

# A Synopsis of Philosophy for Teachers (p4t): A Study of the Philosophy for Children Hawai'i (p4cHI) Educational Framework Applied in Pre-Service Teacher Education<sup>1</sup>

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## Stuck in the Educational Cave

A college student sits in front of her laptop reflecting on Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" (2004) in preparation for the next day's class. She types "this got me thinking about whether or not I am metaphorically the prisoner stuck in a dark cave, and if everything I believe is in fact reality." This student is not preparing for a Philosophy 101 class as one may assume. This is a response from an elementary teacher candidate in a philosophy for children teacher education class. Many may question the place of philosophy in teacher education. However, this alternative approach to teaching is making educators question norms of schooling and pulling teaching out of the dark cave of its past to perceive new realities of education. It is this innovative perspective toward teaching and education that laid the groundwork for the study, *philosophy for teachers (p4t): A Study of the philosophy for children Hawai'i (p4cHI) Framework Applied in Pre-Service Teacher Education*.

It is well argued by many educational theorists that modernist views on education have kept schools in the United States similar to those of one hundred years ago when Dewey (1916) advocated for more democratic views of education (Darling-Hammond 2010; Goodlad 1990; Greene 1978; Hargreaves 1994; Korthagen & Kessels 1999; Schön 1983). Dewey (1916) warned against the hierarchical structures in education, describing how information to be learned in classrooms trickles down from policy makers and universities to administrators to teachers who then "impose them upon children" (p. 108–109). Even with the encouragement of student-centered learning, this still occurs today. Maxine Greene (1978) argues that most teachers are so "submerged in the bureaucracies for which they work (56) . . . [t]hey simply see no alternatives" (45). They are figuratively chained in the cave of the educational system. Due to what Greene (1978) calls "mystification" (54), teachers are blind to or feel powerless against the bureaucratic power of the educational system. However, for Greene (1978, 1988) and others (e.g., Hargreaves 1994; Schön 1983), the reality of schooling is merely a perceived reality like the shadows on the wall of Plato's (2004) cave. Greene (1978) advocates for "wide-awakeness"

(45) to open "the windows" (1978, 134) and leave the educational cave to instigate a shift in the stale educational system. The question is, how?

To move beyond the "factory model of the early 19th century" (Darling-Hammond 2010, 38) that many schools and teachers still follow, one place to begin is the way teachers are prepared. There is much documentation advocating for teacher education programs to evolve (Darling-Hammond 2010; Korthagen, Loughran, & Russell 2006; Loughran 2006). However, a lack of opportunities for teacher candidates to question and inquire into perceived realities of the educational system remains (Danielewicz 2001; Darling-Hammond 2010; Greene 1988).

Greene (1978) argues that perceptions toward teaching could evolve through teacher educators who "work to combat the sense of ineffectuality and powerlessness that comes when persons feel themselves to be victims of forces wholly beyond their control, in fact beyond any human control" (64). However, "conditions must be deliberately created" (Greene 1988, 18). One educational framework aiming to set up these conditions is philosophy for children Hawai'i (p4cHI). It is the use of a p4cHI framework in teacher education that is the basis for this study.

## P4C, p4cHI, and the Philosopher's Pedagogy: A Way out of the Cave?

The p4cHI movement is a branch of P4C developed by Matthew Lipman and his colleagues, Sharp and Oscanyan (Lipman 1985, 2003; Lipman, Sharp & Oscanyan 1980). P4C is an educational approach intended to improve students' reasoning skills through philosophical inquiry. It challenged concepts of philosophy and education to bridge the two, putting Western philosophical reasoning skills at the center of learning. Stemming from P4C, Jackson's (2001, 2004, 2010, 2013) p4cHI emphasizes an intellectually safe community in which participants co-inquire to genuinely wonder about what interests them. In both cases, the educational philosophers behind the movements construct new possibilities for education.

