



The P4C Model in Social Studies Teaching: Examining Creative Problem-Solving Characteristics and Critical Thinking*

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this research is to determine the effect of the Philosophy for Children (P4C) learning approach on students' critical thinking tendencies and creative problem solving skills in 5th grade social studies lessons. This study employs a quasi-experimental design, a quantitative research method, based on a pre-test post-test control group model. The sample consists of 66 students enrolled in the 5th grade of a private school during the spring semester of the 2024–2025 academic year. In the research process, students in the experimental group received structured lessons based on the P4C approach for five weeks; in the control group, the teaching process was carried out based on the Social Studies Curriculum (SSC) without any experimental intervention. The Critical Thinking Tendencies Scale and the Creative Problem Solving Characteristics Scale were used as data collection tools in the research. The findings of the research show that the final test scores of the experimental group, who learned with the P4C method, regarding critical thinking tendencies were statistically significantly higher than those of the control group. However, the effect of P4C applications on students' creative problem solving skills was not found to be statistically significant.

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1. Introduction

Throughout their lives, human beings possess certain characteristics that distinguish them from other living creatures, both in terms of questioning and thinking skills. It can be argued that these characteristics have led to the provision of education based on philosophical thought to humans (Koçoğlu et al, 2025, p. 203). Philosophy, defined as humanity's effort to make sense of itself and the universe it inhabits, plays a crucial role in enabling meaningful and systematic inquiry. However, for these inquiries to develop, philosophy education during childhood is considered a critical element (Lafçı-Tor, 2023, p. 703). In this context, the Philosophy for Children (P4C) approach, which focuses on teaching philosophy to children, comes to the forefront.

P4C (Philosophy for Children) is an educational approach developed by Matthew Lipman in the 1960s. This approach assumes that children are natural philosophers and aims to develop critical thinking in them through philosophical dialogue, as well as to help them become individuals who think

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more deeply, can form judgments, defend and justify them, and question their opinions (cited in Boyacı et al., 2018, p. 150, from Vansieleghem and Kennedy 2011, p. 172).

Since the 1970s, philosophy education programs for children have become widespread globally and have gradually evolved into a program that embodies a life philosophy. Influenced by John Dewey's idea that "research begins with a certain amount of information," Lipman aimed to develop children's critical thinking skills through philosophical dialogues in which individuals respect each other's ideas. Lipman argued that there is no real philosophical or scientific difference between the inner and outer worlds of the mind. According to him, critical thinking is defined as a decision making process aimed at generating assumptions about how problematic situations can be solved. Lipman's aim is not to turn children into philosophers, but to support them in becoming individuals who are guided towards critical and reflective thinking, and who develop themselves in this direction. In this way, children learn not only when to act, but also when not to act (Vansieleghem & Kennedy, 2011, cited in Pala, 2022, p. 28).

The application of a philosophy approach for children depends on certain stages (Cin Şeker, 2022, p. 107). Haynes (2002) summarized a routine philosophical inquiry process conducted in a classroom setting within the framework of the following nine stages (cited in Trickey & Topping, 2004, p. 369):

1. Beginning: Starting the process with relaxation exercises and establishing interaction rules,
2. Sharing stimulating material: Presenting the stimulus that will initiate inquiry,
3. Pausing for reflection: Allowing students a period of quiet reflection,
4. Formulating questions: Students generating interesting or thought-provoking questions,
5. Making connections: Establishing relationships between the questions generated,
6. Question selection: Identifying the question that will initiate the inquiry process,
7. Building on ideas: Supporting students in developing each other's ideas; at this stage, the teacher should strike a balance between encouraging children to follow each other's ideas and allowing for the opening of new and related avenues of inquiry,
8. Recording the discussion: Recording the discussion process using methods such as graphic mapping,
9. Evaluation and closing: Summarizing the discussion, conducting a reflective evaluation of the process itself, and addressing whether there has been a change in thinking.

The main goal of P4C (Personal Fourth Concept) studies, developed by Lipman, is (Socratic) inquiry, in depth and critical thinking about questions, making logical inferences, and developing discussion and dialogue on the topics addressed. A P4C (Philosophy for Children) education that neglects the inquiry phase and fails to develop students' questioning skills is not in line with the essence of the philosophy. The key here is for students to ask the questions themselves and for logical reasoning and dialogue to be strengthened based on these questions (Kökten, 2022, p. 1081).

