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Shaking up story time: A case for shaping the nature of information literacy instruction in public and school libraries through philosophy

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Abstract

While the Philosophy for Children (P4C) method has been adopted within classrooms by individual teachers and into some school systems by schoolboards, public and school libraries, the ideal users of this sort of programming, have been slow to recognise the benefits of this didactic methodology. This is particularly surprising given that the P4C method integrates perfectly with traditional story-time orientated programming. Not only is the integration of P4C into story-time sessions virtually seamless (as it does not aim to replace, but rather strives to enhance story-telling), but it might also help reinvigorate a well-established feature of library programming with an aim to develop 21st-century information literacy competencies. This paper examines the case for the P4C method, explains the process of integration of the P4C method with traditional story-time, and highlights the potential benefits of incorporating Philosophy for Children in public and school library programming.

Keywords

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1. Introduction: information literacy and philosophy

The term 'information literacy' has undergone a number of revisions over the past decades as it gradually gained more prominence within the field of library science and information management. The most common attributes ascribed to an information literate individual are the ability to search, locate, and engage with information. The Association of College and Research Libraries (2015) revised their definition of 'information literacy' as 'the set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning' (Introduction section, para. 6).

The revised definition points to skill sets reaching beyond the basics of searching and finding information, and places greater emphasis on processes occurring after an individual has finished interacting with library staff; an information literate person should understand how information is utilised and the role it plays in the creation of new ways of thinking and knowing. These complex information literacy competencies require the development of both creative and critical thinking.

With the influx of information, partly due to the democratisation of information (both in terms of information access and dissemination), it is increasingly more difficult to remain properly *informed*. The role of traditional information gatekeepers has become unnecessary because of increased accessibility to information, making the accessing of credible and accurate information the responsibility of the information seeker; this, in turn, has resulted in a knowledge and ability disconnect (Downey, 2016).

Bundy (2002) stresses the necessity of information literacy as it 'is a prerequisite for participative citizenship, social inclusion, the creation of new knowledge, personal empowerment, and learning for life' (as cited in Downey, 2016, p.14). Furthermore, Downey (2016) attributes 'a strong understanding of how information is created, organized, distributed, and accessed' (p.13) to the development of informed and engaged citizens. Therefore, both critical thinking skills and information literacy have become central in educating citizens to become discerning participants in a democratic society.

This paper argues that philosophy and philosophical inquiry are an excellent means of cultivating the creative and critical thinking skills which are invaluable to the development of some of the aforementioned complex information literacy competencies. The reason for this is that philosophers engage critically and creatively with the human world. The philosopher Thomas Nagel explains that

> [t]he main concern of philosophy is to question and understand very common ideas that all of us use every day without thinking about them…[For example] [a] mathematician may investigate the relations among numbers, but a philosopher will ask, "What is a number?"…A psychologist may investigate how children learn a language, but a philosopher will ask "What makes a word mean anything?" (Nagel, 1987, p.5)

This paper also argues that people should engage in philosophical thinking from an early age so that they blossom into competent information users throughout their primary school years in much the same way that they develop into competent technology users throughout the educational process. We argue that while there may be some hesitation about teaching children philosophy or doubt about children's ability to fully and productively engage in philosophical reasoning, such worries are by and large unfounded. In fact, as we propose to demonstrate, 'children are naturally disposed to wonder and to think about ideas, in ways that many adults may have long since forgotten'. (Fisher, 2013, p.37)

2. Philosopher children

Fostering critical thinking skills in children through the philosophical exploration of concepts and ideas is impossible if children are not capable of engaging in philosophical reasoning. The renowned psychologist Jean Piaget (1933), in fact, is often understood as arguing that children under the age of twelve are not cognitively developed enough to think philosophically. This view of children's cognition, however, has been both disputed and revised (see Astington, 1993; Gopnik et al., 1999; Gopnik, 2009).

