

## Commentary on ‘Philosophy in Schools: Then and now’<sup>1</sup>

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It is twelve years since the article you are about to read was published. During that time, the philosophy in schools movement has expanded and diversified in response to curriculum developments (see Cam 1993, 1997, 1998; Kennedy 2013; Sprod 2001; Wartenberg 2009, 2013; Worley 2011), teaching guides (see Cam 1994, 2006; Freakley, Burgh & MacSporran 2008; Goering, Shudak & Wartenberg 2013; McCall 2009; Wilks 1996), web-based resources,<sup>2</sup> dissertations, empirical research (Daniel & Michel 2000; Leckey 2001; Garcia-Moryon, Rebollo & Colom 2005; Reznitskaya 2005; Russell 2002) and theoretical scholarship (Davey Chesters 2012; Hand & Winstanley 2008; Haynes & Murriss 2012; Kennedy 2006; Kohan 2014a, 2014b; Lone 2012; Lone & Israeloff 2012; Shapiro 2012; Sprod 2001). Philosophy and philosophy of education journals regularly publish articles and special issues on pre-college philosophy.<sup>3</sup> There are more opportunities for undergraduate and graduate philosophy students to practice and research philosophy for/with children in schools.<sup>4</sup> The Ontario Philosophy Teachers Association (OPTA) (founded in 1999) reports that in English-speaking Canada there are over 28,000 senior high school students studying philosophy in over 440 schools, and philosophy is now a Teachable Qualification (for an overview see Pinto, McDonough & Boyd 2006). In the USA, the Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization (PLATO) was founded in 2009 to create a network of pre-college philosophy teachers. With the loss of its founders—Matthew Lipman (1922-2010), Ann Margaret Sharp (1942-2010) and Gareth Matthews (1929-2011)—the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC) is developing a digital archive in P4C.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The philosophy in schools movement encompasses a diverse array of pedagogical approaches, each with its own method and curriculum. The movement is international in scope. I focus my comments on developments within the English speaking countries.

<sup>2</sup> <http://p4c.com>; <http://plato-philosophy.org/>; <http://depts.washington.edu/nwcenter/>

<sup>3</sup> These journals include: *Journal of Moral Education*, *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, *Teaching Philosophy*, *Theory and Research in Education*, *Studies in Educational Philosophy* and *Educational Philosophy and Theory*.

<sup>4</sup> Academic philosophers seek to give their undergraduate and graduate students an opportunity to teach philosophy in K-12 schools. Typically, the experience is organized around a semester-long course and/or through a voluntary outreach program. University students are encouraged to use literary, digital and philosophical texts to raise and interrogate questions like ‘What is justice?’ with K-12 students.

<sup>5</sup> I use ‘Philosophy for Children’ (P4C) to refer specifically to the program developed and disseminated by the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC).

My original article, which is reprinted here unrevised, was inspired by the design (1999) and pilot (2000) of a new philosophy elective for the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE). This initiative garnered considerable interest from the P4C community because many believed that (a) the decision to offer a VCE philosophy elective reflected the effectiveness and popularity of P4C in elementary schools, and (b) the new philosophy elective would establish P4C as an essential prerequisite for the study of philosophy in senior secondary school and at university. In my view, enthusiasts overlooked an important difference in the conception of philosophy informing the new philosophy elective: it introduced students to the theoretical or academic discipline of philosophy, whereas P4C conceived of philosophy as a wisdom tradition—otherwise known as the art of living.

There has been a renewal of interest in philosophy as a wisdom tradition. Scholars such as Michel Foucault, Pierre Hadot and Martha Nussbaum have raised our awareness of this rich tradition by highlighting the spiritual exercises that thinkers such as Plato, Marcus Aurelius and Michel de Montaigne engaged to promote wisdom (see Foucault 2001; Hadot 1995; Nussbaum 2009). In *Not for profit: Why democracy needs the humanities*, Nussbaum (2010, pp. 73-76) recognizes P4C as an instantiation of this tradition's commitment to Socratic critical reasoning and dialogue (see also Gregory & Lavery 2009, 2010; Lavery & Gregory 2010). Nussbaum recommends it as a practical guide for contemporary educators who aspire to humanistic teaching. Alternatively, Laurance Splitter identifies P4C as an authentic environment in which students become actively engaged thinkers, rather than a second-hand environment in which students are vessels for the accumulated wisdom of others (Splitter 2001). In her book *Learning to teach through discussion: The art of turning the soul*, Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon (2009, p. 6) distinguishes between interpretive and evaluative questions; whereas the former are addressed by attending to the text, the latter invite thinking and judgment about ideas or issues. It can be argued that whereas VCE philosophy considers philosophical texts authoritative, P4C views them as different perspectives to be evaluated through discussion.

If viewed from a Deweyan perspective, the contrast between the VCE philosophy elective and P4C mirrors that between traditional and progressive education. I viewed VCE philosophy as a teacher-led transmission of information through extensive exegesis of canonical texts. By contrast, I saw P4C as student-centered, inquiry-based, open-ended and less reliant upon the philosophical tradition. Progress was measured differently in each; the VCE elective stressed philosophical competencies, whereas P4C prioritized a student's genuine and active involvement in collaborative inquiry indicated by a willingness to self-correct in light of better understanding. In retrospect, I saw P4C as opposed to academic philosophy, and vice-versa. I found a powerful corrective in John Dewey's call to recognize and transcend oppositional thinking.

Dewey argues that educators should not be misled by pedagogical appearances. It is not a matter of simply substituting one pedagogy for another, as the differences between them need not entail alternative philosophies of education. All educators should aim to critically examine the underlying principles of their pedagogical method (Dewey 1988). For example, it would be a mistake to assume that the teacher does not play a pivotal role in P4C, based on the contrast between VCE philosophy elective and P4C. His or her authority is critical. It is exercised procedurally rather than substantively, but the philosophical subject matter remains a principal concern. The view that academic philosophers are not similarly constrained by the ethical values that govern a community of philosophy inquiry is also erroneous. They exemplify 'respect' in their efforts to speak with clarity, listen with accuracy and consider alternative viewpoints fairly. I no longer believe, as I once did, that certain ideas are ruled out in P4C on the grounds that they risk implicating the participants in a self-contradiction (Laverty 1994, 2004).

