

Using Philosophy for Children (P4C) in Teacher Education: Developing Critical Thinking and Dialogic Engagement Among Pre-Service Teachers

Öğretmen Eğitiminde Çocuklar İçin Felsefe (P4C) Yaklaşımının Kullanımı: Öğretmen Adaylarında Eleştirel Düşünme ve Diyalojik Konuşma

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Abstract: This study examines the use of Philosophy for Children (P4C) in teacher education and explores how philosophical inquiry practices influence pre-service teachers' critical thinking and dialogic engagement. While P4C is often treated as a pedagogical method for improving thinking skills, this study approaches it as a philosophical practice that emphasizes the epistemic, normative, and ethical dimensions of thinking and dialogue. From this perspective, critical thinking is understood not merely as a measurable cognitive skill but as a normative practice involving justification, coherence, and responsiveness to alternative viewpoints. The research adopts a mixed-methods design combining quantitative data on critical thinking dispositions with qualitative analyses of dialogic interactions during P4C sessions conducted with pre-service teachers. The findings indicate that participation in P4C-based dialogue supports the development of critical thinking dispositions and enhances awareness of the epistemic and ethical responsibilities involved in dialogic reasoning within teacher education contexts.

Keywords: Philosophy for children (P4C), critical thinking, dialogic talk, teacher education, philosophical inquiry, community of inquiry.



Introduction

Contemporary debates in philosophy and education increasingly move beyond instructional models centered on the transmission of knowledge and instead focus on the quality, limits, and conditions that shape the legitimacy of thinking. This perspective calls for an understanding of thinking not merely as a cognitive skill but as a normative activity shaped through practices of justification, conceptual analysis, and dialogue with others. In recent years, the concept of critical thinking has assumed a central position in both philosophical and educational literature; however, it is often addressed in a restricted manner, primarily in terms of measurable cognitive performance (Ennis, 2011; Facione, 2013). Critical thinking, however, also points to a broader philosophical problem concerning not only how individuals think but also what they are justified in believing and under which epistemic responsibilities thinking occurs.

Throughout the history of philosophy, thinking has been understood not as an isolated mental activity but as a practice embedded in processes of dialogue and public reasoning. The Socratic tradition of dialogue presents thinking as a practice that develops through questioning, examining concepts, and offering reasons. Similarly, modern philosophy increasingly emphasizes the linguistic and social dimensions of thought. Kant's association of thinking with the public use of reason, Arendt's discussion of thinking in relation to judgment and responsibility, and Habermas's theory of communicative rationality all suggest that thinking unfolds not as an inward, individual process but within networks of reason-giving relations established with others (Arendt, 1971; Kant, 1991; Habermas, 1984).

Within this framework, dialogue emerges not merely as a medium through which thought is expressed but as a philosophical space in which thinking itself is constituted and examined. For Gadamer, meaning does not arise from the subject's solitary understanding but through dialogical encounters (Gadamer, 2004). Similarly, Bakhtin (1981) argues that thought is inherently polyphonic and that meaning is produced within dialogue. These perspectives suggest that the relationship between thinking and talk constitutes not only a pedagogical issue but also a philosophical problem.

Philosophy for Children (P4C) can be regarded as one of the contemporary practices that makes the dialogical and justificatory nature of



thinking visible within educational contexts. Developed by Matthew Lipman, P4C seeks to move philosophy beyond an activity reserved for specialists and instead offers an inquiry-based practice in which individuals think together, generate questions, and engage in reasoned argumentation (Lipman, 2003). Central to P4C is the model of the community of inquiry, which repositions thinking from a monological activity to a collective process of reasoning constructed through dialogue (Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyan, 1980).

Although Philosophy for Children (P4C) was originally developed to introduce philosophical inquiry to children, the conceptual structure of the approach—particularly the community of inquiry model—has increasingly been adapted to different educational contexts, including teacher education and adult learning environments. In these contexts, the emphasis shifts from introducing philosophy to children toward enabling future teachers to experience dialogic inquiry, practices of justification, and collective reasoning as part of their professional formation. Studies in teacher education suggest that engaging pre-service teachers in philosophical dialogue can transform their understanding of knowledge, authority, and classroom interaction (Haynes & Murriss, 2011; Kennedy, 2004). Examining P4C practices with pre-service teachers therefore provides a valuable opportunity to explore how dialogic and justificatory forms of thinking can be experienced by future educators who may later facilitate similar practices in their own classrooms.

Nevertheless, a significant portion of the P4C literature approaches the framework primarily as a pedagogical method or an instructional technique for fostering critical thinking, while the philosophical significance of the forms of thinking and talk emerging through P4C remains relatively underexplored (García-Moriyón, Rebollo & Colom, 2005; Trickey & Topping, 2004). Although it has been argued that P4C practices bring about an epistemological transformation in teacher education by reconfiguring relations between knowledge and authority (Haynes & Murriss, 2011), developments in critical thinking are often articulated through quantitative measurements. As a result, questions concerning what conception of thinking such developments presuppose and which epistemic norms they rely upon tend to remain in the background. Yet the thinking practices



that emerge within P4C contexts reintroduce a fundamental philosophical question: whether critical thinking should be understood merely as a skill or as a normative philosophical ideal (Kennedy, 2010).

Similarly, the dialogic talk practices foregrounded in P4C sessions possess a depth that cannot be adequately captured if they are treated solely as communicative skills. Within the context of P4C, dialogue extends beyond a discussion space in which individuals merely express their views; it constitutes a philosophical activity in which reasons are shared, opposing viewpoints are taken seriously, and thinking is reconstructed under conditions of ethical responsibility (Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Splitter & Sharp, 1995). This necessitates an approach that addresses the epistemic and ethical dimensions of dialogic talk together.