From Dewey (1916) foundations, P4C and p4cHI reconfigure the idea of educational content through the

activity of philosophical thinking. P4cHI resists socially-constructed customs of education through philosopher's pedagogies that "challenge contemporary measures for classroom assessment" (Makaiau & Miller 2012, 11) and "make philosophy a living classroom practice" (11). It centers on the four pillars of community, inquiry, reflection, and philosophy, promoting wonderment and questioning (Jackson 2013; Makaiau & Miller 2012). Teaching with a p4cHI framework has been demonstrated to positively impact the engagement levels and thinking skills of K–12 students (Jones 2012; Leng 2015; Makaiau 2010; Makaiau & Lukey 2013; Miller 2013; Yos 2002). As the p4cHI movement expands globally and more teachers implement p4cHI practices, it is necessary to understand how teachers can come to fully understand the p4cHI approach. To do so, Miller (2013) proposes that "colleges of education rethink their approach to current teacher education programs" (122) in order to make "the philosopher's pedagogy model a distinct educational option for our nation's teachers" (122). It is this focus that this study aims to analyze, leading to the central question, "What happens when a teacher education course is taught through a p4cHI educational approach?"

## Research Design

This phenomenological study is a philosophical inquiry to expose "an understanding of the essences of the experience[s]" (Moustakas 1994, 49) of teacher candidates participating in three different teacher education courses taught using a p4cHI approach. The 47 participants, including students and instructors, were observed in an ELA methods, social studies methods, and philosophy for children course over one semester. A crystallization framework (Ellingson 2009, 2011; Richardson 2008) was used to analyze the complexity of the qualitative data gathered through multiple instruments.

## Results: To Leave the Cave or Not Leave the Cave

Overall, data collected revealed a great appreciation toward the p4cHI approach, and most participants demonstrated tendencies toward dispositions that align with core principles of p4cHI: questioning, being reflective, and gaining an awareness toward new perspectives. However, even with the positive reactions, there were challenges as some questioned the reality of using p4cHI practices in their own classrooms.

Participants quickly recognized a uniqueness to the three p4cHI-based courses. Certain procedures specific to p4cHI were common in all three courses: consistently

sitting in a circle with the instructor, an emphasis on intellectually safety, building and using a community ball, Plain Vanilla inquiries, and daily reflections. As stated in the p4c course syllabus, "co-inquiring" as a class was the norm. Due to the p4cHI practices, participants described the class as "engaged" and "interconnected".

Every participant stated an appreciation for the emphasis on intellectual safety and reflected on establishing an intellectually safe community in their own classes. As the classes progressed over the semester, participants began to take on certain dispositions that aligned with the p4cHI approach: questioning, being reflective, and being open to new perspectives.

Most participants increased the frequency of questioning their own lives, teaching practices, and education in general. For example, one participant wrote about how "teachers. . . are given state mandated programs to implement and read to children word-for-word out of the textbook." She then questioned, "[h]ow can we expect children to grow, inquire, and challenge themselves as well as their peers with this kind of learning?" The consistent questioning fostered a shift in participants' teaching philosophies over one semester.

Opportunities to question led participants to rethink preconceived educational notions, which made it important for them to reflect. Through the reflections, evidence revealed tendencies toward seeing new perspectives toward teaching and education. This influenced many to alter their preconceived notions of what teaching should be. One participant reflected that being a part of the class inquiry "completely changed my views on how I want to run my classroom." Another stated "I feel inspired to implement this intellectually safe environment in my own classroom. . . I feel that it is OK to run my classroom in a different way." Throughout the semester, most of the participants saw the benefits of a dialogically based pedagogy where student questioning was central. Overall, every single participant stated an appreciation for some aspect of the p4cHI framework. However, many participants admitted to being hesitant toward implementing a p4cHI pedagogy.

## Challenges: Staying in the Cave

Analysis revealed that the largest challenges came in how many participants questioned whether the p4cHI practices would be accepted by hiring principals and other educators. The lack of awareness about p4cHI by mentors or other veteran teachers caused anxiety for a number of participants. One participant even asked, "What's the point" of implementing p4cHI practices when it was assumed that following a school mandated curriculum would be required? This exposed a lack of

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feelings of autonomy and the pressures felt by teacher candidates to follow the norm.

