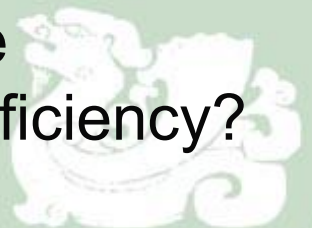
Name and Academic Affiliation of Principal Investigator (PI) and Co-Investigators (Co-Is):

| Role | Name | Post | Institution |
|------|--------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------|
| PI | Dr. Lam, Chi-Ming | Associate Professor | Education University of Hong Kong |
| Co-I | Prof. Adamson, Bob | Chair Professor | Education University of Hong Kong |
| Co-I | Prof. Splitter, Laurance | Honorary Professor | Education University of Hong Kong |



Questions of This Study

1. How do students do philosophy in different contexts?
2. What role does PIS play in promoting students' critical and creative thinking?
3. What are the attitudes of students and teachers towards doing philosophy in the classroom?
4. To what extent does a PIS programme help the development of students' English language proficiency?



Participants of This Study

- The sample for this study will comprise ESL students in **Primary 4-6** and **Secondary 1-3** selected from local primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong, excluding English Schools Foundation and other international schools. Among those schools which volunteer to participate, 2 primary schools and 2 secondary schools will be randomly selected and randomly assigned to two groups: the Phase 1 group (1 primary school and 1 secondary school) and the Phase 2 group (1 primary school and 1 secondary school). In each participating school, **several classes** using **English as the medium of instruction** in **any subject**, preferably with a class size of less than 30, will be selected for study.



Instruments of This Study

1. **New Jersey Test of Reasoning Skills (NJTRS):** it was developed by Virginia Shipman and was successfully used by the principal investigator in local research. It will be used to assess the reasoning ability of the students.
2. **Cognitive Behaviour Checklist (CBC):** it was developed by the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children and was successfully used by the principal investigator in local research. It will be used to examine whether, and to what degree, the cognitive behaviours displayed by the students during philosophical discussions are characteristic of critical thinking.



Instruments of This Study

3. **Creativity Checklist (CC):** it was developed by Romina Proctor and Paul Burnett, and was successfully used by them with Year 6 and 7 students. It will be used to explore whether, and to what degree, the cognitive and dispositional traits displayed by the students during philosophical discussions are characteristic of creative thinking.
4. **Assessment Rubrics for English Language Proficiency:** based on the English Language Learning Targets set by the Curriculum Development Council for Key Stage 2 (P4-6) and Key Stage 3 (S1-3) in the Interpersonal, Knowledge, and Experience Strands, two assessment rubrics for English language proficiency – one for Key Stage 2 (**ARKS2**) and the other one for Key Stage 3 (**ARKS3**) – will be designed to evaluate the students' English language proficiency.

Instruments of This Study

5. **Student Questionnaire (SQ):** based on the Student Questionnaire developed by the principal investigator for a previous study, a modified version of the questionnaire will be designed to examine the attitudes of the students towards doing philosophy in the classroom.
6. **Teacher Questionnaire (TQ):** a teacher questionnaire will be designed to explore the attitudes of the teachers towards doing philosophy in the classroom.



Instruments of This Study

- 7. Video Recordings (VR):** video recordings of selected PIS lessons will be used to find out how the students do philosophy in different contexts (including levels, subjects, and narratives), to assess the development of students' English language proficiency, and to investigate the role played by PIS in developing the students' critical and creative thinking, while video recordings of post-SQ and post-TQ interviews will be used to explore the attitudes of the students and teachers towards doing philosophy in the classroom, respectively (see Procedure).



Design of This Study

- It is a **triangulation mixed method design** in which both the qualitative data (including text data transcribed from the SQ, TQ, and VR) and quantitative data (including numeric scores from the NJTRS, CBC, CC, ARKS2, ARKS3, SQ, and TQ) are collected simultaneously and given equal priority.
- The results from the analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data will be directly compared, or triangulated, to ascertain whether the two databases support or contradict each other.



Procedure of This Study

- This project will be carried out in three phases: **Phase 1** (September 2015 – August 2016): Pilot research on 2 schools (1 primary school and 1 secondary school); **Phase 2** (September 2016 – August 2017): Main research on the other 2 schools (1 primary school and 1 secondary school); and **Phase 3** (September 2017 – August 2018): Analysis, publication, and dissemination of results (including the organization of seminars for local educators and parents, the publication of papers in international journals and conference proceedings, the production of a film on DVD for schools about how PIS works in different contexts, and the creation of a project website for public access to its resources).



