



# The Inclusiveness of philosophy for children Hawai'i (p4cHI)

Watanabe, Aya

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## **The Inclusiveness of philosophy for children Hawai‘i (p4cHI)**

**Aya WATANABE (University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa)**

### **1. Introduction**

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Minae Inahara and Dr. Shinji Kajitani for giving me the opportunity to present my ideas regarding philosophy for children Hawai‘i (p4cHI) and its inclusiveness. In this essay, I would like to share some of my ideas about the inclusiveness of p4cHI by examining its characteristics. At first, however, it is probably a good idea to clarify what is meant by “inclusiveness.” According to the Oxford English Dictionary, “inclusiveness” is defined as follows: “The fact or quality of being inclusive; (now) esp. the practice or policy of not excluding any person on the grounds of race, gender, religion, age, disability, etc” (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). In other words, inclusiveness is a practice wherein any and every person, regardless of their background, is welcomed into a certain area or community. With this definition in my mind, I would like to share one symbolic experience of inclusiveness in p4cHI I had with Dr. Thomas E. Jackson\* (a.k.a. Dr. J).

My p4cHI experiences started in 2012, when I was an undergraduate student in Tokyo. My supervisor at that time, Dr. Tetsuya Kono, introduced me to Philosophy for Children (P4C) and taught his seminar using a P4C-style pedagogical approach. Because of this seminar, I became very interested in philosophical dialogues while writing my thesis on bioethics. I had been raised in an educational environment which had advocated searching for “correct answers” all the time, and because of this I found working on my bioethics paper extremely challenging. There were so many ethical cases to review and reflect on that I felt it impossible to land on one completely “correct” ethical resolution. Therefore, being allowed to keep thinking about things and change my own ideas through listening to others in P4C was incredibly liberating for me. But at the same time, this kind of freedom to conduct philosophical dialogues was very overwhelming and confusing because I had never truly experienced thinking for myself and by myself before.

In June 2012, Dr. Kono suggested that I join a workshop held by Dr. Mitsuyo Toyoda in Himeji to meet educators from Hawai‘i. Since I was increasingly interested in P4C, I

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decided to join the workshop. The workshop centered around the act of listening. Throughout the workshop the educators from Hawai‘i continued to emphasize that “We want to listen to you!” However, since I felt as though I had never really had an original thought of my own, it seemed that I had nothing to share with others, even if somebody was kind enough to listen to me. So I did not fully understand what these teachers from Hawai‘i meant at first. My brain was occupied with “correct answers” that were given by others.

A deep surprise happened after this workshop. I got a chance to ask a question to Dr. J, who is the founder of p4cHI, after the workshop. I asked a question while we were walking towards the reception venue. My question was: “I understand the importance of having free inquiries, but what should I do as a teacher when I have some ideas I want to teach to kids?” My English skills were very limited, so it took a very long time to understand what Dr. J was telling me. But what I understood of his response at that time was: “Observe children. Listen to them. They have wonderful ideas and wonderings.” This answer did not immediately click in my mind because I was not sure what listening to and observing students had to do with the idea that I wanted to share with them. I was sure that I had somehow misunderstood, so I kept listening to Dr. J, trying to understand what he meant and connect it to my own question. In the middle of this conversation with him, I started feeling as though I was wasting his time: who was I to occupy his time with my silly questions and poor English? When I realized that everyone other than Dr. J and myself had already left for the reception venue, and some people had come to look for Dr. J, I could only say in despair “Oh, I’m so sorry! Everyone is waiting for you!” Dr. J suddenly grabbed my shoulder with his strong grip and replied with a big smile: “They are waiting for US!!” At that moment, I could not believe what was happening. I did not understand why this very popular and experienced professor from the US was being so patient with my poor English and continuing to talk to me. I could feel his gentle and deep kindness, and I was shocked that he treated me as somebody worth listening to and having a conversation with.

