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To cite this article: Ivo Jirásek & Kateřina Jágerová (20 Sep 2023): Czech primary school teachers' experience with the Philosophy for Children (P4C) approach, Cambridge Journal of Education, DOI: [10.1080/0305764X.2023.2255540](https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2023.2255540)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2023.2255540>



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Published online: 20 Sep 2023.



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Czech primary school teachers' experience with the Philosophy for Children (P4C) approach

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ABSTRACT

The study presents the basic features of the Philosophy for Children (P4C) pedagogical approach and asks about the experiences of Czech primary school teachers in using it. The empirical investigation of qualitative design is based on interviews ($n = 4$) and their analysis using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method. The results point to the benefits of incorporating P4C into the primary school curriculum, especially in the development of children's thinking, communication and social skills, in the transformation of the teacher's role into a facilitator and in the deepening of teacher–student relationships into a partnership.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 5 December 2022
Accepted 25 August 2023



KEYWORDS

Philosophical dialogue;
facilitation; primary
education

Introduction

A specific pedagogical approach, Philosophy for Children (P4C), has already taken root in the Czech Republic, but it is still a significantly underestimated area of interest in domestic literature. In the practice of the first stage of primary school it appears quite rarely. That is why we have chosen this topic as a stimulus for qualitative research in order to verify the experience of teachers with this method at the first level of primary school. This pedagogical programme, strategy or approach focuses on the development of correct thinking, communication and argumentation skills, teaches mutual respect and tolerance, and provides protection from the manipulative traps of today's world. Although pedagogical approach, pedagogical programme, strategy and methodology are by no means synonymous, in the context of P4C we will use the language alternatively to refer to the broader pedagogical framework within which dialogical activities with a philosophical underpinning are implemented.

The P4C pedagogical approach originated in the late 1960s in the United States as a reaction to the move away from the traditional theoretical framework of philosophy, with the intention of bringing it into practice, as well as to convey deeper dimensions of thought to people without an expert background in philosophical studies. Philosophy thus ceases to be understood as an academic discipline and denotes rather a reflection on everyday life, a desire to formulate questions in new contexts and to seek answers in

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dialogue with others (Bauman, 2013). The term ‘philosophical practice’ then touches directly on pedagogy and psychology (Mareš et al., 2020).

Matthew Lipman (1923–2010) is considered to be the founder and pioneer of P4C. He perceived the traditionally conceived teaching based on memory, mechanical drill and the adoption of the teacher’s opinions as the cause of students’ lack of ability to argue and reason logically, to think independently, to formulate ideas and to form their own judgements. He based his approach on the belief that children typically wonder, ask all kinds of questions, and are delighted when they discover something surprising and unexpected (Lipman, 1984, 2011). It is important for their development that they learn to question and ask questions, argue, seek answers, listen to others and respond to them (Mareš et al., 2020; Sasseville & Gagnon, 2011). Margaret Sharp took part in the development of P4C with Lipman, when together in the 1970s they disseminated information about the project around the world, conducted training workshops, established appropriate institutions, paid attention to teacher training, and developed a methodological manual for the application of P4C even without a deep philosophical background (Kohan, 2018).

The introduction of the P4C programme into the Czech environment is mainly connected with the Faculty of Theology of the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice and the Centre of Philosophy for Children (www.p4c.cz), which has been operating there since 2010. The promotion of the P4C approach is also supported by other organisations and activities, training for teachers and parents, interactive seminars (e.g. the Variants educational programme of People in Need, or the PinkBox platform).

The philosophical basis of the P4C programme is pragmatism as conceived by John Dewey and its pedagogical implications, i.e. in particular experience and the recognition of truthfulness as a consensus arising from dialogue with other people. It is our knowledge and beliefs in confrontation with others that enables us to arrive at an awareness of the consequences of our own actions through thinking (Kennedy, 2010; Macků, 2014; Muchová, 2013). It is from pragmatism that the notion of philosophy, which is not meant to be distant from life, but to help people in their everyday lives, originates (Sasseville & Gagnon, 2011). Following Dewey, Lipman wants to transform the school classroom into an exploratory community in which children, through dialogue, work together to find true answers to questions of their own choosing and thereby develop their thinking.

From a psychological perspective, P4C goes beyond Jean Piaget’s cognitive developmental psychology or criticises it as limited (Macků, 2015). According to it, a child can only work with abstract concepts in the last, fourth stage of cognitive development. However, this stage of formal operations does not become apparent until around the age of 12, so pupils of younger school age should not be mature enough to be able to deal with the activities required in a philosophical dialogue. However, these developmental stages do not apply to the development of philosophical skills because the unique ways in which children engage in philosophical inquiry are crucial (Matthews, 1980). Lipman, who initially constructed the P4C programme in a rather intuitive manner, later supported his approach from the developmental psychology perspective of Lev S. Vygotsky, in particular with his view of the possible facilitation or acceleration of thinking development due to social interactions and the development of thinking through dialogue (Helus, 2018; Lipman, 1996; Macků, 2014).