The philosopher, and philosophy for children practitioner, Gareth Matthews (1980) explains the Piagetian technique for charting children's intellectual development, which consists of mapping several stages of progressive cognitive mastery and then charting children's abilities along the various stages to show that children within certain age groups tend to fall within the distinct, progressive stages determined prior to testing. The problem with this method, Matthews points out, is twofold: '[f]irst, it is notoriously difficult, some would say impossible, for people to agree on what counts as progress in philosophy' (Matthews, 1980, p.38). The second, and perhaps more serious flaw in Piaget's proposal to validate his claims, according to Matthews, is methodological. Matthews raises two related worries with regard to Piaget's methodology and the claim that

children are not cognitively developed enough to engage in philosophical thinking. The first worry pertains to the interpretation and selection of data:

> Piaget proposes to validate his claims about developmental stages by finding the same patterns of response in all children. Such a finding is to be considered a guarantee that the thinking of children really does develop in this fashion. The unusual response is discounted as an unreliable indicator of the ways in which children think…But it is the deviant response that is most likely to be philosophically interesting…Yet Piaget would have the nonconforming response discounted and eliminated on methodological grounds. (Matthews, 1980, p.38)

The second worry concerns the exclusion of certain types of answers or comments made by children, which, Matthews argues, actually tends to reveal the philosophical nature of children's cognitive processing and conceptual play. The fact that such forms of thought were discounted and subsequently excluded from Piaget's data sets is, according to Matthews, one reason for coming to the erroneous conclusion that young children lack the cognitive capacities to engage with philosophical ideas. Matthews writes:

> [Piaget] distinguishes answers and comments that reveal convictions from those that constitute what he calls "mere romancing." Romancing, he explains, is "inventing an answer in which [one] believes merely by force of saying it." Piaget makes clear…that he has little interest in, or appreciation for, romancing…It seems most likely that the philosophically interesting comments a child makes will not so much express the child's settled convictions as explore a conceptual connection or make a conceptual joke. Thus, the most interesting and intriguing philosophical comments are likely to be counted by Piaget as mere romancing. (Matthews, 1980, p.39)

Matthews provides ample evidence of how philosophically profound and inventive children's thinking can be if they are given enough room to think for themselves, which is the central insight of the Philosophy for Children methodology. One striking example of philosophical ingenuity comes from a session Matthews ran with a group of fifth graders in Northampton, USA. The session provocation consisted of a rephrasing of Augustine's contemplation of time; Augustine questions the reality of the past and the future, arguing that the past no longer exists and the future does not yet exist, thereby making both non-existent. He further argues that the present, if it is to have any duration at all, would consist entirely of past moments and future moments, both of which, as the argument suggests, are non-existent. Augustine concludes that the present is a 'durationless "now", which, by itself, can hardly be time' (Matthews, 2000, p.10). What happened during the course of discussion is best captured by Matthews (2000) himself:

> Finally a bespectacled little boy halfway back in the room raised his hand and in a very slow and deliberate way said, "If-the-past-doesn't-exist,-I-couldn't-have-started-this-sentence." I was stunned…no one in the long history of discussions of the reality of time has come up with such a devastatingly *concise* response to this skeptical argument as did this fifth grader in that Northampton school. (p.11)

Through the years, Mathews and others have provided many such anecdotal examples of children's capacity for profound thought (see Matthews, 1980, 1984, 1994, 2000; Pritchard, 1985, 1996; Tizard & Hughes, 1984). The salient context within which such examples often manifest themselves is one where children are given room to think (Claxton, 1999). Matthews (2000) reflects that he 'could so easily have squelched [the discussion] by wading in with [his] own attempt to explain the argument…the virtue of patience in doing philosophy with children is crucial' (p.11).

Unlike Matthews, who argues that Piaget was wrong about children's cognitive capacities, David Kennedy (1996) argues that Piaget's thought is misinterpreted within educational circles, stating

that many 'interpret [Piaget's] notion of 'pre-operational' to mean 'non-logical', [but that] [i]n fact, Piaget's theory places the origins of logic in action, [meaning] that the young child is operating with logical or proto-logical structures from the beginning whether in the form of sensory-motor schemes or concepts' (p.6). Kennedy (1996) points out that his suggestion that logical, rule-governed thought occurs at the level of perception and thus is a 'primitive psychological function' (p.6) is echoed by cognitive scientists and philosophers such as Jerry Fodor (1980), Noam Chomsky (1980), and T. G. R. Bower (1989).

Whatever the final verdict about Piaget's work on children's cognitive development may be, the emergent general consensus is that children are quite capable of profound philosophical thought if given enough room to think for themselves, which is something the community of inquiry model we discuss in the next section suggests. Moreover, much anecdotal evidence also supports this emergent consensus that 'we have much more to learn from [children], and they have much more to learn from themselves…and from each other, than most of us could possibly have imagined' (Matthews, 2000, p.11).

3. Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children and the evolution of the methodology

The philosophy for children movement originated in Montclair State College (now Montclair State University) in the 1970s with the publication of a philosophical novel for children on, among other things, the topic of language and logic. Philosopher Matthew Lipman's (1974) novel *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery* was introduced into the Montclair Public School system with ensuing reports of a significant rise in both literacy and critical thinking skills of middle school students who worked through the novel. The Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children was established shortly afterwards and Lipman penned other novels that were published with accompanying teacher resource guides designed for the entire K-12 curriculum (ages 5-18) (see Lipman, 1976, 1978, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1987, 1996).

The paradigm of philosophically critical thinking in the western tradition is the Socratic method illustrated in the Platonic dialogues where Socrates engages in argumentative dialogue with his pupils as well as other bystanders. The dialogues generally proceed from the establishment of a working definition for some philosophical concept of interest, which is followed by a series of questions and answers that attempt to investigate possible counter examples and arguments in order to cooperatively come to a consensus regarding the correct understanding of the concept. Lipman's approach to philosophy for children is modelled on this Socratic tradition. 'Following Vygotsky, [Lipman] believes that language provides the essential tools for thinking and that children are able to function at an intellectually higher level when in collaborative and cooperative situations' (Fisher, 2013, p.28). The claim that collaborative and cooperative interaction has the potential for increased cognitive capacity is also an entailment of the Extended Mind Thesis (EMT) and is both tacitly and explicitly supported by the EMT proponents (see Clark & Chalmers, 1998; Dennett, 1996; Wilson, 1994, 2004; Wilson & Lenart, 2015). Nevertheless, Lipman's model, as we will discuss in the next section, shies away from a Socratic *elenchus* where the primary mode of philosophising exemplified by Socrates actually takes the form of refutation of an interlocutor's assertion.

Since Lipman's novels are written with traditionally philosophical concepts and ideas in mind, the novels are specially crafted to address the concepts directly. The novels, thus, 'have a clear didactic purpose – to stimulate questioning and philosophical discussion' (Fisher, 2013, p.30). As much as the novels are tailor-made for this sort of philosophical inquiry, they do not serve as particularly strong examples of children's literature, which 'has led others to seek philosophical stimulus from traditional stories, picture books and from other kinds of writing' (Fisher, 2013, p.31). Some great examples of the evolution of Lipman's method can be found in the numerous

adaptations of the Philosophy for Children Program (see Fisher, 1996; Haynes & Murris, 2012; Lewis & Chandley, 2012; Shapiro, 2012; Wartenberg, 2009).

A typical philosophy for children session involves a group of children sitting in a circle either taking turns reading a story or having the story read to them, which is followed by a general reflection on the story where children are invited to comment on anything they thought was interesting, odd, intriguing, puzzling, etc. The group itself generates various discussion points that arise from the reflection and each point is written down on a black/white board, large piece of poster paper, smartboard, etc. Once all the discussion points are collected and recorded, the group collectively and collaboratively decides which question to pursue. This process does not always run smoothly, but there are numerous ways of priming students for the task and establishing a context for the ensuing inquiry (see Shapiro, 2012, for an array of sample lesson plans).

The discussion itself is not so much guided by the teacher or librarian, but rather facilitated; the group itself is responsible for the development of the discussion in accordance with some basic rules of philosophical discourse (which are often also written down so as to remain visible at all times). Thomas E. Wartenberg (2009) suggests the following rules for doing philosophy:

1. State your position on an issue—that is, answer a question that has been asked—in a clear manner after taking time to think.
2. Figure out if you *agree* or *disagree* with what has been said.
3. Present a real example of the abstract issue being discussed.
4. Present a counterexample to a claim that has been proposed.
5. Put forward a revised version of a claim in light of criticism.
6. Support your position with reasons. (p.33)

Aside from the critical thinking skills that develop in the course of a philosophical discussion, there is another valuable benefit of practising engagement in such philosophical discourse.

