

Evaluation of the effectiveness of philosophy for children at improving the literacy skills of disadvantaged pupils

Submission date 06/02/2017	Recruitment status No longer recruiting	☐ Prospectively registered ☐ Protocol
Registration date 07/02/2017	Overall study status Completed	☐ Statistical analysis plan ☒ Results
Last Edited 12/07/2022	Condition category Other	☐ Individual participant data

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims

Philosophy for Children (P4C) is an approach to teaching in which students participate in group dialogues focused on philosophical issues. Dialogues are prompted by a stimulus (for example, a story or a video) and are based around a concept such as 'truth', 'fairness' or 'bullying'. The aim of P4C is to help children become more willing and able to ask questions, construct arguments, and engage in reasoned discussion. P4C has been the subject of a number of studies since the 1980's, these have had various methodologies, but have consistently shown impacts on logical reasoning and reading. The aim of this study is to find out whether the P4C approach can improve children's reading skills, math skills and social skills.

Who can participate?

Children in year 3 and 4 in the 2016/17 academic year who attend participating primary schools.

What does the study involve?

Schools are randomly allocated to one of two groups. In the first group, schools receive P4C training and support over three years. In the second group schools continue teaching as normal and are asked not to use P4C materials during the first two years or for year 6 pupils in the third year. In May 2019, pupils at all schools undertake their key stage 2 reading tests and numeracy tests as well as completing a questionnaire about their social skills, so that the effects of the P4C program can be assessed.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?

Participants may benefit from an improvement in their literacy. There are no notable risks involved with participating.

Where is the study run from?

The study is being run from the National Foundation for Educational Research and takes place in 200 primary schools in England (UK)

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?
February 2012 to October 2014

Who is funding the study?
Education Endowment Foundation (UK)

Who is the main contact?
Pippa Lord, p.lord@nfer.ac.uk

Contact information

Type(s)
Public

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Additional identifiers

Protocol serial number
EEPS

Study information

Scientific Title
A cluster-randomised controlled trial of the effectiveness of a school-based philosophy programme at improving the development of literacy ability in disadvantaged pupils

Acronym
P4C

Study objectives
The aim of this study is to evaluate whether:
1. Using the P4C approach can improve pupils' attainment in Key Stage 2 reading
2. Using the P4C approach improves pupils' Key Stage 2 maths attainment and social skills, measured using an adapted version of a questionnaire developed by Gorard et al. (2015) and SAPERE as part of other evaluations of P4C

Ethics approval required
Old ethics approval format

Ethics approval(s)

NFER Code of Practice group, 31/02/2016

Primary study design

Interventional

Study design

Cluster randomised controlled trial

Study type(s)

Treatment

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied

Literacy attainment, numeracy attainment and social skills in children

Interventions

Schools will be randomised to one of two groups using simple randomisation.

Intervention: Schools will receive training and support over three years, with the intention of reaching SAPERE's Gold Award level of P4C practice. For each school, the programme will consist of the following elements:

1. Two days of P4C Foundation Training (Level 1) for up to 25 staff: this equips teacher to start facilitating P4C enquiries with their students, and covers the basic principles of P4C practice, the standard enquiry model and provides an opportunity to experience a model enquiry
2. One day of P4C Tools for Thinking Together Training for up to 25 staff; this provides staff with additional facilitation techniques and practical guidance in encouraging stronger reasoning and conceptual thinking among students
3. Four days of Advanced P4C Training (Level 2A and 2B) for 2 staff; Level 2A gives the school's P4C leaders advanced facilitation techniques so that they can support colleagues who are less advanced in their P4C practice; Level 2B gives the P4C leaders guidance in how to plan for the development of the school's P4C practice, how to link P4C into the broader curriculum and how to handle sensitive and controversial topics that may arise in an enquiry
4. Seven days of in-school P4C coaching and support; the SAPERE trainer tailors the content of these days to the school's needs; they may include demonstration, observation or co-teaching by the trainer, or planning with the P4C leader or remedial work with teachers who need extra assistance, or specialist advice on linking P4C to literacy, for example
5. Five days of remote administration and planning support; these are for ad hoc support on the implementation of P4C and may include guidance on the Bronze, Silver and Gold award applications
6. Unlimited access to SAPERE's online P4C resources and practice guides; these include a wide bank of suggested enquiry stimuli, a Getting Started Guide, a Moving On with P4C guide, a range of teaching materials and example enquiry plans and the Award framework which sets out a detailed progression for P4C practice across student, teacher and whole school dimensions
7. Two reference copies of SAPERE's Level 1 and Level 2 handbooks
8. Application and assessment fees for SAPERE's Bronze, Silver and Gold awards

Control group: Schools will continue teaching as normal and will be asked not to use P4C materials during the first two years, or for year 6 pupils in the third year.

Intervention Type

Other

Primary outcome(s)

Literacy of pupils eligible for free school meals, measured using scaled score from Key Stage 2 reading tests in May 2019.

Key secondary outcome(s)

1. Numeracy of pupils eligible for free school meals, measured using scaled score from Key Stage 2 mathematics tests in May 2019
2. Social skills, measured from a social skills questionnaire administered to pupils by NFER test administrator in May 2019

Completion date

30/06/2020

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria

1. A pupil in year 3 and 4 in academic year 2016/17
2. Attend a junior/ primary school that includes pupils in year groups four, five and six
3. Attend a school that is recorded in the 2015 annual school census data as having more than 25 per cent of their pupils that have ever been eligible for free school meals (EVERFSM-eligible)
4. Attend a school that has not previously implemented whole-school P4C

Participant type(s)

Other

Healthy volunteers allowed

No

Age group

Child

Sex

All

Total final enrolment

7677

Key exclusion criteria

1. Not a pupil in year 3 and 4 in academic year 2016/17
2. Attends a junior/ primary school that does not have pupils in year groups four, five and six
3. Attend a school that did not record in the 2015 annual school census data as having more than 25 per cent of their pupils that have ever been eligible for free school meals (EVERFSM-eligible)
4. Attend a school that has previously implemented whole-school P4C

Date of first enrolment

01/10/2016

Date of final enrolment

01/02/2017

Locations

Countries of recruitment

United Kingdom

England

Study participating centre

National Foundation for Educational Research

The Mere

Upton Park

Slough

United Kingdom

SL1 2DQ

Sponsor information

Organisation

Education Endowment Foundation

ROR

<https://ror.org/03bhd6288>

Funder(s)

Funder type

Charity

Funder Name

Education Endowment Foundation

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan

It is EEF policy that all trial data be uploaded to Fischer Family Trust, the EEF's data processing contractor. The idea was that anonymised data would then be uploaded to the UK Data Archive

for access by future researchers, but that has recently been blocked by the Department for Education. Data from this still will be held, available either from the Department for Education or the UK Data Archive.

IPD sharing plan summary

Stored in repository

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Funder report results	PDF report	02/03/2021	12/07/2022	No	No
Funder report results	webpage		12/07/2022	No	No
Participant information sheet	Participant information sheet	11/11/2025	11/11/2025	No	Yes
Study website	Study website	11/11/2025	11/11/2025	No	Yes