The main goal of P4C is therefore the development of correct thinking as a means of making the child a citizen for life in a democratic society, capable of independent thinking, decision-making and choice, thus protected from indoctrination and manipulation (Bauman, 2020; Lipman, 1998). The training of thinking skills leads children to question the world in which they live and to build a mental habit through which they acquire the ability to evaluate and solve problems independently (Boyras & Türkcan, 2020).

Therefore, it is necessary to develop not only critical thinking in everyday life situations and reflections on the world and on one's own thinking, but also creative thinking, i.e. bringing original ideas or unconventional connections, and caring thinking. The three-dimensional model of thinking thus relates good judgement to human activity, with all three structures of thinking being necessary, interdependent and interrelated. Thus, the goal of P4C is holistic thinking (Lipman, 1993), or a form of 'full literacy' (Murriss, 2016), through dialogue with ideas and values, teaching reasoning and argumentation through storytelling and reading, seeking meanings and interpretations, asking questions (Lipman, 1976), and fostering an interest in general human curiosity (Altıparmak, 2016).

Philosophical stories, or philosophical novels, play a key role as an initiation into the chosen topic of thought, which is the specific method of the P4C approach. The series of stories is designed to encourage children to philosophise independently. These texts are a specific literary type with a specific purpose, different from the usual literature for children (Šarníková, 2014). They are not primarily about mastering the skill of reading, but about deepening the process of thinking and stimulating group discussion. Lipman's philosophical novels do not focus on producing answers, but on provoking open-ended questioning. The literary protagonists of these stories, of the same age group as their readers, with differing opinions, analyses, assumptions and self-corrections, serve as models for identification in the process of honing critical, creative and engaged thinking.

The first didactic story for children aged 11–12 was the 'philosophical novel' *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*, serving as a motivational text for philosophical dialogue with children. The story of a teacher's question in a unit on the universe and the wrong answer leads to thinking about various statements and the process of logical reasoning. The storyline is intended to inspire in the pupils a desire for discovery, the search for solutions and the process of philosophising. Over time, Lipman and his followers have written other philosophical stories for children of different ages. The novels include method guides for teachers who have not undergone philosophical training, including plans for anticipated discussions or exercises for developing thinking skills. Involving children in the process of inquiry creates the conditions within the school classroom for the emergence of a community of inquiry, whereby hidden meanings are sought in dialogue, it is revealed that there is no single right answer to some questions, and it is assumed that even a different opinion will be heard (Šarníková, 2020). However, a prerequisite for willingness to share one's thoughts and feelings is trust and a sense of security.

The method of Socratic dialogue can go beyond the scientific content of education into the realm of philosophical concepts such as self-concept, personal identity, competence, creativity, truth, goodness, justice and others. P4C can thus be seen as a pedagogical approach based on activation (a shared reading of a philosophical story), questions (elicited by the reading) and dialogical discussion related to issues selected by

democratic voting (Mareš et al., 2020). The community of inquiry discussion is guided by the teacher's prepared plan, but is fully open to spontaneous transformations based on students' interest (Šarníková & Tavel, 2011). Philosophical dialogue, unlike other teaching methods, is essentially open-ended, i.e. in the search for an answer to a question, none of the participants in the pedagogical communication, including the teacher, knows the correct answer in advance, which makes the curiosity and desire for deeper knowledge in all participants extremely developed (Bauman, 2013).

It is very clear that teachers play a fundamental role in the use of the P4C approach. In the context of this paper, this refers to the teachers of the first level of primary education, in the Czech school system corresponding to the first level of the International Standard Classification of Education, i.e. ISCED 1 – primary education (first–fifth grade of primary school) (Průcha, 2013). In the implementation of the P4C programme, it is essential that the teacher completely abandons an authoritarian approach and accompanies the pupils on their journey of search in the role of a co-participant or facilitator/coordinator. Thus, the aim of our article is to verify how teachers at the first level of primary school, who have experience with the P4C method, perceive and evaluate this way of working, as well as the impact they perceive that it has on children's development.

Materials and methods

A qualitative research design was chosen for the empirical part of the thesis, given the interest in delving deeper into teachers' experiences of the P4C approach for children in primary education. Because we are interested in the experience of particular teachers, we do not anchor our research in a positivist or post-positivist paradigm, allowing quantitative research to reduce the complex experiences under investigation to numerical data. We anchor the epistemological assumptions of empirical inquiry in a constructivist paradigm, following a phenomenologically and hermeneutically oriented philosophy in which experience is central theme (Allison & Pomeroy, 2000).

