

# *Mindful Habits & P4C: Cultivating Thinking & Problem-Solving in Children*

CARYN MATSUOKA

Teenagers beating up their peers because of what they thought was said, or a first grader being shot and killed in class because a peer doesn't like her are just some of the stories which fill our news today. Society is faced with many violent tragedies in which students are not making morally sound decisions and choices for themselves. The news brings many stories of children who seem to lack values and morals, which are seemingly not being taught to our youth today by members of society such as family and educational institutions. This is a problem that needs to be dealt with. Waikiki School, where I teach, is making a concerted effort in two ways to respond to that need. Waikiki School has adopted Dr. Arthur Costa's Mindful Model and P4C, which address both academics and values in educating their students.

Waikiki School has made a commitment to systematically and thoughtfully address the skills necessary to become a problem solving and thinking individual who makes good choices for him/herself. The hope is that students who have attended Waikiki School will demonstrate the ability to use their knowledge of the Mindful Habits by applying it to situations in their own lives in order to be skillful problem solvers when faced with difficult decisions. The children are given a common vocabulary in order to discuss the Mindful Habits and are provided with opportunities to practice these Mindful Habits every day. The school focuses on 16 habits of the mind, which are considered to be behaviors important in developing thinking individuals who make good choices.

A number of classes in Waikiki School at various grade levels have also begun to address thinking, problem solving, and making appropriate decisions through P4C. In P4C, the classroom community begins to take part in the inquiry process in which the children begin to construct meaning for themselves because meaning cannot be dispensed. Meanings cannot be given or handed out to children. They must be acquired (Sharp & Reed, pg. 99). Sharp and Reed (1992) go on to argue that meaning is constructed through a process of the child thinking and trying to make sense of things . . . children acquire meanings for themselves . . . it is their meaning, and they acquire it because, to them, it is

meaningful. As the group participates in the inquiry process, the individuals begin to strengthen their thinking skills and become more reflective thinkers by supporting their ideas with evidence, clarifying their ideas, and testing the truth behind their beliefs.

P4C and the Mindful Habits share the goal of helping students become more thoughtful and skillful problem solvers by focusing upon thinking and giving students thinking tools to help them make informed and appropriate decisions for themselves. During the 2002-2003 school year, over a period of several months, my sixth grade class at Waikiki School participated in P4C community circles once or twice a week. I observed and recorded their progress by video taping each community circle meeting and by having the students respond in a journal at the end of each session. This field study examined the students' abilities to practice the habits of the mind, use the Good Thinker's Tool Kit, and incorporate the two into their own lives.

In examining the data, I noticed areas in which the Mindful Habits and P4C wove themselves together. It became apparent that the two influenced one another and helped students become better problem solvers and more skillful critical thinkers. Evidence of this interwoven connection was observed in what the children said, did, and thought. It was interesting to see how the students themselves made connections between the Mindful Habits, P4C, and the ability to solve problems. The tables below are some connections that the students have made between Mindful Habits and P4C

These children, now in middle school, are going to be faced with many tough and challenging decisions throughout their lives. I am hoping that they will have the necessary skills to overcome and resolve problems in a safe and

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*Caryn Matsuoka received her Bachelors degree in Psychology from Santa Clara University and her Masters degree in Curriculum in Teaching from Columbia Teachers College. She is currently working toward her doctorate in education degree (Curriculum and Instruction) at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. Caryn has been an educator at Waikiki School for nine years, and she has been using P4C in her classroom for three years.*

Mindful Behavior	P4C
• Listening with Empathy	One of the most important evaluation criteria is “How’s our listening”
• Creativity	By giving “E” (example) and “C” (counter example) one is motivated to think creatively and flexibly
• Managing Impulsively	By giving “R” (reason) and identifying “A” (assumption) one tends to think deliberately before acting or judging
• Cooperation and Caring • Striving for Accuracy	By verifying or asking “W” (what do you mean by...) one shows care for others points or opinions and also confirm the accuracy of the points made.
• Problem Solving • Persistence	One of the evaluations criteria “ Do we scratch beneath the surface” will enhance problem solving ability and reinforce persistent attitude.
• Metacognition	The evaluation, after each P4C session helps to reflect on one thinking process and behavior during the session.

peaceful manner. The tools of Mindfulness and P4C both work toward that very goal. The problems in their lives are a certainty, but have these students been sufficiently equipped with the necessary tools to help them face and overcome those challenges in the future?

Having observed and documented during the 2002-2003 school year a connection between the Mindful Habits and P4C in the way they provide students with necessary tools to become more thoughtful problem solvers in a classroom setting, I now intend to examine whether a longer range impact of the students ability to use these tools has occurred. As noted, throughout the 2002-2003 school year, the students demonstrated their knowledge of the Mindful Habits and Good Thinker’s Toolkit, and the ability to use them while discussing personal issues they faced in their own lives. The next step, as I continue to research and write my dissertation, is to design a longitudinal study which examines whether or not these students continue to use their knowledge by making responsible, positive decisions for themselves as they maneuver their way through middle school.

Middle school is a time in which teenagers are faced with many challenges, such as, deciding the kind of person they want to become, the kinds of friends they choose to be influenced by, and the type of actions they take when faced with difficult choices. Discovering whether or not these habits and skills are sustained over time would enable us to see what impact the Mindful Habits and P4C have in giving our students the necessary tools to becoming better thinkers. My interest in this research is in finding out if the Mindful Habits and P4C have made an impact in these children’s academic and personal lives over time.

During the 2003-2004 school year, I plan to bring the students together for focus group discussions using the P4C methods of inquiry. I intend to videotape the sessions and have the students write short journal responses at the end of

each session. This will allow me to compare the videotapes I took and the journal entries the students wrote in the 2002-2003 school year to the present and look at the interaction patterns and dynamics between the children to see if they continue to practice intellectual safety, ask questions, and scratch beneath the surface. I’m hoping the questions we pose and the topics we discuss in our focus group inquiries will elicit whether and to what extent the Mindful Habits and P4C continue to impact and influence the children’s lives and their ability to make good choices when faced with difficult decisions.

The methods of gathering data using the focus group inquiries, video taping, and journal reflection responses are important because there is no adequate means for assessing and measuring this aspect of children’s thinking. The current means of assessment using the standardized tests for math and reading are not sufficiently geared toward answering the really important question, which is, are we helping students make morally sound decisions and choices for themselves? This is a vital question for educators, which has many implications upon the future of education as we continuously work toward developing and cultivating thinking skills in truly mindful individuals.

### References

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