Looking back on this experience with Dr. J, I think that his attitude towards others represents the deep core of p4cHI’s inclusiveness. Dr. J treated me the way p4cHI encourages its participants to treat others: he took the person in front of him seriously as a co-inquirer, and used our conversation as a starting point to think about the world. His deeply kind and respectful attitude towards me, a random student from Tokyo, shocked me precisely because it made me feel that I had been *included*, even *welcomed* into his world. And his world was full of wonder: wonder at the things that other people notice, experience

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and share. Years later, I would learn about Dr. J’s idea that every person is born with “Primal Wonder,” which is a state of awareness of the inherently mysterious and awe-inspiring nature of the things and people around us. This Primal Wonder is pre-linguistic, pre-cultural, and inherent in each of us (Jackson, 2019). My conversation with Dr. J represented a personal awakening of my own, long dormant Primal Wonder.

As was mentioned above, in this paper, I would like to present some thoughts on how I believe p4cHI is an inclusive pedagogical approach. I will do this by examining one central idea (“little-p” philosophy) and three defining characteristics of the approach: Intellectual Safety, the philosopher in residence, and the adoption of a “Beginner’s Mind.”

### **2. The Central Idea: The Development and Role of “little-p philosophy”**

One of the most important concepts of p4cHI, and which relates to its inclusiveness, is “little-p” philosophy. The idea of little-p philosophy was established after Dr. J and his colleagues found challenges in implementing Matthew Lipman’s Philosophy for Children (P4C) approach in local schools in Hawai‘i. In the 1960’s, Lipman, who was a philosopher and a professor at Columbia University, established the practice of P4C by writing novels that introduce children to philosophical ideas and teaching materials to help classroom teachers discuss those ideas in classrooms. In a typical P4C lesson, children and teachers sit in a circle, read a passage from one of Lipman’s novels, create questions based on what they have read, vote for one question to discuss, and then have a philosophical inquiry which is guided by the teacher/facilitator who is assisted by the Exercises and Discussion Plans in the teacher manual. These Plans are keyed to main ideas in the passage read. (Jackson, T. personal communication, January 1st, 2024). In 1984, Dr. J was one of the participants in Matthew Lipman’s three-week P4C training workshop. He was deeply impressed by Lipman’s revolutionary approach: asking students what *they* think instead of simply imparting “knowledge” to students and then focusing on their questions. It was a life-changing experience for Dr. J. He returned to Hawai‘i, and then decided to introduce Lipman’s approach and teaching materials to Hawai‘i’s educators by giving presentations and holding workshops for individual schools and their teachers. It was the beginning of p4c in Hawaii.

However, as Dr. J began to work with local teachers and students, he and his colleagues including teachers and students gradually realized that Lipman’s P4C was not easily implemented in local schools in Hawai‘i. One of the biggest reasons for this was that studying and fully utilizing Lipman’s novels and teaching materials on a twice a week schedule proved to be too great a burden for teachers who already had busy schedules.

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Furthermore, Lipman’s P4C was focused on Western philosophy. The students in Hawai‘i, who came from a variety of cultural backgrounds, felt there was a great distance between their own worldviews and Lipman’s P4C materials.

In order to address these issues, Dr. J shifted the starting point for the children’s inquiry from Lipman’s novels and teaching materials to their own wonderings and concerns about the world. As a result of this shift, the idea of “little-p” philosophy was established to make a distinction from academic philosophical content, which in p4cHI is called “Big-P” Philosophy. While “Big-P” philosophy is primarily concerned with philosophy as an academic discipline, both as content and as an activity “little-p” philosophy grows out of each person’s individual questions and wonderings about the world, as well as the beliefs and frameworks that we develop as a result of those questions and wonderings.

The way in which p4cHI was developed around the idea of little-p philosophy represents p4cHI’s strength, which is: beginning and continuing to focus on developing a community composed of deeply caring and respectful individual community members. It recognizes that by including and paying attention to the thoughts, ideas and wonderings of others, we can benefit our own thinking and nurture our own Primal Wonder. This makes p4cHI a dynamic, context-sensitive pedagogical approach: as Dr. Makaiau argues, the content and activity of p4cHI are different in each community, precisely because it respects each individual’s experiences and wonderings (Makaiau, 2016).