Even those who expressed intent to use p4cHI practices sometimes showed a lack of full understanding of p4cHI as an educational framework. Multiple participants described the framework and teaching as “strategies” and “exercises”. This revealed a lack of understanding of the difference between practices and pedagogy. This led to a wonderment as to whether teacher candidates saw teaching as merely a series of strategies rather than a pedagogy or mindset, or even something that is aligned with one’s philosophical view of education. Similarly, some participants reflected on how they were excited to use certain p4cHI practices instead of Common Core State Standards (CCSS)-based lessons. One stated, “I can truly see myself ... taking time out of our Common Core-led schedules to discuss the philosophical questions we share about life.” There was an assumed division between p4cHI practices and CCSS, when p4cHI supports standards-based learning. These misunderstandings belie deeper questions concerning teacher candidates’ preconceived notions of the art of teaching and CCSS and questions as to how those pre-conceptions shape teacher candidates’ own teaching practices.

The anxieties and misunderstandings participants had led to a more profound wonderment about the influences of cooperating schools and mentors. The misunderstandings revealed a disconnect between theory and practice for certain teacher candidates. Those who were able to work with veteran teachers who used a philosopher’s pedagogy were more likely to express their own desire to use it and show understanding of it as a framework or pedagogy. It can be inferred that actions at cooperating schools were strong influences as to the confidence teacher candidates had in implementing p4cHI practices.

### **Agents of Change: Returning to the Cave**

Although it was evident that many participants were hesitant to implement a philosopher’s pedagogy even if they saw the benefits, there were a few who transcended the doubt. It is these teacher candidates who demonstrated a sense of agency. For example, a future elementary teacher expressed how she “hope[d] to convince my colleagues and principal of the importance of incorporating philosophy...all it takes is one school successfully implementing p4c to create a domino effect.” In reflecting on the perceived difficulty of becoming a teacher in the current educational system, one participant recalled how “our methods course teachers remind us that we are the catalyst not just for the students, but

also for our mentor teachers and upcoming teacher candidates.” Those participants who stated a readiness to implement a p4cHI pedagogy understood the challenges that lay ahead in straying away from educational norms. Even with an awareness of the struggle, some became determined in their alignment to a p4c pedagogy.

For me, the p4cHI pedagogy has become a part of who I am as a teacher and as a person. . . Will there be skeptics along the way? Absolutely. But. . . I cannot imagine myself as an effective teacher without it.

This agency as a beginning teacher is noteworthy as it demonstrated that, for a few participants, they came to see the p4cHI approach as transformative to schooling and education. They understood that they “must be willing to view education in a different light.” Seeing teaching in a different way from their gestalts helped many question educational norms, and by doing so, see new possibilities in teaching.

We need to strive to be open and more willing to challenge the ‘norm’. . . This is how we stop the idea of ‘normal’ and instead, get to really developing opinions, thoughts, and explanations, and in the end, seeing ‘different’ as the new ‘normal.’

This “new ‘normal’” of learning through an innovative framework like p4cHI helped to re-ignite some participants’ passion for teaching. “I have been able to more clearly define my teaching philosophy into something that I am proud of.” Some were “skeptical of doing p4c with children at first. Though, for others, “p4c has changed my way of thinking. . . It has opened my eyes to the possibilities of ideas that exist for me, my students, and others around me.” It is apparent that participating in the p4cHI-based course allowed participants the mental space and intellectual safety to question and think deeply about how they wanted to see themselves as teachers. This demonstrates that, for a handful of participants, a philosopher’s pedagogy became more than just actions done in the classroom. “I have come to find that the p4cHI philosophy is not a badge you wear or an apple you have on your desk as a teacher; rather it becomes a part of who you are.”

Though some participants expressed strong determination to implement a p4cHI pedagogy, many others feared “going against the grain.” The influence of participants’ previous experiences and socially held beliefs about teaching were surprisingly strong. Though the appreciation for the p4cHI framework was palpable,

the anxiety felt by participants was considerable. Learning through a philosopher's pedagogy opened Greene's (1988) metaphoric windows to let in an awareness of alternative perceptions toward education, but that was not sufficient to propel all participants to significantly shift from traditional teaching practices. Steps must be taken to combat gestalts that keep teachers adhering to socially-constructed traditions. It is because of this that this study proposes a development in connection with p4cHI to foster more agency for teachers to break away from educational norms.