At this point, the central problem of the study concerns how the philosophical significance of the forms of thinking and talk emerging through P4C should be understood, rather than focusing solely on its educational outcomes. Does P4C merely cultivate more critically minded individuals, or does it propose a normative reconfiguration of thinking itself? Should critical thinking in the context of P4C be understood not only as a measurable disposition but also as an epistemic practice grounded in justification? Is dialogic talk a pedagogical technique, or a philosophical act that defines the ethical and public conditions of thinking?

Drawing on these questions, the present study approaches P4C not primarily as a pedagogical method but as a contemporary practice of philosophical thinking. The P4C sessions conducted with pre-service teachers are considered not merely as an application setting but as a space that renders visible the philosophical meaning of critical thinking, practices of justification, and dialogic reasoning. While the study examines transformations in thinking and talk practices through quantitative and qualitative data, its primary aim is to address the epistemic and ethical significance of these transformations within a philosophical framework.

Literature Review

The Philosophical Foundations of P4C

Philosophy for Children (P4C) has been discussed not only as a practice limited to children but also as a form of philosophical inquiry that can be adapted to adult education, particularly through experiences of dialogue



and collective thinking (McCallum & Stephens, 2011). Although P4C is often approached as a pedagogical innovation or as a teaching method designed to foster critical thinking, its foundational texts are grounded in a fundamentally philosophical problematic. In developing P4C, Matthew Lipman's primary aim was not to introduce children and young people to the concepts of the history of philosophy, but to cultivate an awareness of thinking itself. For Lipman, philosophy is not a body of transferable knowledge, but a shared activity carried out through practices of questioning, examining concepts, and offering reasons (Lipman, 2003). This understanding positions philosophy as a discipline oriented less toward outcomes than toward processes, and less toward correct answers than toward the norms of thinking.

At the core of P4C lies the concept of the "community of philosophical inquiry," which assumes that thinking is not an individual mental activity, but a collective practice constructed through dialogue (Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyan, 1980). This approach stands in continuity with the Socratic tradition of dialogue. As in the Socratic method, thinking in P4C is directed not toward the acquisition of predetermined knowledge, but toward clarifying concepts and subjecting reasons to examination. In this respect, P4C treats philosophy not as a pedagogical instrument, but as a dialogical practice reconfigured under contemporary conditions.

Splitter and Sharp (1995) explicitly emphasize the philosophical dimension of P4C, arguing that the primary aim of the approach is not the acquisition of critical thinking skills, but the introduction of participants to the normative structure of thinking. According to them, P4C does not merely transform individuals into better thinkers; it also provides an environment in which participants can experience that thinking involves epistemic obligations such as responsibility, coherence, and justification. From this perspective, P4C positions thinking not as an instrumental competence, but as a philosophical act.

The Philosophical Background of Critical Thinking

In educational literature, the concept of critical thinking is frequently addressed within frameworks of cognitive skills, problem-solving strategies, and measurable learning outcomes. Within the P4C literature, critical thinking is often defined in terms of skills such as inquiry, reasoning, and



conceptual clarity (Haynes, 2012). Scholars such as Ennis (2011) and Facione (2013) conceptualize critical thinking as a set of mental processes—analysis, evaluation, and inference—together with the dispositions accompanying these processes. However, such approaches tend to treat the philosophical dimension of critical thinking as secondary.

Within the philosophical tradition, critical thinking is not limited to techniques of correct reasoning but is closely connected to the conditions under which thinking can claim legitimacy. Kant's conception of the public use of reason emphasizes that thinking cannot remain at the level of individual opinion, but must be justifiable before others (Kant, 1991b). Similarly, Habermas (1984) links the validity of thinking, within his theory of communicative rationality to conditions of mutual justification and openness to critique. These perspectives make it necessary to approach critical thinking not merely as an individual competence, but as a public and normative practice.

The philosophical framework informing the present study draws on Brandom's (1994) account of thinking as a "practice of giving and asking for reasons." For Brandom, to think is to situate claims within networks of reasons. This approach is particularly significant for explaining why the thinking practices that emerge within P4C contexts possess not only pedagogical but also epistemic and normative character.

Dialogue, Dialogic Talk, and the Construction of Meaning

Pedagogical approaches to dialogue-based classroom interaction often treat talk primarily as an instructional tool, thereby relegating the normative and philosophical dimensions of dialogue to a secondary position (Alexander, 2008). Although dialogue in the P4C literature is frequently discussed as a teaching strategy that enhances participant interaction, from a philosophical perspective dialogue represents a constitutive dimension of thinking itself. Gadamer (2004) argues that meaning emerges not from the intentions of the subject alone, but through dialogic encounters. This view conceptualizes understanding not as an individual mental act, but as a process that develops through mutual interaction.

Bakhtin's (1981) conception of polyphony likewise maintains that thinking is inherently dialogical. According to Bakhtin, every thought gains meaning in relation to other thoughts, and no utterance is ever complete



in isolation. This perspective provides a strong theoretical basis for interpreting practices observed in P4C sessions, such as engagement with opposing viewpoints, responding through attentive listening, and the reconstruction of ideas through dialogue (Buber, 1970).

In educational contexts, Mercer and Littleton (2007) argue that learning is co-constructed through talk. However, the present study approaches dialogic talk not in terms of learning outcomes, but in relation to the ethical and epistemic conditions of thinking. From this perspective, dialogue is understood as a space in which not only knowledge is produced but also the responsibilities of thinking are shared.

Pedagogical and Philosophical Orientations in the P4C Literature

A substantial portion of empirical research on P4C focuses on the approach's effects on critical thinking, problem-solving, and academic achievement (Colom et al., 2014; García-Moriyón et al., 2005; Trickey & Topping, 2004). In this literature, P4C practices are predominantly framed within the context of classroom-based thinking instruction and the development of inquiry skills, reinforcing the positioning of P4C as a pedagogical method (Fisher, 2013). While these studies demonstrate the pedagogical potential of P4C, they often engage only to a limited extent with the philosophical significance of the forms of thinking that emerge through the P4C process.

