Spring 2014

Investigating Children's Capacity for Philosophical Inquiry Through Guided Discussion

MaryGrace Longoria
University of Colorado Boulder

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.colorado.edu/honr_theses

Investigating Children's Capacity for Philosophical Inquiry Through Guided Discussion

By: MaryGrace Longoria
Department of Philosophy Honors Thesis

Claudia Mills, Thesis Advisor
Department of Philosophy

Wes Morriston, Committee Member
Department of Philosophy

Daniel C L. Jones, Committee Member
Honors Program Faculty

April 7, 2014

Abstract

As a volunteer for a fifth grade philosophy class, I observed the inquisitive nature of children, which inspired the research behind this project. The leading question that is explored in this thesis is how to foster critical thinking skills in children as young as ten years old through the practice of philosophy. After researching the field and what other Philosophy for Children practitioners have done, I created a curriculum for philosophy education for children which could be easily implemented into the current public school curriculum. My curriculum was then tested at Creekside Elementary with a group of fifth grade students. The research from the trial led to the realization that children are not only capable of philosophical discourse, and thus critical thinking, but they also thoroughly enjoy the subject. The children were enthusiastic because they were being treated as equals, instead of the traditional hierarchical model of teaching. The children have led me to assert that an alternative teaching method is in need; children want to explore and discover, not be told what is right or wrong. Ultimately, this thesis contends that the traditional method of teaching, characterized by a hierarchical transfer of knowledge, is not necessarily as effective as teaching in a way that is typical of philosophy education: critical thinking is not a concept that children cannot understand, in fact, children excel in critical thinking and thus such a skill should be developed early on in a child's education.

Preface

The inspiration behind this project came from a volunteer job. A wanted ad on the philosophy department bulletin board, which read "bilingual tutor needed for 5th grade philosophy course" caught my eye, and as I read the flyer I suddenly felt extremely excited. I instantly signed up and reported for duty the following week. Mr. Tomich is a fifth grade teacher at Creekside Elementary in Boulder, Colorado. He enjoys incorporating music into class and loves challenging his students. Mr. Tomich is a typical fifth grade teacher, except for the fact that he also teaches an enrichment course in philosophy for fifth graders. Mr. Tomich has been teaching philosophy to children for over twenty years, armed with only his bachelors in philosophy and a sense of understanding that philosophy education is crucial for children. He saw the natural philosopher in his students and decided long ago that he would provide them with the necessary knowledge to begin thinking critically about the world around them.

Where I came in was exciting. For the first time in twenty years, Mr. Tomich had decided to include students from the English as a Second Language department. The three kids who were selected were all of Mexican descent: Manuel, Gabby, and Jorge. When I first met the three, I instantly knew that they had no idea why they were chosen. Maybe their mentality was the result of years of instilled low expectations by teachers, but now Mr. Tomich was providing them with an opportunity to advance and excel, and I was there to help. My job was to attend the lectures, take notes, and assist my three students with understanding the material. My Spanish language skills were solicited so that I could explain concepts in English and Spanish, allowing the children to understand the material at their comprehension level. A chance encounter with an interesting opportunity sparked the foundation for my Honors Thesis.

Many who enter the field do so by reading about what others have done or what others believe about a child's capacity for rationality. As will be discussed later, many renowned philosophers did not believe children were capable of philosophical discourse, but now many modern day philosophers have stepped up and defended the children. I am fortunate to have learned of this field not through literature or articles, but by witnessing the marvels of childhood philosophy first hand. The following quotes are from children from Mr. Tomich's fifth grade philosophy class; I wrote furiously while astonished by what I witnessed.

> *"Sometimes I wonder if I'm really here?"*
> *"Are other people real?"*
> *"What is beyond the end of the universe? Nothing. Well, what is nothing? I can't perceive nothingness."*
> *"Could you make another color?"*
> *"Am I the only person seeing this?"*
> *"I try to stop thinking and think about nothing, but I can't."*

Those comments are what arose after the first lecture, which merely consisted of Mr. Tomich explaining that philosophy is the study of what we can know. Mr. Tomich explained how economics, science, etc. are all children of philosophy, and then explained in simple terms what a hypothetical is, and the difference between objective and subjective. All those quotes followed as comments during the lecture, covering philosophical areas such as epistemology, existentialism, and metaphysics. For example, a young boy wondering if he is real, or even if others are real, is him inquiring about his metaphysical place in the world. The children spoke at a critical level constantly, and every time I witnessed their natural aptitude for philosophical inquiry, the more convinced I became that I had to study this phenomenon and introduce it into more classrooms. I had this gut feeling that the education system needed to stop suppressing children's philosophical nature because it was clearly something that could only benefit a child's

education. Being able to do philosophy better than many adults at such a young age is critical thinking at its best, and that is a skill that I honestly believe should be taught not only in every fifth grade classroom, but every classroom in America.

This paper seeks to understand the field of primary and secondary philosophy education while also recommending a curriculum guided towards philosophy. I also tested my curriculum in a real public school classroom. This thesis begins with some background; a background that is necessary considering the field is so new. Everyone I talk to about my thesis believes it to be the first of its kind, which is not true, and that is why I will be laying down a survey of what has been written on children and philosophy, what has been theorized, tested, and observed. After the brief background, I will offer a curriculum for elementary schools that helps to incorporate philosophy discourse into the classroom. My curriculum will be based on what I believe to be successful teaching methods, based on my research through my trial. This thesis then goes on to explore how the curriculum I designed works when implemented into an elementary classroom over the course of six weeks. Finally, this thesis will offer concluding thoughts on the success or failure of the curriculum design, and how it can be altered and implemented into classrooms, benefiting children all over the country.

The concept of philosophy education for children is extremely important to me, and hopefully after reading this paper, you too will be convinced of its utter necessity in the American education system. Philosophy is the father and mother of all studies and sciences, and it is about time it receive its deserved amount of time in the classroom.

Introduction

For many adults, philosophy is deemed incomprehensible by children, yet the assumption could not be more wrong. Over and over again research suggests that children in fact make the best philosophers due to their inquisitive nature (Montclair). If more adults were to reflect on their own childhood, the finding would be that they too were philosophers at one point: it is a common human experience to ask open-ended and morally charged questions. These questions that children ask, that all humans ask, are philosophical in nature, questions such as "what is beyond the end of the universe? Do we really exist? Is my pain the same as her pain?" Children wonder about the same topics that many adult philosophers ponder, the only difference is that children do not know that what they are thinking is common and can be discussed. Adults tend to dismiss children as "saying the darndest things" instead of cultivating their aptitude for philosophical discourse. Throughout the literature review many different authors will bring up this very same theme, the idea that children make the best philosophers and that developing their skills can be beneficial to not only their development but their emotional stability as well (Lone, Goering, Matthews, Wartenburg).

Children often find their questions frightening, specifically when regarding life and death. As a child, I too had worrisome questions about death, and they kept me awake and scared at night. One question that tended to worry me was not being capable of knowing when I would die. Like many children in the literature, I was under the impression that I was unique, that my questions were concepts no one worried about, and that I must have something wrong with me. When I became a philosophy major, I realized that many others shared those questions that haunted my childhood, and when I began working with children I realized that I was never alone.

This thesis is a proposal to incorporate philosophical discourse into every child's primary education. The literature review will serve as a foundation for the principles that are present in

the curriculum proposal, and the trial will show how a school can easily implement philosophy education. Children deserve to have adults participate in critical discourse with them. The research I have conducted, between my trial and the literature, leads me to believe that children, as early as kindergarten, should be introduced and taught how to do philosophical inquiry because not only are they capable but they also want philosophy in their lives; the critical thinking skills gained through philosophical inquiry are fundamental to a full education, and therefore philosophy with children is crucial.

Background

The Philosophy for Children Movement began in the 1970's when the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (the IAPC) was founded in Montclair, New Jersey, thanks to the efforts of Mathew Lipman. Lipman was a pioneer in the field, for he published one of the first Philosophy for Children (P4C) novels titled *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery (*Pritchard 2002*)*. Shortly after, Lipman created the IAPC at the local Montclair University, and to this day the institute exists, working hard every day to fight for the inclusion of philosophy education in the public school curriculum (Pritchard 2002).

Then, in the 1980's, Gareth Matthews wrote several books that argued against the belief that children were psychologically incapable of philosophical thought and discussion, a notion that was put forward in 1933 by the psychologist Jean Piaget. Gareth Matthews has led the way in alternative ways of viewing children and their capacity for philosophical thought. Following in Matthews's steps, the International Council on Philosophical Inquiry with Children (ICPIC) was created in 1985. Then, in 1996 the University of Washington's Center for Philosophy for Children (NWCPC) opened, and more recently the Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization (PLATO) started in 2009 (Pritchard 2002). Amongst these key dates are hundreds

of books that have been published, ranging from picture books to novels, specifically for children's philosophy. Even books that were never meant for philosophy have been interpreted for philosophical discussion with children. Today, universities across the country have philosophy outreach programs, and high schools are beginning to incorporate philosophy electives, lectures, and extracurricular activities, such as ethics bowl and debate. The movement is still new and fairly unheard of, which is why it is the prime time for my thesis research, and why this informative thesis is more relevant than ever.

