

Are Filipino Children Too Young to Do Philosophy?¹

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Abstract: Children from various countries have been acknowledged and studied for their ability to philosophize, while, unfortunately, Filipino children have not received similar recognition. In this paper, I make a rather unpopular claim that Filipino children can and already are doing philosophy in their efforts to make sense of their existential conditions. “Doing philosophy” here refers to the act of being perplexed by one’s own or other people’s experiences and making an effort to comprehend them. Filipino children, are a vast and diverse group, coming from various backgrounds, speaking different or even multiple languages, and representing rich cultures and unique circumstances. This diversity adds richness to the wide array of experiences from which existential questions can emerge. However, to truly comprehend the philosophical thinking of Filipino children, they need opportunities and guidance to explore their existential questions and solutions, regardless of how tentative or rudimentary these may seem to adults. Without such opportunities, it remains unclear to what extent their thinking engages with philosophical themes and issues. This not only offers Filipino adults a view of children’s inner worlds but also brings fresh perspectives to commonly held assumptions.

Keywords: Filipino children, philosophy for/with children, community of Inquiry, Filipino philosophy

A few years ago, while on a flight to Tacloban to attend a philosophy conference, I happened to sit beside a woman with a daughter who was about six years old. It was apparent from her excitement that she was experiencing her first plane ride. As the child saw the clouds up close, she could not contain her curiosity and full of excitement, she turned to her

¹ Louella Tumaneng’s invaluable insights, probing questions, and encouraging support have been instrumental throughout the writing process of this paper.

mother and asked loudly, “*Nanay, di ba gihaharani-i na la kita hit langit? Makikit-an ta ba it Ginoo?*” (“Mama, aren’t we close to heaven now? Would we be able to see God?”) Her mother, seemingly embarrassed for disrupting the silence in the cabin, hushed her straightaway. The child was pensive for a while but, like most children, could not help but think out loud. As if having a dialogue with an imaginary friend, I overheard her ask in a soft voice, “*Kun may-ada Ginoo kay ano nga diri ko man hiya nakikit-an?*” (“If God is there, why can’t I see him?”) Without her knowledge, this Filipino child’s young mind was puzzled by a question that has perplexed many philosophers. The only difference is that her question was articulated in a straightforward, non-hermetic language. Unfortunately, many adults treat these kinds of questions as naïve childish musings. They are deemed superfluous, sometimes embarrassing, and unworthy of serious attention. As a result, these questions often land on dismissive ears.

In this paper, I intend to negate the question “Are Filipino children too young to do philosophy?” and put forward a rather unpopular claim that Filipino children can do and, in fact, are already doing philosophy.² While children from various countries have been acknowledged and studied for their ability to philosophize, Filipino children, unfortunately, have not received similar recognition for their potential as young philosophers.

This paper has four (4) parts: First, I claim that Filipino children are already doing philosophy in their attempts to grapple with their existential questions. Second, I discuss a few important elements in Philosophy for/with Children, which is at present the only available educational and philosophical program where children and young people are encouraged to explore their existential questions in the context of a community of inquiry. Third, I examine what Philosophy for/with Children can possibly offer Filipino children if utilized. Finally, I anticipate possible objections from three points of view, namely, parents, educators, and philosophers, and provide answers with concrete suggestions.

Filipino Children as Philosophers

Are Filipino children too young to do philosophy? Better still, can they do philosophy? To begin with, *all* children regardless of culture are capable of doing philosophy. Philosophy is not viewed here as a subject content transferred from a teacher to a student, requiring academic degree and expertise. Instead, it is an inquiry into one’s own and others’ experiences

² In this paper, while I use the term “children” to encompass individuals aged 3 to 18 years, I acknowledge the distinctions within this wide range of ages, such as preschoolers, schoolchildren, adolescents, and youth.

and perspectives, many of which are informed by beliefs and assumptions everyone has “to make sense of the world.”³ Doing philosophy in this context refers to the experience of being puzzled about one’s existential conditions and the attempt to grapple with them, where questions, many of which are deeply philosophical, naturally emerge.

In connection, Filipino children philosophize when they ask existential questions. For instance, when a child asks her mother, “Why does *tatay* have to work abroad?”; or when a female 5th grader questions, “Why does Gerald like to wear our uniform?”; or when a child from a gated community wonders, “Why doesn’t *lola* allow me to play with the kids from outside the village?”; or when a child inquires, “Why do I have to wear polka-dotted clothes on New Year’s day?”; or when an adolescent ponders, “Why am I not as pretty as the other girls in school?”

Any adult or parent of course can satisfy a child’s curiosity by giving the simplest answer. However, while these questions may seem ordinary on the surface, there is always an opportunity to explore beyond them and discover their underlying existential worries. Gareth Matthews, one of the forerunners of Philosophy of Childhood, notes that “a parent or teacher who doesn’t hear the questions of a child, or doesn’t understand that they are more than, and different from, a mere request for information, misses a chance to do philosophy.”⁴

To illustrate this point, as to the child’s query, “why does *tatay* have to work abroad?” a parent may respond by simply highlighting the financial benefits of working as an OFW. However, beneath the child’s seemingly naive question, there may be an underlying existential question tied to the notion of work, family, and society, which are philosophical themes in social philosophy and ethics.