P4C is considered an approach that can be effectively used in many courses because it equips students with effective discussion and inquiry skills and allows for content diversity (Durmuş, 2025, p. 4). When evaluated in this context, social studies, which emphasizes active individual participation, questioning, critical thinking, and interpretation, stands out as one of the subjects where the P4C approach can be applied. A review of the literature reveals that while there are studies focusing on different disciplines and skills (Acar, 2022; Adıgüzel, 2025; Akan, 2022; Akbulut Okur, 2025; Aksoy, 2024; Atagün, 2025; Durmuş, 2025; Ertuğrul, 2025; Güleç, 2025; Işıklar & Abalı Öztürk, 2022; Taşgın, 2025; Nak, 2025; Altay Sabuncu, 2025; Sarıkaya Tezcan, 2023; Sevimli, 2024; Tuna Aslan, 2024), there are no studies specifically targeting social studies. Therefore, the following questions were addressed within this framework.

1. In the P4C approach to social studies lessons, is there a significant difference in critical thinking tendencies between the experimental and control groups?
2. In the P4C approach to social studies lessons, is there a significant difference between the experimental and control groups in terms of their levels of creative problem-solving skills?

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This study investigated the effect of the P4C approach on students' creative problem solving skills and critical thinking tendencies in fifth grade social studies lessons. To achieve this objective, a quasi-experimental design, a quantitative research approach, was chosen. In this design, random assignment is not used; instead, two pre-prepared groups are matched based on specific variables (Büyüköztürk et al. 2013, p. 208). In this context, two of the four groups were designated as experimental groups and the other two as control groups. The experimental group received instruction using the P4C approach, while the control group received instruction using the traditional approach. Since a quasi-experimental design and convenient sampling were used in the research, a study group was preferred over a sample group.

2.2. Study Group

The study group consists of 5th grade students attending a middle school in the Yenimahalle district of Ankara during the spring semester of the 2024-2025 academic year. Two of the 5th-grade classes in the school were designated as the experimental group, and the other two as the control group. Care was taken to ensure a balanced distribution of students' academic achievement levels and genders in the experimental and control groups. Accordingly, four classes with similar academic characteristics and gender ratios were included in the study. The selection of the research group from a school in Ankara was carried out using a non-random, convenient/accessible sampling method, considering the ease of access for the researcher and the feasibility of the application. Convenient sampling refers to selecting a sample from units that are easily accessible and suitable for the application due to limitations such as time, cost, and accessibility (Büyüköztürk et al., 2013, p. 92).

2.3. Data Collection Tools

The "Critical Thinking Tendency Scale for Middle School Students" (CTTS) and the "Creative Problem Solving Characteristics Inventory" (CPSI) were used as data collection tools in the study. The Critical Thinking Tendency Scale was developed by Yıldırım Döner & Demir (2021). The scale consists of 3 sub-dimensions: "Dialectical Thinking (12 items), Tendency (4 items), and Analysis (5 items)," and a total of 21 items. The overall construct reliability of the 21-item scale was found to be .93. The reliability coefficient found for this study was calculated as .9. The Creative Problem Solving Characteristics Inventory, adapted into Turkish by Baran-Bulut, İpek & Aygün (2018), was used as another data collection tool in the study. The inventory, which is rated on a five-point Likert scale and consists of a total of 40 items; The Creative Problem Solving Characteristics Inventory consists of five sub-dimensions: divergent thinking, convergent thinking, motivation, environment, and general knowledge and skills. In the adaptation study of the scale, it was stated that the reliability coefficients for the sub-dimensions ranged from .79 to .89, and a significant level of model fit was achieved within the scope of validity evidence. In line with this general information, the overall reliability coefficient of the data obtained from the Creative Problem Solving Characteristics Inventory applied in the current research was found to be .87. This result shows that the inventory in question provides reliable measurements for this research sample as well.

2.4. Data Collection Process

At the middle school level, Social Studies is taught for three lesson hours per week, and the experimental application process is planned for a total of five weeks and 15 lesson hours. P4C workshops were implemented in the experimental group for five weeks, with three class hours per week. Care was taken to ensure that the activities conducted during the implementation period were synchronized with the course content taught in the control group. A separate class hour was allocated for the administration of each data collection instrument: the Critical Thinking Disposition Scale and the Creative Problem Solving Characteristics Inventory. The researcher conducted the study independently. The primary reason the researcher personally conducted the P4C workshops with the

experimental group was her familiarity with the content and implementation phases of the activities, as well as her certification as a social studies teacher in philosophy for children education. This contributed to the high-quality execution of the implementation process and enabled an effective learning experience for the students.