Research objectives

The main aim is to find out what the experiences of Czech first-grade primary-school teachers are with the P4C approach. The sub-objectives were set as follows:

- (1) To explain why primary-school teachers decided to apply the P4C approach in their teaching.
- (2) To find out how first-grade primary-school teachers perceive the benefits of incorporating P4C into their teaching.
- (3) To reveal which form of P4C applied in teaching at the first level of primary school has proved to be effective for teachers.

Research sample

The research sample consists of four primary-school teachers who are trying to integrate the P4C approach into primary-school teaching in the Czech Republic. Initial outreach to potential respondents was conducted through social media, specifically through the

Table 1. Group of respondents.

Anonymised name	Age	Length of practice	Period of use of P4C	Region	Interview length (in minutes)	Number of transcribed words (in Czech)
Eliška	47 years	24 years	5 years	Moravian-Silesian Region	41	4865
Jana	48 years	25 years	5 years	Moravian-Silesian Region	55	5290
Lenka	37 years	10 years	10 years	South Bohemia Region	96 + 42	9500 + 4881
Klára	29 years	6 years	2 years	South Bohemia Region	50	5180

Philosophy for Children group. However, the contacts obtained did not meet the conditions for inclusion in the research: they were not first-grade primary-school teachers. Furthermore, the Centre of Philosophy for Children at the Faculty of Theology of the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice was contacted. Although a number of teaching staff had received training from this centre, even here it was not a first-grade elementary school, with one exception: the first participant who facilitated contact with her colleague. A subsequent meeting with representatives of the Variants project of People in Need facilitated two more contacts. The basic characteristics of the research sample are given in [Table 1](#).

Data collection

In terms of timing, it seemed for a long time that only the case study of the first teacher, with whom there was live communication via email followed by a video call of a preparatory nature, could be implemented. The subsequent online interview was already research oriented, as was the later face-to-face interview. An additional method was the observation of two P4C-oriented lessons. The research sample was subsequently expanded to include three teachers who were interviewed. Thus, the primary research method for data collection was unstructured interviews based on one open-ended question, ‘What are your experiences with the philosophy for children approach?’ The reason was the intention not to limit the statements and to give free space for communication. Only if the participant did not know how to proceed was a follow-up question asked. All but one of the interviews were conducted via video interview, given the unfavourable pandemic situation at the time of data collection and the distance of the participants’ residence. Immediately after the interview was completed, the recording was transcribed into a Microsoft Word document. The scope of all transcribed interviews is 27,693 words in the Czech language.

Data analysis

The interviews were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a method used widely, particularly for analysing participants’ experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2003; Smith et al., 2009). By focusing on understanding a person’s unique experience, IPA provides an opportunity to explore in detail how an individual

attributes meaning to their experience, and IPA allows the whole research process greater scope for creativity and freedom than other qualitative approaches (Willig, 2001). The goal of analysis in IPA is to formulate themes that capture the essence of the phenomenon under investigation. In interpretation, the researcher goes 'beyond' what appears immediately in the text, beyond the obvious content of the text. Therefore, the interpretive process is dynamic and repetitive, part of a hermeneutic circle in mutual interplay between the parts and the whole, as well as between the one who interprets and the one whose experience is interpreted. The credibility of the interpretation is based primarily on the respondent's expressions, supported by direct quotations. The general analytical procedure of IPA can be described as follows (Řiháček et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2009):

- Reflection on the researcher's experience with the research topic (dialogue with oneself);
- Reading and re-reading;
- Initial notes and comments;
- Developing emerging themes;
- Finding connections across themes (degree of abstraction, incorporation, polarisation, contextualisation, restructuring of topics);
- Analysis of the next case;
- Finding patterns across cases.

The first step was to reflect on the topic with the P4C approach in the form of pre-concepts, i.e. theoretical knowledge without actual experience of applying this pedagogical approach. The pre-understanding was deepened through interviews with people who are involved in this programme in the Czech Republic. A further deepening of the experience was guided by observation of the pedagogical process (at the second level of primary school in Prague). Contrary to the initial assumptions (silent disinterested observation), passivity turned into active participation in the seeking community, with the acquisition of direct participatory experience with P4C. It was this step that not only allowed for a comfortable atmosphere during the implementation of the interviews, but also for a deeper understanding of the teachers' statements during the data analysis.