Concerning the question, “Why does Gerald like to wear our uniform?” a parent may answer by resorting to a full-stop reply, “*Bakla kasi siya*” (“Because he is gay”), missing the chance to recognize a possible existential worry concerning individuality, gender roles, and sexual identities, which are philosophical themes in natural law, queer theory, and ethics.

In response to the question, “Why doesn’t *lola* allow me to play with the kids from outside the village?” a father may assert the grandmother’s authority and reassure the child that it is for her own good, overlooking a possible underlying existential concern related to friendship, freedom,

³ Thomas Jackson, “Homegrown,” in *Educational Perspectives*, 44 (2012), 5.

⁴ Gareth Matthews, *The Philosophy of Childhood* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 39.

authority, and even poverty, which are philosophical themes in social philosophy, philosophical anthropology and ethics.

Similarly, regarding the query, “Why do I have to wear polka-dotted clothes on New Year’s Day?” a relative may respond with “*Syempre, para swerte*” (“Of course, for good luck”) or the usual adage, “*Wala may marwala nato kung mutuo ta, di’ba?*” (“We don’t lose anything if there’s no truth in it”), justifying belief in superstitions. Although this line of thought might make sense to many Filipino adults, providing it as an answer to a child’s question only disrupts the exploration of a possible curiosity pertaining to belief and truth, which are philosophical themes in epistemology and metaphysics.

Moreover, on the question, “Why am I not as pretty as the other girls in school?” a father may address her distraught daughter with a soothing reply “*Bako yan totoo, aki ko, an gabos na tawo magayon sa mata kan Dyos*” (“That’s not true, my daughter, in the eyes of God all persons are beautiful”). While this typical response may offer his child immediate reassurance, the father nevertheless misses the opportunity to examine an existential distress possibly linked to the concepts of beauty, self-esteem, self-value, and culture, which are philosophical themes in aesthetics and ethics.

Lastly, returning to the child in the plane, the mother had missed an opportunity to seize the moment in order to explore—even tentatively—the notions of God, knowledge, and faith, which are philosophical themes in philosophy of religion and theodicy.

All these examples show that while offering the simplest answer to a child’s question may seem like the most practical response, it ultimately restricts the opportunities for both the child and the adult to explore and inquire together. For the child, it means missing an opportunity to delve into an experience; while for the adult, it denies them a chance to re-evaluate their assumptions or to discover the philosophical themes underlying even the seemingly simplest questions in life.

At this point, I anticipate some difficulties: first, it is unrealistic to expect Filipino parents or adults to participate in, let alone initiate such dialogues, since understandably, not everyone possesses the basic skills, background in philosophy, or even the willingness (and also, patience and energy) required in philosophical discussions. Second, not all venues and circumstance are appropriate for a dialogue when children ask these kinds of questions, for example, inside a jeepney, while at a party or during a church activity. I will address these difficulties in the last section. For now, the focus is that Filipino children can, and are already, doing philosophy.

Filipino children are a vast and diverse group, coming from various backgrounds, speaking different or multiple languages, and representing rich cultures and unique circumstances. This diversity adds richness to the wide array of experiences from which existential questions could spring. Hence,

there is no reason to believe that Filipino children are any less capable of doing philosophy than children from other cultures and countries. However, to develop the potential of Filipino children in doing philosophy, it is necessary to provide them with opportunities and guidance in exploring their existential questions and answers no matter how tentative or simplistic they may sound. Without such opportunities, it would never be determined how much of their thinking touch upon various philosophical themes and issues that could give Filipino adults a glimpse of their inner worlds, which can also enrich our knowledge.

Instead of asking whether Filipino children can do philosophy or, are too young to do philosophy, the more meaningful question is whether Filipino adults are open and willing to expose children to activities that encourage philosophical thinking. The focus shifts from the children's supposed lack of capacity to philosophize towards the adults' responsibility to foster a nurturing environment for philosophical exploration. This shift entails rejecting the deficit view that Filipino children need to become adults first in order to practice higher-order thinking. Hence, common responses, like *"isip bata ka pa"* ("you still think like a child"), *"wala ka pa masyadong karanasan sa buhay"* ("you don't have much experience in life yet"), or *"hindi ka pa namulat sa katotohanan"* ("you have not been exposed to the truth yet"), should be deeply examined and perhaps corrected.

Another implication of this shift is the need to rethink a common Filipino parenting style that places importance on shielding children from what parents perceive as adult, mature, and taboo themes, which they believe could potentially taint children's innocent minds. Thus, the typical replies like, *"baka malason lang ang isip mo"* ("your mind could be poisoned") and *"wala ka pa sa tamang gulang para malaman 'yan"* ("you are not yet in the right age to know that") should likewise be questioned. While some may find these responses suitable and practical in certain situations, their problem lies in the outright dismissal of children's questions, effectively silencing them rather than sustaining their curiosity.