Much has happened in the last decade to shift my thinking about the relationship between academic philosophy and philosophy as a wisdom tradition. First, the humanities are in crisis. Humanities departments—including classics, literature, philosophy, religion, history, cultural studies and anthropology—are shrinking owing to narrower government priorities, reduced funding and declining student enrollments. Tuition costs have risen, making a liberal education prohibitively expensive. Increasingly, the humanities are seen as overly specialized, impractical and insuperably difficult to justify in a time of global economic crisis. Second, applied philosophy has burgeoned and broadened in recent years to include such prescient issues as climate change, global poverty, terrorism and torture, immigration and refugees, and the impact of technology on communication and our lives. Third, I have pursued a career in academic philosophy *and* P4C. Contrary to my expectations as a graduate student, I have learned that academic philosophy is not immutable. Indeed, its history is characterized by shifting concerns, modes, purposes and practices. More specifically, academic philosophers debate how to delineate their field of study; which procedures and subjects to omit and which to take seriously as the discipline's central questions.

Certainly, some conceptions of academic philosophy are more inclusive than others. Stanley Cavell, Cora Diamond, Jonathan Lear, Iris Murdoch and Martha Nussbaum, for example, seek to reclaim non-standard philosophical topics (such as bodies and emotions) and reconstruct standard philosophical categories (such as experience and scepticism). They argue that the analysis of literary texts, films, dreams and ordinary ways of speaking are indispensable for philosophical inquiry (see Cavell 1979; Diamond 1991; Lear 2006, 2011; Nussbaum 1990). In their role *as* academic philosophers they grapple with what can and cannot be legitimately said philosophically. Nothing is taken for granted as they strive to diagnose and correct philosophical norms and conventions that preclude recognition of

our reality. They question entrenched philosophical biases in order to introduce modes of thinking and conceptual understandings occluded by traditional philosophy.<sup>6</sup>

My current thinking is that the academic discipline of philosophy and the wisdom tradition of philosophy exist on a continuum. Originally I focused on the differences between the two traditions; I am now persuaded by their profound commonalities. The pedagogical differences between VCE philosophy elective and P4C need not reflect alternative conceptions of philosophy and its role in human life. Instead, I have discovered that the teaching and learning of philosophy—be it in schools or universities—is always a blend of both approaches. I am now struck by how difficult it is to differentiate the private exercise of reason from the public. Originally, I drew the distinction from Immanuel Kant who argues that reason is exercised privately when it is annexed to a social role, such as that of a teacher or doctor, and that reason is exercised publically when a person exercises it independently of any social role. Having formally cast academic philosophy as private and P4C as public, I now see greater overlap and interconnectedness between them.

As mentioned, academic philosophers frequently conceive of themselves as needing to exercise reason in a public capacity and strive to think beyond socially circumscribed interests. Furthermore, it is possible for the procedures of a community of philosophical inquiry to imitate academic philosophy, narrowly construed. The important point about philosophy—whether academic or P4C—is that its concerns, modes, purposes and practices are subject to constant investigation and contestation. How we think is as important as what we think. Philosophers such as Dewey and Murdoch teach us this. As Murdoch (1970) asserts, '[t]here is only one culture, of which science, so interesting and so dangerous, is now an important part ... and the place of science must be discussed in *words*' (p. 34). Murdoch is talking about science here but the point applies to academic philosophy which inevitably discloses and prompts the contemplation of our values. Dewey argues that philosophical reflection brings us to a fuller understanding of our values so that we can be more deliberate in having and reconstructing them.

In conclusion, a single approach should not define our conception of philosophy. In reality there are diverse ways to understand and practice philosophy. Instead of perceiving this as a problem to be solved, we should resist totalizing approaches to the discipline (Lavery 2014). I agree with Walter Kohan (2009) that it is vitally important 'to presence, to feed and to take care of this diversity' (p. 119). We already know that philosophy can be practiced with children, but it can also be practiced with teachers, school administrators, nursing educators, prisoners and neighbors. In my experience, practicing philosophy with teachers is as miraculous as practicing it with children. The texts may or may not be more

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<sup>6</sup> For an example see Diamond's essay *The difficulty of reality and the difficulty of philosophy* in Cavell, Diamond, McDowell, Hacking and Wolfe (2008, pp. 43-90). In this essay, Diamond responds to the Tanner Lectures by novelist JM Coetzee which were published with responses from several philosophers under the title of *The lives of animals*.

central, the questions may or may not be more sophisticated and the concerns may or may not be the same. What is most important is what is created within and between the participants in a philosophical inquiry. Philosophy invites us to think. It is animated by the conviction that our values, whether implicit and explicit, could be other than what they are. It brings new discoveries and is a practice of natality (Arendt 1998).<sup>7</sup>

### Original article

## Philosophy and pedagogy in Australian schools: The relationship between Philosophy for Children and VCE philosophy<sup>8</sup>

### Introduction

Traditionally, Australia, unlike several European and Latin American countries, has not taught philosophy in the secondary schools, but now for the first time, Victorian students in their final years of secondary school will be able to study philosophy as part of the Victorian Certificate of Education, or VCE.<sup>9</sup> This is an exciting and portentous moment, both for the discipline of philosophy in Australia and for Philosophy for Children. In particular, with the introduction of VCE philosophy, Philosophy for Children takes on an enhanced status within the school curriculum, expanding from the lower year levels—having hitherto been much less successful in the senior secondary school—with greater legitimacy and direction. Its purported role in the lower levels will now be to prepare students for VCE philosophy study in much the same way that mathematics in primary school prepares students for the study of mathematics in secondary school. But does it? And is this the way to conceive of the role of Philosophy for Children within the broader school curriculum?

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<sup>7</sup> Special thanks to Diana Barnes & Laurance Splitter for comments on an earlier draft of these introductory remarks.

<sup>8</sup> A version of this paper was presented to the American Philosophical Association, Eastern Division 2000 Annual Meeting as part of a symposium, called ‘Sophie’s Travels: Children Doing Philosophy Around the World’, arranged by the APA Committee on Pre-college Instruction in Philosophy. I would like to thank both Jennifer Glaser and Mark Weinstein for their comments on that presentation as well as Pablo Cevallos Estarellas, Clinton Golding, Maughn Gregory, Philip Guin and Laurance Splitter, who read earlier versions of the paper.

