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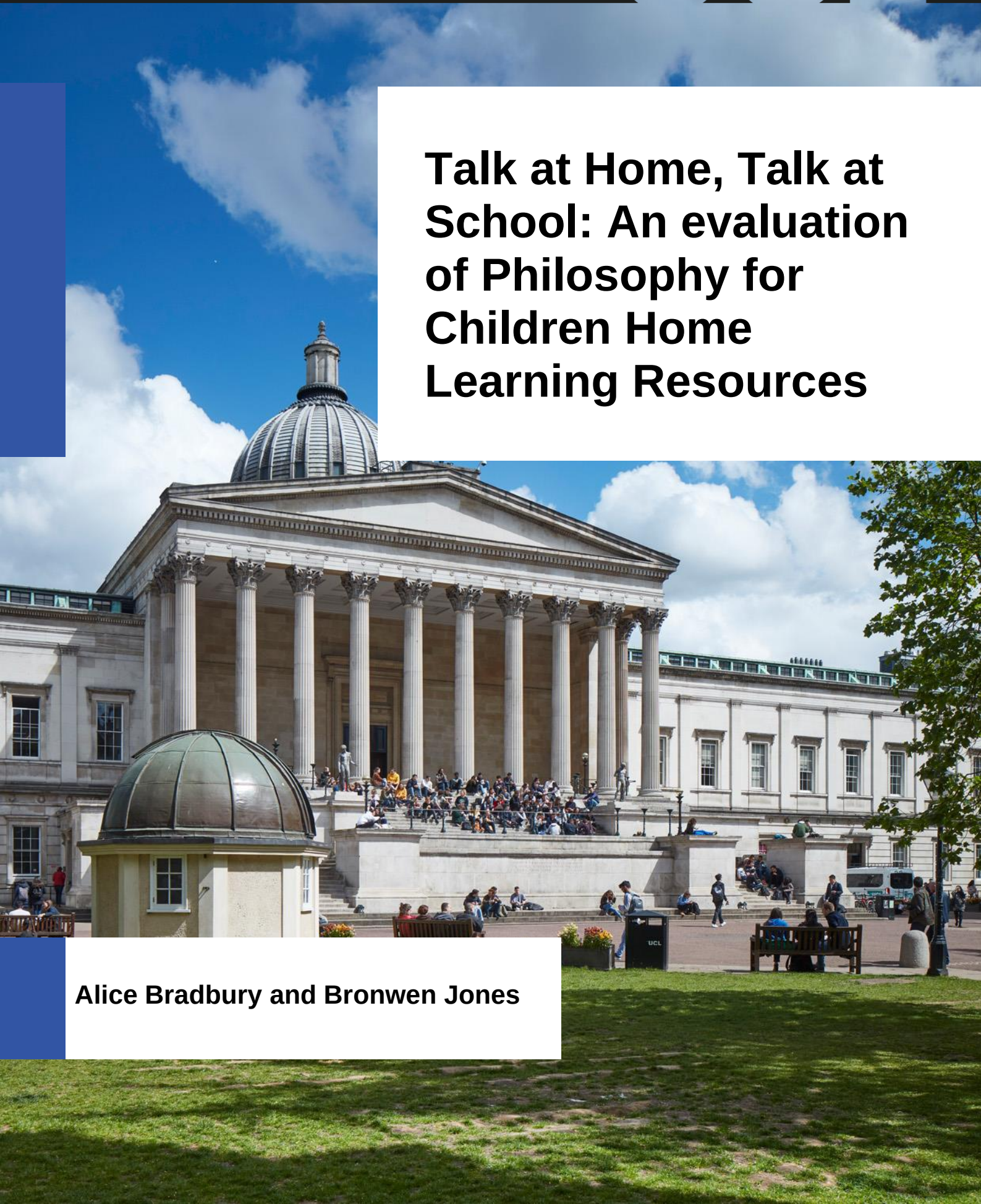
Talk at Home, Talk at School: An evaluation of Philosophy for Children Home Learning Resources



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Introduction

This project aimed to evaluate the use and impact of a resource – HomeTalk – based on the principle of Philosophy for Children (P4C) and produced by the organisation Dialogue Works (Dialogue Works, 2021). HomeTalk is a weekly pack of stimulus materials, intended as a resource for both teachers and families to prompt and scaffold discussion around a wide variety of topics; for example, health, friendship, fairness. The aim is to enhance children's listening, speaking and thinking skills.

This research project aimed to:

- assess how the resource was being used and by whom,
- evaluate the impact of HomeTalk on families in terms of both enjoyment of the resource, development of speaking and listening and thinking skills, and wider engagement with learning, as perceived by parents and children,
- evaluate the impact of HomeTalk on children in school in terms of both enjoyment of the resource, development of speaking and listening and thinking skills, and wider engagement with learning, as perceived by teachers,
- explore the role and use of HomeTalk in a period of education disruption.

This report sets out some background information about HomeTalk and P4C more generally, before reviewing the existing literature on P4C. This review includes both UK and international research, and the critiques of P4C. We then set out the methodology of the study, and then the main findings and recommendations. The intention is that this report will be useful for those interested in both the use of P4C and the provision of resources to be used at home and at school more widely.

What is HomeTalk?

HomeTalk is a series of free, on-line educational resource packs produced and sent out to schools, organisations, parents/caregivers and individuals weekly by Dialogue Works. It was developed in 2020. It consists of a set of materials e.g., video links, stories, activities, discussion questions organised on a particular theme. There have been over 30 editions produced, in both English and Spanish, on a wide range of topics including pollution, fear, pets, and gratitude. It is aimed broadly at three age groups 3-5, 6-9 and 10 plus and is designed to prompt and help structure thoughtful discussion for both families and schools on differing topics. Each edition follows the same format and is based on the principles of P4C and includes Dialogue Work's own metacognition skills approach called 'Thinking Moves'.

Home Talk is available on the Dialogue Works website and is also emailed directly to parents/guardians. There is no charge for access to the resource and all who express an interest in joining the Dialogue Works mailing list are offered access. According to Dialogue Works' own figures in 2020, it was sent out to 130 schools across the UK and over 600 schools internationally. The schools are located across the UK with many serving children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Of the primary and special schools in England and Wales using the resources in 2020, 65% had a free school meal percentage above the national average, and thirty schools involved which have over 50% of pupils on FSM6. Dialogue Works' 2021 figures suggest approximately 250 unique page views per month, over 200 people opening the email for each topic and between 40 and 70 users clicking through to the resources each week.

Dialogue Works

Dialogue Works is a company that offers training, support and resources related to P4C. Their two main programmes are P4C Plus and Thinking Moves. Thinking Moves is their own metacognition scheme designed by one of the founders of Dialogue Works, Roger Sutcliffe. Their P4C Plus approach goes further than the traditional P4C approach to include a 6-strand pedagogical framework and Thinking Moves (Dialogue Works, 2021). Dialogue Works is part of the broader education movement described as Philosophy for Children.