The belief that children are incapable of philosophical thought is not new and has been the dominant paradigm since the Golden Age of Athens. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle all believed that children were incapable of the philosophical thought that accompanies the rationality that only adults could supposedly develop. The Golden Age did not believe children were capable, and that paradigm stuck (Matthews), including in present day science.

Cognitive psychology since its rise in the 1930's has found that children do not develop the mental capability for abstract reasoning until the age of eleven (Pritchard 2002). Given that Jean Piaget is a leader in cognitive psychology, his theory about cognitive development has dominated American psychology literature, and therefore also dominated the way education is conducted. Piaget's theory states that children from ages two to eleven are in first the "preoperational stage" and then the "concrete operational stage." The "preoperational stage" is defined as "Egocentrism begins strongly and then weakens. Children cannot conserve or use logical thinking," while "concrete operational" is defined as "Children can now conserve and think logically but only with practical aids. They are no longer egocentric" (Huit 2003). These stages therefore promote that children cannot experience abstract reasoning until around age 11 or 12 (Huit 2003). The paradigm is clear: traditional opinions on the capability children have for

philosophical thought is that they have none and therefore philosophy has not been taught

traditionally to children in America, unlike many other countries around the world, such as

Brazil, whom have taught philosophy to children in all public schools since 2008 (Dorfman).

How Philosophy for Children Is Taught

There are a few different ways of approaching philosophy for children (P4C): literature-

based discussion, lecture on philosophical concepts, and facilitated discussion. The value of each

method has played a key role in the development of my curriculum. Also, it is important to note

that all three methods emphasize that teachers and facilitators need not be philosophically

trained.

Spearheaded by Jana Mohr Lone, facilitated discussion is a model for doing philosophy

with children that involves philosophical questions and discussions and activities around those

ideas. Philosophy with children can be as simple as asking the children a question and exploring

the meaning behind their answers. This method requires a facilitator to propose a philosophical

question, such as "what is art?" and then discussing possible answers. The benefit of this method

is that it does not require a philosophy background, although it helps. This method is easy to

implement, and as Jana Mohr Lone has advocated, this method is great for parent and child

relationships. This method is based on the belief that children are naturally inquisitive and need

philosophy discussion and exploration in order to cultivate their critical thought. (Lone)

Literature is another effective method of introducing philosophy into elementary

education. In this method, the facilitator reads a book with the children, age specific of course,

then the facilitator picks out philosophical concepts that the book exposes and discusses them

with the children. This method is especially effective because it allows the children to have

concrete examples of the philosophical problems through the situations in the book; literature helps contextualize philosophy.

Another way of teaching philosophy to children, although more commonly practiced with high school students, is to hold a traditional philosophy lecture where the concepts are simplified. Mr. Tomich's philosophy class is an example of this method. The facilitator introduces a philosophical concept, for example altruism, and lectures on the different viewpoints. Then the students discuss the concept and write an essay. An integral feature of this model requires the facilitator to prepare philosophy lectures, which means a background in philosophy is beneficial for this model.

Mr. Tomich's lecture method is also the idea behind the novel *Sophie's World*, a novel that explores a little girl's quest through the history of philosophy in order to learn philosophical thinking. The novel, by Jostein Gaarder, functions not only as a novel but also as a way of teaching philosophy, much like Mr. Tomich's lecture method. The following is a synopsis of *Sophie's World*: "One day fourteen-year-old Sophie Amundsen comes home from school to find in her mailbox two notes, with one question on each: "Who are you?" and "Where does the world come from?" From that irresistible beginning, Sophie becomes obsessed with questions that take her far beyond what she knows of her Norwegian village. Through those letters, she enrolls in a kind of correspondence course, covering Socrates to Sartre, with a mysterious philosopher, while receiving letters addressed to another girl. Who is Hilde? And why does her mail keep turning up? To unravel this riddle, Sophie must use the philosophy she is learning--but the truth turns out to be far more complicated than she could have imagined" (Pritchard 2002). Clearly, this novel encompasses all three methods, making it a prime piece of philosophy teaching material.

The authors and philosophers of the movement certainly do not work alone and are in fact supported by a number of organizations, primarily the following: the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children at Montclair State University (IAPC), The International Council of Philosophical Inquiry with Children (ICPIC), The Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization (PLATO), the University of Washington's Center for Philosophy for Children (NW).

Back in 1974, the IAPC, a not-for-profit education center and the first philosophy for children organization, was founded at Montclair State University. Soon after in 1979, the IAPC began the first journal specifically for the topic of philosophy for children titled <u>Thinking: The Journal of Philosophy for Children</u> (Montclair). This journal is a major contribution to the movement. The IAPC's mission revolves around three tenets: educational programming, dissemination and professional affiliation, and finally research (Montclair). Those three tenets comprise the IAPC's mission. The teaching model that the IAPC has pioneered is characterized by having students both read and act out a philosophical story. The IAPC then allows the children to decide what subjects interest them most and they then guide the discussion based on the suggestions. Finally, the students discuss the subjects that they chose as a philosophical group, learning how to argue and articulate better as a class, creating a "community of inquiry." Finally, the IAPC is revolutionary in that they have a curriculum they have created, with their own unique novels and lesson plans revolving around logic, ethics, and aesthetics (Montclair).

A big step for the movement on an international level took place in 1985 with the creation of the ICPIC. Meant to be a global organization, the ICPIC's mission is to help develop philosophical discussion and inquiry with children all over the world, specifically parts of the world that do not already partake in such inquiry. The ICPIC's main contribution is the annual

conference that they host on the Philosophy of Children; in 2013, the mission of the conference was to "examine the theory and practice of philosophy with children for all phases of schooling as well informal education contexts" (ICPIC), as an example of what conference topics are like. The ICPIC also has their very own journal titled Childhood and Philosophy. This journal is made up of "articles, transcripts, curricula, news advertisements, reviews, and graphics" (ICPIC), and in order to show their global spirit, the journal is actually published in six different languages, including Spanish, English, Portuguese, Italian, and French.

Fortunate enough to have a philosophical acronym, PLATO is an organization that "advocates and supports introducing philosophy to K-12 students through programs, resource-sharing and the development of a national network of those working in pre-college philosophy" (PLATO 2009). A distinctive part of PLATO's mission is the inclusion of philosophy education for all children, not just the talented or wealthy. They provide a website with an extensive amount of resources to guide the research and exploration of the philosophy with children movement (I actually began my preliminary research through PLATO's website). PLATO believes that "it is meaningful to them" (PLATO 2009). The website is also a great resource for finding lesson plans and programs, a great tool for teachers looking to include philosophy into their curriculum.

Finally, the University of Washington's Center for Philosophy with Children at the University of Washington at Seattle, run by renowned Philosophy for Children author Jana Mohr Lone, has also made a significant contribution to the movement. Much like PLATO, the NW Center's website is a beacon of information and guidance on how to start a philosophy program, how to teach philosophy, etc. The NW Center also has a wealth of resources, including lesson plans on hundreds of books and numerous classroom activities revolving around philosophy. The

NW center is unique for their systematic presence in the Seattle school system since 1996 when

the center opened with the mission of bringing philosophy to children and young people

everywhere (University of Washington).

The principal achievement of the center is its "Philosophers in Schools" program, which

is a partnership between the center and the public school system of Seattle. The program offers

philosophy sessions for students and workshops for parents and teachers on how to teach

philosophy. Trained University of Washington Philosophy graduate students do the teaching and

facilitation. The University of Washington students are not only trained but they also receive

academic credit for the sessions at the schools. The center believes that their "Philosophy for

Children seminars introduce UW students to methods of doing philosophy with young people by

stressing the formation of a philosophical community of inquiry, in which students are

encouraged to ask their own questions, develop views and articulate reasons for them, and learn

from one another" (University of Washington). Because of the success of the partnership, the

center has begun a Philosopher-in-Residence project. This project is the natural expansion of the

"Philosophers in Schools" program, where John Muir Elementary School will have a full-time

philosophy staff member. The main expectation of the resident philosopher is that he or she "will

deepen immeasurably our ability to develop strong and sustainable philosophy programs in

schools, by providing an ongoing model for teachers of philosophical engagement, regular

support and training, and outreach to the school's parents" (University of Washington), and will

do so by holding regular philosophy sessions in the classrooms all across John Muir elementary

school. This program marks a big step towards the systematic inclusion of philosophy in public

schooling.

The NW Center is also exceptional in that they have established a fellowship program with the University of Washington graduate school and also publishes a journal of their own. The Philosophy for Children Graduate Fellowship program admits three fellows per year who research and facilitate with the center's programs and initiatives, such as the publication of the journal Questions: Philosophy for Young People, which is co-sponsored by the American Philosophical Association and PLATO (University of Washington). What is special about this specific journal is that not only is the content meant for children and young adults, but also all the content is actually written by children and young adults, giving the students of this movement a voice for themselves. This is important because giving the children a voice in the movement allows scholars to remember that the movement is about them, not the philosophers theorizing, but the actual learning children.