Further, several questions need to be considered: Does our society value and appreciate philosophical thinking? Do Filipino adults listen to and know how to recognize children's philosophical questions? Are there safe and supportive spaces where Filipino children can freely express and explore their thoughts, questions, and experiences without competition or consequence (e.g., grades or rankings)? Do Filipino children in general feel rewarded or satisfied when they exercise philosophical thinking? At present, the possible responses to these questions tend to favor "no" rather than "yes" answers. Nevertheless, these questions highlight the fact that without the necessary enabling conditions, children's ability to philosophize remains untapped.

Philosophy for/with Children at a Glance

Most of the conversations described earlier typically happen between a child and an adult. These, of course, could also naturally happen between children themselves, e.g., between friends, cousins, or classmates who exchange random questions and ideas while, say, having lunch or playing together. However, imagine such conversations happening among several children *and a facilitating adult* in a collaborative dialogue, where everyone follows some guidelines in sharing their own existential questions and views about them. In this section, I will describe this possibility by discussing the educational-philosophical program called Philosophy for/with Children.

Philosophy for/with Children (P4wC hereafter) is a global movement spearheaded by philosophers, education specialists, and teachers who believe that philosophy can and should be taught not only to high school and college students but also to schoolchildren. Matthew Lipman, one of its forerunners, along with Ann Margaret Sharp, asserts that “children begin to think philosophically when they begin to ask why.”⁵ Being naturally inquisitive, they possess the fundamental impulses essential in philosophizing, namely, wonderment, curiosity, and openness. They are, according to Jaspers and Onfray, “‘spontaneously philosophical’ because of their continual and sweeping existential questioning.”⁶

With this view on what children are and what they are capable of, P4wC employs philosophy as a collaborative activity that is accessible to children. This approach challenges the typical impression of philosophy as something restricted to universities and only accessible to adult students and experts. The underlying assumption here is that philosophy, on one hand, and children’s natural disposition to wonder, on the other, blend well together. As prominent in Matthews’ works, “the impulse to philosophize is integral to our humanity, and begins in early childhood.”⁷ Thus, P4wC begins with a rather radical assumption that children are natural philosophers. Of course, other educational approaches also emphasize a non-deficit view on young people’s inherent capacities, such as the Reggio Emilia and Montessori approaches, but only P4wC begins with this assumption.

The Community of Inquiry (COI hereafter) is one of P4wC’s defining features. It rests on the premise that learning is best experienced in a context

⁵ Matthew Lipman, Ann Margaret Sharp, and Frederick Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 58.

⁶ UNESCO, *Philosophy: A School of Freedom, Teaching Philosophy and Learning to Philosophize: Status and Prospects* (France: UNESCO Publishing, 2007), 5.

⁷ Maughn Rollins Gregory and Megan Jane Laverty, “Gareth B. Matthews, A Philosopher’s Life with Children,” in *Gareth B. Matthews: The Child’s Philosopher*, ed. by Maughn Rollins Gregory and Megan Jane Laverty (London: Routledge, 2022), 1.

where all participants treat each other as equal co-learners in the pursuit of knowledge. The emphasis is on nurturing a community where children trust each other enough to build on everyone's ideas like how players work within a team. Consequently, the thinking that transpires in the community, according to Karin Murriss, "transcends the thinking of any one individual" such that "the insights acquired could never have been reached by the individuals alone."⁸ Thus, in a dialogical inquiry, children exercise thinking together—an approach that is essentially Socratic. Led by their own questions, children exchange ideas, listen to each other, and, in some cases, arrive at a consensus in a collaborative manner.

From a P4wC practitioner's point of view, the COI bridges the discipline of philosophizing, on the one hand, and education, on the other. What this means is that teaching philosophy to children requires a different approach other than transmission-based pedagogies. Just as one cannot teach someone to swim by merely explaining the process but by actually demonstrating how to do it, teaching philosophy involves showing how to engage actively in philosophizing. A lecture-type approach to teaching philosophy may have its benefits in other contexts, but in a COI, the facilitator's primary role is not so much about spewing Plato's dialogues line-by-line or explaining Descartes' *cogito ergo sum*, but rather in modelling a reflective and inquiring mind regardless of the topic of dialogue. Therefore, in the COI, the facilitating adult is a co-learner, not an encyclopedic authority of answers.

By and large, P4wC recognizes that children have their own unique ways of grasping their reality and encourages them to explore their own questions. For this reason, it differs from typical philosophy courses in that it emphasizes *doing* philosophy collaboratively rather than studying it individually. Through philosophical dialogues, children explore anything that interests them, including some questions that are philosophical in nature, in a manner that is suitable for their developmental stage. Consequently, it makes philosophy more engaging for young curious minds, allowing them to develop appreciation of their own and others' ways of thinking about the world. The focus on collaboration and dialogue guarantees that children's voices are heard and their perspectives are carefully considered.

At present, P4wC is being applied and practiced in more than 60 countries. However, what can it possibly offer to Filipino children and to the Philippine society? I will address this question in the next section.

⁸ Karin Murriss, "Can Children Do Philosophy?," in *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 34 (2000), 264.