> Getting children to master the rules for having a philosophical discussion provides them with some of the most basic skills they will need no matter what else they go on to study…philosophy also provides them with an important set of cognitive and behavioral skills that will be applicable throughout their educations. (Wartenberg, 2009, p.33)

A philosophical discussion usually wraps up with follow-up activities, which 'may include specific questions for discussion, concept-mapping, creative writing or artwork', (Fisher, 2013, p.33) or any other activity the facilitator feels might work well with an overarching theme or any other curricular or program outcomes. One crucial follow-up activity is a short reflective discussion on how the group did with regard to the progress of the discussion itself (this is a meta-discussion, a discussion about the discussion itself). This reflective exercise helps the group internalise the rules for doing philosophy and facilitates the establishing and strengthening of what Lipman (1995) calls a *community of inquiry* or a *community of inquirers*, a salient concept to which we turn in the following section.

Over time, Philosophy for Children (P4C) has gained popularity in European countries with the establishment of P4C organisations and charities. The SOPHIA Network (n.d.) organises an annual meeting that is held in a different European country each year, while synchronising efforts with the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC) and the International Council of Philosophical Inquiry with Children (ICPIC). Other organisations and charities across the globe that provide support for P4C include The Philosophy Foundation, SAPERE, the Faculty of Philosophy at Laval University in Canada, and Philosophy for Children New Zealand. The expansion of the P4C movement is noticeable in the research studies from education institutions worldwide measuring the impact this programming can have on student skill development. Lam (2012), Topping & Trickey (2014), and Cassidy & Christie (2013) provide insight on vocabulary use

and the development of student verbal skills from Scotland, Hong Kong, and from other international studies. Barrow (2015), Daniel (2007) and Scholl, Nichols, & Burgh (2016) place more emphasis on the skill development of the teachers and facilitators who integrate P4C into their classrooms and the positive impact the program has had on the students in Canada, Australia, Mexico, and Scotland.

4. A community of inquirers

As already mentioned in the previous section, the method Lipman encourages is Socratic in the sense that critical analysis does involve the production of counter-arguments, which are essentially refutations. Moreover, Socrates might be cast in the role of a facilitator who only questions, but does not really make many positive claims of his own (though this is not always the case, as in the instance of Socrates, in *Meno* (Plato, Guthrie & Brown, 1971), demonstrating the positive doctrine that all learning is actually a form of recollection). Furthermore, as Brickhouse & Smith (2009) point out, there seem to be several versions of the Socratic method, all of which are employed by Socrates in Plato's dialogues. Perhaps the best approximation of the method utilised by Lipman is what Brickhouse & Smith (2009) call the *Theaetetus* model 'in which teachers and students are engaged in a fully cooperative and collaborative form of inquiry' (p.187). Lipman's methodology, however, does reach beyond the bounds of the Socratic method:

> Socratic dialectic represents only one set of speech acts among the larger set that CPI [Community of Philosophical Inquiry] encompasses, which is broadly oriented to clarifying, coordinating, instantiating, and evaluating the ideas that emerge from each participant in the group. It is an ongoing self-corrective process that involves offering and evaluating of examples, uncovering assumptions, identifying contradictions, posing further questions, and reviewing chains of argument. (Kennedy, 2012, p.40)

The distinction between the Socratic method and Lipman's community of inquiry is grounded in a specific understanding of how knowledge is generated. According to Kennedy (1996), the notion of a community of inquiry is closely tied to two conceptions about knowledge acquisition: first, that knowledge is communally constructed, and second, that it is continually emergent, but never complete. Knowledge, in this view, is an emergent property of the process of discourse, and as the discourse changes or evolves, so does its product.

The community of inquiry, due to its collaborative nature, as well as in virtue of its philosophical grounding, gives rise to several types of thinking: critical, creative, and caring, the latter of which is directly relevant to the well-being of a democratic society. The development of critical thinking is directly linked to the Socratic roots of the dialogic processes at the heart of the community of inquiry, since the ensuing discussions are sensitive to reasons, arguments, counter-arguments, and logic. Critical thinking, moreover, also contributes to the flourishing of creative thought, as well as caring thinking: '[a] good thinker is reflective in the sense of exercising his/her own powers of thinking, and being responsive to the thinking of others. Reflective thinking in this sense unites reason with empathy, and closely resembles what Lipman calls 'caring thinking' – the linking of emotions with thinking' (Fisher, 2013, p.41)

In fact, some practitioners of philosophy for children follow John Dewey in preferring to cultivate reasonableness rather than mere rationality, which differs from rationality in that it inherently involves an attitudinal stance of caring; or, to paraphrase Splitter & Sharp (1995), it involves a social disposition suited to the bridging of thought and action.