The articles that are included in the journal Questions: Philosophy for Young People explore questions that are introduced by the journal to participating audiences revolving a specific philosophical concept or idea. For example, the very first issue explored questions on children's rights. A few questions that were posed to young people were the following: "What is a child? How are children different from adults? What rights should parents and other adults have over children? What gives parents the rights to make some decisions for their children? Should young people be entitled to make their own decisions?" (Questions 2001). The issue includes quotes, transcripts, and summaries of sessions with children doing philosophy revolving around those questions, with the facilitation of a teacher. This process yields interesting thoughts, such as: "Most of the time the parents always want the best for their children. And since they have more experience over the years than their children, I think that's what gives parents rights over children." "Parents should have the right to make some decisions. But it all depends on a

number of things: the children's ages, how mature they are, and what decisions are being made"
(Questions 2001).

One Philosophy for Children (P4C) program that came about indirectly because of the
NW Center is the Oaxaca Philosophy for Children Initiative (OPCI). The OPCI is a P4C program
that works with the Centro de Esperanza Infantil and run by Amy-Reed Sandoval, a PhD
candidate at the University of Washington (Oaxaca). Sandoval, who has been involved with the
NW center for years and still teaches through the "Philosophers in Schools" program, claims that
she was "inspired by the work of the University of Washington Center for Philosophy for
Children, [so] she approached the Centro de Esperanza Infantil in 2010 about the possibility of
setting up a K-12 philosophy program in Oaxaca" (Oaxaca), and she was successful. For the past
three summers, Sandoval has been teaching rigorous philosophy courses in Oaxaca. The program
has sparked the attention of the media through YouTube, expanding the conversation and idea of
philosophy for children into the mainstream media outlets. Public exposure is extremely
beneficial to P4C programs because they get other educators and scholars discussing how to
incorporate philosophy into their school.

School Case Studies

The inclusion of philosophy in elementary schools is exemplified by the previous
description of Seattle and their partnership with the NW center for Philosophy with Children, but
in order to contextualize my trial of my curriculum I offer a few local case studies. Creekside
Elementary in Boulder Valley District and Shining Mountain Waldorf School have two
extremely different school models, but both have successfully incorporated philosophy into their
students' education. Finally, the University of Colorado at Boulder has its own outreach program

called the Philosophy Outreach Program of Colorado (POPCO), which is also doing some novel activities with the inclusion of philosophy into secondary and primary education.

Creekside Elementary is unique for its diverse culture, which includes over twenty languages spoken by international students, which has created what Creekside claims to be "a creative, vibrant, diverse, and motivating setting for all children"(About Creekside). For our purposes, Creekside Elementary is of special interest because of an innovative teacher named Mr. Tomich. While studying at the University of Colorado at Boulder, Mr. Tomich minored in philosophy while pursuing his education degree. All his life, his minor in philosophy allowed him to understand the deeper meaning behind the surface of everyday events and conversations. Mr. Tomich saw the value in philosophy and also noticed that his fifth grade students were especially prone to philosophical thought and discussion, regardless if they were aware of it or not (Tomich). So, Mr. Tomich proposed a new enrichment class that would run for approximately six weeks for two hours a week. His philosophy class was approved and composed of gifted and talented students. Mr. Tomich has been teaching his philosophy class for over twenty years now; he believes it has been a success, and so do his former students (Tomich). Mr. Tomich's philosophy class is not literature based but instead a combination of lecture and discussion, where he introduces a certain philosophical concept, for example altruism, and then lets the children discuss it with his guidance. Mr. Tomich was never aware of the Philosophy for Children Movement and simply thought that his students could benefit from philosophical discussion, because he believes that they are the real philosophers after all (Tomich).

One negative feature of Mr.Tomich's model is that only gifted and talented students are selected, where I and many others believe philosophy can be done by any child, not just the

smartest. It can easily be understood why the most talented students would be selected because philosophy is generally viewed as difficult and advanced, when in reality philosophy is difficult mainly for adults; children have no qualms about asking questions that may seem crazy but are in fact thought-provoking. Adults have a difficult time letting go of preconceived notions and opinions, or knowledge that they claim as fact. Children are natural born philosophers, and Mr. Tomich does understand that, but the school sees it the mainstream way.

Shining Mountain Waldorf School (SMWS) is a "not-for-profit 501©3 independent school" that was founded in 1983 in Boulder. As a Waldorf school, SMWS is modeled after Rudolph Steiner's 1919 vision of a school that would "educate the body, mind and spirit of children." Such a progressive school would clearly be capable of incorporating philosophy into their curriculum, and indeed they do, but faintly and only for the high school age students. Some of their high school courses include: Philosophy of Mathematics, Geometry and Philosophy of Rene Descartes, Greek Geometry and Deductive Proofs, and Science in Society. The school also incorporates a lot of history of philosophy into their history and English courses (Shining Mountain). While these courses are geared toward specifically analyzing science and math through a philosophical lens, the same weight to philosophy is not given in the English and history department, which is unfortunate. Also unfortunate is the lack of philosophy influence in the elementary and middle school curriculum, which is probably due to the general notion that philosophy is too difficult for children. Regardless, SMWS is making great strides just like Mr. Tomich but with a different method.

Another way that philosophy has been introduced into high schools in the Boulder area is through the University of Colorado's Philosophy Outreach Program – Colorado. "The Philosophy Outreach Program of Colorado (POPCO) offers high school and middle school

students a FREE introduction to philosophy. Through support by University Outreach Council, the Department of Philosophy, and the Center for Values & Social Policy, CU graduate students and faculty travel to Colorado schools to lead Socratic (interactive) discussions for one to six class periods" (Sturgis), and they cover quite the range of topics. In a lecture/discussion format, POPCO introduces and teaches on subjects like the following: science vs. pseudo-science, genetic engineering and ethics, free will and determinism, environmental ethics, and environmental justice (Sturgis). POPCO is contacted directly by teachers who would like to request a presentation, which puts the power in the hands of the teachers to realize that philosophy is crucial. That is a potential problem for POPCO, given that schools may not know of their existence or of the value of such a program. A more systematic and widespread system is needed.

The Curriculum

Before explaining what the curriculum I have created entails, it is important to note that the original curriculum I created is not what came most naturally to the students and is not what I ended up teaching. The original plan was extremely structured and followed a strict plan, and after one class I realized that the children were more capable of engaging in philosophical discourse than I had originally expected. This capability allowed them to take my questions to the next level of analysis; I realized I was going to have to challenge them by challenging myself. Challenging myself literally means planning discussions and lessons for the children that I myself cannot predict. The benefit of a model where the facilitator is also participating in the inquiry, also known as the Socratic method, is that the children gain a sense of confidence and respect knowing that their supposed superior is struggling through these big questions as well, just like them. Being able to connect with the discussion facilitator allows for more open opinions and a sense of trust; the students trust that their thoughts are not going to be met with hostility. After this realization I completely revamped the curriculum and made it much more loose and fluid, which also means that the facilitator responsibilities also changed. Without as much structure, it is important that the facilitator behave sensitively and inquisitively; an effective facilitator understands that the children are capable of discussion at a deeper level than what most adults expect. Therefore, my curriculum may seem simple and straightforward, but that is because the bulk of the work now lies in the facilitator's ability to spark conversation and ask thought-inducing questions.

The curriculum that I did teach at Creekside Elementary is characterized by having a central children's novel, which can be replaced by a picture book(s), and discussion sessions that explore philosophical questions that arise from situations in the book. I will first explain the

importance of the novel or picture book, what its function is in the discussion, and why choosing a novel/picture book carefully is crucial to the success of the discussion. Then I will give examples of sample lesson plans based off the novel that I chose for my trial. Finally, I will explain how my curriculum supplements the discussions with miniature lectures and classroom activities.

My curriculum, above all else, is meant to foster critical thinking. Here is a classic definition of critical thinking: "We understand critical thinking to be purposeful, self-regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, as well as explanation of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological, or contextual considerations upon which that judgment is based…. The ideal critical thinking is habitually inquisitive, well-informed, trustful of reason, open-minded, flexible, fair-minded in evaluation, honest in facing personal biases, prudent in making judgments, willing to reconsider, clear about issues, orderly in complex matters, diligent in seeking relevant information, reasonable in the selection of criteria, focused in inquiry, and persistent in seeking results which are as the subject and the circumstances of inquiry permit" (Pritchard 2002). I believe that this curriculum helps children develop critical thinking skills, like those mentioned in the above definition.

My recommended first step in doing philosophy with children is to choose a novel or picture book, and choose it wisely. Most children's books are going to have plenty of philosophically provocative content, such as instances of stealing, death, lying, etc. But it is crucial to pick a novel or series of picture books that are going to be interesting and offer a diverse amount of philosophical content. A novel that only explores stealing briefly is not going to keep the discussion interesting because there simply is only so much you can discuss when it comes to stealing, as will be seen by my first day of teaching. A novel with many different

situations and life topics is prime. Also, the book should not be too difficult to read in comparison to the ability of the students. This allows the students to read the novel and easily comprehend the content; children who are confused and not in agreement over the content of the novel are not going to be able to participate in the philosophical discussion as well as they could if the content of the novel was straightforward. This is not a reading class; the goal is not to challenge the student's reading skills but to challenge their thinking skills. This distinction is important because many times discussions based on novels lead to discussion about prose and content, whereas philosophical discussion is aiming to use the novel as context for more overarching questions, such as the morality of stealing. Once a novel (or picture book) is chosen, it is of course imperative that the facilitator read the novel analytically, jotting potential philosophical points throughout the novel.