Philosophy for Children

Philosophy for Children (P4C) is an educational 'thinking skills' programme delivered in schools that promotes thinking and reasoning skills by encouraging students to take part in philosophical enquiry and dialogue. It was developed in the 1970s by Professor Matthew Lipman of Montclair State University, New Jersey from work begun at the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC) (Gorard *et al*, 2015, p.5). Influenced by Dewey and Vygotsky, Lipman's P4C programme is characterised by a distinctive pedagogical approach which includes a stimulus for discussion in the form of philosophical novels, and the establishment of a 'Community of Enquiry'. The novel serves as a prompt and a trained facilitator encourages children to come up with a philosophical question to discuss. The Community of Enquiry references the collaborative approach to discussion in which teachers explore an issue/question with the students sitting in a circle. Teachers do not direct discussion but facilitate an open-ended dialogue (Gatley, 2020, p.551). P4C encourages what it refers to as the 4C's of thinking: caring thinking, collaborative thinking, critical thinking and creative thinking (Lipman, 2003). Lord et al describe P4C as 'an educational pedagogy and a social practice' that extends beyond the school community (2021, p.10). Indeed, Lipman specifies his goal as developing 'more thoughtful, more

reflective, more considerate and more reasonable individuals' (Lipman et al, 1980, p.15).

Over the past 40 years, P4C has developed into a global 'network' and is currently used in schools in over 60 countries (Gorard *et al*, 2015, p.5: Gatley, 2020, p. 550; UNESCO, 2007). As P4C has spread, there have been amendments to and adaptations of the approach. Lipman himself has always been supportive of the various developments of his initial method and has not kept P4C as an exclusive brand name. The variations of/on P4C are plentiful and range from widening the type of stimulus that is offered (photographs, poems, videos) to alterations in the protocol for how a lesson is structured. For example, another leading provider of P4C training and workshops, The Philosophy Man, has developed a 'streamlined and accessible' approach called Philosophy Circles (The Philosophy Man, 2021). The Philosophy Foundation offer a P4C approach that has been adapted to include its own meta cognition programme (The Philosophy Foundation, 2022). The Society for the Advancement of Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education (SAPERE - see below) use a far greater range of stimuli using a variety of media and with a specific caution against directive teaching (Gatley, 2020, p.552). It is fair to say, however, that the commitment to the key ideas and goals of encouraging critical questioning and reasoning skills and forming a Community of Enquiry in which the teacher facilitates rather than controls discussion characterise all approaches of P4C.

P4C is generally considered to have found its way to the UK with the airing of the BBC documentary 'Socrates for 6-year-olds' in 1990. This showed P4C being used in classrooms in the USA and prompted considerable interest. As a consequence, SAPERE was established in 1992. SAPERE are a non-profit organisation that promotes the use of P4C in schools in the UK and provides training and resources for all age ranges (SAPERE, 2022). It is a leading provider in the UK and runs the SAPERE P4C Bronze, Silver and Gold awards programme.

Globally, P4C practitioners, philosophers, teachers, researchers and enthusiasts are connected through a variety of interrelated organisations. In particular, the International Council of Philosophical Inquiry with Children (ICPIC) is a network of individuals and organisations that promote P4C and philosophical enquiry at an international level (ICPIC, 2020). The Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC**)** at Montclair State University remains a centre of research and education in P4C (IAPC, n.d). SOPHIA is the European Foundation for the Advancement of doing Philosophy with Children and is a community supporting and promoting P4C in Europe (SOPHIA, 2022). The 2007 UNESCO report 'Philosophy: A School of Freedom' documents extensively the situation in different countries and the organisations, universities, research centres, charities and journals that support the promotion of P4C. The most well-known journals are *Thinking, the Journal of Philosophy for Children*, published by the IAPC and *Childhood and Philosophy,* published by the ICPIC, although there is also *Analytic Teaching and Philosophical Praxis***,** based at Viterbo University, USA and the *Journal of Philosophy in Schools* published by The Federation of Australian Philosophy for Children Associations (FAPSA).

This is by no means an exhaustive list and there are many more hubs, centers, publications, individuals, experts, centers, organisations, providers who offer resources and training in P4C or variations of it around the world.

Research on Philosophy for Children

An overview

The first evaluation of the impact of P4C on student development was a pilot study conducted by Lipman and Bierman (1970) that reported 'significant gains' in logical reasoning and reading scores (Lipman, 1976). The research findings suggested that the experiment was 'worthy of replication' (ibid, p.37). Indeed, Lipman recalls that he could 'hardly believe we'd made such an impact on the kids in the study' (ibid, p.33). Subsequently, there have been

many studies evaluating the effect/impact of P4C on different aspects of student development, both academic and non-academic. Whilst a review of this research may appear a relatively straightforward endeavour, it is complicated by the fact that since Lipman first introduced P4C, the approach has developed to incorporate and reference a wide range of practices. Moreover, there has been a significant increase in the number of critical thinking and thinking skills courses in schools and these are sometimes included in discussion about the impact of P4C. It can be difficult to distinguish in the literature between the different P4C approaches and this raises the obvious concerns about the comparability and relevant of individual pieces of research.

In addition, the quality and scale of many studies does not always meet the norms of academic standards. This is due to the fact that much of the early research appeared to be practitioner-led resulting in small-scale, in situ case studies by teachers. Perhaps in recognition of this somewhat haphazard field, a number of systematic meta-analyses of P4C studies have been conducted in an attempt to delineate a 'legitimate' body of research and to 'synthesize research on the effectiveness of P4C' (Yan *et al*, 2018, p.16). These meta-analyses exclude studies that fail to meet various 'bars' as determined by the authors. Methodological rigour is critical in this screening process and research that is larger scale and quantitative in approach tends to be prioritised. Trickey and Topping (2004) undertake one such review including 'only studies using pre-post measurement of experimental and control or comparison groups' (p.370). This narrowed down their review to 10 studies covering a 30-year time span. They conclude that despite concerns about the 'methodological rigour' of some of the studies they included (p.374) there remained a 'wide range of evidence of positive outcomes from different countries with different age groups of children' (ibid, p. 374). Similarly, Garcia Moriyon *et al* (2005), Millett and Tapper (2012), Ventista (2018) Yan *et al* (2018) acknowledge that whilst 'the quality of some studies is open to discussion' (Ventista, 2018, p.457), meta-analyses broadly concur that P4C has a positive effect (Garcia Moriyon *et al*, 2005) and certainly does not have

any detrimental impact on either cognitive or non-cognitive domains (Ventista, 2018, p.457). A later less comprehensive review by Topping and Trickey (2015) is slightly more equivocal pointing to studies such as Reznitskaya *et al* (2012) and Gillies *et al* (2011) in which improvements in reasoning were undermined by an overall lack of better outcomes (Topping and Trickey, 2015, p. 107-108). Overall, these meta-analyses paint a promising picture for P4C - certainly one that justifies further research, but they clearly favour a certain model of research.

Scholars have expressed concern about this, notably Reznitskaya (2005) who points to the limitations of standardised testing in assessing reasoning skills. Similarly, Burden and Nicholls (2000) raise questions of the value of pre and post designs in assessing cognitive development due to the difficulty of creating 'control' conditions in complex and messy real-life classrooms. Yan *et al* accept that meta-analyses prioritise of quantitative studies (2018, p.28) and acknowledge the potential for insights from qualitative research, pointing to the need for more research into P4C practices in 'different cultural, social, educational, linguistic and philosophical contexts' (ibid, p.30). In practice however, concerns over the small size and quality of many of the existing 'studies' into P4C seem to have led to an increase in positivistic, quantitative studies. The trend seems to be for RCTs that draw on various forms of psychometric assessment amenable to statistical analysis and representation.