> The possibility of nurturing the 'reasonable person' lies at the heart of education in a liberal democracy. Reasonableness is more than rationality. Being reasonable is neither simple nor constant. Ethical precepts do not easily or automatically become praxis. They need exemplification in practice. (Bruner, 1996, p.78)

'Caring thinking involves learning to collaborate with others, and developing empathy and respect for others' (Fisher, 2013, p.42), which makes it the intellectual grounding of democratic social interactions. There is, then, an inseparable link between the formation of, and processes at work within, a community of inquiry and the cognitive tasks, and procedural knowledge, necessary for the maintenance of a healthy democratic society. In fact, Lipman's conception of the community of inquiry arose in part in this kind of intellectual context:

> The idea of a collaborative *community of enquiry* originates in the work of the American pragmatist philosopher Charles Peirce (1839–1914). He argues that we are participants, not spectators, in knowledge making. Knowledge is not a body of certainties but a body of explanations. John Dewey (1859–1952) believed in the application of co-operative intelligence and in learning as problem solving. Dewey argued that schools should be participatory communities, a meaningful part of society where young people could develop as citizens. (Haynes, 2001, p.46)

Joanna Haynes (2001) also remarks that

> [i]n a democratic society the diverse and active participation of citizens is necessary to protect values such as human rights, individual freedom and equality. Children should be encouraged and given room to participate in society from an early age and in contexts that are meaningful to them such as families, schools and other settings where they have a stake. (p.46)

Following Kennedy (1999), Haynes also suggests that the reason children have for so long been thought to lack the capacity to both democratically participate in their own social spheres and to engage with abstract philosophical ideas stems from the historical devaluation of their assigned social status. Children, she explains, have been viewed as politically inferior and can be understood as a disempowered group. 'Like other groups of people in society, such as women, ethnic minorities and the poor, children have traditionally been marginalised. Their claims to knowledge are devalued through a process that identifies them as *outsiders*' (Haynes, 2001, p.49), but, she argues, '[i]deas of citizenship will almost certainly arise spontaneously as groups of children debate the rules of their engagement with each other' (Haynes, 2001, p.48)

> Dewey's identification of democracy as not just a political but also a social, communicative ideal sets the stage for CPI as…a model of an ideal speech community at the heart of any school community engaged in genuine democratic practice, and the only basis for a form of moral education worthy of the name. Philosophical dialogue is in the middle of it because, as Dewey himself said, "the chief role of philosophy is to bring to consciousness, in an intellectualized form, or in the form of problems, the most important shocks and inherent troubles of complex and changing societies since these have to do with conflicts of value" (1986, p.30).
> (Kennedy, 2012, p.42)

The community of inquiry, then, serves a much larger function than just the cultivation of critical thinking and information literacy skills (both of which are necessary components of this larger function); the community of inquirers become citizen-thinkers in their own social spheres and, through continuous discourse, develop into capable participants in the wider spheres within their own, as well as global, democratic societies. The reason the community of inquiry is such a powerful tool for the socialisation of future citizenry is because '[i]n a democratic society, moral principles must be self-accepted rather than uncritically imbibed; they must be freely chosen rather than externally imposed…[but] [i]ndividualism must be tailored to communal responsibility' (Kelly, 1995, p.172).

So how can an individual librarian accomplish such an enormous task while focusing on his or her particular literacy outcomes? In a real sense, just as is the case with the generation of knowledge within the community of inquiry, so the various forms of thinking that ground democratic literacy are emergent properties of the community of inquiry. The facilitator, following Socrates' example, becomes a midwife to the birth of ideas rather than the keeper of knowledge. In fact, the rules for doing philosophy in and of themselves are meant to embody this Socratic role, allowing, with time, for the facilitator to truly embed herself in the community of inquiry and share in its progress as just another one of its inquirers.

5. Skill development: speaking, listening, and reasoning

One salient role of the facilitator is to assist participants in articulating their thoughts, especially at a time when the participants are actively developing their vocabulary and comprehension (Cassidy & Christie, 2013; Barrow, 2015). Language abilities mature through the articulation of reasons and through the provision of clarity (Cassidy & Christie, 2013; Topping & Trickey, 2014). Furthermore, participants develop valuable communication skills in the course of discussing varied topics and perspectives in a respectful manner, while also supporting and arguing for their position on a particular topic (Barrow, 2015; Daniel & Auriac, 2011; Daniel, Gagnon, & Pettier, 2012; Wartenberg, 2009). A study conducted by Daniel and Delsol (2005) suggests that when 4–5 year-olds participate in philosophical discourse, the children exhibit a significant increase in the number of words they use to articulate and express themselves (as cited in Aslanimehr, 2015).