While I chose to utilize a novel, picture books are also an option. While a novel based program may look at a chapter or a few chapters in a session, an entire picture book can be read and discussed in a session. This method allows for a wide range of topics to be covered throughout the entire teaching time period. I specifically did not choose a picture book because my trial was during Creekside Elementary fifth-grade reading time, which meant the only option was a novel. If I had utilized picture books in my trial, I would have chosen a series of picture books that explore a wide array of topics. Both options have their merit and are extremely effective in teaching philosophy to children.

The ability to identify situations in a novel that could lead to philosophical discourse is a skill that a facilitator must learn before facilitating a philosophy class with children. There are a number of ways a facilitator can learn this skill: attend a workshop or training seminar, watch other philosophy with children sessions and see what questions other facilitators ask and how

they ask, or simply come in to the session with an open mind and sensitivity. The reason for the lack of strict rules when it comes to learning how to facilitate is because all it really requires is a natural inquisitive intuition and an openness to participate in the discussion at the same intellectual level as the students. I learned to facilitate my curriculum by watching Mr. Tomich teach his philosophy class last year. I took extensive notes on how he taught and absorbed it into my own style of facilitation. There is no exact science to facilitation; conversing with children over philosophy may or may not come naturally, but practice definitely improves facilitation immensely.

After choosing and reading a novel or picture book, what I suggest is to develop lesson plans. Creating lesson plans is a tricky art. It is important to have plenty of lesson plans for each chapter (or chapters depending on length and content) of the book; I specifically create two lesson plans per chapter (or chapters) of the novel, or two lesson plans per picture book. Of course, the length of the chapters may limit the ability to plan a lesson per chapter, so a general rule of thumb is to create two lesson plans per philosophical topic. If chapters 1-5 explore the concept of stealing through characters and story line, and no other topics arise, then of course two lesson plans for all five chapters is still appropriate. The facilitator's judgment plays a key role in determining how many lesson plans to create. The reason that more than one lesson plan is suggested is because sometimes the children just do not want to participate in a discussion that does not spark their interest, so a back-up plan is crucial.

This kind of lesson plan is not what is typically thought of as in traditional education. Instead of key points to get across and how to get the students to understand them, a philosophy with children lesson plan should consist of various discussion questions. The most work-intensive part of creating the lesson plan is the process of creating questions that will provoke the

children and get them thinking. Questions should use scenes from the novel or picture book to give context to what the question is asking. For example, regarding a scene about lying in the novel Homecoming by Cynthia Voigt, I created the question, "Dicey asks Sammy to lie by making the baker feel bad for him in order to get free food. She also lied to the nice man that gave her two dollars. Is lying always wrong?" The previous example shows how discussion questions need to be created using the novel but also incorporating a much larger and deeper question, in this case the question of whether or not lying is always wrong. By using the book's context the students are given a concrete example of what the discussion is about, which is more effective then simply starting off with the question "Is lying always wrong?" which can be daunting and confusing. A supplement to the questions the facilitator offers can come from the student's themselves. Jana Mohr Lone and Sara Goering advocate having the students also create questions of their own, which should absolutely be practiced. Session should provide time for student questions as well as facilitator questions.

Depending on the length of the program, a significant amount of time at the beginning should be spent exploring big questions in order to accustom the kids to the process of philosophical discussion. These first lesson plans should therefore consist of various discussion questions and the session itself should lead to proper arguments that the students create themselves. This means that lesson plans are just questions, and that planning for the discussion is actually impossible because it is hard to predict what the children will say and where they will take the discussion. The focus in the beginning of the program is to work on the students' argumentative skills and teach them the process of asking a question, discussing it, and creating arguments, also known as doing philosophy. I suggest that one of the first few sessions should include a miniature lecture, as I did in my trial, regarding logic and terms that are frequently used

in philosophy. Depending on the age of the students in the program, logic and terms can be simple or complex, but a general understanding should be conveyed in order to give students the tools to discuss philosophy properly.

In the case of the fifth grade class that I taught, terms such as hypothetical, premise, subjective, objective, and the "if, then" logical form were not too difficult for the students to grasp. A few of the first 45 minute sessions were spent lecturing on these concepts, but at a rudimentary enough level that they could understand. We explained the concepts that should be pertinent in understanding the discussion and specifically how the facilitator facilitates, given that these terms make the job of the facilitator much easier and the students learn proper argumentative skills. The first few sessions therefore end up being not planned entirely, but an argument should arise out of the children, as will be seen in the results of my trial. Including logic and terms is only crucial depending on the mission of the class. If the mission is to have the children learn proper argumentation and philosophy, then including logic and terms is appropriate, but if philosophical discussion is the only goal, then logic and terms are unnecessary. The decision is up to the facilitator.

After the initial part of the program, I believe more planning is required for the lessons because by this point the students have practiced the philosophy process enough that more challenging activities can now be incorporated into the lesson plans. In addition to discussion questions, academic activities that allow the children to lead their own philosophical inquiries and arguments can be a useful technique in teaching philosophy to children. There are a number of ways to do this: have students break into groups and discuss a question the facilitator poses, have students propose their own questions that they came up with as homework, have student groups present on their discussion (what did the group discuss, what conclusions were arrived at

(if any), etc.), and countless more. The idea behind these exercises is to give the facilitator reins over to the students themselves. By taking leadership in the class, students garner a better understanding of how philosophy discussion works and how they themselves can discuss and argue for beliefs that they have formed, in an effective and organized manner.

Many other P4C programs begin by playing games and conducting other fun activities, such as aesthetics games which require students to draw pictures showing what they see as art and see as not art, then discussing the implication from there. I chose to not incorporate such activities because of the age of the students I was working with, mainly, I felt I could challenge them in a more academic setting. This choice, when conducting a P4C program, is beneficial either way and is really about preference in relation to the age group.

At the end of the program, many educators wish to assess the progress students have made in a tangible way, and therefore, I suggest a written assignment be assigned. A written assignment can also be a way of letting the students use the skills they have learned by formulating their own discussion and argument of a philosophical topic. The essay should pose a question that is both broad enough to formulate an argument about but also narrow enough that the student has a clear understanding of what is being asked. This is easy to achieve given the use of the novel; specific scenes can be part of the essay prompt, allowing students to have a reference point for their thoughts. The written assignment is again optional, for assessment can be measure in other ways, such as observing discussions and gauging their complexity, but I believe that in a school setting where results are often necessary, a essay can be a prime tool in appeasing such requirements.

My Trial at Creekside Elementary

The curriculum just described is what I implemented in a school as a trial. As mentioned in the introduction, I volunteered for a teacher, Mr. Tomich, in his philosophy class, making it natural that I approach him with my curriculum trial. I approached Mr. Tomich with the original idea for the curriculum, and he was extremely open and flexible to my plan. He gave me 45 minutes, twice a week, for six weeks, to conduct my own philosophy class with a group of 25 fifth grade students. The book that was to be the literature part of the curriculum was not chosen by me; the 45 minutes that was given to me for philosophy was also reading time, and so it made more sense for me to pick up where they left off in the book they were currently reading, which was <u>Homecoming</u> by Cynthia Voigt. <u>Homecoming</u> is about four siblings who are abandoned by their mother and journey on their own to find their cousin Eunice, hoping their mother would be there, and then on to their grandmother's house. The oldest sibling and main character is Dicey, the mother figure to her siblings; Maybeth, is a quiet eight year-old; James, a smart ten year-old; and Sammy, the rambunctious six year-old.

Mr. Tomich gave me complete freedom to teach what I wished, as I wished, with the children. I decided to run the trial for six weeks, totaling twelve sessions.

The very first day was more interesting and complex than I could have ever predicted. The students and I read chapter six of <u>Homecoming</u>, and I decided to pose the following questions: In chapter 6 we see Sammy steal the lunch from the picnic area. Is stealing always wrong? What about taking the small boat, even though it was not theirs, just to cross the river? Is that morally okay? The children were shy at first, but thankfully a few brave souls spoke up. The children began with how stealing is usually wrong, but because the characters needed food and the boat, and the owners did not need those items, then it seemed to be okay. I responded by playing the devil's advocate, asking questions like: well, what if the owners did need those items

then was it wrong? How do you decide if it is wrong or right when you do not know if the owner is well off or worse-off? After some discussion I decided to guide the students in writing an argument for when it is morally permissible to lie. The argument the children came up with, with my facilitation, was the following:

> *It's okay to steal, as long as:*
> *P1) No resources*
> *P2) No ways to get resources, other than stealing*
> *P3) and this is not your fault*
> *P4) and as long as the person who is being stolen from can replace it*
> *- If (P1 & P2 & P3 & P4), then, it is okay to steal survival items under survival*
> *circumstances or to keep family together*

The first day was exciting and more then I could have ever hoped for or planned for. The kids were receptive, inquisitive, and enthusiastic. It was also extremely hard. The children were hard to keep focused and got ridiculous at times, so not only did I have to think on my feet but I also had to control them. I realized that this experience was going to be a challenge, because not only did I challenge them, but they too challenged me.