<sup>9</sup> Philosophy has entered the school curriculum in other guises. Students of religion are introduced to normative ethical theories as a reference point for their reflections on issues of ethical importance. English continues to include as one of its learning objectives, the analysis and development of arguments. Students of the International Baccalaureate are required to take ‘Theory of Knowledge’, a basic introduction to epistemology. In the Australian state of Victoria, philosophy is part of an extended or gifted and talented program run by Monash University targeted at high-achieving senior secondary school students and taught through distance education. There are also those schools like Melbourne High that allow philosophy as an extra-curricular activity substituting for choir, tennis or athletics for example. Whilst these incursions of philosophy have done much to raise the profile of philosophy within schools, they are not the focus of this article.

Assuming that further empirical research and curricular analysis are required to answer the first of these questions, I shall attempt to answer the second.<sup>10</sup>

I begin by distinguishing between Philosophy for Children and the new VCE philosophy subject in terms of curriculum, materials, pedagogical and assessment procedures, so as to highlight potential differences in their underlying conceptions of philosophy and its role in human life. I suggest, in the tradition of Plato and Aristotle, that the reflective or examined life is a worthwhile life, and that philosophical thought is, if not synonymous with, then at least integral to, what it is to be reflective. But what I mean by philosophical thought here, is not philosophy as a theoretical discipline of the academy, but rather something more like philosophy as Socrates practiced it.<sup>11</sup> Drawing on the work of Raimond Gaita, Alexander Nehamas and Richard Shusterman for an articulation of this distinction, I argue that students should be given the opportunity to practice philosophy both as an academic discipline (VCE philosophy) and as Socrates practiced it (Philosophy for Children).<sup>12</sup> I focus on philosophy as Socrates practiced it, not because I conceive of it as being uniquely or paradigmatically philosophical but rather because I am taking it for granted that the discipline of philosophy is perspicuous, and no more, or less, worthwhile than any of the other academic disciplines.<sup>13</sup> The reasons for including VCE philosophy in the senior secondary curriculum therefore are the same as the reasons for including European history, psychology and literature for example. On the other hand, the potential of Philosophy for Children to resemble philosophy as Socrates practiced it, demonstrates, I argue, that Philosophy for Children should be incorporated into the *overall* school curriculum not because it culminates in the study of VCE philosophy but because it encourages students to take responsibility for their own thinking and lives enabling them to speak and live more meaningfully.

<sup>10</sup> Although Philosophy for Children has had a presence in Australian schools for seventeen years, there is still very little empirical research establishing the impact of Philosophy for Children on children's reasoning skills. Teachers of Philosophy for Children claim significant and lasting changes in the ways children express themselves, think and reason, but such claims are largely anecdotal.

<sup>11</sup> I am referring here to Plato's character Socrates and so leave mute the question of whether or not Plato's 'fictional' Socrates is an accurate presentation of the man, Socrates. I am assuming in my formulation of the distinction that Socrates exemplifies non-academic philosophy although there are arguments to the contrary. I would like to put aside this debate for the purposes of this article and so recommend that if Socrates is not exemplary for you in this sense that, to appreciate the argument of the article, you substitute a philosopher that is. Possible alternatives or complements explored by Nehamas and Shusterman are Nietzsche, Dewey, Wittgenstein and Foucault.

<sup>12</sup> I draw on Raimond Gaita's book (1991) *Good and evil: An absolute conception*, in particular Ch 17, 'Fearless Thinkers and Evil Thoughts' and his most recent book (1999). I draw on Alexander Nehamas (1998) and Richard Shusterman (1997).

<sup>13</sup> Of course not everyone agrees that the discipline of philosophy is perspicuous. Others would see the difference between VCE and Philosophy for Children in terms of different approaches to the discipline of philosophy itself, say for example between the analytic versus pragmatist tradition in philosophy, or a debate between the Enlightenment and post-modernism. Without embarking on a discussion of these approaches, I merely wish to highlight the force of the distinction between philosophy as an academic discipline and philosophy as Socrates practiced it, as it relates to the differences between VCE philosophy and Philosophy for Children.

There is already a great deal of scholarship relating the Socratic or dialectic method to Philosophy for Children, but it tends to highlight the role of questioning, essentially contested concepts, scholarly ignorance and individual self-correction common to both, whereas what I will be stressing is their ethical and existential dimensions.<sup>14</sup> I shall argue that Philosophy for Children is premised on the Socratic belief that one's philosophical reflections inform, and are informed by, who one is and how one lives one's life. It is a practice of philosophy conditioned by the understanding that individuals represent and construct their personalities through the exploration and establishment of philosophical views. To do philosophy is to articulate a mode of life. It is a way of becoming oneself or, as Nehamas so nicely puts it, the art of living. Philosophy as Socrates practiced it—and by implication Philosophy for Children—involves the examination of our beliefs on matters of importance to us, the logical relations between these beliefs, and the extent to which these beliefs inform how we live. It is to be called to a certain kind of seriousness in our philosophical reflections, and although we necessarily conduct our philosophical reflections in community with others, the aim ultimately is to improve ourselves as individuals (admittedly what is meant by individual improvement cannot be understood independently of our relations with others).

It does not follow from this characterization of Socrates' practice of philosophy, that the academic discipline of philosophy bears no relation to life for there is too much evidence to the contrary. Furthermore, both approaches to the practice of philosophy are legitimate developments of philosophy as it began in ancient Greece. Socrates lived a good life and called others to do the same but couldn't provide the rules for their doing so: he prompted his interlocutors to reflect on their own lives and attempted to persuade them of how important it was for them to do so, but he certainly did not presume to know how *they* should live. Plato on the other hand, identified the views—epistemological, ethical, aesthetic, metaphysical, political and so on—that he thought Socrates *must* have held in order to lead the life that he did, making them the necessary conditions for the living of any good human life. With Plato, philosophy changes from being personal and procedural to becoming more impersonal and substantive. It is from Plato that the academic discipline of philosophy takes its lead, concerning itself with the establishment of true or necessary epistemological, ethical, aesthetic and metaphysical views and the logical relations among them.