UK research

The first study in the UK conducted by 'working teacher' Steve Williams **(**Williams, 1993) was a small scale, unfunded project involving 42 pupils who took pre- and post-intervention reading and comprehension tests. These showed statistically significant gains in both the academic and non-academic development of 11- and 12-year-old pupils who had received 27 one-hour P4C lessons (Gorard *et al*, 2015, p.6). The following year a project run by Dyfed County Council (DCC, 1994) focused on the impact of a P4C intervention on five-year-olds. This showed improvements in 'in thinking, listening, language skills, and self-confidence' (Topping and Trickey, 2004,

p.373) though the standardized tests showed no evidence of an improvement in reading (ibid, p.373).

Further evidence came from the inclusion of P4C in a £2.5 million project Northumberland Raising Aspirations in Society (NRAIS) (2003-2006). This project introduced a number of thinking skills interventions into schools across Northumberland. It was an ambitious, large, mixed methods study that included primary and secondary schools. A team from the University of Sunderland and University of Newcastle evaluated the project and the impact of each approach on academic and non-academic development was assessed (Gregson *et al*, 2008). In the findings from the qualitative data, P4C was specifically identified as having a positive impact on teacher and pupil confidence and creativity. Further, teachers noted that P4C encouraged the development of student's independent and critical thinking and reasoning (ibid, p.xv). However, the difficulty in understanding the ramifications of this report for P4C is that it is not always easy to identify which specific approaches are being discussed. The report is after all evaluating the NRAIS scheme as a whole. Further, there are results for different years of the study, which can make it difficult to draw conclusions about the overall impact of the various schemes on SATs or GCSEs.

There are smaller studies that are sometimes referenced in the literature, and these provide interesting results and demonstrate some of the difficulties in assessing the field. The Shine Trust's Thinking for Better Learning Project led by Alison Hall and Sara Liptai (the latter is now a P4C advocate/trainer) introduced a year of weekly enquiry sessions to 2 classes in a school in Wandsworth and reported better than expected progress in KS2 reading SATS and improvements in oracy and social and emotional development in Year 4 students (The Shine Trust, 2005). The Excellence in Cities Action Zones was a small case study in south-west Middlesbrough which reported a positive response to a P4C intervention (2005). The Philosophy Foundation (TPF) delivers a particular version of P4C and has carried out two significant pieces of research. The first, evaluated by the Institute of Education, covered one term's intervention and showed improvements in reading for those pupils

receiving FSM and girls. The qualitative feedback was positive from teachers and pupils with teachers claiming communication and reasoning skills had improved (Swain *et al*, 2013). In the second study, TPF teamed with King's College London to carry out a small-scale study into teaching thinking skills in primary school. This compared the impact of the TPF's standard philosophical enquiry (PhiE) programme (based on P4C) with one that included specific teaching of critical thinking and metacognition. The conclusion of the report was that both the quantitative and qualitative data showed that focusing on the explicit teaching of critical thinking and metacognition skills during a philosophical enquiry does enhance the children's use of these skills (Worley and Worley, 2019). There are many more studies of this kind e.g., an evaluation of a P4C project in 10 schools in Islington (House, 2015), an assessment of the P4CISP (P4C in Schools Project) in South Wales (Jenkins and Lyle, 2010), Newell-Jones's evaluation of P4C in different school contexts in Wales (2012), Meir and McCann's evaluation of P4C intervention in schools in Liverpool (2017).

These studies are the kind of studies that the meta-analyses referred to above screen out as they are small-scale, sometimes problematic in their methodology, and demonstrate a blurring between P4C, critical thinking, philosophy, community of enquiry and similar programmes. Whilst there are questions over the academic rigour of some of the projects, together they constitute a body of evidence highly suggestive of a range of positive outcomes for P4C.

More frequently mentioned in academic reviews of the impact of P4C is the work of Topping and Trickey. They were particularly interested in the longer-term impact of P4C and followed pupils over two years. Their study in Clackmannanshire in Scotland involved 19 schools (8 intervention, and 11 control) and measured improvements in cognitive and non-cognitive abilities. Their intervention was a contemporary version of P4C – *Thinking through Philosophy* - developed by Paul Cleghorn (Cleghorn, 2002) who also coordinated the support for teachers in this study. For 16 months, 177 pupils,

10- and 11-year-olds, took part in a one-hour weekly session in which philosophical ideas were identified in a series of stories and then discussed. Testing took place pre- and post-intervention and used mixed methods consisting of standardized tests, video analysis and questionnaires. They concluded that 'P4C yielded cognitive gains…that transferred across domains of intelligence largely irrespective of pupil school/class, pre-intervention and gender' (Topping and Trickey, 2007a, p.283). In addition, that P4C 'enhanced reciprocal communicative interaction in the classroom, between teacher and children between children and children, in terms of both quantity and quality (Topping and Trickey, 2007b, p.82). They also considered the impact on socio-emotional development stating that there was 'some evidence that collaborative enquiry can yield significant gains in academic self-esteem' (Trickey and Topping, 2006, p.608) and a boost in some contexts to 'emotional intelligence' (ibid, p.611). They followed up the study two years later when pupils had transferred to secondary schools and concluded that the 'significant pre-post cognitive ability gains…. were maintained towards the end of their second year of secondary school (Topping and Trickey, 2007c, p.787). The question of the long-term effect of P4C is often raised in discussion and a strength of this study is that it addresses this.

More recently, there have been three large UK-based studies into the effect of P4C in interventions in schools. The first in 2015 was a trial funded by the Education Endowment Foundation and evaluated by Gorard, Siddiqui and See from Durham University. This was a large-scale study using a randomized control trial, including 48 schools and 3159 students. All schools had, or recently had, at least 25% of their pupils eligible for FSM. The primary purpose was to establish whether a year of P4C intervention in Years 4 and 5 would improve attainment in math, reading and writing and on performance on the CAT4 (Cognitive Ability Test, 4th edition). The CAT4 is designed to measure different aspects of cognitive functioning- verbal and non-verbal reasoning, quantitative and spatial reasoning- with the aim of identifying potential. Teachers were trained by SAPERE and pupils received one period of P4C per week. The main findings were a positive impact on Key Stage 2

attainment, with pupils making approximately two months' additional progress in reading and maths. The biggest impact was among disadvantaged pupils. There was a rather smaller positive impact in pupils' CAT4 scores, and disadvantaged pupils benefitted less here. In general teachers and pupils reported that P4C 'had a positive influence on wider outcomes such as pupils' confidence to speak, listening skills, and self-esteem' (Gorard *et al*, 2015, p.3. The results of this study were sufficiently encouraging to warrant the EEF funding a subsequent project.

The 2015 report also prompted the Durham researchers to extend this study. Funded by the Nuffield Foundation, Siddiqui, Gorard and See conducted research into the impact of P4C on non-academic development. This study involved 42 schools and 2722 pupils. 16 schools received training - again from SAPERE - and interventions for 18 months. They reported that the pupils in the P4C group were ahead in self-reported communication skills, teamwork and resilience and marginally ahead in empathy. This effect was greater for those on FSM. Overall, the report was in line with 'successive evaluations of P4C…. [that] show persistent, small positive links with attainment and non-cognitive outcomes, especially for disadvantaged pupils' (Siddiqui *et al*, 2017, p.7). In their 2019 article based on the project, they assert that the study implies that 'pupils' social emotional behaviour, cooperation, resilience and ability to empathize with others can be changed by adopting structured approaches such as P4C' (Gorard *et al*, 2019, p. 161-162).