The transcribed interviews were reread repeatedly, and meaningful segments were underlined with respect to their meanings. Simultaneous listening to the audio recordings of the interviews helped to delve deeper into the readings. In the next stage of analysis, initial notes and comments were made on the sides of the interview, mostly descriptive in nature. All comments were subsequently transcribed and collated according to thematic relatedness and interrelationships. Individual themes were further assigned to clusters and named with overarching thematic categories. Once the analysis of all the interviews was complete, connections across themes were extracted, with cross-cutting themes captured. Data analysis thus led to the interpretation of individual cases and then common themes. The quotations were left in their original form; only filler words that do not transform the meaning of what is said (such as 'uh', 'you', 'that', 'like', 'as if', 'actually' and so on) were removed. However, for the authenticity of the utterance, we keep the common language expressions and spelling mistakes in their original form. The entire analysis process was carried out in Czech; only the summary research report

was translated into English and some of the subtle linguistic phenomena may thus be lost in translation. To label the selected excerpts, we first use identification by anonymised name (we do not specify for the interpretation of individual cases), followed by the interview number, transcript page and line.

Ethical aspects and limits of research

The research respected all the requirements of research ethics, established regulations and international guidelines for research involving human participants. The rule of voluntary participation, the right to privacy, the confidentiality of information provided in the research, including the notice that the interview will be recorded for research purposes, and the anonymisation of respondents were observed.

We consider the main limitation of the research to be the relatively low number of teachers who apply P4C in the first level of primary schools in the Czech Republic. Despite extraordinary efforts, it was not possible to recruit a higher number of respondents.

Considering the rules of gender balance, we can consider a gender homogeneous group (only women) as an additional limit, but knowing the extremely strong feminisation of elementary education, it was not in our power to exceed this limitation.

Results

Interpretation of individual cases

Eliška

For Eliška, the P4C course, which she signed up for as part of the training for teaching staff, was a highlight, thanks to its appealing name. However, the two-day course did not persuade her to start using the programme in her teaching. The turning point for her was the intensive, roughly year-long training, which made her feel more confident to integrate the method into her teaching.

The first way is to implement the whole lesson, where students go through all the stages of philosophical inquiry. Eliška admits that ‘I do whole philosophy lessons or those two-hour lessons sometimes’ (1, 8), especially in the subject of personal and social education, but also in national history, specifically the topic of Jews in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, with the stimulus in the form of a poem, proved to be a good one for her. A particular challenge is the time-consuming nature of the lesson (at least 60 minutes), which is why she sees classroom teaching as an advantage: ‘because I am the classroom teacher, I can stretch it, stretch it as much as I need to’. (1, 29–30). More often, ‘I try to include elements from philosophy for children’ (2, 18), with support from, for example, argumentative series methods and voting with my feet. And because ‘I’m not that much of a philosopher’ (6, 193), ‘I hold a lot of facilitation questions or prompts, for example’. (2, 38). Having previously been used to a more traditional teacher–to–student approach, Eliška admits that ‘it’s hard for me to be the facilitator’ (3, 105) and sees herself as a beginner in this regard.

Still, she finds positives in the change in her role as a teacher: ‘I get to know the children from a different side, I see them differently, and there are hours when I don’t

have to talk, not much, but I listen a lot to what the children are saying' (6, 182–183). Children have much more space to participate in their own learning and also to decide the direction of the lesson. Sometimes she perceives that the children start a discussion on a different topic than the one she originally wanted to address. In such a situation, Eliška steps back from her direction and gives space to a topic that interests the children. 'And then it's really important to sense that and not try to redirect the children somewhere else' (5, 152).

Initially, she noted the children's rather superficial reactions, often arguing with each other during discussions, directing their attention to the teacher, 'always needing to know the right answer' (3, 97). There was also the usual choice of who they wanted to work with and who they did not want to work with. The focus was on changing the way they listened, 'not shouting at each other' (1, 29), 'so they could work with others. On the whole, it's working' (2, 62). Through P4C, pupils who are left behind or are among the underachievers in mainstream lessons are not afraid to express themselves, but children 'in that circle or in that discussion are able to really come up with some . . . interesting ideas yeah? and that they will interest the others' (6, 186–187). For Eliška, teaching implemented through the P4C approach is an opportunity to 'look into the minds of children and you are surprised at the kind of thinking spirit they have within them. It's really getting to know these kids from a different side as well' (6, 190–191).

Through the use of P4C, Eliška perceives that the pupils develop skills of deeper thinking, discussion and communication competences, as well as mutual respect, but that especially 'they are more able to listen to each other more' (3, 132), to show sensitive disagreement, 'to accept the opinion of others, not to argue or convince that theirs is the best' (3, 132), i.e. 'they can already (with emphasis) discuss a little bit on a level I would say is better' (2, 53). The improvement and shift were confirmed by the mentor who trained her in the P4C approach.

Jana

The interest in professional development and exploring the unknown is an important aspect that brought Jana to P4C. She first encountered the approach a few years ago at a two-day training session, but 'I felt I needed to get better at it' (1, 6–7). She signed up for another, more intensive course that lasted a year and perceives that 'because of that course I am now more able to incorporate the method into my teaching' (1, 8).