The next session was chapter seven, where Dicey and the rest encounter a nice man named Windy, and she contemplates the idea of home, so I posed the following questions: What is home to you? The definition from the book that Dicey thinks of is "the place where you finally stayed, forever and ever" referring to the tombstones she was sitting by in the novel, but then Dicey changes the definition to "where you rested content and never wanted to go anywhere else." In this chapter we see the kindness of strangers, but we are also told in general that strangers are dangerous and that we should not talk to them. Did Dicey do the right thing by accepting Windy's help?

The students and I never even arrived at the second question, which shows how intense the conversation got. The kids really liked the idea of home as an abstract idea rather than

necessarily a physical place. After discussing for a while, and helping the children see past the physical concept of home to the deeper meaning, the following argument was created:

> *Home is…*
> *P1) a feeling you are connected to*
> *P2) Home makes you who you are*
> *P3) where you want to go back*

We ran out of time that day, and I learned that time management is another crucial part of this experiment. If the children are not progressing on their own, it is my job to keep the discussion focused, which can be extremely difficult given the excitable nature of the discussion. Also, it became apparent that the connection between the literature and the philosophy needed to be made more apparent. I realized I needed to focus the lessons on having the children understand that the book is meant to be an example of larger philosophical questions. I took these considerations into account when creating subsequent group discussion lesson plans.

The third session was also significant, mainly because I gained an understanding that the children were capable of making even deeper connections than what I thought possible. We read chapter eight, where we see James steal twenty dollars from one of the men who helped them. Dicey finds out and yells at James, and James responds by pointing out that Sammy stole that lunch (from chapter 6), and did not get scolded. I posed these questions.

> "Lets first work through the differences between what James did and what Sammy did: Are the two situations different? Using our argument from last week let's decide".
> The following graph shows what the students thought of.

James took $20 from Stewart	Sammy took a bag of food/wallet from a picnic site
Stewart did not need it, but is not rich	They gave the wallet back because of fear from the police
Stewart and Windy helped them	Sammy thought he was helping/needed food
James is 10 years old	Sammy is 6 years old

Having the students fill out the chart helped them understand the factual differences between what James did and what Sammy did; ultimately, the students understood that it was morally wrong for James to steal but not necessarily for Sammy. I then continued to ask the students about the nature of morally wrong and right, specifically I asked, "well, who decides what is wrong or right? How do we know what is good and bad?" Then the students decided to abandon the question at hand and decided to define morality in terms of a previous discussion we had: whether altruistic acts can ever truly be altruistic. The conclusion of that session was that altruism is not possible because we always receive something in return for acting selflessly, such as a reward or good moral conscious. Given this, the students decided that morality should be defined by whether an act is good selfish or bad selfish, a topic that will be explored later.

It was hard to keep up with the kids and move the discussion forward because I myself was extremely confused on the issue: the ten-year olds stumped me! The most memorable quote from this session was the following: " It seems like it is the people in power that decide what is good or bad in a society," regarding how Hitler decided for all of Germany that the Jewish population is not good. I ended the discussion with an assignment: the children were to think of definitions for what "good selfish" is and what "bad selfish" is and write the definition down for next class.

The next session focused on what "good selfish" and "bad selfish" are. I had the children break up into groups and share their definitions and formulate one they could agree on and to present. Then all the groups presented on their definitions. The general consensus was that good selfish is an action that is self-serving and positive, while bad selfish is an action that is self-serving and negative. The definitions may sound simple, but the implications are deep. The following quotes are samples of what the children came up with:

"Good selfish is something that not only benefits you and helps you but benefits your society and helps other people, and bad is something that can do harm to other people, but it can put others in a bad position."

"Something that not only helps you but this helping you is also helping other people and the society, and it helps them more then you. Bad selfish helps you more and makes you happy and other people sad."

"Good selfish is when you do something selfish for the greater good."

Ultimately, the students came up with their arguments for why altruism does or does not exist, and the following was an especially intricate argument:

Student: I can prove that altruism is real without someone dying because if I act like – let's say hypothetically there's a big disease that's going around that makes you lose your memory– like everything that you've ever done and you can't remember anything. Kind of like amnesia. But you can tell it's kind of like cool because you can like walk up to someone if they have it and say I want your disease, and take their disease and they'll have everything back. And so if you do that for someone else, and you lose your whole memory then that would be altruistic, because you wouldn't be – you wouldn't be able to see – you'd be seeing their satisfaction, but you wouldn't be able to remember their satisfaction.

Teacher: Can't we go back to asking you what inspired you to do that? Even though you lost everything and you knew you weren't going to lose anything and there was not going to be any enjoyment, what caused you to do that at that moment? Wasn't there your own desire to let them have their memory back? Even at your loss?

Student: I know. But what caused me to do that was – it couldn't have been the fact that I wanted to see them happy because I wouldn't have seen them happy. I might have made them happy, but I wouldn't have seen them happy, and that was my desire. So if that's my desire, then I can't see that happening. But you can still see them happy. You just don't remember.

We then took the rest of the time that day learning logic. I decided to teach the children modus ponens and modus tollens because I believed, after experiencing a few sessions with them, that the students were in fact capable of understanding these logical argument forms. Also, since I kept structuring arguments for them in that form, I figured they would benefit from learning the forms, in order to help them structure their own arguments in the future. That is

exactly what philosophy is supposed to foster. It took some slow explanations, and many fun yet ridiculous examples, but the students absolutely learned the forms and how to use them, and they seemed to truly appreciate the fact that I taught them logic. Mr. Tomich explained to the students that these concepts were college level and they thanked me for challenging them and believing in them. This session made me realize how empowered all the students felt when I challenged them and showed my own confusion with the discussions. They appreciate being treated like adults, and they gain self-confidence when they understand that adults do not know everything and are also confused by many of the same transcendental questions as them. Below are a few memorable logic examples that the students created:

> *"If Kobie acts like a hippie, then Cassidy will crack up. Kobie is acting like a hippie. Therefore, Cassidy is cracking up."*

> *"If I'm a hater, then I hate. I don't hate. Therefore, I am not a hater."*

> *"If others are happy, then I'm happy. Others are happy. Therefore, I am happy."*

> *"If my dog dies, then I didn't feed him. I fed my dog. Therefore, my dog is alive."*

> *"If I like food, then I will jump. I like food, therefore I jump. If I like food, then I will jump. I didn't jump, therefore I dislike food."*

The next few sessions followed the same pattern as the previous four, except for one noteworthy difference: the students were improving. They were improving in their argumentation skills and general understanding of how to do philosophy. They started realizing what questions are philosophical and which ones are not, which I noticed after hearing a girl tell her classmate to "go deeper, you aren't thinking deep enough," regarding a shallow and non-philosophical example that her peer gave. Seeing the children improving gave me the confidence to challenge them further, so the next session I tried something that Jana Mohr Lone pioneered, the moral spectrum activity.

"Moral Spectrum" Exploration Exercise
In this exercise, students are introduced to "the moral spectrum"—seven different perspectives on the right thing to do, seven different questions to ask themselves to determine whether a particular course of action is right or wrong. These questions are drawn from the dominant moral theories in Western philosophy over the past 2500 years or so. They are presented, however, in a form that is quite accessible; the focus is on questions to ask rather than principles to follow. The questions explore issues of liberty, duty, compassion, community, happiness, virtue, and self. They thus mirror the central concerns of, respectively, existentialism, Kantian deontology, an ethic of caring, Humean communitarianism, utilitarianism, Aristotelian virtue theory, and ethical egoism.

We refer to these questions as different "moral prisms" to emphasize their function as different perspectives on the right thing to do, perspectives that, together, form what can be called a "moral spectrum." The prisms and their questions are as follows:

• The Existentialist prism asks: "What course(s) of action will set people most free?"

• The Deontological prism asks: "What would I do if everyone in the world were to do as I did?"

• The Ethic of Caring prism asks: "What course(s) of action will best sustain and nurture a caring relationship between myself and others?"

• The Communitarian prism asks: "How would I act if everyone in my community knew exactly what I were doing?"

• The Utilitarian prism asks: "What course(s) of action will best maximize total happiness in the world?"

• The Virtue Ethics prism asks: "What would the most virtuous person I know of do in this situation?"

• The Egoist prism asks: "What course(s) of action will most effectively ensure that my short- and long-term goals are reached?"