Given the concerns and derivations of the academic discipline of philosophy, it is not surprising that it spills over into students' lives, but the point remains that as a practice, it is not conditioned by a sense of itself as relating to the individual living of a life. In the academic discipline of philosophy, arguments are 'rehearsed' and not held. Raimond Gaita refers to them as 'blackboard arguments' or 'arguments only in inverted commas' to

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<sup>14</sup> See works by Clinton Golding (2000), Robert Fisher (1995), Gustav Heckmann (1988), James Jordon Jr (1983) and Leonard Nelson (1980)

emphasize this fact, as well as the fact that they often result in “conclusions” which no one is seriously prepared to conclude’ (Gaita 1991, pp. 320-321). The suggestion is that the student’s engagement with the discipline is predominantly, if not exclusively, intellectual and therefore hypothetical. Socratic concerns—whether a student is actually committed to the conclusion of her argument, the logical relation of this commitment to her other personal commitments, and the extent to which the commitment is consistent with her life—are considered (if they are considered at all) to be of merely psychological and sociological interest. They explain pathologies of thinking, but have little or no bearing on the enterprise of philosophy—and what it is for an individual to reason philosophically.

In the following paragraphs, I offer a brief historical sketch of the new VCE philosophy subject, and its current structure so as to reveal its affiliation with, and likeness to, university philosophy. I then characterize a likely response to the new VCE philosophy subject. Philosophy for Children and VCE philosophy share a common goal, employing alternative, and age-appropriate methods by which to achieve it. I question whether the discrepancies between Philosophy for Children and VCE philosophy are just pedagogical and suggest, rather, a difference in overall emphasis. I explain this difference by way of the distinction between philosophy as Socrates practiced it and philosophy as an academic discipline, concluding that whereas VCE philosophy is valuable for the reasons that all academic disciplines are valuable, Philosophy for Children is valuable because it teaches for more meaningful lives.

### **The new VCE philosophy subject and its relationship to Philosophy for Children**

In recent years, philosophy academics have been looking with greater interest and sense of urgency at alternative possibilities both for philosophy and philosophy graduates. A VCE philosophy subject is one such alternative—designed in 1999, trialed in 2000, it is now being offered in Victorian schools, subject to teacher and student interest.<sup>15</sup> It comprises four units to be taken over the course of two years. There are no prerequisites and each of the units involves at least fifty hours of scheduled classroom hours.<sup>16</sup> Units 1 and 2 are assessed internally and may involve any combination of the following assessment tasks: written reflection or analysis, oral reflection or analysis and essays. Units 3 and 4 are assessed externally by examination. The curriculum, as contained in the four units, is representative of philosophy as it is characteristically taught in the university. Students are

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<sup>15</sup> Individuals prepared to teach this subject are not required to have any philosophy background, although several university philosophy departments are offering philosophy seminars or workshops for those teachers who are interested.

<sup>16</sup> Unit three is a prerequisite for unit four.



introduced to the divisions within philosophy as well as to ancient and modern philosophers and examine some applied philosophical issues.<sup>17</sup>

Philosophy for Children practitioners have witnessed the development of the new VCE philosophy subject with some enthusiasm, largely seeing it as a coup for school-based philosophy.<sup>18</sup> Generally, it is felt that the new VCE philosophy subject essentially vindicates and is continuous with the efforts of Philosophy for Children and that with the growth of VCE philosophy there will be an increasing and proportionate demand for philosophy in the lower grades to give students the grounding they need for VCE philosophy, particularly as there is no plan for any devolution of VCE philosophy to the lower year levels and also that, Philosophy for Children is currently the only available model for teaching philosophy to younger children. But this way of thinking fails to take into account two considerations. Firstly, even though the success of Philosophy for Children in Australia has been limited, by and large, to primary schools, it has a comprehensive curriculum that spans from pre-school until year twelve.<sup>19</sup> Secondly, the new VCE philosophy subject incorporates neither the Philosophy for Children curriculum nor its pedagogy: the transition from Philosophy for Children to VCE philosophy will therefore involve supplanting narrative by philosophical text, a student-driven and student centered inquiry with the questions of

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<sup>17</sup> Information for the new VCE Philosophy subject can be found in the Study Design but what follows is a brief summary:

*Unit One: Introduction to philosophical inquiry introduces epistemology, metaphysics and ethics. Students are expected to be able to, define key concepts associated with these three areas of philosophical inquiry, understand the relationships between them, as well as provide examples of philosophical thought associated with each of them.*

*Unit 2: Philosophical issues in practice covers a range of issues in applied philosophy. It is intended that the student should be able to identify and discuss a range of applied philosophical issues as well as argue for a position in an applied issue.*

*Unit 3: The good life focuses on ancient and modern philosophers. Students examine the relationship between happiness and virtue as conceived by, Plato, Aristotle, the Cynics, Epicureans and Stoics. In the case of the Moderns, students look at theories of Nietzsche and Sartre with a view to understanding how they both deny the existence of God but argue for a universal ethic.*

*Unit 4: Mind and knowledge looks specifically at two areas of rich contemporary philosophical debate. Firstly it looks at ‘What is mind, and what is its relationship to the body?’ It then looks at ‘Does science provide us with knowledge or just true belief’.*

<sup>18</sup> This sense of optimism is reflected in the renaming of the ‘Victorian Philosophy for Children Association’ to the ‘Victorian Association for Philosophy in Schools’ and the renaming of the ‘Center for Philosophy for Children’ to the ‘Centre for Philosophy with Children and Adolescents’.

<sup>19</sup> There are principally three reasons why Philosophy for Children has been more successful in the primary school. Firstly, until recent years the primary school curriculum was not overburdened and was taught in a much more fluid and flexible manner, so allowing for the introduction of new programs such as Philosophy for Children. Secondly, and also until recently, there was less emphasis in primary schools on assessment, again allowing for a program like Philosophy for Children that is still in the process of formalizing its assessment procedures. Thirdly—and I find this reason less compelling—it is argued that Philosophy for Children is more successful with younger children because they have had less time in the school system and so are less conditioned by it, making them more open to wondering and puzzling about matters of importance to them. Of course, this way of putting it is intended as a criticism of the current educational system and sets Philosophy for Children up, unnecessarily I think, as an alternative paradigm

epistemology, metaphysics and ethics etc. and the ‘community of inquiry’ by individual learning and assessment (I am using the term ‘community of inquiry’ technically to distinguish it from the communal inquiry which will undoubtedly occur in VCE philosophy).<sup>20</sup>