The second EEF effectiveness trial took place over 2 years and included 198 schools and evaluated the impact of P4C on Year 6 pupils' reading, maths, and social and communication skills with a primary focus on pupils eligible for Free School Meals. Again, SAPERE provided support and training. This was a considerably less positive study showing no additional progress in reading or maths for the disadvantaged students or anyone else, and no significant improvements in social and communication skills. There were, however, more positive responses from the qualitative material in the study with teachers reporting positively on the development of pupils' social, thinking and

communications skills, although this was not corroborated by the pupil survey. Teachers and pupils also found the programme enjoyable and engaging and helpful in encouraging students to share opinions in a non-judgemental way (Lord et al, 2021, executive summary). This study did report on the involvement (or lack of involvement) of parents. Whilst some schools had not attempted to engage parents, those that had found that parents were not responsive. Overall, they concluded that there was little evidence to suggest that P4C was having a wider impact on parents (ibid, p.54).

Global research

P4C is now used in over 60 countries worldwide and unsurprisingly therefore there is research into P4C in many different countries. Gillies *et al* (2011) looked at the impact of P4C on developing student meta cognitive questioning strategies in Australia; Lam's (2012) study in Hong Kong showed reasoning improvement in 28 secondary students; and Reznitskaya *et al* (2012) and Reznitskaya and Glina (2013) examined P4C as a form of dialogic learning in classroom in New Jersey, USA. Fair *et al*'s Texas study was a replication of Topping and Trickey's Scottish study (2015a). They used the same materials though had less lesson time and focused on older students (aged 12-13 years old). Their original results showed an improvement in students' cognitive abilities and a follow up three years later still detected a significant difference between the experimental and control groups (Fair *et al*, 2015b, p.13-14).

Perhaps most interestingly, Colom *et al*'s (2014) longitudinal study tracked the development of 776 pupils in two private schools in Madrid. Pupils were studied from the first year of primary school to the final year of high school to assess the impact of P4C on their cognitive and non-cognitive and academic achievements. One school used the P4C programme and the other served as a control. Preliminary results showed a positive impact on general cognitive ability particularly for lower-ability pupils. However, Gorard *et al* express concern about the methodological approach and also the generalizability of the study as participants came from relatively prosperous families (2015, p.7) evidencing again the issue of methodological rigour that dogs much of the research into P4C.

Critiques

The difficulty of adequately defining or identifying a 'P4C' approach becomes particularly significant when assessing the main critiques. P4C is often described according to two stages: stage one refers to and incorporates Lipman's original programme replete with his philosophical novels and Community of Enquiry structure; and stage two is where others have developed his approach to include different kind of stimulus materials, added on different programmes of critical thinking/meta cognition and developed the Community of Enquiry model. Vansieleghem and Kennedy (2011) characterise this development as the transition of P4C from a 'method' to a 'movement' (p.177-8) and see the second and subsequent generations of P4C not as critics of their predecessors but rather as the necessary adaptation of P4C to a dynamic and changing global environment. The difficulty with the range of current iterations of P4C is that it means that critiques can appear to be misplaced- addressing one formulation of P4C but not another- or even appear to rest on a misunderstanding of what P4C is. Murris et al (2009) stress this point in their article 'What Philosophy for Children is not" in which they complain that some of the critiques are based on fundamental misunderstandings of what P4C is and take issue with critiques treating P4C as though it had one identity. They comment:

> P4C houses a complex mixture of educational ideas and philosophical traditions as practitioners situate the approach in their own cultural context and infuse the practice with their own identity and philosophical beliefs' (p.1).

The diversity of practice included under the P4C banner can facilitate rather frustrating discussions in which those defending P4C sidestep certain criticisms on the grounds that not all P4C is 'like that'. Whilst the view that many critics have misunderstood P4C hovers over many of the critiques (Gregory, 2011; Murris et al, 2009), if P4C is used as a unifying banner, it seems inevitable that it will be responded to as such. Below is a broad summary and categorisation of the major critiques of P4C.

First, Gregory (2011) references the approach of some developmental psychologists who argue that ‘certain kinds of thinking are out of reach for children of certain ages’ (2011, p.212). This criticism may not be so readily espoused in today’s more Piaget skeptic climate although it certainly featured in earlier debates about P4C (Vansieleghem and Kennedy [2011] reference a paper by Richard Kitchener [1990] in which he uses Piaget to argue that children cannot do philosophy). Lipman’s work is clearly influenced by Vygotsky’s theory of cognitive development and zone of proximal development that obviously counters Piagetian theory.

Second, questions have been raised about the philosophical approach of P4C. Many of these critiques prompt or include a consideration of what philosophy is. Suissa’s critique (2009) implies that P4C does not address the question of meaning in the child’s life, arguing that it places too much emphasis on the process of philosophical analysis. This stress on process reiterates Vansieleghem’s (2005) critique in which she contends that P4C places too much emphasis on critical thinking, analytic reasoning, dialogue and communication. She asserts that in doing this, P4C does not truly offer children freedom or indeed autonomy but rather ensures that they are taking up ‘a pre-constituted place’ in an existing discourse (2005, p.25). Biesta (2011) argues that the approach of the community of philosophical enquiry is ‘more about a community of scientific enquiry, one based, moreover, on a particular ‘rational-epistemological’ view of what scientific knowledge is’ (p.308). This leads to a focus on thinking skills ‘reasoning, investigation and conceptual development’ (p.309), rather than, for example, meaning and understanding which leads to an ‘uncomfortable’ and unbalanced presentation of philosophy. He expresses concern that this might be seen as representative of all philosophy (p.310). Kohan (2014) reiterates the concern about the way philosophy is portrayed and understood in P4C. He is wary of the idea that philosophical thought entails formulas and prescriptions fearing that ‘to understand philosophical thought as a set of abilities or tools condemns it to mirrored repetition of the same’ (p.40). From a different perspective, Bleazby (2004) points out that contrary to Dewey’s pragmatic

and practical philosophy, P4C places almost its entire emphasis on classroom dialogue. There is little scope for action that was central to Dewey's thinking of educating children to be democratic citizens. Michaud (2020) reiterates this point that P4C is largely discursive and does not lead to action as his understanding of Dewey's approach would commend. Bleazby's work also addresses the concern that P4C's emphasis on logic and a particular style of analytic philosophical reasoning and argumentation promotes an adversarial kind of philosophical debate that is **'**masculine' (Bleazby, 2007).