By contrast, Kennedy (2010) approaches P4C as a democratic and ethical practice, arguing that the approach shapes not only individual cognitive development but also a culture of public thinking. According to Kennedy, P4C is concerned less with teaching children and young people how to think, and more with inviting them to reflect on what it means to think. This perspective provides an important point of reference for studies that place the philosophical dimension of P4C at the center.

The position of the present study within the literature lies in moving beyond debates about pedagogical effectiveness and proposing a philosophical framework that addresses the normative, epistemic, and ethical dimensions of thinking simultaneously. Within this framework, practices of critical thinking and dialogic talk are approached not as measurable outcomes, but as thinking experiences that require philosophical problematization.



Despite the growing body of empirical research on P4C, relatively little attention has been given to the philosophical significance of the forms of thinking and dialogic interaction that emerge within P4C sessions, particularly in the context of teacher education. While existing studies largely examine the pedagogical outcomes of P4C, fewer studies investigate how practices of justification, reasoning, and dialogic engagement shape participants' understanding of thinking itself. Addressing this gap, the present study seeks to examine how critical thinking and dialogic talk are experienced and interpreted by pre-service teachers within P4C inquiry sessions. Accordingly, the study seeks to address the following research questions:

- What patterns characterize pre-service teachers' critical thinking dispositions in the context of P4C?
- How do pre-service teachers experience practices of giving and asking for reasons during the P4C process?
- How do P4C sessions shape pre-service teachers' dialogic relations with opposing viewpoints?
- Within which frameworks of meaning do pre-service teachers conceptualize critical thinking and dialogic talk during P4C?
- How does the P4C experience render visible pre-service teachers' awareness of the epistemic and ethical responsibilities of thinking?

Methodology

Philosophical and Methodological Positioning

Quantitative and qualitative designs commonly employed in educational research tend to focus on learning outcomes and evaluating effectiveness and thus remain limited in directly addressing the normative and philosophical dimensions of thinking (Fraenkel et al., 2019). The present study approaches Philosophy for Children (P4C) not as a pedagogical intervention or as a teaching method aimed at generating measurable learning outcomes, but as a normative philosophical practice in which thinking is constituted through shared inquiry, justification, and dialogue. Accordingly, the methodological framework of the study departs from effectiveness-oriented educational research and aligns with philosophical approaches that foreground the conditions under which thinking gains legitimacy and the epistemic dimensions of dialogic interaction (Kennedy, 2014; Lipman, 2003).

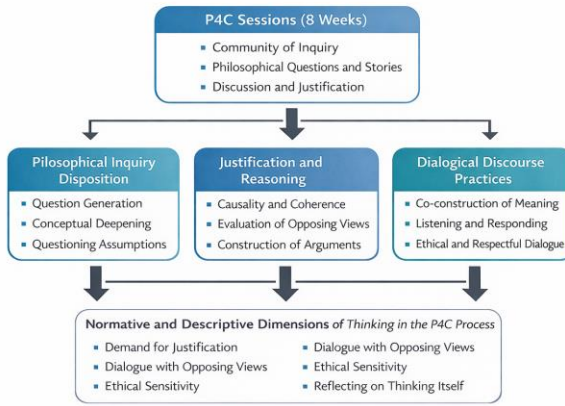


The model presented in Figure 1 conceptualizes the P4C process not as a linear or causal chain of effects, but as a field of philosophical practices in which different dimensions of thinking mutually inform and reinforce one another. Within this model, the disposition toward philosophical inquiry, practices of justification and reasoning, and dialogic talk are not treated as instructional techniques or independent variables, but as constitutive and interrelated dimensions of philosophical thinking.

Within this methodological framework, quantitative and qualitative data are not employed to demonstrate pedagogical effectiveness or to generate causal explanations. Rather, these data provide a descriptive and interpretive ground that renders the thinking and talk practices experienced in P4C sessions open to philosophical discussion. Quantitative data make visible shifts in dispositions related to critical thinking, while qualitative data illuminate how philosophical practices such as the demand for justification, engagement with opposing viewpoints, responding through attentive listening, and reflection on thinking itself are experienced. In this sense, empirical findings do not replace philosophical argumentation; instead, they function as experiential points of reference for philosophical problematization (Gadamer, 2004; Biesta, 2010). From this perspective, the methodological structure of the study reflects its aim to examine critical thinking and dialogic talk not as measurable outcomes, but as experiential and philosophical practices that disclose the epistemic and ethical norms of thinking.



Figure 1. A Model of Critical Thinking and Dialogical Discourse through P4C



Note. This model does not present the P4C process as a structure aimed at producing pedagogical effectiveness or causal explanations. Rather, it offers a conceptual framework that depicts how thinking is experienced and negotiated through philosophical practices within P4C contexts.

Figure 1 *A Model of Critical Thinking and Dialogical Discourse through P4C*

Note. This figure presents a conceptual framework that depicts the philosophical practices through which critical thinking and dialogical discourse are experienced within Philosophy for Children (P4C) sessions. The model does not aim to demonstrate pedagogical effectiveness or causal relationships; rather, it illustrates how inquiry, justification, and dialogue function as normative and epistemic dimensions of philosophical thinking.

Research Design

The study employs a quasi-experimental mixed-methods design that integrates quantitative and qualitative data sources. The mixed-methods approach is grounded in the assumption that a single type of data may be insufficient to capture the complexity of the research phenomenon (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). However, this methodological choice is not aimed at using different data types as mutually validating measures; rather, it seeks to provide a multidimensional understanding of the thinking practices that emerge within the context of P4C. While quantitative data make visible general shifts in critical thinking dispositions, qualitative data make it possible to interpret the philosophical dimensions of this transformation, such as practices of justification, engagement with opposing views, and dialogic reasoning. It is important to note that the quantitative dimension of the study focuses specifically on critical thinking dispositions, as



standardized instruments for measuring dialogic interaction, epistemic responsibility, and practices of justification remain limited in the literature. Therefore, these dimensions were explored primarily through qualitative data, allowing a deeper interpretation of participants' dialogic experiences and justificatory reasoning during the P4C process. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey University, Social and Humanities Sciences, with the decision dated 05.01.2026 and numbered 01-2026/07.