### **Proposal: philosophy for teachers (p4t); Putting Philosophy at the Heart of Teaching**

It is evident from analysis of the data that there is a desire of the next generation of teachers to reconceptualize education. However, they need more support in doing so. Therefore, it is proposed that there be a shift to perceive teaching as a philosophical endeavor that promotes intellectual safety, inquiry, and reflection for teachers through philosophy for teachers (p4t).

The purpose of p4t is to promote the development of teachers' mindfulness about learning, teaching, and philosophies of education. It aims to help educators teach in more meaningful ways that engage students to think deeply about themselves and the world around them. It emphasizes wonder in order to promote more joy in the art of teaching and learning.

Implementing a p4t framework includes actions that stem from the four pillars of p4cHI. First, teachers must have opportunities to learn in *intellectually safe professional communities* that foster inquisitiveness and dialogue. This includes teacher candidates, teacher educators, veteran teachers, and mentors and invites all parties to see education as "problematic" (Loughran 2006, 30) to promote inquiry between universities and K-12 schools. The roles of teachers and students are re-defined to advocate for collaboration versus traditional hierarchical practices.

Second, *philosophical inquiry* is central with aims to question educational theories and practices, gestalts, and socially-constructed educational norms. An emphasis on questioning perceptions of education from a philosophical foundation allows teacher candidates to wonder beyond universal "best practices" to implement meaningful curricula. Through philosophical inquiry, there are opportunities to refocus teaching practices around the phronesis or synthesis of theory and practice within the context of a situation (Korthagen et al. 2001; Korthagen and Kessels 1999). This phronesis helps

teachers to implement more truly student-centered practices.

Third, there needs to be an insistence on time to *reflect* on teaching practices and philosophies toward teaching and education. As advocated by Schön (1983), "reflection- in-action" (59) helps professionals to improve on quality and efficiency. Teaching must be perceived as a high-level profession that requires intellectual space for metacognition and dialectical reflection as teachers craft their art. Time to reflect promotes teacher autonomy. Lastly, the emphasis of intellectual safety along with the use of philosophical inquiry and reflection supports teaching to be perceived as a *philosophical endeavor*. Recognizing teaching in this way advocates the profession as the pursuit of understanding the nature of humans and our society in connection with the natural world. It promotes mindfulness teaching instead of following pre-set, universal curricula. The cultivation of thoughtful teachers cultivates thoughtful students.

Putting the steps toward p4t into action will be daunting in its aims to re-conceptualize teaching. However, if educators can view teaching as a philosophical endeavor, then, another shift to radically alter the teaching profession can be initiated in society at large, p4t. If we can change perceptions of teaching and schooling in society to support more philosophical thinking, teachers can leave the cave of socially-constructed norms of education. With this shift, we can fundamentally alter perceptions of education to that which truly aims for the betterment of humanity. In so many ways, therein lies the ultimate goal—philosophy for humanity (p4h).

### **Conclusion: Leaving the Cave Behind**

This study, which originally aimed to show teacher candidate responses to the use of a p4cHI framework, revealed deeper questions about socially-constructed perceptions of teaching. In an intellectually safe community, it is evident that a new generation of teachers can be empowered to question underlying societal beliefs. However, more must be done to support those whose philosophies of teaching aim beyond the cave to help them to stay metacognitive and transformative in their practices. If we are to re-conceptualize the purpose of education away from perpetuated modernistic, socially-constructed norms, we have to do more than open the windows to new realities of education. We need to support innovative teachers, both incoming and veteran, who step out of the cave to envision new realities of education.

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It is not until we shift the focus of teacher education in universities and professional development that we can begin to unlock teachers from the chains of pre-conceptions of education. The chains holding us to the socially-constructed educational norms are merely a mirage. Let teachers gain a “wide-awakeness” (Greene 1978, 45) to the cave like the teacher candidate questioning herself from reading Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave” at the beginning of this piece. Empower them to see the bright sun outside of the cave and give them the strength to bring those new possibilities into their classrooms to empower their students.

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## ENDNOTES

1. This article was developed from the author’s dissertation. For the full dissertation, go to <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED579362>.