She uses P4C in two ways. In the subject 'Personal and Social Education. We have it as a stand-alone subject even though it's a cross-curricular subject, so there's just huge opportunities for me to use it here' (1, 9–11). Or using sub-methods, 'which I incorporate into a regular lesson and I work with that method for maybe ten or fifteen minutes' (1, 14–15). Incorporating even small activities 'never hurts and on the contrary, it can enliven the lesson and it can also bring another dimension to the lesson' (8, 368).

Jana admits that she doesn't even know Lipman, the founder of the P4C approach, and that she bases her lesson structure on 'the structure that is taken from Jason Buckley's methodologies' (6, 201). Particularly in setting the objectives, 'he has some objectives in there divided into four categories, so that's what I'm working from' (5, 185–186). Within the lesson, Jana is not strictly concerned with philosophical stories, although that is what she works with most often. She also uses pictures, books and charts as stimuli and looks for ways to engage the students: 'The stimulus has to be so load-bearing that it creates an

appetite, a desire to discuss' (8, 279–280). She chooses controversial topics, 'like the questions of good and evil, we talked about punishment and forgiveness, the kids picked up on that a lot, the questions of what is reality and what is fantasy or reality a fairy tale' (2, 79–80). The topics are meant to provoke children to formulate philosophical questions, 'which they either just say and I write it down, or they write it down in pairs' (6, 214–215).

Discussion follows, either 'in small groups in pairs, in threes. Sometimes I include argumentative pairs that [are] all at the same time, well, and then some larger discussion follows' (6, 222–223). Reflection takes the form of looking back at the process, returning to the original intent of the lesson and evaluating together how they have met the goal, and 'I'm still trying to come to some generalisations' (7, 233), another of the P4C criteria.

Jana sees certain risks or problematic pitfalls that must be taken into account when using P4C, especially in the formulation of questions with real philosophical potential, because the absence of a philosophical charge in the question will frustrate the whole discussion that follows. Directing the children is helped by 'different questioning words' (6, 213), preparing their own questions and possibly reformulating the children's questions 'slightly or somehow fitting them into mine' (6, 218–219). In any case, it is essential to start 'from what they said, that we deal with what they asked' (9, 324). A further pitfall lies in the reflection stage, which is made easier for the children by aids, 'using some dots or smileys' (5, 172–173), or trying to read from the written records 'how they thought about it and what they took away from it' (5, 176–177).

It is important to move from simple and understandable topics to more complex ones, and P4C does not focus only on information and knowledge, but develops skills 'often forgotten in school' (1–2, 38–39), i.e. the repeatedly mentioned respect, listening, reasoning and others. There is 'not only a right and wrong answer that they can easily learn, but that it is not free, they have to think about it' (1, 26–28). Thinking and arguing together strengthens the courage to express oneself and perform even in children 'who are sort of left behind or below in some other subjects, . . . they can't achieve those feats because they are limited in some way, so here suddenly these kids grow up, it's surprising, and even the other kids see them differently' (2, 67–70). Another positive that Jana sees in the development of children through P4C is the awareness of values, the possibility of realising that people have a value system built in a different way. 'That they realise where they have those values, where maybe some other person has them, what's important to whom, that we don't all have the same values' (8, 274–275).

The impact of the approach on the teacher is also interesting, as the role of facilitator is 'the hardest' (2, 61), which is why she often incorporates P4C methods and discussions into her teaching 'and I train myself by doing that' (7, 302–303). This gives the children the space to come up with their own solutions because 'I would often put some ideas to them, . . . that they need to know and then from the discussion I understand that maybe they are not mature enough for that and I would put some of my things to them' (7, 270–273). Jana plans discussions for her P4C lessons, but is sometimes surprised that the children are interested in something different from what she originally intended, and this is not easy for her. 'Keeping sort of one step behind the kids and leading it in the direction that they're leading it, but at the same time deepening it so that it doesn't stay on the surface, or it doesn't go too much in different direction' (2, 63–64). 'It's such a partnership that the teacher has to really step back a lot, has to give a lot of space to the kids' (8, 277–278).

Lenka

The meeting with P4C took place at Lenka's college, where she was primarily attracted by the attractive name. 'There wasn't a word in the title Philosophy for Children that bothered me, just words that were enticing' (1, 1, 17–18). She initially thought it was an explanation of an academic discipline in a simpler, childlike way. As a student, she enrolled in the course and pursued it intensely because she was 'terribly tempted to try to work through it' (1, 2, 62). From taking the course to writing her thesis or implementing it in the first year of primary school, 'it has guided me in all my research activities. It's everywhere, it always shows up somewhere' (1, 7, 299–301). She refers to Matthew Lipman's classical approach, which she uses in practice, but also to the practitioners in Norway who 'are more kind of rough and Nordic in the way they conduct discussions, but I found that in the school setting it sometimes fit well, just because they had created worksheets' (1, 6, 227–229).