It might be argued that the transition is not as great as it first appears, for in the case of Philosophy for Children, philosophers have written nearly all of the narratives and supporting teacher resources and intentionally use these to model arguments and ideas as found in contemporary and historical philosophy. So although Philosophy for Children promotes student-driven and student-centered questioning, students will inevitably ask and propose answers to the central questions of epistemology, metaphysics and ethics. Admittedly Philosophy for Children has, in recent years, been incorporating and creating curriculum materials that are less derivative of the philosophical tradition, on the assumption that the status of Philosophy for Children *as philosophy* is secured by the philosophical nature of its questions, and the logical procedures that govern the exploration of those questions.<sup>21</sup> For to engage in a ‘community of inquiry’ is to assume that concepts are contestable. It is to ask for, and to evaluate reasons for a particular point of view; to identify the logical implications of those views, test them for consistency with other views; examine examples and counter-examples; bring to the foreground underlying assumptions and so on. This leads to the second point, that if one justifies the community of inquiry on instrumental grounds—that by virtue of their involvement in the community of inquiry students are able to internalize a model of philosophical reasoning—then it would seem natural to supplant the community of inquiry with more independent study after students have had an adequate number of years to internalize its model of philosophical reasoning. It makes sense to think of Philosophy for Children—with or without traditional philosophy—and the new VCE philosophy subject as being on a continuum.

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<sup>20</sup> The Director of the Centre for Philosophy with Children and Adolescents did serve on the Committee responsible for conceiving and designing the subject but the Study Design reflects that he was most likely a lone voice. One difficulty was that the Board of Studies, which is the body responsible for overseeing VCE subject, had to work with traditional assessment model which, notoriously, make the idea of philosophy as communal inquiry difficult to assess.

<sup>21</sup> This development has been in response to a number of factors:

- An interest in developing a Philosophy for Children curriculum for the young child, e.g. DeHaan, MacColl and McCutcheon (1995); Partridge, Dubuc, Splitter, and Sprod (1999); and Sharp and Splitter (2000).
- A desire to use shorter, more interesting and culturally relevant narratives not necessarily authored by philosophers, e.g. Sprod (1993); and Cam (1993-4; 1997)
- A recognition that even though students ask such recognizably philosophical questions as, ‘How do I know I am not dreaming?’ and ‘Is lying ever morally permissible?’ it is questions like ‘What is the criterion for being a nerd?’ and ‘Is my pet part of my family?’ that often spark sustained and rigorous discussion
- A better understanding of the community of inquiry and its contribution to reasonableness, education of the emotions, imagination and the body.

However there is, I would argue, a real question about whether Philosophy for Children—even with its philosophy-authored curriculum and its connection to the tradition—is continuous with, or a developmental precursor to, VCE philosophy and by implication, to university philosophy. Again we lack the empirical evidence, but there are enough important discrepancies between the two to at least raise some doubts. Let me outline just a few of these. Firstly, in the new VCE philosophy subject, students will be exposed to canonical philosophical texts that span the tradition as well as some of the best pieces of contemporary philosophy; they will be exposed to arguments of the most rigorous and refined kind, and in the case of the canonical philosophical texts, arguments that have been profoundly influential. Students are introduced to philosophical terminology and the subtle but significant variations in use. They are also required to identify and attempt to understand the broader philosophical context for the argument as well as its influence on future philosophical thinking. In learning philosophy's terminology and history, students are increasingly able to map the contours of the philosophical tradition.

Generally speaking in the case of Philosophy for Children there is little or no terminology, with the exception perhaps of the procedures that govern the 'community of inquiry' in that students represent themselves as identifying as well as giving and requesting 'examples', 'counterexamples', 'assumptions', 'implications' and so on. There is however no history lesson and no induction into the philosophical tradition. It is not important that the student know that there is such a thing as 'the dreaming argument' and that Descartes was responsible for it. Some of philosophy's traditional arguments—or parts of them at least—are embedded in the narrative but the arguments are translated into a language and context relevant to the student. Furthermore, the purpose of the narrative is not to explicate or defend a series of arguments, but rather to rehearse different arguments as they intersect and are brought to bear on experience—hence the role of these arguments in the characters' lives. In reading the narratives, students do not identify arguments but consider what they find puzzling or illuminating in the story. Admittedly, the students of Philosophy for Children are exposed to variety of argumentative moves—'What is your reason for thinking that is true?' and 'What do you mean by that?' for example—both in the dialogues of the characters and through the facilitation of their own community of inquiry—but rarely examine arguments of a sustained and sophisticated nature. The narrative, as does the community of inquiry, emphasizes the development of reasoned and reasonable positions with respect to experience as it includes others.

Secondly, Philosophy for Children presumes that if children are to be taught to reason philosophically then they need to be both interested in what they are thinking about and have an investment in the outcome of their reflections. In short, their reflections must be seen to impact upon their own lives. Although the philosophical tradition presides in the background of the Philosophy for Children curriculum, students end up discussing questions related to such practical everyday issues as: the relationship between dolls and

human beings; the criteria for nerdiness; the best way to distinguish between the floor and a bed; the justified and unjustified exercise of parental and teacher authority—issues about which the philosophical tradition has had little to say, at least directly. Such discussions in Philosophy for Children inevitably raise questions of epistemology, metaphysics and ethics, but the formulation of these questions is sensitive to the context of children's lives and experience. And in discussion of these questions, more than just rational considerations are taken into account: respectful attention is given to how a student might feel about a particular issue, how a student experiences that issue, and how they have been told to think about that issue.

Thirdly, students of VCE philosophy are required to produce more or less substantial pieces of written work; emulating the philosophers that they read by producing sustained and detailed treatments of philosophical issues. This is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, to write a philosophical argument is, in a sense, to own it, and ideally, to produce something of beauty. The repetition of the writing requirement ensures that students simultaneously demonstrate and witness their own philosophical development and growth; the overall experience is one of being inducted into a craft that one then learns how to perfect. Although a student might be better at making distinctions than he is at identifying assumptions, or he might find Plato more accessible than Sartre, the written assessment ensures that the student at least attempts to become competent in all areas. Generally speaking, in the Philosophy for Children program there is little to no structured writing. This is in large part due to the fact that we encourage students in Philosophy for Children to conceive of themselves as comprising 'a community of inquiry' and then interpret what it means to be a 'community of inquiry' literally: homework is rarely set and rarely assessed if set; questions are given immediately after reading; examples and counter-examples are given in response to what others say and so on; an individual's development as an inquirer is generally measured behaviorally. I am suggesting that the absence of any writing requirement means that students in Philosophy for Children all too often fall back on their strengths and fail to develop their weaknesses. The discussion plans and exercises are designed to ameliorate this but are often not used, and if they are used then they are not used in this way. There is no clear sense of the student developing, or at least attempting to develop, a predetermined set of philosophical skills.