Participants

The study group consisted of pre-service teachers enrolled in the Faculty of Education at a public university. In the quantitative dimension of the study, 50 pre-service teachers participated, and pre-test and post-test administrations were conducted to examine their critical thinking dispositions. In the qualitative dimension, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 pre-service teachers who participated regularly in the P4C sessions and took an active role in dialogic discussions. The qualitative sample was determined through criterion sampling, a form of purposive sampling (Patton, 2015). In this study, the P4C approach was adapted to a teacher education context in order to allow pre-service teachers to experience philosophical inquiry practices and dialogic discussion processes that are central to the P4C tradition.

Data Collection Process

Quantitative data were collected using the Critical Thinking Disposition Scale in order to identify pre-service teachers' dispositions toward critical thinking. Developed by (Yıldırım Döner & Demir, 2022), this five-point Likert-type scale consists of 21 items and comprises three sub-dimensions: dialectical thinking, disposition, and analysis. In the scale development study, construct validity was tested through exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, and reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .87. These values indicate that the scale is a valid and reliable instrument for measuring pre-service teachers' critical thinking dispositions.

Qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews developed based on the P4C literature and the philosophical framework of



the study. The interviews focused on participants' practices of justification, their engagement with opposing viewpoints, their experiences of dialogic talk, and their awareness of their own thinking processes. Semi-structured interviews are frequently preferred in qualitative research due to their capacity to allow participants to articulate their thinking processes in detail (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

P4C Implementation Process

Within the scope of the study, P4C sessions were conducted over an eight-week period, with one session per week. Each session lasted approximately 60-90 minutes. The sessions were structured in accordance with the community of inquiry approach that constitutes the core of P4C (Lipman, 2003; Splitter & Sharp, 1995). Philosophical stimuli—such as short texts, case examples, and conceptual questions—were employed throughout the process, and participants were encouraged to generate questions, develop reasoned contributions, and critically examine one another's arguments. The researcher acted as a facilitator during the sessions, ensuring that discussions progressed without directive intervention while maintaining philosophical depth. This approach aligns with the treatment of P4C not as a pedagogical technique, but as a philosophical thinking practice (Lipman, 2003).

Interpretation of the Data

In the analysis of quantitative data, pre-test and post-test scores were compared to examine changes in pre-service teachers' critical thinking dispositions. The data were analyzed using statistical analysis software, and the findings were interpreted through descriptive statistics and appropriate comparative tests.

Quantitative data were analyzed to describe observed changes in critical thinking dispositions, whereas qualitative data were approached not through a purely outcome-oriented lens but within an interpretive framework that allows for philosophical understanding of thinking and talk practices. In this context, the data were not used to establish independent-dependent variable relationships, but to render conceptually discussable the thinking experiences that emerged during the P4C process.

For the analysis of qualitative data, content analysis was employed. Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim, the data were read



repeatedly to generate codes, and these codes were subsequently organized into meaningful themes. Content analysis enables the systematic examination of participants' experiences and the identification of conceptual patterns (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Although content analysis was employed as an analytical technique, the interpretation of qualitative data was guided by a philosophical-hermeneutic framework rather than an outcome-oriented coding logic. Throughout the analysis process, the researcher took care to remain faithful to the data and to preserve participants' statements within their contextual meaning.

Although there are no standardized quantitative instruments specifically designed to measure dialogic talk, ethical responsibility, or public thinking directly, these dimensions were indirectly examined through qualitative data and through participants' engagement patterns during philosophical discussions. The quantitative measurement of critical thinking dispositions was used not as a direct indicator of dialogic or ethical thinking, but as a complementary measure reflecting broader shifts in reflective and justificatory reasoning tendencies. In this respect, quantitative and qualitative data were interpreted together to provide a holistic philosophical understanding of thinking practices rather than to establish direct causal or instrumental relationships.

Ethical Principles and Research Trustworthiness

Participation in the study was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. To ensure the validity and reliability of the study, several strategies appropriate to both the quantitative and qualitative components were employed. In the quantitative dimension, the previously established validity and reliability of the measurement instrument support the credibility of the quantitative data (Yıldırım Döner & Demir, 2022). In the qualitative dimension, data triangulation of data sources was used to enhance credibility, and interview findings were interpreted alongside observations from the implementation process. In addition, transferability was strengthened through participant validation and thick description (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

This study does not evaluate P4C practices in terms of pedagogical effectiveness, instructional success, or the production of causal learning outcomes. Rather, quantitative and qualitative data are not treated as



empirical evidence of pedagogical impact but as an experiential field that renders philosophically discussable the normative, epistemic, and ethical dimensions of thinking and talk practices that emerge within the context of P4C.

Findings

In this section, the quantitative and qualitative findings obtained in this study are presented using a descriptive approach in line with the re-search questions The findings indicate the changes observed in pre-service teachers’ critical thinking dispositions and dialogic talk practices through both quantitative measurements and participants’ lived experiences during the P4C implementation.

Quantitative Findings: Changes in Critical Thinking Dispositions

In the quantitative dimension of the study, pre-test and post-test scores were compared in order to to examine changes in pre-service teachers’ critical thinking dispositions following the P4C implementation. To this end, the Critical Thinking Disposition Scale was administered to participants before and after the P4C implementation, and the data obtained were analyzed using descriptive statistics and comparative analyses.