University of Washington's Center for Philosophy for Children. (n.d.). University of Washington's Center for Philosophy for Children. Retrieved from http://depts.washington.edu/nwcenter/

I first explained each perspective in the simplest possible way; luckily Jana Mohr Lone already simplified the perspectives effectively. In order to conduct the activity, I posed a specific moral question that arose in the novel: is it acceptable for teachers, cousin Eunice, and Father

Joseph to treat James better than Sammy because James is smart and well behaved and Sammy is

not? Then I had the children break up into seven groups, each group assigned to a specific ethical

perspective. Then they were tasked with discussing the question using that perspective. Finally,

each group presented on what they found. The results were incredible. Every group presented

points that were completely correct; they understood the theory and applied it to a moral question

that arose in a situation in a book, giving them context for their analysis. The children felt proud

and so were Mr. Tomich and I: the students were starting to understand philosophy. The

following quotes are from this memorable session, going in order of presentation. The transcript

is verbatim, but the bold sections are significant, so the classroom climate can also be followed:

Student: (Existentialist) So what we were thinking was if – we first assumed that it was just both of them being treated well. So, if both of them were treated well, we thought that that was going to be good because then it would like – Sammy might behave better because he would feel more at home, because people would be treating him nicer. And then ,also, it would like take some stuff off Dicey and cousin Eunice's back kind of, and so they wouldn't have to worry about Sammy and then James would also be together. But then we looked at the fact that maybe what if they're both treated badly?

Student: Yeah. So even if they're treated well, it would give Sammy more positive energy to maybe be better towards others, because we're saying that each one should be treated equally. But we also said what if – you don't treat your parents like you do your friends. So we said well, different authorities should be treated equally, but even though they're different. Not even though they're different. A parent should be treated different than a friend, but two parents together should not be treated differently. But two friends together should be treated equal, too.

Student: Then we also decided that if like for this situation, if we decided that the action would be good, would be that the thing that would set the most people free, then it would be probably be treating both of them nice.

Student: **Equally. Treating them both equally. Even if it wasn't equally it would still be – you should still treat them equally, even if you treated them both bad. So if you treated them both bad, it would make them both more intimate, and feel better together.**

Student: **Yeah, and they would have each other.**

Teacher: **Okay. So you guys think that from an existentialist point of view, treating them equally would set the most people free?**

Student: Uh-huh. Yeah.

Student: As in equally for them.

Student: Like the way that it would go, it would make them both feel the same way. Like even if it's not like —

Teacher: Their perception of being treated the same.

Teacher: Treating them equally at their level.

Student: Yeah. Yeah.

Student: Because if they were treated differently, they'd feel apart and they'd both feel bad. James would feel bad so everyone would feel bad for themselves, and then he would want to be in James' position.

Student: And James would want to be in Sammy's position.

Student: Then they would connect better probably, because they'd have more stuff to relate to.

Teacher: Awesome, guys. Thank you. Alright. Number two.

Student: Well, we did deontological. What would I do if everyone were to do as I did?

Student: **So if everyone treated people like James the way they treated people like James, and the way they treated people like Sammy, it would be like discrimination against stubborn kids, and like bullying and abuse would happen. And you can take it from there.**

Student: **Kids can't then – that would be like then kids wouldn't have to like fit in with everyone else so they would like pretend to be smart. So then they wouldn't feel like themselves anymore. So then kids can't share their opinion, so like kids would have problems letting you know, like what people need. If I needed more help in reading I wouldn't let you know anymore.**

Teacher: **So if we all treated James the way they're treating James. So we treated all the smart people in the world better than all the stubborn people.**

Student: Okay. And also like kids pretending to be smart so they can't tell other people about what they don't understand during learning, so they can't learn stuff either.

Teacher: Okay. Cool. So it's not okay to treat James better than Sammy?

Student: No.

Teacher: Cool. Number three.

Student: So we're doing the ethic of caring. Which is, what action will nurture a caring relationship between myself and others? So I think James and Sammy should be treated differently to a level. Of course, Sammy being adored it could go either way. If, let's say he could try to be better at things and try to learn and have better etiquette. But of course, it could take a turn on him going away and just not really caring about anything anymore. So if we do this up to a level, Sammy will probably get better etiquette.

Teacher: And then have a better relationship with other people.

Student: Yes. Exactly. But of course, if he starts getting worse they can try to treat him equal again. If that's the case, it will probably work.

Teacher: What about treating James better all his life? Will that make a better relationship between him and others?

Student: No. That could lead to stubbornness. Just thinking he's better than everyone else in the world.

Teacher: Okay. Cool. Awesome. Okay, number four.

Student: **We did communitarian, and how would I act if everyone knew what I was doing? So we said if everyone knew that people were treating James better than Sammy, like the people who were treating James better than Sammy would probably treat Sammy better because it could be bad for like their reputation or something. Yeah.**

Teacher: **So it looks bad. If everybody in the world knew what they were doing they'd probably be like 'that's not good'. So they would probably not do it anymore. Right?**

Student: Yeah.

Teacher: **That's interesting, and I'm going to comment on that one, because sometimes adults say well, quit worrying about what everyone thinks. Because sometimes it's a good one to say you know what? I'm doing this, and I ought to put it through the filter of what would everybody think based on what I'm doing? Sometimes it's a good thing. That you're saying to yourself, you're saying oh my gosh, most people would think I'm a big jerk.**

And then sometimes that can change behavior. So it is. I think the communitarian approach can be good at times so you can double check yourself. That's a good job.

Student: What about if like, so, they were treating them differently, kind of, and they looked at what Sammy was doing to get that treatment, so then those people would say after he gets in fights that he deserves being treated differently.

Teacher: So you're putting it into a more complex filter saying that if they knew everything they would understand why, but that's okay. Yeah, that's reasonable.

Teacher: Yeah, that would make sense. But at the face value. If they just saw them being treated differently. Yeah.

Teacher: That's a good point. Yeah. Thank you. Now number five. Alright, do you guys agree or disagree?

Student: We agree.

Teacher: Right. Okay. This group disagrees, so we're going to hear both sides. Go.

Student: **So ours is utilitarian. Which action maximizes happiness for the world? And I said it was good they treated Sammy not as good as James because he would then learn better, James already knows things. He's good at doing things like school. And then Sammy, he's a kid, and he has nothing to respond back that would actually make sense. So like Sammy would then, when he grows up, he would become a better person. Like not steal.**

Teacher: So by treating Sammy differently he'll be a better person in the long run, and make the world better. What do you guys think?

Student: So first we agreed. Right? And then I said but if everybody treats Sammy poorly, like badly, then Sammy will think like oh, they don't like me. I'm not good enough for them. And then this will change like his attitude with the people around him.

Teacher: So he'll become a worse person, because he'll be —

Student: No, but if it's only Dicey and like the Tillermans that treat him this way, it will be good for him. But if it's like everyone in the globe that treats him —

Teacher: These are communitarian. What would happen if everyone treated Sammy badly?

Student: That would be really bad.

Teacher (Mr. T):   I want to tell you something, Miss Mary. This is an interesting classroom. Because my experience from all the years, not just from teaching philosophy, is that kids are more punitive than adults. A lot of times when I give a situation where I say you know, what should you do with this kid? A lot of them are like punish him. Whip him. And this class tends to be much more aware of well, if you're too hard on a kid, after a while they feel bad about themselves. And that's a real compliment to you guys.

Usually kids are like young adults who become parents who think punishment is a good way to get control of a child. And you guys seem to be beyond that. Where you're saying if you control a child constantly through punishment, there's some bad things that come from that. And that's really good that you're aware of that, because most often it's not the case.

Teacher: Are you guys ready? Okay.

Student: **I agree with Eli, and I disagree with you because _____ should. Like he will think like I'm not good enough for them and it'll make him like want to change so they will like him. And the reason they don't like him is because like he's misbehaving. And so if they do treat him that way, he'll want to change because they don't – like he's not good enough for them.** So he'll think well —

Student: Well, what if he doesn't take that turn saying I'll change just because they don't like me.

Student: But he's a kid, so he doesn't realize it.

Teacher: There's psychology studies that would say that treating a child badly all their life is going to make them not healthy adults.

Student: But if they do it when he's a kid and then he realizes okay, if I do something wrong I'm going to get yelled at. I don't want to be yelled at, so I —

Student: Yeah, no one wants to be yelled at.

Student: Nobody does everything right.

Student: I disagree with Dave and stuff because I don't think it's true that if you treat him bad he'll realize why he's being treated badly because he's only six. And so he probably would just think like the family doesn't love him, and I think that'll make him more stubborn and he'll just kind of like close up. So I think that they're probably going to treat him good.

Teacher: This is a great discussion. See how deep you guys have gone?

Student: I think Eli's wrong. Because what Eli's kind of saying is that fear is like a better way to rule, which is like not true. Because if you strike fear you're not really ruling. You're more of like forcing them.

Teacher: Guys, I want to add a little bit of information because the more information you guys have the more you can argue this point. Because actually what someone just said is usually if you use a little bit of fear, the kids who respond to fear adapt immediately and they change their behavior. Or even if you use rejection. So if a kid's being obnoxious and you go I don't want to play with you, they figure out immediately. The other kids who don't seem to figure it out, they already know. Generally speaking they know that they're not being liked or they know and further punishment doesn't seem to help. And it's a weird thing.

It's sort of like when a kid is not getting along, I don't need to sit down and say well gosh, if you just acted differently. Can't you figure this out? They already know, and there's another reason they're doing it. There's anger. Frustration.

Teacher: For the sake of argument I'm going to declare that Sammy is one of those kids, because I've read ahead of you guys and I know more.

Student: But somewhere where we read, when Sammy stole the groceries, when Dicey told him to stop he stopped.