Third, and allied to the critiques of the philosophical approach advocated and exemplified by P4C is a concern about the way philosophy is positioned by P4C. These critiques point to the instrumentalisation of P4C and accusations that it has a political agenda especially in wanting to produce a particular kind of 'democratic' citizen. Kohan (2014) argues that P4C presents the purpose of teaching philosophy to children as the formation of an 'ideal' person and society, and as such it is not particularly revolutionary as this is the goal of many traditional pedagogical approaches. As a stance, it effectively reinforces a view of the child as a 'not yet' or change agent who had the potential to fulfil adult's aims as long as they are 'formed' correctly. The educational value of philosophy lies in its 'formative political potential to lead to a better world' (2014, p.35). Biesta also argues this claiming that philosophy 'is deployed as an instrument that is supposed to work upon individuals so that they can develop and/or acquire certain qualities, capacities and skills' (2011, p. 310). This instrumentalisation of philosophy is premised on a particular understanding of a human being as a 'developing organism' but in practice it also tends to promote the idea that there is a particular 'norm' of what an ideal human being should be. 'The upshot of this, to put it briefly, is that education becomes focussed on the 'production' of a particular kind of subjectivity' (p.313). This is also the view of Vansieleghem (2005) who argues that P4C teaches philosophy in order to produce individuals who have specific skills, strategies and attitudes that are useful in 'the formation of participative, autonomous, responsible and respectful, self-governing citizens (p.22). The thinking skills identified and taught are circumscribed by political ideals,

determined by the logic of democracy: ‘Philosophy for Children has a political agenda and functions as a vehicle to develop that agenda as well’ (ibid, p.20). Interestingly, Vansieleghem and Masschelein argue that P4C calls into being a philosophizing subject that aligns with an ‘entrepreneurial self’ (2010, p.135). They argue that the Community of Enquiry approach is a method of rational procedures through which a self-responsible individual can identify where they have gone wrong in their thinking: ‘in short, it is a method of systematic self-correction’ (ibid, p.137). Philosophy is therefore positioned as a ‘potential productive investment’ (ibid, p.138).

Some of the above critics do not want to abandon P4C and suggest the addition of alternative philosophical approaches. Vansieleghem and Masschelein draw on Agamben in advocating an approach that allows space for the development of a child that is ‘is deaf to the call to consider oneself as an entrepreneurial self’ (2010, p.145) a figure who ‘exposes herself to the world’ (p.145). Biesta (2011) proposes drawing on Arendt (and Levinas) to offer a more radical and transformative programme. Kohan (quite a keen supporter of P4C) likewise does not want to jettison P4C but improve it with the adoption of critical pedagogy, such as Freire (Kohan, 2018).

Following on from the above, the last main critique of P4C is that it fails to acknowledge that discussion of topical/ethical/philosophical issues needs to be situated within wider social, historical and political contexts. The work of Chetty (2014), a former P4C teacher, is critical of aspects of the P4C approach and materials that are used particularly in respect of race. He points to the lack of materials produced for P4C by people of colour and critiques some of those materials as oversimplifying the issue of race in order to avoid difficult discussions. In an attempt to avoid sensitive issues, he claims P4C operates a gated community of inquiry (Chetty, 2018). Further, he contends that P4C effectively promulgates certain views of democracy, philosophy and reasonableness that are inherently biased.

Critiques of P4C do not seem to feature in research that has been conducted on the impact of P4C. However, it is useful to be aware of some of the wider academic discussion that surrounds its approach and practice.

Summary of the research into P4C

As explained, while there is a wide body of UK-based and international research on P4C, it is difficult to draw broad conclusions given the variety of approaches and the questions over the quality of research in small scale studies.

There is very limited research on the use of P4C resources by parents/ caregivers as part of home learning or educational support. Below we offer a cursory summary of broader research on the significance and impact of parental involvement in student education. As our research has determined that HomeTalk is largely used by teachers as a classroom-based resource, we also briefly review research into teachers' use of resources- particularly ready-made resources. These summaries place our findings within key wider research contexts.

Research on the impact of parental involvement/engagement on student development

The remit of this research was to investigate the use of HomeTalk at home by parents, families and caregivers, as well as at school. As such, we were interested in situating it within a broader context of the importance and impact of parental involvement/engagement on student development.

There appears to be a widespread consensus that parental engagement/involvement is strongly correlated with student attainment (Desforges, 2003; Harris and Goodall, 2008, 2009) although the way in which parental involvement is defined and understood is important and varies widely. Epstein (2018) breaks down parental involvement into six categories, of which ‘learning at home’, including helping with homework and other

curriculum related activities, is one. Whilst research into more general 'at-home good parenting' shows a significant positive effect on student achievement, research on specific interventions to promote parental involvement is more problematic (Desforges, 2003). Goodall et al's (2011) review of best practice in parental engagement cautions about the quality of such research evidence but concludes positively about the value of family learning programmes and literacy interventions. Other studies are more skeptical about the relationship between parental involvement and student development. Gorard and See's extensive meta-analysis concluded that there was 'no good quality evidence that parental involvement interventions result in improved educational outcomes in most ages and for most approaches' (2013, p 4.). An EEF review of studies into parental engagement (2020) broadly chimed with this account. One study was of particular interest as it explicitly focused on the parental involvement with P4C. Using an action research approach, a research group comprising a researcher-facilitator (teacher psychologist) and teachers and parents, assessed the impact of introducing P4C to establish a Community of Enquiry for parents in a Kindergarten in Athens from 2014-2016. The goal was to assess whether this improved the academic and socio-emotional performance of students in the school. Whilst it is not entirely clear that a conclusion can be drawn on this, and the issue of methodological rigour needs discussion, the overall impact seems to have been positive in a number of respects. Parents became far more involved in school life in general and more supportive and integrated into the school community. More than this, they created their own community that continued beyond the research. Parents also reported a dramatic change in the way their children and indeed they themselves discussed issues (Papathanasiou, 2019).

Research on teachers' use of resources

The study is also situated within the wider field of research into how teachers use education resources. The past 30 years have witnessed a proliferation in the production and marketisation of educational resources. Technological advancements, intensified teacher workload, pressures to raise student

performance and the increasing involvement of private edu-businesses in education have contributed to a trend of prepackaged curriculum materials (Hogan et al, 2018; Petrie, 2012). Research in this area has often addressed how the teacher employs resources and what the implications of ready-made materials are for the role and professionalism of the teacher. Studies indicate that teachers value access to prepackaged resources that are ready-to use-especially in the context of changing policy contexts and/or areas where teachers are concerned about lack of expertise (Burch, 2009; Campbell et al, 2014; Polly, 2017). A 2018 DfE research report examining the range of curriculum resources and how they are used in England reported a list of 250 resources ranging from lesson and curriculum planning tools, pupil resources, online subscription services, assessment tools, teachers guides with nearly all respondents citing general internet searches as a key means of finding resources. The report found that despite this use of the internet to access and download teaching materials, 'substantial activity is taking place in schools to create, tailor and differentiate individual lesson resources for different pupil needs' (CooperGibson Research, 2018, p.61-62). This reinforces other research that shows - in contrast to concerns regarding the loss of professionalism and agency such resources might herald - that teachers exert considerable agency when selecting and utilising educational resources (Hogan et al, 2018). Teachers' values and beliefs about their practice influence their selection and use of materials (Remillard, 2005) and they are often 'discerning actors' in both the way they choose and employ educational materials (Hogan et al, 2018, p.627).

The Research Study

The objective of this study was to evaluate the use and impact of the P4C resource, HomeTalk. The research aimed to:

1) establish how many schools and families receive HomeTalk regularly and their characteristics

2) evaluate the impact of HomeTalk on families – in terms of both enjoyment of the resource, development of speaking and listening and

thinking skills, and wider engagement with learning – as perceived by parents and children.

3) evaluate the impact of HomeTalk on children in school – in terms of both enjoyment of the resource, development of speaking and listening and thinking skills, and wider engagement with learning – as perceived by teachers

4) explore the role and use of HomeTalk in a period of education disruption

In order to establish who uses HomeTalk and how, online surveys were built using *Opinio* software for teachers and parents/carers who use HomeTalk. These surveys included questions about how HomeTalk was received and used, what barriers to use arose, what aspects of the resources worked well, whether the resource was enjoyed, how the child responded to HomeTalk, what the impact of HomeTalk was perceived to be on various aspects of the child's development as well as questions regarding family and school characteristics. Participants from both groups were able to volunteer for interviews at the end of the survey.