First, the mean and standard deviation values of pre-service teachers’ pre-test and post-test scores on critical thinking dispositions were calculated. The findings indicate an increase in participants’ critical thinking disposition scores following the P4C implementation.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics of Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores on the Critical Thinking Disposition Scale*

Measurement	N	Mean (X ⁻)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Pre-test	50	3.41	0.42
Post-test	50	3.78	0.39

As shown in Table 1, the post-test mean scores of pre-service teachers’ critical thinking dispositions are higher than their pre-test scores. A paired-samples t-test was conducted to determine whether this increase was statistically significant. The results indicated a statistically significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores.



Table 2. *Paired-Samples t-Test Results for Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores on the Critical Thinking Disposition Scale*

Measurement	X ⁻	SD	t	df	p
Pre-test	3.41	0.42	5.62	49	.001*
Post-test	3.78	0.39			

*p < .05

The results presented in Table 2 indicate a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of pre-service teachers' critical thinking dispositions ($t(49) = 5.62, p < .001$). These findings suggest that participation in the P4C sessions was associated with an increase in participants' critical thinking dispositions.

A comparison of pre-test and post-test scores revealed an overall increase in pre-service teachers' critical thinking dispositions. This increase was observed not only in the total scale score but also across the sub-dimensions of dialectical thinking, analysis, and disposition.

In the dialectical thinking sub-dimension, participants demonstrated an increased tendency to consider multiple perspectives simultaneously and to establish relationships between opposing viewpoints following the implementation. In the analysis sub-dimension, the findings indicate an improvement in pre-service teachers' tendencies to decompose ideas, distinguish reasons, and ground claims in justification. Results related to the disposition sub-dimension suggest that participants developed a more sustained and willing orientation toward engaging in critical thinking.

These quantitative findings indicate that P4C practices were associated with a measurable change in pre-service teachers' critical thinking dispositions. However, rather than explaining the nature of the thinking practices underlying this change, the quantitative data provide a framework that should be interpreted in conjunction with the qualitative findings.

Qualitative Findings

This section presents the qualitative findings derived from semi-structured interviews conducted with pre-service teachers who participated in the P4C sessions. The qualitative data were analyzed using content analysis and the codes generated during the analysis were organized into themes in



line with the research questions. The qualitative findings provide insight into understanding how pre-service teachers experienced critical thinking and dialogic talk practices within the context of P4C.

Table 3. Themes, Sub-Themes, and Sample Participant Statements Regarding Pre-Service Teachers’ Experiences of Critical Thinking and Dialogic Talk in P4C Practices

Theme	Sub-Themes	Sample Participant Statements
Experiencing a Philosophical Disposition	Question generation	“I used to be more interested in the answer, but now the question itself makes me pause.” (P3)
	Conceptual inquiry	“When I use a concept, I started to think about what I am actually assuming.” (P8)
	Becoming aware of assumptions	“Now I feel that something is missing if I express my opinion without explaining why.” (P7)
Practices of Giving and Asking for Reasons	Providing reasons	“I have started to ask ‘why?’ about other people’s ideas as well.” (P12)
	Asking for justification	“Instead of trying to silence a view I disagree with, I try to think with it.” (P11)
	Seeking coherence	“Different perspectives actually allow me to test my own thinking.” (P5)
Establishing a Dialogic Relationship with Opposing Views	Listening to opposing views	
	Trying to understand	
	Relating different ideas	
The Emergence of Ethical Sensitivity in Dialogue	Distinguishing ideas from persons	“I realized that I can disagree with an idea without hurting the person.” (P2)
	Speaking without judgment	“I learned that everyone needs time to think.” (P9)
	Respecting the right to speak	
Philosophical Reasoning	Monitoring one’s thinking process and Multiple perspectives	“For the first time, I became clearly aware of how I think while thinking.” (P14)



Theme	Sub-Themes	Sample Participant Statements
Metacognitive Awareness	Questioning one's own assumptions	"I began to see how my own assumptions guide my thinking." (P6)

Experiencing a Philosophical Inquiry Disposition

Participant accounts indicate a noticeable shift in pre-service teachers' approaches to thinking throughout the P4C process. In particular, practices of question generation evolved from everyday and surface-level inquiries toward questions with greater conceptual depth that targeted underlying assumptions. Pre-service teachers reported an increasing tendency to interrogate the meanings embedded in concepts and to reflect on the limits of those meanings. These accounts indicate that, within the P4C context, thinking was experienced less as a search for ready-made knowledge and more as a practice grounded in problematization and conceptual analysis.

Participants' reflections illustrate how philosophical inquiry gradually shifted their focus from seeking ready answers to questioning the assumptions embedded in everyday concepts. One participant described this transformation as follows:

"I used to be more interested in the answer, but during the discussions I realized that the question itself sometimes opens new ways of thinking."
(P2)

Another participant emphasized the importance of conceptual clarification in philosophical dialogue:

"When I use a concept, I now feel the need to think about what exactly I mean by it and whether others understand it in the same way."
(P7)

Similarly, participants indicated that questioning itself sometimes became more meaningful than reaching a definitive conclusion:

"Sometimes the question itself becomes more important than finding an answer, because it changes how we think about the issue."
(P4)

Another participant reported becoming aware of the hidden assumptions embedded in everyday thinking:



“I started to realize that many ideas we use in daily life actually contain hidden assumptions.” (P10)

This shift toward deeper questioning also influenced how participants approached the justification of their ideas during discussions.

Practices of Giving and Asking for Reasons

The qualitative findings indicate that pre-service teachers increasingly felt the need to justify their thinking during the P4C process. Participants emphasized the growing importance of articulating reasons when putting forward a claim and of defending those reasons in dialogue with others. Moreover, they reported that they not only justified their own views but also began to request reasons for the views expressed by others. This pattern suggests that thinking within the P4C process was experienced less as the expression of subjective opinions and more as a practice organized around shared standards of justification.

