How to Evaluate the Effectiveness of a School-Based Intervention

Evaluating the Impact of the Philosophy for Children Programme on Students' Skills

Ourania Maria Ventista

Foreword by Professor Chris Brown

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BY

OURANIA MARIA VENTISTA

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

To my parents and to Grigorios

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Abbreviations

P4C	Philosophy for Children
RCT(s)	Randomised Controlled Trial(s)
TTCT	Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking
HCTA	Halpern Critical Thinking Assessment
CCTT	Cornell Critical Thinking Test
SD	Standard Deviation
NPD	National Pupil Database
FSM	Free School Meals

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Foreword

Professor Chris Brown, Durham University School of Education

The world we inhabit, COVID-19 aside, has had very mixed fortunes over the last decade. On the one hand, technology has enabled us to achieve things our ancestors would never have believed possible: redefining the way people communicate, collaborate, shop, travel, read, research, watch films, gather information, book holidays, bank and so much more (Greengard, 2015). Digital photography and social media have enabled us to capture, represent and share the world in previously unimaginable ways, while tools such as 3D printers allow us to make real our designs for anything, from sculptures to bridges, at the touch of a button. In terms of the economy, artificial intelligence (AI) and mass automation have been transformative, with much routine and low skilled work now undertaken by robots or algorithms. This use of AI is set to continue, with most commentators agreeing that AI will eventually take over many of the tasks machines can perform equally or better than humans: everything from processing insurance claims to space exploration. And this is problematic: with pre-COVID estimates indicating that, over the next 20 years, some 47% of jobs in the United States and 54% of those in Europe will be lost to machines (Bregman, 2018; Frey & Osbourne, 2013).

But what separates humans from machines is our ability to engage in creative thinking – which along with its alter ego, critical problem solving – is about constructing more or less novel ideas, objects or even worlds (du Sautoy, 2019). It is 'imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value' (National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE), 1999): in other words, activity designed to produce ideas that are not only innovative, but also fit for purpose (Durham Commission on Creativity and Education, 2019). What is novel, fit for purpose and indeed somehow satisfying, will depend on different domains: in what Victorian designer William Morris describes as the lesser arts (such as interior decoration), there can be a strong emphasis on novelty. In fields such as architecture, fitness for purpose is generally likely to receive more attention. In all cases, however, our acts of creation elevate, expand and transform what it means to be human.

But if it's creativity that is keeping us one step ahead of the machines, then education systems globally now need to be focussed on actively supporting future citizens to be able to collaboratively engage in critical and creative thought. In other words, we need education systems to now arm students with the capacities required to explore, experiment, try and re-work, make and re-make, explore and

value difference, overcome obstacles and develop and apply knowledge (Newton & Newton, 2018). But we still need practical suggestions for how to make this happen. Also, to have the confidence that if we are to embrace approaches to creative problem solving, that these will make a concrete and positive difference. With this extraordinary new book, Dr Rania Ventista has managed to meet these twin goals. Taking us on a powerful journey of exploration, not only does Dr Ventista showcase, with some considerable skill, how to evaluate educational interventions effectively; she also illustrates in detail why one intervention in particular – *Philosophy for Children* – matters.

The results are a framework that can and should be used by teachers and school leaders when understanding how to allocate scarce resources. But at the same time, how *Philosophy for Children* can enhance creative problem solving and why educators should be embracing this programme to arm their students with the skills they need to navigate the perils and pitfalls the twenty-first century holds. With this, her first book, Dr Ventista has announced to the world her skills as a scholar and leading thinker in this field. I can't wait for what's to come!

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