Knowledge creation requires that individuals listen to what is being said, process the newly obtained information, and build upon it or constructively critique the original statement. Freire (2005) emphasises the importance of not devaluing simpler language:

> [Simpler language] is based on concepts developed in day-to-day experience, in the world of sensory experience. On the other hand, it also lies in moving away from the concept of "difficult language," impossible language, as development occurs around abstract concepts. This critical way of comprehending and realizing the reading of text and context does not exclude either variety of language, or syntax. It does recognize, however, that writers using scientific, academic language cannot become simplistic even though they must attempt to become more accessible, clearer, simpler, less closed, and less difficult. (p.40)

Prompting children to find fallacies in assertions will naturally slow conversations down as children are encouraged to listen to the arguments and contemplate the language being used. This 'slowing down' provides children with more time to develop and understand their opinions and to reflect on fallacies and biases in their own thought processes.

Listening is one of the more understated and forgotten skills developed through this style of programming since the ability to listen to others is integral to the functioning of the community of inquirers.

> Listening is an activity that obviously goes beyond mere hearing. To listen...is a permanent attitude on the part of the subject who is listening, of being open to the word of the other, to the gesture of the other, to the differences of the other. (Freire, 1998, p.107)

The combination of listening and exploratory conversation promotes creative cooperation within the bounds of reasonable compromise and consensus (Lipman, 1995). Children can practise these skills by mediating each other and being allowed to determine the resolution without adult interference (Lipman, 1995). Giving children a voice in matters important to them makes them naturally invested in pursuing solutions to problems that 'speak to them directly and are genuinely unsettling' (Lipman, 1995, p.122).

Because philosophical discourse presents opportunities where participants' perspectives and beliefs are challenged, participants can explore the reasons underpinning their beliefs, which promotes an understanding of how these beliefs or opinions were constructed in the first place. Participants are thus able to develop their own worldviews and accept what values are authentic to them, not having to adhere to the truths or beliefs adults encourage them to accept (Aslanimehr, 2015, p.341; Daniel & Auriac, 2011; Topping & Trickey, 2014; Cassidy & Christie, 2013; Barrow, 2015). Participants in philosophical discussions learn most when they realise they have been mistaken or when they encounter a failed argument, and children engaged in philosophy, within the trusted company of the community of inquirers, also learn that it is perfectly acceptable to make mistakes (Millett & Tapper, 2012; Wartenberg, 2009; Haynes, 2017; Daniel et al., 2012; Cassidy & Christie, 2013). The environment generated by the community of inquiry provides the opportunity to understand the existence of varying perspectives, to realise that it is acceptable to challenge social norms, and to incorporate the knowledge of other individuals into their own worldviews; all this promotes the development of critical thinking skills in children (Millett & Tapper, 2012; Daniel & Auriac, 2011; Daniel, 2007).

Independent, creative, and collaborative thinking occurs throughout the conversational segment of the P4C method (Daniel, 2007; Daniel & Auriac, 2011; Haynes, 2017; Lam, 2012; Millett & Tapper, 2012). This is because participants have numerous opportunities to practise independent thinking as they engage in the creation and selection of a central discussion topic, and throughout the philosophical conversation where they are allowed freedom to determine their stances and defend their positions. As the conversation progresses the features of creative and collaborative thinking emerge through participant contributions to others' ideas. Moreover, the fostering of philosophical thinking and conversing aids in the development of an understanding of how arguments are developed, positions are formed, and knowledge is created (Daniel & Auriac, 2011; Lam, 2012; Millett & Tapper, 2012; Wartenberg, 2009). All of these skills assist in the evaluation of information. As these information literacy skills are nurtured, a critical consciousness can be established and a greater awareness of social issues can begin to emerge. This critical consciousness will accompany children into adulthood and contribute to the development of an aware and critically engaged citizenry.