Participant accounts further indicate that philosophical dialogue encouraged them both to justify their claims and to ask others for reasons. One participant described this shift as follows:

“During the discussions, I realized that simply stating my opinion was not enough. I needed to explain why I thought that way.” (P5)

Another participant highlighted how questioning the reasons behind different viewpoints became a natural part of the dialogue:

“When someone expressed an idea, I started to ask what reasons supported that idea. This helped the discussion move beyond personal opinions.” (P9)

The growing emphasis on giving and asking for reasons also shaped how participants engaged with opposing viewpoints during the discussions.

Establishing a Dialogic Relationship with Opposing Views

Participant statements demonstrate that engagement with opposing views became a natural component of the thinking process during P4C sessions. Pre-service teachers noted that, while they initially perceived opposing ideas as positions to be refuted, they gradually came to regard them as opportunities to test and reconsider their own thinking. Practices such as listening attentively to opposing views, attempting to understand their internal coherence, and responding by taking previous contributions into



account point to the emergence of dialogic talk as a sustained practice within the discussions.

Participants further indicated that engaging with opposing viewpoints became an important dimension of the dialogue process. Rather than rejecting different perspectives immediately, they described learning to listen carefully and respond thoughtfully. One participant expressed this experience as follows:

“Sometimes I disagreed with what others said, but instead of rejecting it directly, I tried to understand why they thought that way.” (P6)

Another participant emphasized that encountering different perspectives expanded the scope of the discussion:

“Hearing different opinions made me reconsider my own ideas. It showed me that an issue can be approached from multiple perspectives.” (P11)

These experiences also appeared to introduce an ethical dimension into the dialogue process.

The Emergence of Ethical Sensitivity in Dialogue

The qualitative findings indicate that discussions within the P4C process acquired not only a cognitive but also an ethical dimension. Participants reported developing greater awareness of distinguishing ideas from persons, using non-judgmental language, and respecting others' right to speak. These accounts suggest that dialogic talk in the P4C context was experienced not as a competitive form of debate, but as a thinking relationship grounded in mutual respect and responsibility.

Participant reflections further indicate that the dialogic environment fostered a sense of ethical responsibility during discussions. In particular, participants became more attentive to respecting others' contributions and creating a fair space for dialogue. One participant explained this awareness as follows:

“I realized that listening carefully to others is also a kind of responsibility in a discussion.” (P3)

Another participant noted that the discussions encouraged them to be more considerate when expressing their ideas:

“Even when I disagreed with someone, I tried to express my thoughts in a respectful way so that the dialogue could continue.” (P12)



These dialogic experiences also appeared to encourage participants to reflect more deeply on their own thinking processes.

Awareness of the Thinking Process and Philosophical Reasoning

Several participants reported that, through the P4C process, they became increasingly aware not only of what they thought but also of how they thought. Experiences such as questioning one's own assumptions, suspending immediate judgments, and considering multiple perspectives simultaneously emerged prominently in participant accounts. These accounts indicate that thinking within the P4C context appeared to acquire a reflective quality and that philosophical reasoning was experienced as a more conscious and deliberate practice.

Participant reflections further suggest that the discussions increased their awareness of their own thinking processes. Many reported becoming more attentive to how ideas develop during dialogue. One participant described this experience as follows:

"During the discussions, I became more aware of how my thoughts were changing as I listened to others." (P8)

Another participant emphasized that philosophical dialogue helped them examine their own reasoning more carefully:

"Sometimes I noticed that my initial opinion changed after thinking about the reasons more carefully." (P14)

Taken together, these themes illustrate how participation in the P4C sessions shaped pre-service teachers' experiences of thinking as a dialogic, reflective, and justificatory practice.

Overall Interpretation of the Qualitative Findings

Taken together, the qualitative findings suggest that pre-service teachers experienced critical thinking and dialogic talk within the P4C process not as isolated skills but as interconnected thinking practices shaped by justification, dialogue, and ethical responsibility. In this sense, P4C can be understood as an experiential space in which the normative and dialogic dimensions of thinking become more explicit for pre-service teachers. These insights provide an interpretive basis for understanding the quantitative changes observed in pre-service teachers' critical thinking dispositions.



Discussion

The discussions presented in this section do not constitute a simple repetition of the quantitative and qualitative findings reported above. Rather, these findings serve as a point of departure for examining the philosophical horizons within which practices of critical thinking and dialogic talk may be meaningfully understood. The experiential transformations described in the findings are rearticulated and interpreted here within their normative, epistemic, and ethical contexts, thereby situating them within a broader philosophical framework. In this sense, engaging pre-service teachers in P4C-based philosophical dialogue may contribute not only to the development of critical thinking dispositions but also to a deeper understanding of dialogic teaching practices that they may later apply in their own classrooms.

Repositioning Critical Thinking as a Normative Practice

The quantitative findings indicate a statistically significant increase in pre-service teachers' critical thinking dispositions, with observable gains across the subdimensions of dialectical thinking, analysis, and disposition. These results are consistent with previous studies demonstrating the positive impact of P4C on critical thinking (Trickey & Topping, 2004; García-Moriyón et al., 2005). However, such quantitative outcomes remain limited in their capacity to illuminate the philosophical meaning of critical thinking. Within the philosophical tradition, critical thinking is not merely understood as a set of cognitive skills, but as a normative practice that establishes the conditions under which thinking can claim legitimacy.

Kant's conception of the public use of reason emphasizes that thinking cannot be confined to the production of private opinions; rather, it must be justifiable before others (Kant, 1991). From this perspective, thinking constitutes not only a cognitive activity but also a domain of public responsibility. Similarly, Habermas's (1984) theory of communicative rationality situates the validity of thinking within conditions of mutual justification and openness to critique. The qualitative findings of this study—particularly participants' growing dissatisfaction with merely stating "I think" and their increasing sense of obligation to support their claims with reasons—suggest that this normative structure of thinking was experientially enacted within the P4C process.