2.5. Experimental Application Process

In the experimental group of the study, the learning outcomes related to the first learning area of the social studies course were implemented in accordance with the P4C (Philosophy for Children) learning approach. Within this scope, P4C workshops were prepared, planned, and systematically conducted for each learning outcome. The P4C classroom environment created for experimental applications is designed to support student interaction and intellectual participation. The classroom is carpeted, furnished with cushions for a circular seating arrangement, and supported with necessary teaching materials such as a projector and a whiteboard. During the implementation process, a safe and friendly learning environment was created where students could feel comfortable and freely express their thoughts. No experimental procedures were carried out in the control group. The lessons in both the experimental and control groups were conducted simultaneously by the same teacher, in accordance with the social studies curriculum. The procedures implemented by the facilitator for the experimental group are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Procedures applied to the experimental group by the facilitator

Week	Date	Workshop
Week 1	18–22 September	P4C Workshop 1–2
Week 2	25–29 September	P4C Workshop 3–4
Week 3	2–6 October	P4C Workshop 5–6
Week 4	9–13 October	P4C Workshop 7–8
Week 5	16–20 October	P4C Workshop 9–10

2.6. Data Analysis

The data obtained from the research were analyzed using the SPSS 22.0 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software package. Prior to the application, independent samples t-tests were performed on both data collection tools, and no significant difference was found. This situation has been interpreted as the groups being equal to each other. After the completion of the intervention phase, an independent samples t-test was applied to determine the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental and control groups on the Critical Thinking Disposition Scale and the Creative Problem Solving Characteristics Inventory, and the findings were interpreted with a significance level of .05.

3. Findings

This section presents the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental and control groups on the Critical Thinking Disposition Scale and the Creative Problem Solving Characteristics Inventory, respectively, in tabular form.

Table 2. Independent samples t-test results for pre-test measurement of critical thinking tendencies and creative problem solving characteristics of experimental and control groups

	Group	N	$\bar{X}$	S	t	sd	p
CTT	Control	33	71,36	11,45	,39	64	,70
	Experimental	33	72,39	10,19			
CPSS	Control	33	140,00	17,48	-1,12	64	,27
	Experimental	33	135,54	14,81			

According to Table 2, there was no statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups' pre-test scores for critical thinking tendencies and creative problem-solving characteristics ($p > .05$). The findings indicate that both the experimental and control groups were equivalent before the experimental intervention. In terms of Critical Thinking Tendencies (CTT) scores,

there was no statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups, and the effect size was small ($d = 0.10$). Similarly, no difference was found between the groups in Creative Thinking Skills (CPSS) scores, and the effect size was also small ($d = 0.27$).

Table 3. Independent samples t-test results for the post-test measurement of the critical thinking tendencies scale for experimental and control groups

Group	N	$\bar{X}$	S	t	sd	p
Control	33	70,60	10,72	5,45	64	,00
Experimental	33	83,00	7,44			

According to Table 3, there was a statistically significant difference between the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups on the critical thinking tendencies scale $t(64)=5.452, p<.001$). When the group means were examined, the mean score of the experimental group ($\bar{x} = 83.00$) was higher than that of the control group ($\bar{x} = 70.60$). Accordingly, it is stated that the P4C approach had a positive effect on the critical thinking tendencies scores of the experimental group students. Furthermore, the difference between the experimental and control groups was statistically significant, with an effect size of ($d = 1.34$). This can be interpreted as indicating a strong effect of the experimental intervention.

Table 4. Independent samples t-test results for creative problem solving skills post-test measurement of experimental and control groups

Group	N	$\bar{X}$	S	t	sd	p
Control	33	140,36	17,53	1,49	64	,14
Experimental	33	145,60	10,04			

According to Table 4, there was no statistically significant difference between the mean post-test scores of the experimental group ($\bar{x} = 145.60$) and the control group ($\bar{x} = 140.36$), although the experimental group showed a higher mean score $t(64)=1.491, p>.05$). The effect size was calculated as The ($d = 0.37$). This can be interpreted as indicating that the difference between the two groups is small.

4. Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

This study investigated the effect of using the P4C (Philosophy for Children) method in Social Studies lessons on the creative problem solving levels and critical thinking tendencies of middle school students. The findings of the study show that the P4C method has a significant positive effect on students' critical thinking tendencies. This result can be attributed to the inquiry-based learning and philosophical dialogue processes that form the basis of the P4C approach. In P4C (Personal Fourth Concept) applications, students are expected to initiate a discussion process by asking questions rather than accepting existing information as is, and to justify, evaluate, and restructure the new information they obtain at the end of this process. This ensures the active use of analysis, evaluation, and inference skills, which are important in the context of critical thinking (Lipman, 2003). At the same time, this result can also be linked to P4C's student-centered and dialogical learning environment. The openness of the social studies course to multiple perspectives aligns with P4C's concept of a "community of inquiry." In this context, students have the opportunity to express their own thoughts, question the views of others, and make reasoned comparisons; these processes are seen to strengthen their critical thinking tendencies (Moriyón, Rebollo & Colom, 2005; Trickey & Topping, 2004). Studies conducted in different disciplines in the literature also show that P4C contributes to the development of children's critical thinking skills and critical reading skills. Aydoğan (2024) showed that online P4C training positively contributed to the critical thinking skills and sub-dimensions of the experimental group students; Boynueyri (2025) showed that P4C applications in the experimental group significantly improved children's critical thinking and especially cognitive-emotional perspective skills; Enkavi (2025) showed that the P4C method had positive effects on both critical thinking and critical speaking skills in children; Eroymak (2024) showed that P4C applications positively improved children's creative and critical thinking tendencies; Özyaydın (2025) showed that P4C applications had a positive effect on the creative, critical, and reflective thinking skills of the experimental group students; Taşgın (2025) showed that the final test scores of the experimental group for general critical thinking and its sub-dimensions were

significantly higher than the final test scores of the control group. Türksoy (2020) showed that P4C positively improved the conceptual achievements, critical thinking skills, thoughts on scientific research, and attitudes towards application of middle school students; Esen (2024) showed that P4C significantly improved the critical reading skills of sixth-grade students, and the results of this research are parallel to the findings of this study. However, Işıklar & Abalı Öztürk (2022) state that although the experimental group showed a greater increase in their final test average scores after the implemented program, no statistically significant difference was found between the control and experimental groups. On the other hand, when examining creative problem solving characteristics, another dependent variable of the study, a significant difference was observed within the experimental group itself, while no statistically significant result was found between the experimental and control groups. In her study, Eroymak (2024) found no significant differences between groups as a result of the analysis of quantitative data. Creative problem solving is a competence based on social skills related to internal and external factors. Internal factors are expressed as readiness to learn, the ability to understand one's needs, and the ability to recognize one's own learning style; while external factors are expressed as being influenced by the social environment of the classroom, the way groups are formed, and classroom management. These factors can particularly affect creativity in students with low social skills (Suryanto et al., 2021, pp. 333-334). In this context, the lack of a significant difference between the experimental and control groups in the relevant study may be due to a lack of social skills; because creative problem solving, understanding concepts and processes, is largely related to social skills (Suryanto et al., 2021, p. 333). Although this study did not find a significant difference in the creative problem solving characteristics of the P4C approach, Güleç (2025), in her study titled "The effect of P4C application in life skills lessons on creative thinking skills," found that it provided a significant and strong development in students' creative thinking skills; Adıgüzel (2025), in her study titled "The effect of science lessons conducted according to the P4C method on children's science achievement, creative writing, and values education," found a significant development in creative thinking skills in the experimental group; and Özdemir (2024) concluded that it positively improved the creative writing skills and writing attitudes of middle school students. In light of these studies, it is generally supported by research that the P4C approach makes positive contributions to students' creativity skills in lessons.

Based on the findings of the research, it is believed that encouraging the integration of the P4C approach into social studies lessons and giving it more prominence in the teaching process would be beneficial. Learning environments supported by philosophical inquiry sessions enable students to effectively utilize higher order thinking skills. From this perspective, the systematic and planned integration of the P4C approach into curricula is considered important for developing critical thinking skills. Furthermore, examining the effectiveness of P4C applications in different learning areas of social studies lessons, using mixed methods designs to analyze quantitative data as well as process data, student discussions, and the resulting products using qualitative methods; and conducting comparative studies by applying it to different age groups and different subject areas will contribute to reaching more comprehensive conclusions regarding the effectiveness of the method.

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