Perhaps the differences that I identify between Philosophy for Children and the new VCE philosophy are merely contingent and that what they point to is, that academic philosophy would be enriched by the inclusion of 'community of inquiry' practice as Philosophy for Children would be enriched by including analysis of academic philosophical texts and more writing exercises.<sup>22</sup> Whilst I agree with this to a certain extent, and recognize the efforts on

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<sup>22</sup> Philosophers are designing and offering courses that facilitate greater self-reflection and self-knowledge on the part of their students. As examples see Conway (1999) and Shumaker (2000). Teachers of Philosophy for Children are increasingly using email (and therefore writing) in the development and expansion of their

the part of both academic philosophers and Philosophy for Children practitioners in this regard, I nonetheless maintain that the predominance and seeming inevitability of these differences reveal differences in the conceptions of what it is to do philosophy and the role of philosophy in human life on the part of academic philosophy and Philosophy for Children. In other words, even if academic philosophy were to include 'community of inquiry' practices and Philosophy for Children were to include the analysis of academic philosophical texts as well as written work, the emphasis in each case would be different.

### **Practicing philosophy as an academic discipline: The 'private' use of reason**

The new VCE philosophy subject—as with university philosophy from which it derives—practices philosophy as an academic discipline and this essentially involves developing 'acknowledged mastery' or expertise (Gaita 1991, p. 16). There is a degree of circularity here, of course, because the community of experts to a large extent determines what is to count as expertise, but it is not completely circular because expertise also implies competency, which, in turn, implies a method or identifiable way of proceeding at which one can become competent. Individuals expert in the discipline of philosophy are, typically, academic or professional philosophers, and their competency includes the terminology and history of philosophy, being able to produce rationally defensible arguments and identifying weaknesses in arguments.

Academic philosophical thinking on this view is equivalent to what Immanuel Kant means by the private use of reason, which he distinguishes from the public use of reason in his essay, 'An answer to the question: "What is Enlightenment?"' To use reason privately, according to Kant, is to reason 'in a particular civil post or office with which he is entrusted.' (Kant 1991) It is to reason and make judgments in one's capacity as a cleric, magistrate, citizen, or as I am suggesting, academic philosopher. We understand ourselves to be reasoning privately when we qualify what we are saying with the statement, 'I am speaking now as a teacher' or as 'a parent', 'unionist', 'taxpayer', 'your doctor' and so on. The qualification here demarcating that our reasoning in this instance is circumscribed by the role we are fulfilling, or alternatively, the particular relation we have to the problem or issue in virtue of that role. In other words the reasoning is internally conditioned by the function or office, which the individual represents and is therefore answerable to. I am suggesting that academic philosophy, even with its emphasis on questioning, is analogous to the private use of reason because it contains correct procedures which shape our

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communities of inquiry. One of the things that Clinton Golding does is ask his students to write down one of the questions raised by the students of the class and to write their answer to that question with reasons. These papers are then exchanged among the students with each student writing a response to what they have received—whether they agree, disagree, have different reasons for agreeing and so on. The papers are exchanged again. At the end of the time the student who asked the question is able to read what other people have written in response to their original question.

expectations of what it is for someone to do academic philosophy: the student uses philosophical terminology; the student demonstrates familiarity with the tradition and is capable of outlining and commenting on its canonical arguments; the student is capable of producing an argument irrespective of whether she believes it; the student predicts and answers objections to her argument even though she might be wracked with uncertainty and so on. A student is not exclusively exercising her reason in her study of philosophy but is reasoning, as the discipline of philosophy requires her to. She is taking on the persona of the philosopher. Let me follow with an example of Gaita's by way of illustration.

An individual studying university or VCE philosophy will inevitably come across the subject of applied ethics in which she will be assessed. To demonstrate competency in the subject a student will need to deal with the issues deemed important by the subject: (abortion, euthanasia, infanticide, surrogacy, human cloning etc.); she will need to be able to apply philosophical theories to these issues; she will need to be familiar with the seminal arguments associated with each issue; she will need to consider the seminal counter-arguments; she will need to frame her reflections in the context of the debate. A student's thought that it might *matter to philosophy* that for example, individual human beings make these decisions in the contexts of their lives, or that we generally don't eat our dead, or that we find it difficult to disassociate pregnancy and sex from intimacy, is determined as being philosophically naïve. Similarly if a student makes the judgment that it is corrupt or evil to consider whether infanticide is justified—she would be speaking morally or religiously but not philosophically. The assumption informing this view is that responding to a thesis on the basis of feeling, experience or political commitments reveals a deficit in one's philosophical ability (unless of course one sublimates one or other of these into an argument of apparent rational derivation). It is to speak personally about an issue, which is, in a sense, to fail to speak philosophically because within the theoretical discipline of philosophy, rational considerations, namely truth and validity, are sovereign; it is purely a matter of argument. The ideal student of philosophy follows reason where it leads and in the moment of reasoning, at least, detaches herself from what she might think or feel about where reason is leading her; she learns to separate her thinking from her humanity. That she is able to do this is largely because there isn't the expectation that she necessarily believes what she is arguing for. The normative ideal is that we are 'fearless thinkers' but we can be fearless in our thinking precisely because it is thinking done hypothetically, in one's persona as philosopher. The point is that outside philosophy, there are ideas that we wouldn't want to entertain, for the reason that our doing so would reflect a sickness or corruption of the mind.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Such ideas are for example, 'that we should allow a proportion of the human population to die so that there might be greater resources for others', 'that we should be able to experiment on unwanted human babies.' See Gaita (1991, Ch 17).