The survey was distributed through Dialogue Works to families and schools that use HomeTalk. It was also publicised on social media and via Dialogue Works' networks, and on their website. We also gathered up-to-date information from Dialogue Works on the numbers of downloads and access rates. We quickly found that the number of parents using HomeTalk was limited, and so we were not able to get a detailed picture of their number or characteristics. Instead, we focused more on the impact on children in schools. Participation rates for the survey, particularly for parents/carers, were lower than anticipated but logical given the overall numbers using the resource (see Table 1 below). This may have been due to reduced use of HomeTalk overall, the wider burdens of the continuing Covid pandemic, or lack of interest in the evaluation.

Table 1 Survey information

Participants	Number	Survey partially completed	Survey fully completed
Teachers	51	51	22
-Classroom teacher	27		
-Senior Management	6		
-Teaching Assistant	1		
-Other (P4C coordinator/trainer)	7		
Parents	17	17	6

These low survey numbers led to a low number of volunteers to be interviewed from both groups, and additionally many of those that volunteered did not respond to further contact. Despite the inclusion of incentives for participation (a shopping voucher), the overall number of interviews was 7 (see Table 2 below). We were not able to include any children in the family interviews.

Table 2 Interview information

Interview Participant	School/Age of children	Country
Classroom Teacher	Primary School	Netherlands
Classroom Teacher	Primary School	China
Deputy Head	Primary School	UK
Head of Year	Secondary School	UK
Vice Principal	Sixth Form College	UK
Parent	Primary age	UK
Grandparent	Primary age	UK

The interviews were conducted online using Zoom and recorded and professionally transcribed. Questions focused on how the teacher or parent/carer used HomeTalk, their views on its impact on children and themselves, and limitations and issues that arose. In total, we collected 214 minutes of interviews. Quotations from interviews are indicated with their code (e.g. T1), while quotations from the survey responses are denoted with S.

While the small sample size is a significant limitation in terms of overall conclusions that can be drawn, the volume of data produced through the written survey comments and through the detailed interviews does provide evidence which is useful and interesting in relation to the use of HomeTalk in schools and homes, which we set out in the following section.

Findings

The most significant finding in terms of the original remit of the project was that it was hard to find evidence that HomeTalk was being widely used by parents, even among the small population of schools who received and opened the weekly emails. Those parents that were using HomeTalk were not receiving it via a school: instead, they received it either directly from Dialogue Works as an email or accessed it via the website. As our main avenue of contact with parents was through schools, this appeared to explain the difficulty we had getting parents to respond to the survey or volunteer for interviews. Our analysis then proceeded with the data we were able to gather, which is heavily weighted towards teachers.

Five key findings were evident from the survey responses, which were then reinforced by the interviews.

1. HomeTalk is used predominantly by teachers as a classroom resource

Although HomeTalk was intended as a resource for parents to use at home with their children to introduce P4C-style discussions, it is largely used by teachers as a classroom-based resource. The vast majority of teachers who answered our survey were classroom teachers with over 10 years' experience. The overwhelming majority of these teachers used P4C and/or had had training in P4C, and so were otherwise familiar with and sympathetic to the aims of P4C. They all stated that the HomeTalk was a valuable resource; it was used largely for its stimulus materials.

2. Teachers that use HomeTalk rate it highly

Both the survey and the interviews showed that teachers who use HomeTalk rate it extremely highly as a teaching resource. For example, they commented:

> [I]t's like manna from heaven, it's like these wonderful materials' (T5).
>
> [I]t's a fabulous resource. (T1)

> I find it to be an excellent resource, I truly do. (T1)
>
> I honestly find it to be a fabulous resource. (T1)
>
> I always think is well chosen, it's very accessible (T2)

Although there were fewer responses from parents, they were also positive about the resource.

> I thought everything had been thought of, there were so many good ideas for each week (P1)
>
> I feel like it's great content (P2)

These positive responses were reinforced by findings from the survey, which showed that 24 out of 24 teachers who answered the question agreed with the statement 'HomeTalk is a valuable resource'. In addition, in commenting on what they liked best about HomeTalk, teachers were effusive in their praise. There were many more positive survey comments than those listed here but these are indicative of the enthusiasm teachers showed about HomeTalk.

> I love Thinking Moves
>
> Love the range of stimuli for the different ages
>
> It's all useful. Thank you
>
> Love all of it
>
> It's all good, I would like to use it more
>
> Excellent resources/ideas

Likewise, the survey showed that 7 out of 9 parent respondents really enjoyed using HomeTalk and looked forward tor receiving the resource.

Several reasons were given by teachers for why they were so positive about HomeTalk, including its range, variety, the fact that it narrowed down choice

from the unlimited selection of resources on the internet, and that it is differentiated according to age. Teachers commented:

> Love the range of stimuli for different ages (S)
>
> The HomeTalk material is all topical, differentiated, and engaging (S)
>
> Video clips and quotes can be easily incorporated into lessons (S)
>
> The different age groups are useful because you can differentiate (S)
>
> Contents in Hometalk are crisp, short and adaptable. Love the choice of stimuli (S)
>
> I do love all the different age groups of the videos and the books (T1)
>
> ...the black history one, that was really good. It’s always quite difficult to find resources and appropriate stimulus online for that, because there's so much out there (T3)

Case Study 1: Using HomeTalk with families

Teacher 4 is Head of Year 9 in a large, inner city comprehensive school where the majority of students are in receipt of FSM and have English as an additional language. The school has embraced P4C - which runs within the daily tutorial programme - but HomeTalk was introduced for the first-time during lockdown. Accessed via an online platform, the teacher has weekly conversations with the year group and directed them to continue those conversations with their family. The following week, feedback from the conversations they had at home would be discussed. Teacher 4 was struck by the impact of HomeTalk, noting an improvement in vocabulary, questioning, thoughtfulness and making connections between ideas. Students were described as '*more expressive and they had new vocabularies', and as 'more thoughtful about each other'.* Teacher 4 commented that they were *'making connections'* and '*able to share their views really well'.* In particular, students were able to question their own views and thinking and this was especially noticeable in students with behavioural issues. This effect appeared to continue once lockdown was over when students seemed to be more engaged. Students who were '*not usually engaged in lessons'* became more engaged, and *'it impacted their whole…understanding of themselves'*. This HomeTalk experience, involving family participation during lockdown suggests the potential of the resource as a way of engaging disaffected students and encouraging a more thoughtful and reflective attitude to the self, others and learning.

3. Teachers like the ease of using HomeTalk

Both the survey and the interviews showed that there were two key ways in which it was used and valued: as an 'off the shelf' resource, and alternatively as an adaptable resource.

Many teachers valued HomeTalk as an easy to use 'off the shelf' resource. This was valuable both for new teachers or teachers who were not confident in using P4C, and more experienced teachers who were busy.