### **3. Three Defining Characteristics of the p4cHI Approach**

p4cHI inquiries emerge from or make use of people’s experiences and wonderings, which are indeed different in each person. But how do people in p4cHI form communities and conduct inquiries together? How does it include everyone’s feelings, ideas and thoughts and treat them as meaningful contributions to an inquiry? I propose three necessary conditions, along with some related components, to answer this question, based on my own experiences as a facilitator in p4cHI. The first condition is Intellectual Safety, which is a quality that each p4cHI community of inquiry strives to establish and maintain where all participants are able to genuinely voice their own thoughts and feelings without fear. The second condition concerns the relationship between classroom teachers and Philosophers in Residence. Philosophers in Residence are individuals who are experienced in p4c inquiries and regularly visit classrooms to support students and teachers in their own practice of p4c. The third condition is the ability of participants to listen attentively with a “Beginner’s Mind” (Suzuki, 1970).

### **(1) Intellectual Safety**

In order for anybody to be able to share their personal experiences or ideas, having a sense of intellectual safety is crucial. Intellectual Safety is defined by Dr. J as follows: “All participants in the community feel free to ask virtually any question or state any view so long as respect for all community members is honored” (Jackson, 2017, p. 6). Dr. J and his colleagues emphasize that establishing and maintaining a safe environment for all participants is a necessary condition to offer their own, authentic feelings, thoughts and wonderings, and inquire together as a community.

One of the many efforts made to create an intellectually safe community in a classroom with unique individuals is to make a Community Ball together. In the first session of a new p4cHI community, students and teachers sit in a circle and create a ball out of yarn. The participants wrap a tube with yarn while answering questions that range from accessible self-introduction questions such as “What is your name?” “Can you tell us something about your name?” “What is your favorite place to have lunch?” to more complicated ones such as “Do you see a connection between children and philosophy?” Each participant, in turn, has the opportunity to wrap the yarn around the tube. This means that the Community Ball is literally made by everyone’s hands in the circle. As Dr. J says, it “becomes a symbol of a powerful symbolic shift in the circle regarding the authorization of the right to speak” *from the focus on the teacher to the members of the circle equally as well* (Jackson, 2013, p. 102). Also, the process of making a Community Ball (CB) offers an opportunity for everyone to listen to and observe each other. This process “formally introduces each member to the community, and allows the uniqueness of this community to be connected to the CB which will be used in all future inquiries” (Watanabe, 2023, p. 20). (See Jackson [2001] for more details about how to make a Community Ball).

After this first session, the Community Ball will become a crucial tool in all inquiries to follow: for once a Community Ball is created, only the person holding it is allowed to speak. And while the Community Ball does not itself establish Intellectual Safety, it does provide a powerful symbol for the way in which the community depends on the willingness of each person to contribute to it, and to find joy and food for thought in the contributions of others. As the Community Ball is passed from hand to hand over the course of many inquiries, it comes to hold within it a power all its own. That power is not established from outside of the community, but is dependent on having included each person in the process of creating it and understanding its function.

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### **(2) Collaborative Relationships Between Teachers and Philosophers in Residence (PIR)**

In addition to the use of tools such as a Community Ball, collaborative work of classroom teachers and Philosophers in Residence (PIR) is necessary to establish a sense of intellectual safety in each community. The role of the PIR in p4cHI, as described by Dr. Lukey (2012), is

to find every way possible to support these teachers [as co-equal partners] both in their classrooms and as faculty in a school setting. This has aided the teachers to develop their own intellectually safe communities of [...] inquiry and to grow as colleagues engaged in [...] fruitful reflections on issues that matter to them (p. 38).

In classrooms, the teachers and PIR work together, each relying on the experiences and skills of the other: the teacher knows the students in the circle, and the PIR has extensive experience with p4c inquiries. As a result of this collaborative work, the PIR and classroom teachers create their own approach, and make innovations to fit the p4c approach to the culture of each school or classroom community. The important thing to note here is that p4cHawaii is not a program with a pre-set framework and in which the PIR's skills and knowledge of that framework are imposed on the teachers, who are then asked to conduct their educational activities accordingly. Rather, the teacher and the PIR work together to determine the best means of including all students in the inquiry, and making sure that each person's unique contribution is appreciated.