6. P4C and similar methods in libraries

Although the philosophy for children method has been popularised since the 1970s and has seen implementation in singular classrooms as well as a number of school systems, we see public and school library users as the ideal target audience for this innovative alternative to traditional library programming. This is particularly true since the Philosophy for Children learning outcomes are exceptionally well aligned with the librarian imperative of aiding in the development of information literacy skills.

While there does not appear to be much evidence of the benefit of philosophy for children within the library context, this is largely due to the fact that the P4C methodology has not been widely adopted in library programming. Nevertheless, school librarians may have had more opportunity than their public librarian colleagues to collaborate with teachers in student learning through Guided Inquiry by connecting education curricula with the students' sphere of understanding and reality (Kuhlthau, 2010; Kuhlthau, Maniotes, & Caspari, 2012).

Guided Inquiry and P4C utilise constructivist teaching methods to encourage students to actively inquire and interact with information, while teachers, librarians, and other instruction members act as facilitators for student learning (Kuhlthau, 2010). When these methods are embedded in the classroom setting, they enable information literacy to become a habitual process and a regular way of thinking for students, which can help prepare them for higher education and future careers (Kuhlthau, Maniotes, & Caspari, 2012). While Guided Inquiry is grounded in the notion of the Information Search Process, which emphasises the process of student learning through different

sources and media, the P4C method focuses on using logical and critical thinking to explore ideas and challenge preconceptions. Both, however, are similar in that they focus on the development of team and inquiry-based learning through participation in the community of inquiry.

There is evidence of various beneficial outcomes related to the introduction of the P4C method within the classroom context. Two South African studies (Borman, 2005; Roberts, 2006), for example, report positive changes in student learning, professional and personal teacher growth (Roberts, 2006), as well as greater learner engagement during P4C sessions (Borman, 2005). Borman reports that

> learners appeared to be more inclined to use thinking processes consciously such as giving reasons and expressing opinions. This is in line with the finding of Lam Chi Ming (2004) who claims that students wanted to clarify concepts that they did not understand. Schleifer *et al.* (1987) also found that it improved young children's logical and moral reasoning ability. (Borman, 2005, p.60)

A United Kingdom study by Topping & Trickey (2007) concludes that children who had been exposed to the P4C programming actually 'showed significant CAT [Cognitive Abilities Test] gains, while controls did not' (Topping & Trickey, 2007, p.792). In fact, their study 'provides evidence that [those] gains in cognitive ability … can be maintained over the subsequent 2 years … on the same measure, even when pupils have not had any further experience of collaborative inquiry in the secondary school' (Topping & Trickey, 2007, pp.793–794) while the control group showed signs of loss in testable cognitive ability recorded in the pre- and post-test results.

Topping & Trickey (2004) also conducted a systematic review of studies evaluating the P4C method in both primary and secondary schools. The studies examined nine different outcomes:

- Logical reasoning (Lipman & Bierman, 1980; Williams, 1993; Sasseville, 1994; Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children, 2002);
- Reading comprehension (Lipman & Bierman, 1980; Haas, 1980; Williams, 1993; Dyfed County Council, 1994; Fields, 1995);
- Mathematics skills (Fields, 1995);
- Self-esteem (Dyfed County Council, 1994; Sasseville, 1994);
- Listening skills (Dyfed County Council, 1994);
- Expressive language (Dyfed County Council, 1994);
- Creative thinking (Education Testing Service, 1980);
- Cognitive ability (Doherr, 2000); and
- Emotional intelligence (Doherr, 2000). (Topping & Trickey, 2004, p.371)

Of the ten studies that met their inclusion criteria, all showed at least some positive results associated with the implementation of the P4C methodology.

Another UK study by Jenkins & Lyle (2010) reports that dialogic approaches to teaching, in the spirit of a community of inquiry advocated in all the variants of the P4C method, affords opportunities for children who have been tested as below-average readers to demonstrate higher-order language skills that considerably exceed their test scores. This finding implies that the dialogic method actually benefits certain learning styles, which may be marginalised or outright ignored in the more traditional monologic approaches.