Teacher: Okay. I'm sorry, guys. I want to finish the groups. I want to finish the groups. Last comment. Quinton.

Student: I hate to agree with Eli, but I have to agree with them. Because what's going on is Sammy is stubborn so he's like – when he's getting treated bad he's not going to like persevere through that. He's just going to like take it in and just be like I'm dying, kind of.

Teacher: Group number six. Who's number six? I know. I wish we had all the time in the world. Sorry. Alright. Go ahead.

Student: **Egoist. What action would allow me to reach my goals? Well, we decided that under this, you could treat one person better than another if you didn't – like if you liked that person more.**

Student: And each, Sammy and James are reaching different goals in their life.

Teacher: Yeah. You guys got it. If you like somebody more than the other one that is – under egoist theory, which is a totally good reason to treat them better.

Teacher: Last one. Virtue Ethics?

Student: **Virtue. And well what would the most virtuous person do? I think a good person would know to treat people equally. Because like it's kind of racist to like say well, no.**

Teacher: **Not racist, but prejudiced.**

Student: **Prejudiced. To say oh, you're smarter so I like you better. Because like if James was dumb, oh, you're dumb, but you're not.**

Teacher: **So the good person would treat them the same?**

Student: **Yeah. Because a good person, in their heart knows that everyone should be treated equally and maybe he or she would have had some experience with that early in their childhood.**

Teacher: Maybe a good person would even try to help Sammy. Right?

Student: Um-hmm.

Teacher: Okay, we're out of time.

I realized after this session that the children also wanted to choose what topics we talked about, and this concept was both exciting and frightening; the children wanted to explore what interested them but that also meant that I would have to do less planning and more thinking on my feet. I decided to give it a try.

The next session we talked about what the students wanted to talk about. The suggestions, which were unrelated to the novel, ranged from reincarnation, to what is the past, present, or future? To whether or not Robin Hood fit our theory of when it is morally acceptable to steal. We settled on talking about Robin Hood, and as expected this session was extremely difficult. Without a plan, I could not predict where the conversation might go and therefore what counterexamples, theories, or thought experiments I might need to know. This is when a background in philosophy becomes useful, because when a student claims that Robin Hood is not the same situation as poor people stealing from the rich, I can counter by asking them why?

What makes Robin Hood different? Is it because he does have resources and is stealing it for others? Isn't that more fair than having poor people get in trouble for stealing? Philosophy training is what has allowed me to survive the few sessions where the kids decided what to discuss.

Another session that was their decision was on metaphysics, more specifically, the nature of reality. I offered them the film The Matrix as a thought experiment, and instead of exploring how we come to know what is real or not real, the discussion ended up with the mind/body problem. The students could not understand how real Neo and Matrix Neo could still be the same Neo, so I offered them a suggestion: what if our bodies are not connected physically to our mind/soul? This seemed to be puzzling for them, but after some back and forth discussion; they understood what Descartes meant by "I think, therefore I am." Had it not been for my philosophy training, I do not believe I would have been capable of keeping up with the students and advancing the conversation.

A session that also stood out to me was on happiness. In the novel, Dicey and her siblings leave the safety of their Cousin Eunice's house in order to find a better home with their grandmother, not because Cousin Eunice was cruel, but she simply demanded too much. So I asked the students to tell me whether or not they thought Dicey and her siblings were better off in the safety of an adult or on their own. This conversation quickly led to happiness, and whether they were happier in one situation or another. After we discussed that for a while, I introduced a vastly different conception of happiness, Aristotle's Eudaimonia. I purposely explained the negative aspects of Eudaimonia, mainly how Aristotle believed that wealth, power, and beauty make it easier to reach Eudaimonia. I also stressed that Eudaimonia was an excellence, a

fulfillment of purpose over a lifetime. They were not very fond of the concept, so I had them

discuss what happiness meant to them. Here are some example definitions:

> *"Happiness is a balance between family, friends, enjoyment, work, success and a clear consciousness. The person's opinion on enjoyment and work factors in as well of course."*

> *"Happiness is being in the moment and not thinking about the past or future."*

> *"I think that happiness is an emotion, a feeling tied up with being happy with yourself because you helped others."*

> *"Happiness is a feeling of knowing you've done or accomplished something you're proud of."*

> *"Happiness is a feeling of worth and acceptance."*

> *"Happiness is feeling a sense of accomplishment."*

> *"Happiness is the feeling of knowing that throughout your life you will always have something, or someone, that supports you."*

> *"Happiness for me is when life is good and fun. Happiness to me is also being nice and doing the right thing."*

> *"Happiness is a great feeling inside that makes you feel warm and smile, sometimes from looking back on good things."*

> "Happiness is when you have everything you need and feel everything is perfect."

The following week the discussion returned to whether or not Dicey and her siblings

were better off with their cousin, or on the road alone. Two students disagreed with each other

and argued a point for well over five minutes. It was an impressive sight. Both students were

respectful of each other's opinions and tried to speak well and eloquently. I was impressed and

proud. Ultimately the discussion came down to how to Dicey and her siblings should be raised,

whether hardship is good or bad. One side of the argument claimed that hardship would build

stronger character, while the other side claimed that the struggle may cause the children to

become dysfunctional adults. At the end of the session, the children concluded that the best way

to raise a child was a balance between hardship and nurturing love; the children successfully

solved the dilemma of how to parent. This session was quite revolutionary to me and seemed

especially deep. The main argument went something like this:

> **Quintin:** I think it could be better for them to be on the road. I mean they won't get
> good health and all that stuff, but I think that when they go somewhere else like
> Cousin Eunice's they kind of change and when they are out on their own they're really
> like, there's always the danger of others hurting them, no safety, but I think they will
> have better character when they're older because they will know how to persevere
> through struggle.
>
> **Eli**: I have something to argue against Quintin, like Maybeth and all that, her behavior,
> it's hard, and a hard life can lead to drug addiction and that kind of stuff.
>
> **Quintin**: Yeah, but on the road, their behavior on the road so far shows that that
> wouldn't happen, they have shown that their character is what is affected.
>
> **Eli:** Well, let's take Maybeth into account, in that situation, she won't receive the help
> she needs.
>
> **Quintin:** But she seems to express her opinions more and talk when she's with Dicey.
>
> **Eli:** She will eventually have to be alone, though.
>
> **Quintin:** But that could make her depressed and lead to drug addiction also.

Reflections

Teaching philosophy to fifth graders is no easy undertaking, and as I found out, children

are capable of discussing and arguing on a par with adults. I know this because throughout the

trial, I myself was confused and puzzled on several occasions, and this itself is a major

realization. Psychology and society lead individuals to believe that philosophy cannot be taught to children, but what they do not understand is that what I am doing is not only teaching philosophical content, but also the philosophical process. The process involves respectful argumentation, how to structure arguments, and how to think critically. Children are more than capable of participating in the philosophical process and understanding rudimentary philosophical content, such as Descartes' mind-body problem as seen during a session with my students. Children are capable of doing philosophy, I have seen it, experienced it, and been amazed by what children can think of and say. It is important to note that teaching philosophy to children requires patience and compassion. Children can say things that conflict with your own personal beliefs, so be kind and sensitive when approaching comments that have deeper implications for you personally. For example, "well can't poor people just work harder, its their fault they are poor after all" was something a student of mine said, and while it struck a nerve and made me angry, I had to calm down and approach the student at their level, that of a child. A child is learning and as the teacher I cannot get angry for the opinion of a student, regardless of how personally at odds the opinion may be. It is also important, on the flipside, that the facilitator do not exert their own opinions and judgments on the students either, it is not the facilitators job to teach the students such values and beliefs that belong under the control of the child's parents.

This experience has also led me to become a better philosopher. Practicing philosophical discourse is not focused on as much as content is in college philosophy, at least in my own undergraduate experience, which seems to be the opposite of what should logically happen. By practicing the philosophical process with my students, the way I learn in my current philosophy classes is different from before this experience. Now I can think of counterexamples much faster

and the examples themselves are more creative. Now when a viewpoint is introduced, I immediately start thinking of how to debunk it, or how to simplify the theory itself so it is more understandable. My argumentation has improved, and my overall critical thinking has benefited greatly from teaching the children. Acknowledging this means I have also developed an interesting opinion on the way philosophy education is conducted: philosophical process is sometimes ignored when it should in fact be emphasized throughout the Philosophy department's introductory classes. If college students had ample opportunities to argue with one another, and think on their feet, then the harder content would be easier to understand and the analysis would delve deeper. This is not to say that these opportunities do not exist, but from my own experience, those opportunities were few, and never as lively as the discussions that I had with my students. I would go as far as to say that teaching children philosophy is another way of strengthening your own philosophical skill set, simply because children have no filter and only a slight bias, leaving the discussion open for anything. Adults tend to be more stubborn and set in their ways, making it more difficult for "outside-the-box" thinking.