Lenka uses P4C on two levels: as an application of philosophy in the ethics course, where she tries to have a real, 'genuine philosophical dialogue' (2, 12–13), but she also uses the sub-tools in other classes 'whenever there is something to solve' (2, 1, 19), especially when there is conflict in the classroom or understanding of the material. She begins the lesson by activating students with 'some kind of warm-up activity' (1, 10, 430), a game or a morning community circle 'just to get them moving and tuned in' (1, 10, 436). This is followed by 'the main thing' (1, 10, 436), i.e. reading the story and formulating questions, which she refers to as the evocation part, as it is not possible to master all the steps of P4C in one teaching unit. So, the discussion usually comes in the next hour. In the last part, reflection, pupils can compare their thoughts with those of others and form a new perspective on the topic under discussion. This is actually another way of discussion that takes place on a meta-level, where the pupil reflects on his/her own thinking. However, Lenka has not yet 'had the courage to try to say: now let's talk again on the meta-level. . . . I've never really tried that'. (1, 13, 535–537). As a means of closing the process, she uses the method of having students 'just write down in a notebook some of their own thoughts, what they take away from it' (1, 11, 448).

The basis of philosophical discussion is the stimulus from which the students' reactions are derived. If the topic resonates, 'they react very vividly' (2, 1, 33), but if it is not close to them, it is possible to perceive the children's disinterest, when 'they sit and wait for it to be over' (2, 1, 39–40). In her teaching, she works with stories by Lipman, but the song 'It Is Not Necessary' or a video can also be a stimulus, but it has not been successful. Through P4C, the children bring ideas 'that I probably would never have known and would never have thought of' (2, 2, 63–64).

The children in Lenka's class are not afraid to speak up and express their own opinions. When sorting the questions, 'the biggest scamp just came forward' (1, 11, 464), spoke in front of the whole class and pointed out to Lenka that she had made a mistake. It is precisely the fact that children have the opportunity to express their opinion and learn to respect the opinions of others that cultivates communication. They don't even have to be forced to listen because 'you listen all by yourself, and that's what philosophy does for kids' (2, 4, 124–125). 'When you start doing that, it changes you in the way you communicate with children overall. That you stop presenting them with ready-made information and the moment you feel they can think, you take two steps back and let them think' (1, 9, 363–365). The main task is to step back and let the children realise themselves, 'leave it to them' (1, 13, 553). This way of teaching brings 'the good

feeling that I'm not manipulating them to my point of view' (2, 2, 69) and the knowledge that the children are 'more active than if I taught frontally' (2, 2, 68).

Klára

Taking a P4C course at college was an opportunity for Klára to learn how to use the approach: 'I enjoyed it incredibly' (7, 200). 'We actually got to try it out for ourselves' (1, 11–12). She evaluates the course positively, particularly for seeing the approach as a beautiful tool 'to open the minds of children' (1, 7), but also in developing 'how to ask questions or how to lead a group' (2, 46–47).

Klára prefers to incorporate specific sub-methods rather than whole P4C lessons, e.g. 'when introducing the children' (1, 32), or when addressing an educational problem, for example, 'when I felt that they couldn't work together as a big group, as classmates' (2, 34–35), or to enliven the lesson, 'for the fun of the children, when I thought the activities were nice' (2, 36–37). In such situations, she relies on methodological help, especially the course book, which 'helped her a lot with the preparations and with the production of the different activities' (1, 23–24). She also refers to Lipman's book, which she used when there was a conflict between students in class: 'About this conflict, that conflict, so we read one of those texts' (6, 167–168). However, she doesn't necessarily have to ask questions, discuss and reflect only on the story; the stimulus can be anything that catches the children's attention, such as dramaturgy, or 'a poem, a song, a drawing, a walk, maybe in silence or blindfolded; I guess that's how I would take it too' (8, 230–232).

Klára perceives the children's progress to be mainly in the development of relationships between pupils, in a higher level of cooperation, or 'when they were, for example, nasty to somebody and so on, they actually stood up to it' (6, 184–186). She believes that the skills children acquire in this way will be applied in everyday life, as they 'learn to look at different situations in life' (3, 76–77). Thus, they can benefit from discerning verified information from misinformation so that in the digital world they 'don't take everything that is spread as 100% truth, but know that they always have to think about it' (4, 108–109). Without a doubt, P4C develops children's communication; children can 'express their opinion well then, that they can accept the other person's opinion'. (3, 105–106). A valuable insight is the realisation that disagreement is not a mistake and that a child does not always have to just conform to an adult's opinion, 'but to learn to maybe disagree, I think that's important there too' (5, 135–137).