As John Dewey has said, the role of educators is to select the kind of present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences (Dewey, 1938). The PIR and classroom teachers work together to achieve this goal in inquiries.

### **(3) Listening with a Beginner's Mind**

Now, how do PRI and classroom teachers create "good" experiences for students in inquiries? I would like to introduce the third condition as an answer to this question: the "Beginner's Mind." Dr. J has frequently discussed this idea in his seminars. The Zen monk Shunryu Suzuki explained in his book *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* that "[t]he mind of the beginner is empty, free of the habits of the expert, ready to accept, to doubt, and open to all the possibilities" (Suzuki, 1970, pp. 13-14). This means that it is the attitude of the "beginner," the person who can listen to any idea or thought without preconceived assumptions or judgements, that can attain the most fruitful learning opportunities. Classroom teachers, the PIR, and students will learn to listen to each other with a

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“Beginner’s Mind” in order to truly learn as much as possible from each other. To the extent that participants can listen to each other in this way, free of biases and judgements, different and unique ideas can be included in an inquiry. This attitude lets all participants stay present with each other. In this way, a maturing community can work together and select context sensitive experiences for their community.

Of course, “Beginner’s Mind” is not something we can achieve immediately - it is *in fact*, surprisingly difficult to be a true beginner. Zen monks, p4cHI facilitators, participants, indeed all of us, have to work hard to achieve this attitude by constantly reflecting about what it means and finding out how to practice it in our own way. To take an example from my own life, I often find myself practicing “Beginner’s Mind” when I am working as a translator. In order to fully understand somebody’s speech in one language and then convey it to another person in another language, I need to fully concentrate on what the speaker is saying with an empty mind. If I come up with any ideas of my own or have strong feelings when I listen to the speaker, I tend to forget exactly what was said and therefore am unable to translate it accurately. When I facilitate a p4c inquiry, I strive to have almost the same attitude while listening to others. In order to include a variety of ideas and understand each individual’s viewpoint, it is important to deeply focus and listen to people with all my senses.

The teachers and facilitators that I learned the most from were able to take ideas and experiences that I thought were very off topic and connect it back to the inquiry. In one 1st grade class, there was a child who had a hard time staying in the circle, so he was constantly coming in and out during the discussion. Once, when he was in the circle, he got a chance to share something, and what he shared seemed to be off topic. However, instead of just telling the student something like “That is off topic. You need to stay focused,” the classroom teacher, Mr. R, listened to him, took what the child said seriously, and successfully included his idea in the discussion. I thought that it was such a great example of a teacher observing the students with a Beginners’ Mind and including everyone in the inquiry.

### **4. From My Own Experiences as PIR**

Now, I would like to share some more of my own experiences as a PIR, and some of the lessons I’ve learned from those experiences. When our community was able to accomplish the three conditions I mentioned above, the inquiry was more successful. In unsuccessful cases, where the inquiry did not seem to go anywhere, I inevitably found that I was failing to pay sufficient attention to what the students were interested in. It usually happened when



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I depended too much on the resources in my brain to ask questions to children. For example, I may have asked questions within the community of inquiry that I had already asked myself and pondered over many times. As a result, the questions were too abstract to allow the students to respond. In other words, my questions were not truly aimed at the other members of the community: I would sometimes find myself carrying out a dialogue with myself, thereby unconsciously excluding others from the process of the inquiry.