What P4wC Can Offer to Filipino Children

P4wC is not new in the Philippines. In the past two decades, several Filipino scholars and practitioners have attempted to apply it in the locale, researched and appropriated the COI as a teaching strategy in classrooms, and organized P4wC teacher trainings and workshops.⁹ In this section, I examine how P4wC can influence the development of critical and reflective thinking, and cultivate democratic values among Filipino children—goals that do not only benefit children but the Philippine society in general.

P4wC Develops Critical and Reflective Thinking

One of P4wC's benefits for Filipino children is the development of their capacity for critical and reflective thought. Zosimo Lee, the country's pioneer in P4wC, advises that "Filipino children have to be encouraged, as early as possible, to participate in philosophical dialogue and enhance their thinking skills."¹⁰ In the COI, children are introduced to various "thinking tools" that can stimulate further their curiosity about the world. These include, among others, reflecting on experiences, clarifying ideas, making distinctions, probing assumptions, providing examples and counter-examples, exploring alternative ideas, finding criteria, and respectfully challenging others' ideas when necessary. As children become familiar with using these tools in the context of dialogue, they also develop a reflective disposition and critical thinking habits.

In her P4wC research with second grade students in Camarines, Abigail Thea Canuto records that philosophical dialogues "enhance children's critical thinking skills and allow them to think reflectively" which manifests in their ability to "ask probing questions, and make reasonable judgments."¹¹ These skills, which go beyond mere reasoning, enable children to think well and develop a reflexive aptitude that cultivates open-mindedness as well as self-correction. She observes that her students were "able to widen [the] whole group's perspective about a particular concept by making connections between the arguments and analyses made by their

⁹ See Marella Ada Mancenido-Bolaños, "Narrowing the Gap between Theory and Practice: Community of Inquiry and Its State in the Philippines," in *Kritike*, 12:2 (2018).

¹⁰ Zosimo Lee, "Philosophy for Children in the Philippines," in *Children Philosophize Worldwide: Theoretical and Practical Concepts*, ed. by Eva Marshal, Takara Dobashi, and Barbara Weber (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2009), 584.

¹¹ Abigail Thea Canuto, "Developing Children's Reasoning and Inquiry, Concept Analysis, and Meaning-making Skills through the Community of Inquiry," in *Childhood & Philosophy*, 14 (2018), 449.

peers.”¹² Her study is important not only because it is one of the few researches on P4wC conducted in the Philippine context but also because it shows how the COI has enabled her students to experience what Lee calls “synergy in thinking” where diverse individual thoughts are woven together to form a cohesive fabric of new or broader idea.¹³

For his part, Leander Marquez highlights that “philosophy looks at education as education in thinking,” contrasting this to the supposed framework in Basic Education which is “oriented towards the descriptive sciences and skills training.”¹⁴ Mainly for such reason, he offers a radical but necessary suggestion, which is to institute philosophy as one of the core subjects in Basic Education.¹⁵ P4wC’s emphasis on improving the quality of thinking, among others, and not merely to prepare students for future employment, is its important contribution to Philippine schools.

P4wC Cultivates Democratic Participation

Aside from critical and reflective thinking, the procedures of inquiry in the COI support children in developing basic interpersonal and social skills necessary to grow as responsible members of their community, and as citizens in general. Several of its concrete manifestations include willingness to listen, respect for diverse viewpoints, appreciation for the plurality of positions, and openness to resolve problems together. Certainly, this process does not occur overnight but unfolds gradually through repeated exposure to philosophical dialogues. As Lee explains:

One of the intended results of embedding Philosophy for Children in the educational system is the development of a citizenry that demands and participates in discussion of crucial issues, including the basic principles of their society and its social interactions. Citizens can do these things if they are habituated early in collective reflection and decision-making; what will matter is the collective mind and intentionality. These cannot be the product of individual decisions and perspectives alone, but have to be constructed together

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Zosimo E. Lee, “Nurturing Communities of Inquiry in Philippine Schools,” in *Suri* 4 (2015), 4.

¹⁴ Leander Marquez, “Philosophy in Basic Education: Towards the Strengthening of the Foundations of Philippine Education,” in *Policy Futures in Education* (2017), 3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

through the deliberative process and extended reflections and discussions over time.¹⁶

Philosophical dialogues in the COI are a concrete application and exercise of some democratic principles, which prepare students for the procedures of rational deliberation essential in a democracy. The procedures of inquiry in the COI equip children with the basic skills necessary to participate actively in nation building later on. For Lipman, fostering and strengthening critical thinking in schools is crucial since in a democratic state citizens are expected to think “flexibly but responsibly” in order not to fall prey to “authoritarian and conformitarian propaganda.”¹⁷ This is why the commitment to engage in a COI is, according to Sharp, a “political commitment even at the elementary school level.”¹⁸ Depending on their age and readiness, children in a COI may choose to examine views and practices that are common but often taken for granted in society, thereby cultivating a sense of belonging and accountability even before reaching the age of majority. The procedures of inquiry in the COI, encompassing practices like taking turns, voting, exchanging ideas, agreeing or disagreeing, making meaning, and maintaining openness to diverse viewpoints, cultivate equality, fairness, and respect—values that are integral in a democratic society. Hence, democratic participation is a disposition that children gradually learn and practice in the COI.