> Saves teachers who are not trained in P4C time and gives them ideas (S)
>
> I like how it is ready to use and there is no need to prepare anything (S)
>
> [e]specially for new inexperienced teachers at our school, yes, because it's exactly where I'll send them first because it's all laid out quite simply (T1)
>
> for other teachers who don't have that luxury of the extra time, it's very simple to pick up and say, "I'm going to use this today and I'm going to make sure I implement it into my week, and I have a resource that's very easy to follow (T1)
>
> I would recommend them because you don't have to think too much. You could expand things if you wanted to, I guess, but it's all fairly well laid out. So if you've got a session that pops up out of nowhere and you don't have a lot of time to plan, I definitely recommend it, …I think it's a really good tool to have in your back pocket kind of thing just because it's so ell set up…It's just ready made diamond, really (T2)
>
> [T]hey're worth a million dollars, and I've had them for nothing' (T5)

In particular, HomeTalk was seen as useful for those teachers who were less confident with P4C (although as noted, many of those who use it were familiar with P4C):

> It's really that simple, and if you're really afraid, and you're afraid to come up with questions, or if you don't feel confident, it's got all the thinking moves that you can utilise. Whether you utilise it in Literacy or whether you do it with your P4C, or whether you use it across the board, it's got the different resources and it's got questions (T1)
>
> I just need something and it was, bang, right there, so, yes, it was really convenient. I think you can plug and play with this kind of stuff. Show the stimulus and go through the talking points, it's laid out, pretty much anyone could do it, I'd say (T2)

> It’s a good tool because we’ve got some new ECT teachers that haven't had the P4C training. So it’s kind of a good resource for them to be able to keep their structures around them, to kind of get an idea of what stimulus might be suitable for different age groups (T3)

> I think the resources are really good, the videos are… rather than me spending all my time looking for good resources, good video clips, I think HomeTalk is really good at the resources that they use, the video clips, the questioning as well […] I don't think you have to be a skilled teacher to use those resources (T4)

As well as being useful as a provided resource, and as a way of allowing less experienced teachers to access P4C, HomeTalk was seen and valued by some teachers as an adaptable set of resources. Some used a more selective and discerning approach, choosing material and stimuli and adapting them to whatever lesson they were delivering.

> I feel comfortable tweaking things or using them how I see fit, and I can adapt or improvise as we’re going with the talk (T1)

> I really appreciate the resource and it’s easy to skim through and say, “Well, do I want to pull this, or not?”. I use different pieces of it, and I go back to them, and I have them all saved for my colleagues to utilise when they would like, if they would like (T1)

> [W]hen I said adapted it, I meant, so for example, it came on I think a pdf, so I just took relevant slides […] and then further went on to thinking about questions and relevant to the year group. So, for example, Year 7 may not have the same question as a Year 9. So I adapted it so that it was more age appropriate. […] You can actually extract what you need from it (T4)

> So, that’s why I valued the materials basically because it’s been that prompt for me, I’m not sure I would have got to the point I’ve got to if I hadn’t had the materials and been able to use them as my own prompts - what questions am I going to pose, and critical thinking questions and so on (T5)

For these teachers, who were more experienced, the ability to adapt HomeTalk and select particular areas added to its usefulness.

Case Study 2: Using HomeTalk to deal with lockdown

The survey showed clearly that teachers valued HomeTalk not only as an easy-to-use resource but also as one that as flexible and amenable to adaptation. A particularly interesting example of that adaptation took place in a large sixth form college of over 2000 students. On returning from lockdown, teachers expressed concern that student experiences of and reactions to lockdown were causing behavioural issues; students felt that '*they've been given up on and that's the thing that needs talking through*'. A member of the senior management team, experienced with P4C, felt that this needed addressing with students, explaining '*There's this big thing that's gone on, that we're just not talking about'.* HomeTalk resources were used as a scaffold to initiate and frame open-ended discussion. The difference of pedagogical approach, the questions and prompts and topics such as conflict, prejudice, gratitude and anger clearly formed the basis of a different kind of discussion with students which lead the teacher to comment: '*I'm thinking, how on earth did we ever get ourselves in the situation where these people were [behaving anti-socially], how on earth did it ever come to that?'.* Moreover, the positive response extended beyond the classroom: '*I can tell you honestly, it's a joy when you see these same students go back to the refectory and carry on the discussion…*'.

4. Both teachers and parents think HomeTalk has a positive impact on students.

We set out to explore the different potential impacts of HomeTalk on children's speaking and listening and thinking skills, and wider engagement with learning. In general, both teachers and parents perceived HomeTalk as having a positive impact on children, although of course the sample size for the latter is very small.

Teachers in particular spoke of the positive impact of HomeTalk across a number of areas, including children asking more questions, and improving their speaking and listening skills:

> It didn't hurt their speaking and listening skills at all, it's good to get into that. (T2)

> I can say, particularly with my year group, Year 9s currently, at the time only Year 8s, they were more expressive and they had new vocabularies they were using new vocabularies as well that they'd never used before (T4)

> They do more often come up with big ideas. They do more often ask questions (T1)

There were also comments about children engaging in 'deeper' thinking, as a result of using HomeTalk:

> They feel more comfortable, I think, to be able to go deeper into their thinking, or asking questions, or saying, "Hey, maybe if we look at it from this way?" (T1)

> It's not just surface learning, is it? It's deeper, and they enjoy digging deeper and finding out about different things. And be able to do reasoned arguments about it, not just saying there's a right or wrong answer, but being able to actually understand that different people might think differently because of, you know, various reasons (T3)

> I think the curiosity was better because there was one particular topic, curiosity and time, and I think when you looked at some of the resources they actually started thinking about time in a completely different way that they wouldn't necessarily do before. That was brought up in several discussions again and again and again because they're particularly linked to that concept really well. So now there was like a connection between the concepts (T4)

For the teacher participants T4 and T5, there were additional effects in terms of behaviour:

> [Students are] more thoughtful about the world, more thoughtful about each other. Kind of like checking… "Why do I think this way?" a lot of them were asking: "Okay, but why?" you found that, I would say, that those who had behaviour issues were the ones that were thinking more about the why (T4)

> I can tell you honestly, it's a joy when you see these same students go back to the refectory and carry on the discussion, never mind (*example of bad behaviour)*, carry on the discussion (T5)

These findings were backed up by the teacher survey which gave the following results regarding the impact of HomeTalk:

Statement: HomeTalk has…	**Number agreeing**	**Percentage agreeing**
improved children's speaking skills	17 out of 24	71%
improved listening skills	18 out of 24	75%
improved critical thinking skills	20 out of 24	83%
encouraged children to be more intellectually curious	19 out of 24	79%
encouraged children to be more enthusiastic about learning	17 out of 23	74%

With regards to parents, the survey suggested a marginally more ambivalent attitude among this very small sample. Whilst both parents and children enjoyed HomeTalk, a lower percentage, 6 out of 8 (75%), thought it a valuable resource. The majority thought that it had a positive impact on confidence, critical thinking skills, listening skills and speaking skills. Comments included these on the impact on children at school, and levels of engagement with younger children:

> [Child] sent me her interim report, this was in the summer term 21. It said: "[Child name] has demonstrated tremendous personal and emotional growth throughout the spring term". The spring term is when we were doing the HomeTalk. She said: "[Child] listens attentively and confidently volunteers and justifies her own ideas and feelings." Now, of course, what her mum

> said was she'd not had a report like that before. I was really quite surprised (P1)
>
> I mean, yeah, I'm not sure I'd use the word 'enjoy' but I think she can be engaged with it if it's questions, and if I've delivered them well and chosen the right topics, and things like that. But the sign of success, I think, with a 5-year-old, is just like three minutes of attention (P2)

While clearly the data used here are limited, we can see this as reinforcing some of the positive outcomes presented in some larger scale research on P4C (Topping and Trickey, 2007a, 2007b; Gorard et al, 2015).