Student Experience and Feedback

At the end of the trial I gave the students a survey regarding their experience in philosophy class. I asked the following questions: Before this philosophy class, had you ever been taught anything about philosophy? What was your favorite part of philosophy class? What was your least favorite part of philosophy class? What are three interesting things you realized in philosophy class? If your school offered a philosophy class, would you take it? What do you think I should do differently in philosophy class? What is something I did in philosophy class that you really liked? Lastly, just tell me what you think about philosophy class; you can say whatever you want to say to me. I will offer the results for each question.   Regarding whether or

not the students had been exposed to philosophy in the past, the majority of the students answered no, and when I asked the students who had previously heard of philosophy how they learned about philosophy, most of them answered through their parents (for example, one of my students, Sadie, is the daughter of a CU philosophy professor) or other teachers. The low amount of yes answers exemplifies the fact that philosophy is not introduced or taught to elementary children in the public schools of Boulder.

The most common answer for what their favorite part of philosophy was that they enjoyed "the challenge of stretching my mind and thinking 'out of the box'" (student quote) and also the opportunity to debate with their classmates. One student even specifically stated that "my favorite part of philosophy is getting to go above and beyond. In some classes the teachers say 'this is true' and we don't get to argue," showing that the students appreciated being given the chance to discuss and debate about deeper issues and different viewpoint. Seeing that the students expressed a lack of opportunities for deeper level discussion elsewhere in their education, my research shows that children do desire philosophical inquiry, they desire learning and exploring what they believe and discussing those beliefs in comparison with the beliefs of others. Another opinion expressed in the surveys that shows that children want philosophy in their lives is the fact that nearly all of the students, except for two, said they would definitely take a philosophy class if their school offered it. Many students even expressed that they "hope that next year's fifth graders can have this experience."

I also received some constructive feedback that the children gave me on the questions regarding my performance. Many students expressed that they liked how deep I would go and how I'd challenge them every day, and also the way I discussed and debated with them. Specifically, the students liked "how [I] formed the discussion and made [them] think hard about

what [I] was saying." Some students also expressed how they enjoyed it when I would split them into groups and conduct academic exercises; the ethical perspectives session and happiness session were their favorite. On the contrary, many students expressed that I should incorporate more fun games and student-led discussions. One other negative about the class was that nearly none of the kids actually enjoyed the novel, but given that the novel choice was not my decision, I do not hold that feedback as part of my research, but it I will consider the fact that the book choice needs to be a good choice, something the kids will enjoy and find interesting. Having the students express that they would enjoy leading a philosophical discussion is incredible because it shows that the students have thoughts and questions that they believe they should explore on their own. The major problem that students had with my teaching and my class was that I made it too hard, which is something I will definitely keep in mind for future teaching experiences. The students found that my questions were sometimes too difficult to answer, and the language I used was sometimes too advanced for them, making philosophy class very hard. Notably, thinking deeper and more complex was not expressed as a source of difficulty in the class.

Overall, the student surveys expressed that the students absolutely loved philosophy class. The majority of students expressed that I did a good job teaching and that they loved the class in general. They found the content interesting and the discussions fun yet hard. One student even told me that I " should talk to my teacher about expanding the program to other schools," which I of course would love to see happen. The kids also expressed that they learned some amazing things, most notably: "there are more ways of thinking… I think much deeper now," and "I realized I had my own opinion on subjects and that there are many different ways to look at things, and I realized that I now think deeper thoughts." Those quotes indicate that the children

understand that they learned how to think through topics better; they learned how to do philosophy, which was ultimately my goal in teaching this class.

While the majority of the feedback from the surveys was positive to my research, three students expressed unfavorable feelings toward my philosophy class. They found the discussions boring and did not enjoy the activities or thinking. No constructive feedback came from those three negative surveys for they simply conveyed that the student was not happy, instead of why they were unhappy. This fact is troubling to me because it seems to indicate that maybe those students were not interested in learning and did not care. Mr. Tomich explained to me that those students have experienced some extreme emotional distress, and that he believed that is why the surveys were indifferent and negative. I do not contend that those three surveys, out of 23 total, affect the overall conclusions that my research arrives at, mainly that children can do philosophy and want philosophy in their lives (the surveys are attached in the appendix).

Recommendations

Based on my experience teaching philosophy to fifth graders, I am convinced that children benefit from philosophy in their education. Children are capable of doing philosophy and the critical thinking skills associated with philosophy already come naturally to them, so it is wise to foster that skill at a young age and develop it throughout their education, instead of waiting to introduce critical thinking in college, as is the case with most education systems in America.

I recommend that school districts enact a philosophy curriculum into their schools, grades K-12. Incorporating philosophy time into reading time as I did is a good place to start, and for many reasons, the best way to incorporate philosophy due to the low-cost and sustainable nature

of philosophy reading time. Local university philosophy departments could hold trainings for teachers on how to teach/facilitate philosophy discussion and thinking, specific to the grade level they teach. Schools could also partner with a local university and develop a class that teaches undergraduate students how to facilitate philosophy with children, much like what has been implemented at the University of Washington. The cost to implement philosophy education through programs that are already in place is nearly nonexistent, allowing for the case to be easily made for why a district should implement philosophy education during normal curriculum, as I did with reading time. If not implemented concurrently with an established part of the curriculum, philosophy education can be extremely hard to incorporate due to the stress of an already overworked school schedule. With an education system so tight on resources and time, every addition and every cut in the curriculum must be purposeful and clearly beneficial. While my research and other similar studies show that children benefit from philosophy, there is unfortunately no concrete proof that philosophy should be taught to children the same way science or history is deemed necessary. My method, when partnered with a University that can supply facilitators for free, can be implemented more easily then many others, is sustainable, and cost-effective; three things a school district looks for when making implementation decisions.

It is clear that the children desire philosophy in their lives, and a full education needs to foster critical thinking early and constantly.

Lessons Learned and Tips and Tricks:
- Try having a co-teacher to help you think of counterexamples and thought experiments when your ideas run dry.
- Treat the students as your equals.
- Philosophy background can be helpful for classes where the students choose the topic.
- Children are rowdy, so find your balance of discipline while still instilling trust and respect.

- Always have a back-up plan in case the students fly through the discussion.

- If you have doubts about teaching something especially difficult, always try! The students may surprise you as they surprised me.

- Don't fear failure. The children will appreciate the effort you put into teaching such a difficult subject matter to them.

- Explain to the students the purpose behind doing philosophy. It helps them to know why they are doing something they usually don't do. Telling them how unique an opportunity this is also helps instill confidence in the children because they realize you are treating them like adults, which they really appreciate.

- Don't be afraid to play devil's advocate. Just explain that you are not necessarily expressing your own views, just the views that others hold.

- Make sure the content is not too difficult, because if it is, then the children will shut down and not pay attention.

- Make sure the chosen novel or picture book is one the children will enjoy.

References

About Creekside. (n.d.). *Creekside Elementary*. Retrieved from

   http://schools.bvsd.org/p12/creekside/about/Pages/default.aspx

About Us. (n.d.). *Shining Mountain Waldorf School*. Retrieved from

   http://shiningmountainwaldorf.org/our-school/overview/

Conversations with Michael Tomich [Personal interview]. (2013, April 5).

Children's Rights. (2001). *Questions: Philosophy with Young People, 1*(1), 1-16. Retrieved

   from http://www.pdcnet.org/pdf/questions1.pdf

Goering, S., Shudak, N. J., & Wartenberg, T. E. (2013). *Philosophy in schools: An introduction*

   for philosophers and teachers. New York: Routledge.

Huitt, W., & Hummel, J. (2003). Piaget's theory of cognitive development. *Educational*

   Psychology Interactive. Valdosta, GA: Valdosta State University. Retrieved [date]from

   http://www.edpsycinteractive.org/topics/cognition/piaget.html

Lone, J. M., & Israeloff, R. (2012). *Philosophy and education: Introducing philosophy to young*

   people. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Lone, J. M. (2012). *The philosophical child*. Lanhamn, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Matthews, G. B. (1980). *Philosophy and the young child*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University

   Press.

Matthews, G. B. (1984). *Dialogues with children*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Montclair State University. (n.d.). *Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children -*.

   Retrieved March 2, 2014, from http://www.montclair.edu/cehs/academics/centers-and

institutes/iapc/

The Oaxaca Philosophy for Children Initiative. (n.d.). *The Oaxaca Philosophy for Children Initiative*. Retrieved from http://oaxacaphilosophy.com/who-we-arequienes-somos/

"Philosophy and Education in Brazil: Teaching Kant to Grade Schoolers - Global Ethics Network." *Philosophy and Education in Brazil: Teaching Kant to Grade Schoolers Global Ethics Network*. N.p., n.d. Web. 26 Mar. 2014.

PLATO: Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization. (2009). *PLATO: Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization*. Retrieved March 2, 2014, from http://plato-philosophy.org/

Pritchard, M. (2002, May 02). Philosophy for Children. *Stanford University*. Retrieved from http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/children/

Sturgis, D. (n.d.). POPCO Program Description. *Center for Values and Social Policy, University of Colorado, Boulder*. Retrieved from http://www.colorado.edu/philosophy/center/POPCO.shtml

University of Washington's Center for Philosophy for Children. (n.d.). *University of Washington's Center for Philosophy for Children*. Retrieved from http://depts.washington.edu/nwcenter/

Wartenberg, T. E. (2009). *Big ideas for little kids: Teaching philosophy through children's literature*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education.