Objections and Suggestions

In this third section, I anticipate some objections from three points of view, namely, that of parents, educators, and philosophers/specialists. Some of these objections are based on feedback I received from colleagues, relatives, students, and friends, which I think represent widely held views towards philosophy in general and P4wC in particular. My responses to these objections are accompanied by some concrete suggestions for actions. However, I emphasize that these suggestions are interrelated; each in fact, necessarily implies the others not least because enabling Filipino children to do philosophy is incumbent on the larger community.¹⁹

¹⁶ Lee, *Philosophy for Children in the Philippines*, 596.

¹⁷ Matthew Lipman, *Thinking in Education*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 209.

¹⁸ Ann Margaret Sharp, “The Community of Inquiry: Education for Democracy,” in *Thinking*, 9 (1991), 35–36.

¹⁹ See Cathlyne Joy P. Alvarez-Abarejo, “Facing an Inestimable Giant: Socio-philosophical Reflections on the Difficulty of Implementing Philosophy for Children Program in the Philippines,” in *Diskurso*, 2 (March 2022).

Parents' Point of View

Parent 1:

"I understand that philosophy generally deals with the big questions in life. While thinking about these questions is generally important, letting my child encounter them early is not age-appropriate. My child is supposed to have an innocent and carefree childhood. Why would I let her think about life's serious problems so soon? I want her to grow a little bit older and mature before I let her engage in these issues."

It is not entirely accurate to assume that children directly confront the "big questions" in life. Oftentimes, the questions they are interested in naturally grow from their lived experiences and are expressed in their own level of language development. In most cases, these questions gradually arise from an immediate but perplexing experience, or of something that they encounter regularly but find interesting nevertheless. In other words, existential questions emerge from a child's present conditions and circumstances. In a philosophical dialogue, either between a parent and a child, or in a COI, the topics or questions are determined by the children themselves. It is not the parent's role to steer the dialogue in whatever direction she pleases. Instead, what a parent does is model an open and inquiring mind and ensure that the child is given proper guidance in using some philosophical thinking tools. The fact that the questions that occasion a dialogue come from the children themselves addresses the worry about age-appropriateness. When a child expresses an existential question, it indicates her readiness to learn more about it and the ideas surrounding it. Conversely, a dialogue will not progress if the topic or question is something that the child is not ready for or interested in engaging with.

Parent 2:

"I don't feel comfortable letting my child question our faith, traditions, and practices. Exposing him to P4wC might only encourage him to question authority and social norms. I worry that introducing philosophy to my child at an early age might lead him to think it is acceptable to challenge authority figures, including me and other elders. *Baka maging pilosopo!*"

It is inevitable that children would raise questions that may seem to challenge certain traditions, practices, and beliefs. This inclination to pose such questions is in fact what makes children essential in a democratic society, as they naturally inquire about matters that many adults have taken for granted or are often reluctant to question. While this might cause worry for some conservative parents, the COI does not condone disrespectful behavior as this goes against its democratic ideals. After all, being critical does not necessarily mean being defiant. Hence, it is incorrect to think that children who are exposed to philosophy are encouraged to object insolently to societal beliefs and family traditions. Reflecting further, these questions are not necessarily problematic; rather, they present an opportunity to encourage children to uncover the assumptions behind their inquiries and what these assumptions might signify to them. What I see as a problem is when children are forbidden from asking such questions, denying them the opportunity to broaden their perspectives beyond what is told to them. On this note, Marquez is correct in pointing out that the COI “opens the person to ideas outside his/her socio-cultural and religious milieu”, which actually helps expand one’s horizons.²⁰ Thus, no matter how difficult or unsettling these questions may be, they must be taken seriously since it is the child’s way of making sense of her personal experiences. In addition, raising these questions may be a child’s only means of surfacing a deeper issue (e.g., abuse or trauma).

At this point, I step sideways and address the two difficulties mentioned earlier: first, it is impractical to expect Filipino parents to initiate philosophical dialogues with their children due to differing levels of skill, philosophical knowledge, and willingness. Second, not all situations are suitable for dialogues when children ask such questions. Some possible solutions to these difficulties include encouraging parents to sustain their children’s curiosity, accompanying their children as co-learners, and supporting their children’s philosophical abilities. Let me elaborate on each.

First, when children ask such questions, parents are not obliged to address them immediately, particularly when the timing is not suitable or when the parent is not prepared to discuss the matter. What I think a parent can do is to sustain their curiosity by either assuring the child that the question will be inquired at a later time or by asking the child probing questions, such as: What made you ask that question? What did you see, hear, or experience that provoked you to ask the question? Why is this question important to you? Another way is to keep a record of their questions. An example would be to create a “wonder wall” at home where children’s

²⁰ Marquez, *Philosophy in Basic Education*, 3.

questions are written using text or pictograms, which could serve as prompts for reflection and dialogue. This helps sustain their curiosity and, most importantly, honors their questions regardless of how they may sound to an adult.