In this respect, the findings point beyond approaches that define critical thinking primarily in terms of cognitive skills and dispositions (Ennis, 2011; Facione, 2013). They suggest that critical thinking involves not only improved analytical abilities or logical inference, but also a concern with the question of what makes one's thinking binding or accountable to others. Within the P4C context, critical thinking thus emerges as a normative epistemic practice rather than a purely instrumental competence. This interpretation also resonates with a growing body of educational research emphasizing the dialogic and socially situated character of critical thinking. Studies conducted within P4C contexts suggest that improvements in critical thinking are closely related to the opportunities learners have to articulate, challenge, and revise their ideas within collaborative inquiry communities (Daniel & Auriac, 2011; Gorard, Siddiqui & See, 2015; Reznitskaya & Wilkinson, 2017). From this perspective, critical thinking develops not simply through the acquisition of analytical skills, but through participation in dialogic environments that encourage justification, reflection, and openness to alternative viewpoints.

Justification Practices and the Public Dimension of Thinking

One of the most salient themes emerging from the qualitative findings concerns the transformation of participants' justification practices. Pre-service teachers reported placing increased emphasis on providing reasons, requesting justifications, and seeking coherence when articulating their views. Interpreted through the lens of Brandom's (1994) normative pragmatics, this finding underscores the idea that thinking is fundamentally constituted through practices of giving and asking for reasons.

According to Brandom, making a claim entails a commitment to offering reasons for that claim and to defending it within what he describes as a "space of reasons." Viewed from this perspective, P4C sessions function as a public arena in which participants engage with the normative dimensions of thinking. The willingness of participants to reconsider their views in response to opposing arguments further demonstrates that thinking is not a static internal process but an activity that evolves through dialogic engagement.

These findings resonate with contemporary philosophical accounts emphasizing the linguistic and social dimensions of thinking. Habermas



(1984) for instance, locates the validity of thought not within individual consciousness but within communicative processes structured by justification. Within the P4C context, justification therefore signifies not merely an individual attempt at persuasion but participation in a shared practice of reasoning. This suggests that critical thinking is shaped not by isolated individual abilities but by engagement in a public and collectively sustained normative order.

Empirical studies on classroom dialogue similarly indicate that practices of justification play a central role in the development of reasoning. Research on dialogic teaching has shown that when learners are encouraged to justify their claims, challenge ideas, and build upon others' contributions, they gradually adopt more reflective and epistemically responsible forms of thinking (Alexander, 2008; Mercer, Wegerif & Major, 2019). The patterns observed in the present study support these findings and suggest that P4C provides a structured environment in which such justificatory practices can become a habitual dimension of thinking.

The Philosophical Grounding of Dialogic Talk and the Construction of Meaning

The qualitative findings further demonstrate that P4C applications brought about a notable transformation in participants' dialogic talk practices. Participants reported increased awareness of listening to opposing views, striving to understand alternative perspectives, and adopting more non-judgmental forms of expression. These experiences challenge approaches that conceptualize dialogue merely as a communicative technique or instructional strategy.

Within Gadamer (2004) hermeneutic framework, dialogue is understood as a process through which meaning emerges independently of individual intentions, arising instead through reciprocal engagement. Meaning, from this perspective, is not transmitted as pre-given knowledge but constructed through dialogic encounters. Bakhtin (1981) concept of dialogism similarly emphasizes that thinking is inherently polyphonic, with every utterance gaining meaning in relation to others. The interactions with opposing views and the reconstruction of ideas observed in P4C sessions closely align with these philosophical accounts.



Educational research on dialogic talk, such as that by Mercer and Littleton (2007), highlights the role of talk in the co-construction of learning. However, the present study extends this perspective by situating dialogic talk within the philosophical conditions of thinking itself. Dialogue, in this sense, emerges not merely as a medium for expressing thought but as a philosophical space in which thinking is tested, transformed, and ethically situated. Recent research on dialogic pedagogy further supports the idea that dialogic interaction contributes not only to conceptual understanding but also to the development of reflective and critical forms of reasoning. Studies by Reznitskaya & Wilkinson (2017) and Wilkinson et al. (2015) demonstrate that sustained engagement in dialogic discussion enables students to evaluate arguments, consider multiple perspectives, and revise their positions in light of new reasons. The dialogic transformations reported by participants in this study appear consistent with these findings, suggesting that P4C can function as a pedagogical environment in which philosophical dialogue becomes a lived experience rather than a purely theoretical ideal.

The Ethical Dimension of Dialogue and Thinking

The findings of the study also indicate that P4C practices foster the development of an ethical culture of discussion among pre-service teachers. Participants reported increased awareness of distinguishing ideas from persons, respecting others' right to speak, and listening without adopting a judgmental stance. These experiences suggest that the ethical conditions of thinking were not merely discussed but actively enacted within the P4C process.

Arendt (1971) conceptualizes thinking in close relation to judgment and responsibility, emphasizing its inherently moral dimension. From this perspective, thinking cannot be reduced to a neutral cognitive operation; rather, it involves an ethical orientation toward others and toward the world. The dialogic practices that emerged within the P4C context render visible this ethical dimension of thinking, demonstrating that dialogue is not simply a cognitive exchange but also a moral engagement. In this sense, dialogue becomes a philosophical space that takes the presence and perspectives of others seriously rather than a competitive form of debate aimed at winning arguments.



This ethical dimension also highlights the potential of P4C to contribute to the formation of a democratic and public culture of thinking. Kennedy (2010)) conceptualizes P4C as a philosophical rehearsal for democratic life, arguing that the approach habituates individuals not merely to thinking but to thinking together. The findings of the present study provide empirical support for this claim, showing that participants experienced dialogue as a shared responsibility grounded in mutual recognition and ethical attentiveness.