On the other hand, in successful cases I was able to spend a good amount of time participating with both the students and the teachers, and learned from them what kinds of questions and topics the students would be more likely to engage in. In this way, by being attentive and learning from them I was able to participate more effectively as a participant/facilitator and move together with the energy and interests of the community. Dr. J has introduced three “stages” of development in any p4cHI community: a beginning, emerging, and mature stage. Depending on which stage a given community is currently, the role of classroom teacher and PIR changes (Jackson, 2013). In the beginning stage, the classroom teacher and PIR are “responsible for establishing, monitoring, and maintaining the safety within the group” (Jackson, 2013, p. 106) by introducing the rules of the CB and actively encouraging students to listen to each other. In the emerging stage, the participants are more familiar with the rules and the act of sitting in a circle together with each other. In a mature community, everyone in the community feels safe enough to have more “intimate engagement and commitment, vulnerability and trust” (Jackson, 2013, p. 101). In this stage, students and teachers have grown to be equal co-inquirers, and some students can take over the role of facilitator.

In my own experience, I found that regardless of which community I was participating in, I needed to interact with classroom teachers and their students regularly to allow them to welcome me and to feel safe having me in the circle. However, when participating in beginning communities, it was especially important to be sensitive to the unique context of the classroom community, and treat each thought and experience offered in the course of the inquiry as a gift. I found that the best means of doing this was by adopting a “Beginner’s Mind,” and specifically being open to learning what worked for them. In other words, the successful cases were a result of my engagement with the little-p philosophy that the students and teachers brought to the circle. This engagement consisted of appreciatively observing and listening carefully, and being willing to learn and grow from what I was experiencing. These experiences engaged my own Primal Wonder, and allowed me to exercise and develop my little-p philosophy.

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The Center of Gravity in little-p philosophy is in the “first person”, focusing on the thoughts, experiences, and feelings of each participant: what you, I and the larger “we” think and feel about the topic of our inquiry. This in no way is meant to exclude the rich resources of the Big-P Philosophy traditions (Western, non-Western, and Indigenous). These encounters (Big-P Philosophy) are in the “third person” focusing on what “he, she, or they” thought, and are certainly important and valuable to be included when relevant.

Little-p philosophy recognizes and acknowledges that our individual thoughts and feelings are important because they are uniquely situational, and therefore making them the central focus of p4cHI sessions assures that all voices of the community are included and reflect the rich aspects and experiences of each member. The safety of the community makes possible a vulnerability that allows us to be open to powerful personal narratives that expand and deepen our understanding of each other and the topic that is the focus of our session.

Here is one example of many that have emerged in the safety of a mature community. I have been in an inquiry where more than half of the students were crying at the end of the inquiry. It was in an inquiry with 5th grade students. I was visiting this classroom once a week. The inquiry was about family, and there was one girl who began sharing her difficult experiences with her family. As she talked, she soon began to cry. After this, other students felt sufficiently safe to share their own experiences with their family, and many of them also began to cry. Mr. T, who was the classroom teacher, gently offered these students a piece of tissue paper, and accepted their expressions of emotion with his gentle eyes and kind words. It was as if Mr. T, by being who he is and openly embracing the emotions of all the students, acknowledged and welcomed their need to express themselves and commiserate with each other. The inquiry ended because of time, but because the community was strong, they could carry this experience into the future together, as a community.

The point I want to stress is that what everyone brings to an inquiry is important, and the act of being together over time, listening to each other in such attentive, caring ways creates an atmosphere of trust that results in new experiences that cannot be predicted, yet creates rich, new possibilities of understanding rarely if ever achieved in more conventional, traditional settings. This establishes a new level of understanding, with all members being proactive with a welcoming and openness to the needs and gifts of each other in their community. Little-p philosophy is always expanding in such a community, where each member is internalizing this way of being within oneself and with each other.

## 5. Conclusion

In p4cHI, each participant's "Primal Wonder," represented in the ongoing activity of developing their own "little-p philosophy," is the main resource of the inquiry. This reliance on the wonderings of each participant is what makes p4cHI so sensitive to context. Therefore each inquiry is unique: for each and every inquiry will be different from the previous one, be it in the community members, place, time or any number of environmental factors. p4cHI inquiries are built by accepting and embracing all events and phenomena - by inviting those around us into our own world, and trusting in those people to make our own experiences more meaningful. Therefore, any moment in an inquiry which is shared with, or rather created by, community members is a miraculous moment that can never be repeated again. It is up to us to be as inclusive as possible, so that we can make the most of these moments.

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