The basic idea is to avoid any instance when children think and feel that their questions are less important or irrelevant. The worst reply that a parent can say is “That is a stupid question,” even if it is only meant as a playful banter. Children’s naivety, openness, and curiosity should not be stifled most especially at home not least because they are integral to their overall human development. Besides, when children do not get answers or support from parents, they will naturally turn elsewhere, such as the internet where information mostly lack some regulation. Alternatively, parents may use content-appropriate children’s literature that can deepen their children’s curiosity about a certain topic or question.

Second, it is important to note that not all questions from children are philosophical. Some arise from their interest and curiosity but may not have any underlying existential worry. For willing parents, the crucial task is to pay attention to questions with philosophical potential and to accompany their children *as co-learners*. This, of course, neither requires parents to have a prior knowledge of relevant philosophical themes nor must they feign mastery. Rather, parents can act as “sounding boards” to their children’s philosophical musings, offering a receptive ear without assuming control or passing judgments. On this note, Gareth Matthews highlights “that wonderfully strange mode of inquiry in which grownups cannot control the outcome or rely on the advantage of age and experience to maintain their position,” and to “be able to enjoy the special thrill that comes when insight bursts unexpectedly on shared puzzlement and miraculously clears it away.”²¹ Such patient and respectful accompanying as co-equal learners is in itself a skill that parents I believe should also learn.

Third, many modern Filipino parents desire their children to acquire life skills or engage in creative hobbies at a young age. Many even want their children to become “future-proof” by allowing them to acquire practical competences early on, such as foreign languages, digital literacy, culinary arts, finance, and entrepreneurship, in addition to conventional extracurricular skills in music, arts, and sports. Unless they are already knowledgeable in these fields, parents do not need to impart these skills themselves but can send their children to trainings or extra classes where professionals and experts teach them. Similarly, doing philosophy is also an important skill that can equip children to face the future with the confidence to think for themselves and with others. Similar to the other skills mentioned

²¹ Gregory and Laverty, *Gareth B. Matthews, The Child’s Philosopher*, 23.

earlier, parents do not have to be professional philosophers in order to teach philosophy to their children. One effective approach involves exposing them to activities aimed at enhancing their philosophical thinking abilities, such as philosophical dialogues (in person or online)²², philosophy summer camps,²³ and ethics competitions,²⁴ among others. However, these activities require the presence and active involvement of Filipino philosophers—a rather bold suggestion which will be discussed in the next part.

Philosophers' Point of View

Philosopher 1:

“I understand that children are naturally curious. Nevertheless, I do not think that just because they are curious and are able to question qualifies them as philosophers. While anyone can pose a question, not everyone with this capability is a philosopher. A philosophical thought is a product of an independent mind. Many children can hardly think for themselves, let alone express their thoughts clearly and convincingly.”

To some extent, it is inaccurate to say that children are philosophers based only on their propensity to ask existential questions. Here, it is important to make a distinction between academic philosophers and natural philosophers. Academic philosophers pursue philosophy as a profession, conducting research and teaching. In contrast, children and young people are natural philosophers because they ask these questions spontaneously not for any other gain aside from understanding their immediate environment and real-life experiences. According to Viktor Johansson, “it is in the way children ask questions, in the way they are puzzled by their encounters with ideas, the world, and others, that they demonstrate their capacity for abstract thought,

²² Between 2020 and 2021, the Philosophy with Children and Youth Network for Asia-Pacific (PCYNAP) has organized philosophical dialogues online with some children from various countries in the Asia-Pacific including some Filipino children.

²³ In the Philippines, there are currently no existing and ongoing P4wC programs, but there are regular philosophy summer camps for children and youth in Canada, the US, and Europe. For example, P4C/Aggie School of Athens Philosophy Summer Camp for Teens. See <<https://blog.apaonline.org/2021/01/21/the-p4c-aggie-school-of-athens-philosophy-summer-camp-for-teens-wins-the-2020-apa-pdc-prize-for-excellence-and-innovation/>>.

²⁴ An example is the Ethics Olympiad, which aims “to do more than just help them think through ethical issues: It is to teach students how to think through ethical issues together, as fellow citizens in a complex moral and political community.” See <<https://ethicsolympiad.yahoosites.com/how-does-it-work.html>>.

and it is their ability to remain in this puzzlement that demonstrates their ability for philosophy.”²⁵ Meanwhile, given that most young children lack advanced language skills and complex conceptual abilities, as well as the capacity to sustain prolonged attention, it is not only practical but also advantageous for them to philosophize among peers in the context of a dialogue where there is no competition or consequence. For this reason, philosophical dialogues are a shared experience created together by free and co-dependent minds, distinct from the solitary pursuit of philosophy by independent minds.²⁶

Philosopher 2:

“P4wC is a foreign concept and practice. Most of its underlying assumptions (e.g., reasonableness) are predicated on western constructs, which oftentimes do not match our unique ways of viewing the world. I am afraid that P4wC, despite its noble goals, actually ‘colonizes’ further the mind of Filipino children.”