Although our research showed that parents considered HomeTalk to have had a positive impact on their child's speaking and listening, confidence, critical thinking, intellectual curiosity, and enthusiasm for learning, the small number of parent respondents undermines these results. The study does not offer any significant findings in terms of the parental use of home learning resources and/or parental involvement in student education. The survey did reveal that work commitments and lack of time were cited as barriers to engaging with HomeTalk, and this fits with Hornby and Lafaelle's (2011) identification of aspects of family context as a key barrier to effective parental involvement in home learning (see also Hornby and Blackwell, 2018).

Case Study 3: Family members using HomeTalk

There was some evidence that caregivers found HomeTalk an enjoyable and valuable activity. Notably, P2 was a grandmother, previously an experienced teacher of P4C, who used HomeTalk with her grandchildren over Zoom during lockdown. Her grandchildren were at primary schools that did not use P4C and so were not familiar with the approach. They met every week of lockdown over Zoom to read and do one of the HomeTalks. The children were very enthusiastic and overtime it became a family affair as the children's parents would often stay in the room. As well as proving a fun activity that clearly built on and developed family relationships, it appeared that HomeTalk had made a significant impact on the development of the children, particularly the older grandchild. This was initially noted by the parents who felt that '*her confidence in speaking had improved'.* As referred to in the main report, her school report reinforced this '*tremendous personal and emotional growth'.* This example shows how HomeTalk can be used effectively by family members, though it is notable that the participant had previous P4C experience.

5. It is not always easy to distinguish between the impact of P4C classes and HomeTalk

The point made repeatedly when asking about the impact of HomeTalk was that teachers felt it was hard, in practice, to distinguish between the impact of P4C more generally and HomeTalk specifically. This highlights the observation that those schools and/or teachers using HomeTalk tended to be those already actively engaged with P4C in some way.

> As HomeTalk resources are used as part of wider P4C provision I feel it would be disingenuous of me to attribute any of the above statements *(on impact of P4C)* to HomeTalk alone (S)

> Whether you call it HomeTalk, whether you call it P4C, whether you call it Dialogue Works, in my mind, they are all so interconnected that it's really hard to find a line between which is which (T1)

> Yeah, I mean, we've kind of felt that P4C as a whole has had that impact, so it would be quite difficult to say whether it was the HomeTalk. Because they were already confident with that (T3)

This finding is important because it suggests that the positive benefits of HomeTalk cannot be separated from a wider culture of using P4C, and thus using HomeTalk alone may not have similar benefits.

6. There are some limitations to HomeTalk for some

There were few comments on barriers to using HomeTalk or improvements that could be made. One teacher commented on the other pressures of the curriculum:

> I think the kids did enjoy P4C but, like I said, in this stream there's not a lot of chance to do it because everything is so structured and they have to get through all the curriculum and stuff like that, so they enjoy it but they just don't get that many chances to do it (T2)

Another commented on using with older students:

> The only thing [sigh] I think is just making it more age-appropriate for older students (T4)

Other survey comments, which may have been from outside the UK (the survey respondents did not provide location details), related to the cultural and linguistic accessibility of some of the topics and the materials in general.

> The quotes are sometimes too convoluted for younger children especially EAL [English as an additional language] children to understand (S)

> It's just we can't use some topics as they mention things like Christmas or Christian topics which we can't use in a mainly Muslim school (S)

> Some have been unsuitable for our Muslim families (S)

> Was thinking about how to make some of these topics more accessible for Chinese students (S)

> Personally I'd like an Arabic version for my parents (S)

These ideas were also reflected in the interviews:

> Something else that might be an idea, is more videos for EAL, for children without the language, so you've got less talk in the videos (T1)

> I think in choosing some of the topics, because of my location, I have to be a bit careful about that. I don't want to get into stuff [laughter], there are a few landmines there. As long as I'm on the ball with that it's okay. If I was anywhere else, I don't think anything would be a problem, really (T2)

These comments may be useful in planning topics and resources in the future, or for a wider audience beyond UK schools.

7. Teachers felt that HomeTalk had a positive impact on their own skills

Finally, there were indications that HomeTalk had a positive impact on participants' own skills, in relation to questioning and assumptions:

> My use of questioning is better now as HomeTalk is used by me as almost a teacher's guide before I plan P4C sessions for my school (S)

> I am more aware of not making assumptions about what the children may already know/feel/think/believe (S)

> I try to always give children a voice in the classroom where they can feel safe to voice their opinions. HomeTalk has reminded me of this (S)

There were also references to improvements for other staff:

> Maybe staff confidence. It's improved, it's helped them as well (T3)

Thus, while this only a tentative finding, it is important to note that the positive effects of HomeTalk related to staff as well as children.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This research project aimed to explore and evaluate the use of HomeTalk, P4C-based learning resources among teachers and families. It was conducted during the autumn term of 2021, when schools remained open but the Covid pandemic continued to disrupt the education system through staff and child absences and continued uncertainty over new variants.

The conclusions that can be drawn are tentative in nature given the low participation rates on the survey and small number of interviews that the research team were able to access. We note the overall use of HomeTalk is relatively small in the context of the primary education system: Dialogue Works' figures suggest approximately 250 unique page views per month, over 200 people opening the email for each topic and between 40 and 70 users clicking through to the resources each week. This may have declined since children returned to school in comparison with use during lockdown.

Our findings suggest that HomeTalk is being used effectively and enthusiastically by a small number of teachers who are otherwise engaged in P4C activities, as a classroom resource. There is very limited evidence of schools sending out HomeTalk to parents, and parents accessing it this way and using it. The parents that do use it do so via the weekly email or the website, independently of the school. The reasons for this require additional exploration, but the teachers' positive comments suggest that they currently prefer to use the resources themselves in their classrooms. Teachers that use HomeTalk are very positive about how easy it is to use, its adaptability, and its impact on children and their own skills. There were few suggestions for improvement, beyond issues about culturally appropriate topics.

While the evidence base here is small, our findings suggest that teachers and parents/carers view HomeTalk as having a positive impact on children in numerous ways. It is not possible to make claims which distinguish between impacts on different areas, such as speaking and listening skills compared to

a wider enthusiasm for learning. Moreover, the use of HomeTalk by teachers also using P4C otherwise makes it impossible to distinguish the specific impact.

Given these findings, we make only broad recommendations as to the use of HomeTalk in the future and its further development:

1. The use of HomeTalk predominantly as a classroom resource should be considered in future planning, particularly if the overall aim is to increase P4C participation among families.
2. The positive aspects of HomeTalk for teachers should inform future consideration of what teachers want in terms of resources from P4C organisations more broadly.
3. If the aim is to expand the use of HomeTalk internationally, cultural issues should be taken into account when choosing future topics.
4. Additional use of HomeTalk by a wider range of teachers and parents beyond those using P4C is possible, given its ease of use, but will require new ways of promoting the programme.

In terms of future research, we would also recommend that serious consideration is given to how best to gauge the ‘impact’ of programmes like P4C. Current research appears to be split between large scale, quantitative studies that arguably fail to identify some of the wider, holistic effects of P4C on students' development and small scale, qualitative studies that lack the methodological rigour to ensure their findings are taken seriously. In order to do justice to the claims of P4C as a progressive pedagogical approach that seeks to develop the whole child, it would be beneficial to think carefully about the capacity of different methodologies to define and capture any such development.

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