This interpretation is also consistent with studies emphasizing the ethical and democratic potential of P4C practices. Research suggests that philosophical dialogue in educational settings can foster dispositions such as intellectual humility, respect for difference, and openness to disagreement, all of which are essential for democratic participation (Lipman, 2003; Kennedy, 2004). The experiences reported by participants in this study indicate that such dispositions were not merely discussed but gradually internalized through dialogic engagement.

The Philosophical Status of the Quantitative Findings

In this study, quantitative findings were not treated as evidence demonstrating the pedagogical effectiveness of P4C in a strictly causal or instrumental sense. Rather, they were interpreted as accompanying indicators suggesting that the transformations in thinking practices observed at the qualitative level were also traceable at the quantitative level. Dewey's (1933) characterization of critical thinking as a sustained orientation toward inquiry helps clarify why the quantitative data were interpreted with philosophical caution.

This perspective aligns with the philosophical assumption that critical thinking is not a discrete and easily measurable outcome but a form of thinking culture that develops over time. Quantitative findings may signal the emergence of such a culture; however, the meaning and value of thinking itself become fully visible primarily through the philosophical interpretation grounded in the qualitative findings.

Overall Evaluation

In conclusion, this study approaches P4C not merely as a pedagogical method but as a contemporary philosophical practice that renders visible the normative, epistemic, and ethical dimensions of thinking. The findings



demonstrate that P4C enables participants to experience critical thinking not as a skill-based competence but as a mode of thinking structured by justification, dialogue, and responsibility. In doing so, the study offers a philosophically grounded contribution to the P4C literature that extends beyond debates on pedagogical effectiveness.

More broadly, the study contributes to a growing strand of scholarship that seeks to understand P4C not merely in terms of measurable learning outcomes but as a practice capable of reshaping the epistemic culture of the classroom (Haynes & Murreis, 2011; Murreis, 2016). By foregrounding the normative and philosophical dimensions of thinking, the study aligns with recent calls for re-examining the role of dialogue and inquiry within contemporary educational theory.

Accordingly, the study positions itself among the relatively limited number of works in the P4C literature that treat empirical data not as a substitute for philosophical argumentation, but as a resource for philosophical problematization. From this perspective, P4C may be understood not simply as a teaching approach, but as an educational practice that reopens the philosophical question of what it means to think together in contemporary classrooms.

Conclusion

This study approached Philosophy for Children (P4C) not merely as a pedagogical method but as a contemporary philosophical practice that renders visible the normative, epistemic, and ethical conditions of thinking. When the quantitative and qualitative findings are considered together, the results indicate that P4C not only contributes to an increase in pre-service teachers' dispositions toward critical thinking, but also fosters an awareness of the justificatory, public, and responsibility-oriented dimensions of thinking.

The primary contribution of the study lies in its reconceptualization of critical thinking not as a skill-based competence but as a normative act of thinking structured through practices of giving and asking for reasons. From this perspective, P4C is understood not as a means of transforming individuals into "better thinkers" in a technical sense, but as a philosophical space in which participants experience the conditions under which thinking becomes legitimate and accountable. Dialogic talk, in turn, moves



beyond the framework of communicative skills and is conceptualized as a philosophical act through which meaning is co-constructed and thinking is reconstituted under conditions of ethical responsibility.

By moving beyond debates on pedagogical effectiveness, this study offers a theoretical contribution to the P4C literature that foregrounds the nature of thinking itself. It invites a reconsideration of critical thinking and dialogue within their normative and philosophical contexts rather than treating them solely as measurable educational outcomes. In this respect, the study opens a space for understanding P4C not merely as an educational tool but as a practice closely aligned with contemporary philosophical conceptions of thinking and dialogue.

Future research may further explore how such philosophical practices can be sustained within teacher education programs and how they contribute to the development of dialogic classroom cultures. In this sense, the study supports the view that P4C may play an important role in cultivating reflective communities of inquiry within educational settings (Splitter & Sharp, 1995).

Ultimately, P4C may be understood not merely as an instructional approach, but as an educational practice that reopens the philosophical question of what it means to think together within contemporary classrooms.

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Öz: Araştırma Çocuklar İçin Felsefe (P4C) yaklaşımının öğretmen eğitiminde kullanımını inceleyerek, felsefi sorgulama pratiklerinin öğretmen adaylarının eleştirel düşünme ve diyalojik etkileşim süreçlerini nasıl şekillendirdiğini araştırmaktadır. Eğitim literatüründe P4C çoğu zaman eleştirel düşünme becerilerini geliştirmeye yönelik pedagojik bir yöntem olarak ele alınmaktadır. Ancak bu çalışma P4C'yi, düşünme ve diyalogun epistemik, normatif ve etik boyutlarını öne çıkaran bir felsefi pratik olarak değerlendirmektedir. Bu perspektife göre eleştirel düşünme yalnızca ölçülebilir bilişsel becerilerden oluşan bir yetkinlik değil; gerekçelendirme, tutarlılık ve alternatif bakış açılarına açıklık içeren normatif bir düşünme pratiğidir. Araştırmada karma yöntem deseni kullanılmış; öğretmen adaylarıyla gerçekleştirilen P4C oturumlarında eleştirel düşünme eğilimlerine ilişkin nicel veriler ile diyalojik etkileşimlere yönelik nitel veriler birlikte analiz edilmiştir. Bulgular, P4C temelli diyalog süreçlerinin öğretmen adaylarının eleştirel düşünme eğilimlerini desteklediğini ve diyalojik akıl yürütmeye yer alan epistemik ve etik sorumluluklara yönelik farkındalıklarını artırdığını göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çocuklar için felsefe (P4C), eleştirel düşünme, diyalojik konuşma, öğretmen eğitimi, felsefi sorgulama, sorgulama topluluğu.