It is a fact that P4wC as a program first grew in Western soils. However, despite its foreign origins, I think it can work in the Philippine context by integrating it in our culture, languages and practices. It goes without saying that contextualizing and localizing P4wC is necessary, such as using Filipino-authored children’s literature, employing criteria and procedures that are germane to the local community, drawing on local experiences as stimuli, and using the local language in actual dialogues. Moreover, implementing P4wC within a local context should also consider children’s positionalities. This means that philosophers and educators who wish to practice P4wC are responsible for discerning whether their goals and methodologies address the unique needs and contexts of children. In addition, it is incumbent on the philosopher-educator to pay attention to the subtle dynamics of power, privilege, and exclusion, which may be reflected and reproduced in the COI.²⁷ In this way, philosophy will not be introduced to children as a foreign practice, but one that organically emerges from them through their situated perspectives, shared language, and common beliefs.

²⁵ Viktor Johansson, “Children as Philosophers,” in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood*, ed. by Daniel Thomas Cook (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2020), 405–406.

²⁶ See Peter Paul Elicor, “Children as Dialogue Partners in Doing Filipino Philosophy,” in *Suri*, 10:1 (2022).

²⁷ See Peter Paul Elicor, “Resisting the ‘View from Nowhere’: Positionality in Philosophy for/with Children Research,” in *Philosophia International Journal of Philosophy*, 21:1 (2020), 19–33.

As mentioned in the preceding part, the presence and active participation of Filipino philosophers in providing opportunities for children to hone their philosophical thinking abilities is not only important but necessary. Similar to some education professionals who engage with the local communities by giving voluntary lectures, seminars, and workshops, providing assistance (like tutorials and career advice), raising awareness about some issues (such as, gender sensitivity, inclusivity, etc.), Filipino philosophers can also make a valuable contribution by collaborating with primary and secondary school teachers nearest to them. Matthews refers to this approach as the “visiting philosopher” model, which he had personally implemented in the United States. For him,

What a professional philosopher can do is to collect examples of philosophical thinking in young children and then, by linking those childish thoughts to our philosophical tradition, help parents and teacher to recognize philosophy in their children, respect it when it appears, and even participate in it and encourage it on occasion.²⁸

Given that philosophy departments nationwide regularly organize extension programs aimed at engaging with local communities through research initiatives and outreach activities, establishing connections with local children in collaboration with teachers and parents can also be viewed as a valuable component of such efforts. One possibility is to engage directly with a group of children by doing philosophical dialogues on a regular basis. Another option is to collaborate with teachers who are willing to be trained in facilitating philosophical dialogues with their students. These approaches can potentially address the concern regarding the limited capacity of many Filipino parents and teachers in initiating philosophical dialogues with children. Again, like most social advocacies, these activities rely on the voluntary participation of Filipino philosophers.

Moreover, Filipino philosophers interested in working with children may consider exploring the philosophical dimension present in many Filipino children’s literature. A possible approach is to select specific children’s literature that contain philosophical themes, and write reviews and guidelines (e.g., teacher’s discussion guides) on how they can be used as provocations for philosophical dialogues. Another approach is to create original children’s stories with embedded philosophical questions/themes and introduce them to schools. Both can significantly assist parents and

²⁸ Matthews, *Philosophy of Childhood*.

educators in understanding and appreciating some topics in philosophy and discovering effective methods for introducing them to their children or students.

Finally, it is imperative to maximize social media in passing on information to the public about some philosophical themes in relation to children's existential questions. This has a double effect: it encourages philosophical dialogues with children and at the same time corrects the stereotypical portrayals of *pilosopo* prevalent in social media. Philosophy departments can encourage their students (undergraduate and/or graduate levels) to conduct projects such as content creation, just like what brand influencers do.²⁹ Certainly, this entails conveying philosophical questions and ideas through ordinary everyday language and accessible mediums such as images, memes, and videos, ensuring they are understandable and stimulating even to non-specialists. This kind of public engagement is I think comparable to Socrates's discussions with ordinary people in the Agora. For the many Filipinos who do not have the chance to learn formal philosophy but probably spend time regularly with their social media accounts, this can be a way to introduce them to philosophy through what we may aptly call "philosophy influencers."

Educators' Point of View

Teacher 1:

"I understand that philosophy can help develop critical and reflective thinking. However, as many educators working at the elementary level have observed, Filipino children, particularly the younger ones, are generally shy. Only a few have the confidence to voice their questions and ideas. Even less are those who can stay attentive and participative in the entire duration of a class. The reason is because they are not cognitively ready, and obviously, most of them do not have enough experiences in life. Thus, it is better to postpone philosophizing until they reach Senior High."

Children from various countries who have been exposed to P4wC are reported to show improvement not only in thinking and communication

²⁹ For example, some philosophy undergraduate students from MSU-IIT (Iligan) use TikTok to promote some concepts in philosophy.

skills, but also self-esteem.³⁰ I am confident that a similar outcome can occur with Filipino children who engage in COI from the early stages of their basic education onward. Just like learning a foreign language is more effective when started at a young age, introducing children to philosophical dialogues early on can give them confidence in thinking for themselves and communicating their thoughts. Even more fundamental I think is that allowing Filipino children to engage in philosophical dialogues responds to the need to promote their right to be heard, which should begin in elementary schools. Thus, while P4wC serves as a means for developing children's cognitive and linguistic abilities, it should not be overlooked that these capacities are enabled precisely because P4wC is deeply committed to protecting children's fundamental right to be seriously heard and listened to even if they may have fewer experiences than adults.