Procedure of This Study

- During the project, PIS **training** (2 initial days: in December 2015 in Phase 1; in August 2016 in Phase 2) and **support** (4 support days, including lesson observations and demonstrations: between December 2015 and May 2016 in Phase 1; between September 2016 and May 2017 in Phase 2) will be provided for participating teachers by the researchers.
- A few days before the start of the PIS programme, the NJTRS will be administered to the students. Regular sessions of PIS, which will be videotaped at different periods, will then be provided for them at least once a week.



Procedure of This Study

- A typical PIS session will operate as follows: after being presented with a certain kind of narrative material (e.g. stories, poetry, pictures, music, videos, etc.) by the teacher as a stimulus for philosophical thought, the students will first take turns to share with the others what they find interesting or puzzling about its content in the form of questions, and then decide on a question that is agreeable to the majority for in-depth inquiry in a **teacher-facilitated whole-group discussion**. To facilitate the philosophical discussion, the teacher will introduce students to some inquiry tools beforehand, like the “Good Thinker’s Toolkit” below:

[R] = Are *Reasons* being offered to support claims?

[A] = Are we aware of and identifying key *Assumptions* being made?

[T] = Is what is being said *True*? How could we find out?

[C] = Are there any *Counterexamples* to the claim being made? ...

Such inquiry tools support students’ use of the **language of reasoning**. The teacher will stress the language of reasoning by using it when having philosophical dialogues with students and when giving feedback on their writing.

Procedure of This Study

- During the discussion, corresponding to different Key Learning Areas (KLA) of the local curriculum, the teacher will draw students' attention to different philosophical questions that help them reflect on and inquire into the respective curriculum areas. A sample of such questions is shown in the following table.

| KLA | Philosophical Questions |
|----------------------------|--|
| English Language Education | Do all stories have a beginning, a middle, and an end? Can a story have no end, or more than one ending? (Related theme in the KLA: Clarification of the concept of story) |
| Mathematics Education | Can we imagine in more than three dimensions? What is the nature of the fourth dimension? (Related theme in the KLA: Shape and space) |
| Science Education | Do people alive today have responsibilities towards the next generation? Can environmental problems be addressed fairly? (Related theme in the KLA: Science, technology and society) |

Procedure of This Study

| KLA | Philosophical Questions |
|---|--|
| Technology Education | Does everybody have a right to privacy? Is the use of CCTV justified if it cuts crime? (Related theme in the KLA: Technology and society) |
| Personal, Social & Humanities Education | Is it stealing if you borrow something and don't give it back? Is it less wrong to steal from a rich person than to steal from a poor person? (Related theme in the KLA: Social systems and citizenship) |
| Arts Education | Can a piece of writing be visual art? Can a walk be an artwork? (Related theme in the KLA: Connections between visual arts and other disciplines) |
| Physical Education | When does a group become a team? What are the features of great teams? (Related theme in the KLA: Sports-related values and attitudes) |

Procedure of This Study

- After the discussion, in order to develop in students a critical and creative response to the narrative material, the teacher will assign them various **follow-up writing tasks**. For example, after discussing such philosophical topics as fairness and friendship, the teacher can assign students the following tasks respectively.

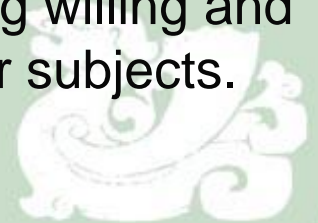
Imagine your class has been given HK\$100,000. Discuss a fair way of dividing and using this money.

Create a play about a quarrel between friends, and demonstrate how the quarrel is resolved.



Procedure of This Study

- To facilitate the implementation of PIS in local primary and secondary schools, an “**English Plus**” **model** will be adopted to promote students’ thinking and English competence across the curriculum. More specifically, the **language of reasoning**, as exemplified by the aforementioned Good Thinker’s Toolkit, will be taught to and developed in students in **English classes** before it is practised in other subjects. It is expected that students will become reasonable when they are capable of using the language of reasoning to control their thoughts and when they recognize how resourceful that language can be. And if students can become more reasonable, they will display their reasoning disposition and competence, thereby being willing and able to engage in philosophical inquiry, in classes of other subjects.



Procedure of This Study

- In the last PIS session, the students will be required to complete the SQ. One-third of them will be randomly selected to take part in a follow-up interview which will address the main themes of the SQ. A few days after the end of the PIS programme, the students will be administered the NJTRS, while the teachers will be required to complete the TQ and to take part in a follow-up interview which will address the main themes of the TQ.
- The posttest will be followed by a close analysis of all data collected in this project.

