

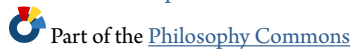
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Book Review - Philosophy in schools: an introduction for philosophers and teachers

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Philosophy in Schools: An introduction for philosophers and teachers edited by Sara Goering, Nicholas J Shudak and Thomas E Wartenberg (2013). (Routledge Studies in Contemporary Philosophy) Taylor & Francis, New York, NY. ISBN: 9780415640633.

The edited collection *Philosophy in Schools: An introduction for philosophers and teachers* is exactly that; an introduction to the central ideas of the Philosophy in Schools movement, with tips and strategies as to how to implement Philosophy for Children (P4C) in your classroom or educational space. With 25 chapters, this handy edition includes the writings of 31 academics and well known practitioners of P4C worldwide. While all the voices contributing to this volume are positive and optimistic as they exalt the benefits of P4C, the diversity comes in the form of the various ways in which the numerous authors have practiced philosophy with participants of different ages, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. There is a mix of theory and pedagogy, with a focus on the pragmatic reality of *doing* philosophy with young people.

The book is divided into four sections. The first section explains how various philosophers have brought philosophy into a pre-college classroom or educational environment. This includes one chapter on the benefits of a high school having a ‘philosopher in residence’ as detailed by Benjamin Lukey, who served as a high school Philosopher in Residence at Kailua High School in Hawai’i. Another chapter describes EUREKAMP, a philosophy summer camp which commenced in Alberta, Canada in 2009 and which still takes place today.

The second section centres around philosophy in the K-8 classroom; P4C in the primary school years. Among others, one chapter sees Thomas Jackson tell us how to make and then use a Community Ball within a community of inquiry (CoI); David Kennedy lists the classical toolbox of philosophical ‘moves’, and Jana Mohr Lone writes about conducting a philosophical dialogue with middle school students using Plato’s allegory of the cave as an initial stimulus text that eventually leads to students discussing the ‘moral impulse’. As the editors inform us in the Introduction:

If you thought philosophy was dull and abstract, you will be surprised by how inventive practitioners have been in devising ways to tap into the philosophical thinking of younger students and help hone their thinking skills. They have used children’s literature, games and other methods to excite the minds of even—as in the case of the preschool programs developed by the Gauts [in reference to Berys and Morag Gaut’s chapter]—very young philosophers. (p. 4)

The third section considers philosophy done with high school aged students. Arik Ben-Avi's honest appraisal of what worked and what did not when he brought philosophy into high school classrooms as an outreach program will benefit teachers who are considering implementing the P4C pedagogy into their own classrooms. Sara Goering's chapter nicely articulates how the CoI and P4C approach can be seamlessly incorporated into the English Literature classroom, which is then extended and elaborated upon by Marina Vladova, whose stimulus texts are the movies *The matrix*, *Vanilla sky*, *Run Lola run*, *Ikiru*, *Eternal sunshine of the spotless mind*, *Moon*, and *Crimes and misdemeanours* (half of which I use in my own philosophy of film unit that is offered for undergraduate university students).

The fourth and final section focuses on strategies for assessment and considers how teachers can assess the outcomes of P4C. In their Introduction, the editors claim that this is the section of the book aimed at the skeptic; the person who wonders whether philosophy done with young people is simply an enjoyable conversation that passes the time and leaves everyone feeling warm and fuzzy, or whether it really challenges young minds and results in genuine learning. They write, 'there are a variety of strategies for assessing the efficacy of precollege philosophy programs, from participant observations to careful statistical studies that meet standards for empirical research. Both of these strategies are represented here ...' (p. 4) and indeed they are as chapter authors include internationally recognised, contemporary researchers in P4C.

Contributing one chapter to this final section are Steve Trickey and Keith Topping, who conducted the impressive and widely cited study in Clackmannanshire, Scotland. This study produced empirical research on the beneficial cognitive effects of P4C on participants, as well as analysed how well such improvements were retained over time. Here, Trickey and Topping write about their engagement with both quantitative and qualitative data that includes standardised tests, video analysis of CoIs, and student questionnaires. Another chapter is co-authored by Lynne Hinton and Sarah Davey Chesters, who report on a struggling public school in a low socio-economic area in Queensland, Australia. Buranda State School was turned into an above-average high school in terms not only of its students' test results but also its improvement in the school culture both within the classroom and in the playground. This impressive transformation was achieved by then-Principal Hinton adopting a 'whole school' P4C and CoI approach that enabled each student to recognise their place within an educational space as a member of a community of learners where they were individually heard and respected.

The editors of *Philosophy in Schools*, all passionate about P4C, explain in the Introduction that in answer to the question of 'why P4C?', they have three answers. Firstly, children and young people, like adults, have genuine 'big' questions about the world and the meaning(s) we make about how and why things are as they are. Such wondering deserves to be given the space to be explored and it is the study of philosophy that takes seriously the need to ask and try to answer such questions. Therefore, young enquiring minds should be able to study philosophy, albeit at their own level, in their educational environments. Secondly, philosophical thinking skills as trained in the P4C classroom are the kinds of intellectual skills that assist people of all ages in their academic abilities. Critical, caring, creative and collaborative thinking, aimed at by P4C practitioners and developed by regular participation in CoIs helps students to be successful: not just on tests, but also in life. Thirdly, the holistic aim of bringing P4C to young people is to shape democratic citizens who are reasonable in their interaction with diverse ideas and respectful in their consideration of others. Philosophy has a role to play in helping people to become decent members of a democratic society. With reasons like that, the real question may be, why wouldn't you include philosophy and CoIs in every school?

Laura D'Olimpio