Teacher 2:

"Busy po kami! Aside from a lot of paperwork, we also do extra-curricular activities, already sacrificing our own personal time and resources. Besides, we are not Philosophy graduates. Most of us are not trained to facilitate philosophical dialogues."

It is safe to assume that many teachers are familiar and perhaps already use classroom activities that encourage thinking and participation to enrich their classes like debates, think-pair-share, gallery walk, and roundtable discussions. Although the COI is distinct from these interactive discussion activities, it nevertheless shares some facilitation principles with these approaches. Some of these principles include creating a safe space, ensuring equal participation, maintaining respectful and organized discussions, promoting collaboration, modeling active listening, and ensuring that everyone respects each other's turns. Similar to how teachers use these principles when managing the activities mentioned, P4wC practitioners also utilize them in facilitating dialogues in the COI. Simply put, Filipino teachers who are interested in appropriating P4wC in their classrooms are not starting from scratch. Even without formal training in philosophy, they can effectively facilitate philosophical dialogues by simply enhancing what they are already capable of. This entails acquiring a general understanding of the various branches of philosophy, their corresponding assumptions and questions, along with the common arguments and counter-arguments addressing these questions. While this may still sound daunting

³⁰ UNESCO, *Philosophy: A School of Freedom*, 8.

to some overloaded teachers, it is still possible to integrate the COI as a *pedagogical complement* to the established strategies used in teaching non-philosophy subjects in Basic Education.

The critical and reflective thinking exercised in the COI can be valuable for children across various subjects since the process of dialogue-based inquiry encourage a “philosophical mindset,” even when the topic of shared interest is not directly related to a philosophical question or theme. Students develop this mindset every time they consciously and constantly exercise “(re)constructing experience and knowledge through the critical analysis of subject matter, questioning, and the challenging of assumptions.”³¹ Whether exploring historical knowledge, scientific concepts, or everyday life themes, students in the COI develop cognitive and socio-emotional intelligence. For this reason, several Filipino educators have emphasized the value of integrating COI in various subject areas in the Basic Education curriculum.

For instance, in the context of science education, Ma. Theresa Payongayong opines that “if the creation of the community of inquiry would be permitted to serve as an educational paradigm then surely it will manifest a back-to-back reinforcement of concept and skills acquisition” which for her are “reasoning and analytical skills.”³² Meanwhile, talking about social studies education, Canuto asserts that

knowledge about history, culture, society, politics, economics, and geography in the community [of inquiry] is built and not merely transmitted, as students are given opportunities to ask questions and share their opinions while following the train of logic in the process of inquiry.³³

Moreover, several case studies conducted in the Philippines have examined the impact of COI in classrooms. For instance, in a study involving 7th and 8th grade students at Pangasinan State University Integrated High School, COI has been observed to be effective in teaching English especially

³¹ Daniela Dumitru, “Communities of Inquiry. A Method to Teach,” in *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 33 (2012), 239.

³² Ma. Theresa T. Payongayong, “Creating a Community of Inquiry through Philosophy,” *Transactions of the National Academy of Science and Technology Philippines* 29 (2007), 309.

³³ Abigail Thea Canuto, “Social Studies for Democracy: Cultivating Communities of Inquiry for Filipino Students as Deliberative Citizens,” in *International Journal of Progressive Education*, 18 (2022), 6.

in fostering students' autonomous learning.³⁴ Additionally, various researchers have documented significant positive outcomes when implementing COI in blended and online K–12 learning settings.³⁵

As a final note, utilizing COI as a pedagogical complement does not mean exclusive reliance on it as the sole teaching strategy not least because it can be employed in conjunction with other methods, including those considered “traditional” (e.g., lecture, demonstration, etc.). Depending on the subject area, a teacher may switch between teacher-led and student-led approaches to respond to different learning needs and objectives. For example, science teachers may initiate a lesson with a lecture or demonstration, followed by hands-on experiments. Subsequently, they could facilitate a COI session to further enhance understanding, encouraging them to exercise their philosophical mindset. This progression allows students to grasp concepts both through direct instruction, active participation, and collaborative engagement.

*Kindergarten am See
Salzburg, Austria*

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³⁴ Alqy Novia Rachman, Ana Maghfiroh, Diyah Atiek Mustikawati, and Niken Reti Indriastuti, “Community of Inquiry for Students’ Autonomy in English Language Learning: A Case of Philippines High School,” in *Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, 6 (2021).

³⁵ See Juliet Aleta Rivera Villanueva, Petrea Redmond, and Linda Galligan, “Manifestations of Cognitive Presence in Blended Learning Classes of the Philippine K–12 System,” *Online Learning*, 26 (2022). See also Mark James Javier and John Vincent Aliazas, “Community of Inquiry Framework in Basic Science Process During Synchronous Learning Modality,” *International Journal of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics*, 2 (2022).

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