For some, what I have described will represent only the first or earliest stage in learning how to do academic philosophy. It is a necessary first stage because it clarifies what academic philosophy is, enabling students in their later studies to accommodate their intuitions and felt insights in a way that is appropriate to, and defensible within, the academic discipline of philosophy. Such a position however, assumes that students' intuitions and felt insights are not altered (or some would say corrupted) by the practice of doing academic philosophy, which is in turn symptomatic of the more general view, that it is possible to engage in academic philosophy without it transforming the self.<sup>24</sup> It also assumes that academic philosophy at best lends itself to, and at worst is not incompatible with, the articulation and evaluation of these intuitions and felt insights, but there has been in recent years within academic philosophy increasing speculation as to whether this is in fact true, possible or even desirable.<sup>25</sup> My response is to say that I am not convinced that I have only described the initiation of students into academic philosophy, although perhaps (and I am not convinced of this) the conception of philosophy that I identify as informing academic philosophy is most visible here. Secondly, I think it is at least questionable whether it is possible to do academic philosophy without it transforming the self. Thirdly, I think that if academic philosophy is going to properly incorporate these intuitions and felt insights, then its form and practice will need to be more responsive to the lived life, narrative, emotions, poetic discourse etc.

### **Philosophy as Socrates practiced it: The 'public' use of reason**

Ironically, Philosophy for Children conceives of itself in much the same way as the academic discipline of philosophy: the community follows reason wherever it leads; views are subjected to the rational criticism of others; students become more open-minded and willing to entertain alternative possibilities and so on. And there is nothing to say that it can't be conducted in this manner: students can, and often are, encouraged to, 'play' at reasoning philosophically with their peers—asking questions, asking for reasons, giving

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<sup>24</sup> Stanley Fish makes a related comment in relation to deliberative democracy in the classroom. He argues that the practice advocates that it is advantageous, or at least not disadvantageous, for individual students to entertain ideas that they are undecided about or profoundly disagree with, which is to assume that the student is untouched in the process of entertaining these ideas. He writes in defense of those people who do not adhere to this assumed liberal psychology, that 'in another psychology, one undergirded by a conviction of original sin, the mind is not (at least not since Eden) so strongly independent. Rather than standing apart from the range of views that contend for its approval, it is, in its congenital weakness and disposition to be overwhelmed, at the mercy of those views. This is where the indoctrination comes in—not at the level of urging this or that belief but at the more subliminal level at which what is urged is that encountering as many ideas as possible and giving each of them a run for its money is an absolutely good thing.' (1999, p. 93).

<sup>25</sup> Philosophers have increasingly focused on the differences between philosophy and literature in their appreciation of the role of narrative in its relation to the character of practical reasoning. In the spirit of self-awareness, philosophers have identified the adversarial, scientific and authoritative discourses that inform and condition the practice of academic philosophy.

counter-examples—without having to speak personally or become personally involved. There is the persona of the inquirer in Philosophy for Children as there is the persona of the professional philosopher in the academic discipline of philosophy.

However, Philosophy for Children has the potential, I would suggest, to present and practice philosophy as an art of living, as Socrates practiced it, so that it really does matter what one thinks. The first reason for this potential is the lack of clarity in Philosophy for Children with respect to what expertise or mastery in philosophy consists in. In an obvious sense it includes acknowledging one's ignorance, asking the right kinds of questions, identifying logical connections, but there is no reference to either a community of experts or a recognizable body of knowledge. Whilst asking the right kinds of questions seems to be a necessary condition of expertise, it is not sufficient because one has to take into account, the language one uses, the tone with which one speaks, the manner in which one proceeds, who one's interlocutors are and their worldviews and so on. But what is it to have expertise in this?

Secondly, it often seems in the academic discipline of philosophy that any idea is permitted so long as one is able to give a reason for it. Nothing is ruled out of consideration: it has been possible within the discipline of philosophy to doubt the existence of other minds, to doubt the existence of one's body, to be skeptical about the authority of morality and so on. This has been, and undoubtedly continues to be, one of philosophy's strengths. Whilst much is similarly permitted in Philosophy for Children, I want to suggest that certain ideas are importantly ruled out of consideration and that these ideas are ethically and epistemically substantive even though they start out as pedagogical or procedural. In saying that certain ideas are 'ruled out' of consideration, I am not suggesting that the members of a community of inquiry can be forbidden from formulating or positing these ideas, by appeal to some authority, either internal or external to the community of inquiry or that individuals don't ask them. It is possible for individuals to entertain these 'ruled out' ideas in the persona of the inquirer, but what they ideally learn from their experience of the community of inquiry is that it is precisely the practical or 'lived' endorsement of the contradictories of these so called 'ruled out' ideas that provides the conditions for the possibility of inquiry itself. The conditions of the inquiry are such that to inquire is to appreciate that to endorse what I am calling 'ruled out' ideas is to undermine or deny the conditions for the very possibility of inquiry itself, which is to risk involving oneself in a self-contradiction of the kind that Socrates was trying to draw attention to in his interlocutors.<sup>26</sup>

To put it in more Kantian terms, a person only engages with such 'ruled out' ideas at the risk of profound irrationality, for it is only rational to will the conditions for the possibility

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<sup>26</sup> See my article, 'Philosophy of education: overcoming the theory-practice divide' in the forthcoming spring edition of *Paideusis*.



of the exercise of one's rationality. Analogously, to inquire is to will the conditions for the possibility of that inquiry, for to question the conditions of the possibility of inquiry (rationality) is to in a sense either, disqualify the *inquiry as an inquiry* (which may indeed be their intention) or to disqualify oneself as an inquirer (disqualify oneself as rational). Given that Philosophy for Children conceives of inquiry as occurring in the context of a lived life (its use of narrative and dialogue), occurring in community, and as directed towards meaningfulness and understanding as opposed to truth, the ideas or questions that I am suggesting are ruled out of consideration are essentially epistemic and ethical (others might want to refer to them as political). Such ideas that are ruled out of consideration include: 'An individual is capable of a meaningful understanding of life without the engagement of others'; 'Some individuals do not deserve respect'; 'I can respect a person without listening to what they think' and so on. I say these ideas are ruled out of consideration because their contradictories provide the necessary conditions for the possibility of community of inquiry. To engage in the community of inquiry is itself to assume that individuals need to communicate with each other in order to come to a meaningful understanding of life, that all individuals deserve respect, and that we show that respect by listening to others.