More recently, the evaluators involved in the assessment of the P4C method for the Education Endowment Foundation (2016) 'observed that P4C sessions tended to improve pupils' confidence and engagement when teachers were equal participants in the enquiry circle with the pupils, rather than taking their normal position of authority in the classroom' (Gorard, Siddiqui, & See, 2016,

p.25). The report also illuminated challenges with the implementation of the P4C method: one of the challenges for teachers revolved around the difficulty of incorporating the program into an already oversaturated curriculum, while another challenge concerned the building of a community of inquiry. The first challenge is not one that librarians generally need to worry about since our proposal is to merely enhance an existing library program rather than embedding a new program into an already established schedule. The latter is more problematic for librarians who may not be able to depend on the same group of patrons to attend library programs consistently (school librarians do not, however, face this issue as they can count on predictable group dynamics of the same cohorts of students consistently attending sessions together). While the group dynamic is always different in a one-off session compared to a multi-session course, one-off sessions can nevertheless be quite productive and empowering for the involved participants (both authors have successfully implemented one-off P4C library workshops in the past).

7. Conclusion: the importance of philosophy in libraries

The democratisation of information, while certainly beneficial, has led to an overabundance of information, making it increasingly difficult to be a properly informed citizen (Downey, 2016, p.11). Globalisation and recent international events have increased social awareness of the importance of critical thinking and information literacy, especially in the context of evaluation and the vetting of information. Critical thinking and information literacy skills are essential in assisting individuals with navigating the tangle of information, misinformation, opinion, propaganda, etc., as they evaluate source credibility in an attempt to determine whether the information they encounter is biased or has an underlying agenda.

Librarians, in their role as information professionals, are in an ideal position to help information users learn how to process and consume information skilfully and responsibly. While social media platforms have started to offer tips on how to spot fake news and the internet is flooded with various information literacy rules of thumb (the most famous being the CRAAP test), that is far from enough (Kavanaugh & Lenart, 2017). Sharpening critical thinking skills through philosophical discourse can address social justice issues, as well as language, logic, ethics, and information evaluation, among many other possible topics explored through a plethora of excellent children's publications. Moreover, such philosophical grounding makes for a fertile soil in which to grow an information literacy skillset for the future generation of democratic citizens. While the adoption of the philosophy for children method and its integration into traditional story time programming is relatively simple, easy, and seamless, the added benefits of incorporating philosophical discourse into library-led story time are potentially enormous and far-reaching.

John van de Pas (2014) describes libraries as 'cultural institutions' because they no longer serve as mere repositories of information, but as public spaces which allow individuals to gather, learn, and interact with one another (as cited in Yoshida, 2016; Jochumsen, Hvenegaard Rasmussen, & Skot-Hansen, 2012). As more libraries embrace this role and create learning commons environments, people's notions of the library will shift from their misapprehensions about the social roles of librarians and libraries to an understanding of libraries as places of civic discourse (Yoshida, 2016; Jochumsen et al., 2012); the engagement in philosophy in library programming will certainly aid in the shift of public understanding of, and engagement with, libraries and librarians.

The shift to an environment of learning not only enables numerous opportunities of lifelong learning, but also enhances the quality of programming options (Yoshida, 2016). While Lopez, Caspe, & Simpson (2017) attribute this to the fact that libraries are increasingly more interested in 'engaging entire families....playing a stronger role than ever in supporting families to promote children's early literacy and reading skills' (p.318), we argue that this kind of engagement can be exponentially enhanced with the inclusion of high quality educational content that not only focuses on early literacy and reading, but reaches beyond by building the scaffolding necessary for lifelong interactions with information. Not only is information literacy education of benefit to the future

generations and thus society more generally, as well as, arguably a basic human right of library users (Lenart & Koshelek, 2015), but it is also an excellent branding strategy for 21st century libraries and librarianship. We argue that the incorporation of the philosophy for children methodology into traditional story time programming can contribute to the achievement of such goals.

Given Kuhlthau's work in information literacy education, it is somewhat surprising that P4C programming is not more ubiquitous within the library context, especially since while it shares similarities with the Guided Inquiry approach, it promises to deliver more than just information literacy skills; the method's focus on the development of deep logical and critical thinking skills as well as its philosophical engagement with children's literature make it a valuable endeavour in its own right, rather than a mere replication of Kuhlthau's excellent approach. Perhaps a little information dissemination, popularisation, and advocacy for this sort of programming can go some way toward remedying this situation. We believe that one compelling argument for implementing the method into library programming (other than the arguments already offered above) is that the implementation of the method into already existing story-time orientated programming can be both seamless and help reinvigorate a well-established feature of library programming with an aim to develop 21st-century competencies.

Acknowledgments

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