Interpretation of common themes

Possibilities of using P4C

Participants use the P4C approach in two possible forms. The first consists of a separate lesson, where they try to 'get as close as possible to the form of a philosophical discussion' (Lenka, 2, 1, 16), e.g. in ethics education classes. The usual structure of implementation is an initial activation, which can be a reading of a story or a game, or a 'tune-up' (Jana, 4, 7, 234–235) or 'warm-up' activity (Klára, 5, 1, 27). This is followed by a supporting stimulus (e.g. through a philosophical story by Lipman), but it can be any other stimulus that carries a theme close to the children's lives to 'arouse the desire to discuss' (Jana, 4, 10, 328). The following creation of philosophical questions 'is very difficult. Even for the fifth graders' (Eliška, 5, 4, 123).

Therefore, sometimes teachers use their own questions and try to link them to the children's questions so that 'the children feel that I am actually building on what they said, that we are dealing with what they asked' (Jana, 4, 12, 312). Sorting out the questions so that the children can look for connections between them is essential, because 'if they don't learn to ask questions for a good discussion, it's always just about, so I wanted to show off and nothing' (Lenka, 1, 11, 480). Discussion is conducted in small groups followed by a community of inquiry. Reflection at the first level mainly takes the form of a written record, with the children 'writing in their notebook some of their own thoughts, what they take away from it' (Lenka, 1, 11, 450) or noting something about a character in the story 'and I'm already trying to read from that how they thought about it and what they take away from it' (Jana, 4, 7, 204).

The second form is the selection of a method 'which I incorporate into the regular lesson' (Jana, 4, 1, 15), because 'I think that the partial tools can be used whenever something is being solved' (Lenka, 2, 1, 19), i.e. the inclusion of certain elements 'according to what suits me or what we are currently discussing in class' (Eliška, 5, 1, 13). Elements taken from Jason Buckley's methodology are popular, such as thinking in motion, 'so that all the children express an opinion at once' (Jana, 4, 8, 262), or voting with their feet, argumentation orders and scales. These methods can also serve as motivators in the regular classroom or as problem-solving tools.

Children's development and expression

The teachers' accounts refer to the fact that through P4C pupils develop various skills 'that are often forgotten in school' (Jana, 4, 2, 44), with the potential for children to 'take the skills from the philosophical discussion into their lives' (Lenka, 2, 1, 25). The development and deepening of critical thinking 'makes them think about these things a little differently' (Jana, 4, 1, 29). 'In regular teaching, we are still oriented towards that knowledge, but here you look into the mindset of these kids and you are surprised at the kind of thinking spirit they have inside them' (Eliška, 5, 6, 190). 'Often I learn ideas that I probably wouldn't have learned, or sometimes I'll hear someone say something that I really wouldn't have thought of' (Lenka, 2, 2, 57–58).

In addition to the development of thinking, mutual 'cooperation has deepened, better relationships have developed' (Klára, 5, 6, 183–184). Respect for the other, where they 'can talk even with the one who is not a friend right now' (Eliška, 5, 2, 58) is fostered by the fact that 'we trained them to listen, and to realise that they don't actually agree with a child, but with the opinion that he says . . . to be able to listen with feeling, not to yell at each other' (Eliška, 2, 1, 26–29). In doing so, children 'listen and respond all by themselves. You don't have to say listen, let's listen . . . They do it quite naturally' (Lenka, 2, 3, 127–129).

Since the most frequently used method in P4C is discussion, effective development in this area can be observed, 'the discussion has really progressed . . . , it's better quality'. (Eliška, 5, 2, 50–53). Teachers perceive that children's reactions when using P4C differ from those in traditionally conceived teaching. Children are not afraid to express themselves, to raise their voices and their ideas often surprise both the teacher and other classmates. Even pupils who are usually in the background, 'so here come these kids, it's surprising and the other kids see them differently' (Jana, 4, 3, 80–83), the lower-achieving pupils 'in that circle or in that discussion they are able to really come up with

some interesting idea, yeah? and that others will be interested' (Eliška, 5, 6, 186187). Even 'the child who has a teaching assistant in the classroom . . . has pointed out to the teacher that she hasn't finished the process here' (Lenka, 1, 11, 473–476).

Untraditional

P4C is still an alternative, rather than a conventional approach, different from traditional teaching, as the teacher enters a facilitative role. For some, this role is natural: 'I think, I'm really good at it, leave it to them' (Lenka, 1, 13, 556). For others it is challenging: 'it's a little bit different approach than I was used to before' (Eliška, 5, 3, 106), thus 'facilitation skills I find the hardest . . . I have to improve those facilitation skills That's why I include those discussions in all possible moments and I train myself with that' (Jana, 4, 3, 71; 11, 354).