One way of formulating my point is to say that within the community of inquiry, reflection necessarily becomes answerable to an ethical vocabulary. There is the acknowledgment, within the thinking and reflection itself, of the need for compassion, patience, love and humility, as well as humor and irony, in considering matters of life (for a good discussion of this refer to Lipman 1995). This necessarily occurs within Philosophy for Children and not philosophy conceived of as an academic discipline because Philosophy for Children assumes, in the form of the community of inquiry, firstly, that to engage in philosophical reflection is to articulate and revise a mode of life (become who one is) and secondly, that other individuals and the quality of my relations with those individuals are integral to both philosophical reflection and our modes of life.<sup>27</sup> These assumptions are borne out in a number of ways. Firstly, Philosophy for Children starts from what is of relevance and interest to student (the issues in their lives) and declining to enlist arguments from authority, encourages students to rely on their own intellectual and experiential resources, to think and speak for themselves and ultimately come to a sense of, and be able to articulate, what they seriously believe. Secondly, students take each other seriously in the context of the community of inquiry: they are listened to; what they think is discussed by others; they are encouraged to see other points of view; look at reasons against what they think and so on.

Thirdly, what counts as a rational or potentially legitimate move within the community of inquiry, exceeds any predetermined single authoritative method or set of rules for

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<sup>27</sup> For a fuller elaboration of the multi-dimensionality of community of inquiry refer to Kennedy (1997).

proceeding; certain responses and critical concepts become legitimated in the community of inquiry and so are able to be explored and therefore developed. There is for example, constant feedback in a community of inquiry as to how attractive or unattractive someone's views are and how attractive or unattractive they make that individual—a student might come to be *ashamed* of a particular point of view, or see it as *cynical* or *naïve*. The critical vocabulary of Philosophy for Children extends to include such phrases as, 'Are you being serious?', 'I can't imagine what that would be like' and 'It must be terrible to think that.'<sup>28</sup> In a community of inquiry, judgment and scrutiny can legitimately extend to include behavior as well as assertions—'Does this individual talk over others?' 'Does the individual frequently interrupt?' 'Is the individual considerate to less assertive members of the community of inquiry?'—highlighting the relationship, or lack thereof, that a person's thinking has to their way of living; drawing attention to the relative superficiality or depth of a person's reflection and self-knowledge as well the role that a person's behaviour/thinking has in how someone responds to her thinking/behavior. Within a community of inquiry, as much attention is given to the language with which a person conveys an idea or explains a concept as to the idea or concept itself. It is acceptable within the community of inquiry to be partly, if not largely, persuaded by the poetry of a view and to aspire to greater poetry in one's own views—of course, such poetry is open to correction but such correction is always given in the language of which poetry is a part.

I referred earlier to Kant's distinction between the private and public use of reason as presented in his article, 'An answer to the question: What is Enlightenment?' using his idea of the private use of reason to explain what might be meant by doing philosophy as an academic discipline: reasoning *as* an academic philosopher, or alternatively, as the academic discipline requires. I would like by way of conclusion to return to Kant's distinction and suggest, that if doing academic philosophy is equivalent to the private use reason, then Philosophy for Children is equivalent to the public use of reason which Kant not surprisingly represented as the key to 'man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity.' (1991, p. 54) To use one's reason publicly, according to Kant, is to speak in one's own person and not in one's capacity as a teacher or student of a theoretical discipline for example (1991, p. 57). If the private use of reason is to reason according to the specified roles that one fulfils in relation to others, then the public use of reason is an exercise of one's reason in *one's humanity*. There are two things to be said about this. Firstly, it does not follow from this that the public use of reason is necessarily impersonal and therefore properly universal, for the point about the public use of reason is that it is personal, and because it is personal but unconstrained by *any one role* that we might fulfil,

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<sup>28</sup> Callicles says this to Socrates in the *Gorgias* 481. The point he is trying to make with this question is that whilst you might be able to assert what Socrates has asserted, it is another thing to seriously believe it. He is in this comment marking the two kinds of human discourse and wanting to draw attention to his disbelief that Socrates believes the things he is claiming to believe.

it makes reference to the broader community. Secondly, to reason in one's humanity is for that reasoning to be conditioned by features of our humanity and what it is to live a human life, like the fact that we are embodied, of woman born and will die; that we can only live our own lives and not someone else's; that so much of what happens in our life is a function of contingency; that we experience certain individuals in our lives as irreplaceable and so on.

It is through the exercise of public reason that we are working on becoming ourselves but for such an exercise of reason there can be no absolutist rules or precedents, no requisite way of proceeding; one has, to a certain extent, find one's way as one goes along. In the words of Nehamas (1998, p. 10) 'there is no best work—no best life—by which all others can be judged.' All we can do is continue in the public use of reason i.e. make judgments for ourselves, submit those judgments to others for review, and refine those judgments in light of how others respond and their public use of reason, which is what we essentially already do in a community of inquiry. Philosophy for Children provides a forum for the use and education of public reason, and if Kant is right about the public use of reason being the key to humanity's maturation, then Philosophy for Children should be an integral part of the school curriculum. Further, if to use reason publicly is to reason in our humanity, and if we keep in mind the emphasis in Philosophy for Children on inquiry as occurring in the context of a lived life (its use of narrative and dialogue), in community, and as ultimately directed towards meaningfulness, then it would seem that Philosophy for Children provides a lived experience—an experience of ourselves and each other in our humanity—that serves as a corrective context for any public use of reason. For example, it is impossible, without profound self-contradiction, to genuinely believe myself to be disembodied whilst immersed in a community of gesture; it is impossible, without profound self-contradiction, to conceive of the ethical impulse as imposed from without, whilst witnessing its natural and constant operation in the community of inquiry (Kennedy 1997, p. 67). Another way to make the point is to say, drawing on the language of Gaita, that for the public use of reason to be properly answerable to our humanity then 'the "part of us" which is obedient to the claims of reason must be the same part of us which can be the proper respondent of another's call to seriousness' (1991, p. 329).

### **Conclusion: The value of Philosophy for Children**

In summary then, Philosophy for Children is integral to overall curriculum because firstly, it gives students the opportunity to engage in the public use of reason and the public use of reason is essential to our ability to live meaningful lives and grow as individuals. Secondly, the lived context for that public use of reason that Philosophy for Children provides in the form of the community of inquiry makes it more likely that our public use of reason will have greater authenticity or fidelity to how we experience ourselves and others (our

humanity). Philosophy for Children importantly invites students to *take seriously* Socrates' challenge to his interlocutors—rather than what we usually do as philosophy students or readers, which is to assume that we are of his kind and continue to live our lives unchanged.

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