The change of approach is an opportunity to get to know the children 'in a different way and get to know their thinking better' (Jana, 4, 3, 85); 'from a different side, I see them differently and there are hours when I don't have to talk, not much, but I listen a lot, what the children do' (Eliška, 5, 6, 182–183). The change in optics is also due to a different, equal relationship with the pupils, creating a 'partnership relationship' (Jana, 4, 10, 324) and 'the feeling that we are partners in this decision-making' (Lenka, 1, 6, 63).

Summary of results

Let us now briefly recapitulate the results in response to the research questions posed above.

Why did primary school teachers decide to apply the P4C approach in their teaching?

An important aspect of the decision to apply the P4C approach in their own teaching was the initial experience of studying a university course or a professional development course for teachers. The attractiveness of the methods and principles, a certain novelty and a change of perspective on the teaching process, led all the respondents to be interested in further training in the approach and to actively apply it in their own teaching.

What do primary school teachers see as the benefits of including P4C in their teaching?

It is not only the aforementioned non-traditional or different from traditional forms of teaching, but especially the teachers' own evidence of the development of pupils' skills when using the P4C approach, which leads them to implement lessons or selected methods in the teaching process. Above all, it is the development of children's thinking, social and communication skills, i.e. the ability to formulate interesting ideas, to listen to each other, to respect the views of others and to respond sensitively. This deepens cooperation between children and strengthens their relationships with each other.

In addition to the benefits for the children, the respondents also point to the benefits for the teacher: the need to step back and take on the role of facilitator. This gives the children more space for self-realisation and for expressing themselves in unexpected situations, which enables them to establish a true partnership with the teacher.

Which form of P4C applied in teaching at the first level of primary school has been successful for teachers?

The results show that there is no single way that can be chosen for the implementation of P4C objectives in teaching. Although Matthew Lipman's approach is a noticeable source of inspiration, Beate Borresen from Norway and Bo Malmhøster from Sweden provide further enrichment through the use of worksheets and more structured discussion guidance. The well-established structure of the philosophical exploration lesson involves pupil activation, stimulating deeper thinking (not only in the form of Lipman's philosophical stories or novels), the generation of philosophical questions, discussion and reflection, in the first instance mainly in written form. Also, the application of Jason Buckley's approach, especially playful methods and philosophy in motion, allows for use in other subjects to increase motivation, solve current problems or enliven the teaching process.

Discussion and conclusion

In the Czech Republic, the P4C approach is actively used and applied in teaching practice, but in the academic environment, it has not yet established itself as a topic of pedagogical research. Information about the origin, main methods and possible use in education is relatively abundant here as well (e.g. Bauman, 2013, 2020; Macků, 2015; Mareš et al., 2020; Muchová, 2013; Šarníková, 2014, 2020; Šarníková & Tavel, 2011; and especially the methodological materials of the Centre of Philosophy for Children at the Faculty of Theology of the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice). Yet, first grade primary school teachers in the Czech Republic are not sufficiently informed about the possibilities of the P4C approach, as evidenced by the difficulties in recruiting participants and the very low familiarity of the teachers addressed with the topic. Research projects are so far completely absent.

However, there is a clear growing body of evidence from current international research (although not always in primary education) that P4C has positive effects on children, in terms of critical thinking, communication skills, social skills including cooperation and growing self-esteem (Kilby, 2019). We also know that a community-based approach to classroom discussion is perceived positively by educators and teachers, particularly in the personal and professional development of teachers and in observable changes in students (Green et al., 2012), and that P4C affects the way teachers perceive their students, a form of instruction that is particularly beneficial for marginalised students (Jensen, 2021). P4C helps to increase teachers' effectiveness in the classroom, particularly their ability to engage in dialogic and inquiry-based learning (Lam, 2022), although prospective teachers show difficulty in adopting the role of facilitator and encouraging student thinking and interaction (Schaffalitzky, 2021), i.e. asking questions, leading debates and connecting philosophy to curriculum, and thus it is essential to provide feedback and opportunities for practice and self-evaluation to adepts of this approach (Çayır, 2018). However, teachers are also concerned that facilitation entails a lack of control over student behaviour and the direction of dialogue (Jensen, 2020).

Thus, the results of our exploratory research seem to be largely consistent with foreign investigations. Czech teachers also appreciate the attractiveness of the methods and principles, as well as the possible change of perspective on the teaching process. They

see the development of pupils' skills in the same areas of competence and the highlighting of the personality of pupils who otherwise remain in the background. There is also some concern about the role of the facilitator: asking questions and leading discussions is the same for both home and foreign teachers. However, it is clear from the accounts that sufficient practice and training helps to increase confidence and to make more frequent use of the opportunities offered by the P4C approach. Recommendations for further research on P4C in the Czech Republic are thus directed towards investigation not only with teachers and their experiences with this method, but also directly towards real validation with groups of children. Thus, we need to complement the teachers' belief that the method also helps Czech children to develop their critical thinking, communication and social skills, using evidence-based data.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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