

*Philosophy in Schools: An Introduction for Philosophers and Teachers*, ed. Sara Goering, Nicholas J. Shudak, and Thomas E. Wartenberg. New York and London: Routledge, 2013. 325 pages. ISBN 978-0-415-64063-3. \$125 (hardback).

Perhaps it is just because I am interested in and pay attention to the subject, but it appears to me that the call for doing philosophy with students in schools (meaning primary and secondary schools) is growing louder in the past few years. In 2009, the American Philosophical Association's Committee on Precollege Instruction in Philosophy started the Philosophy Learning and Teaching Association (PLATO: <http://plato-philosophy.org>), devoted to advocating for and supporting philosophy in schools. A look at PLATO's list of books shows a significant number published on the subject in the last five to six years. In 2011 there was a mini-conference about philosophy for children (p4c, another term for philosophy in schools or precollege philosophy) before the annual meeting of the Pacific Division of the APA. This anthology was inspired by that mini-conference, but it is not just a collection of those presentations; some of the papers were presented at the conference and revised later, while others are new.

This text has multiple potential audiences. In part, it speaks to teachers, principles and others who might want to introduce philosophy into a school setting: in the Introduction, the editors call this volume a "handbook," stating their hope that "the eager practitioner can use [the book] to develop a philosophy program of her own" (4-5). While I wouldn't say that the book provides everything one would need to start a philosophy program in a school—nor does that seem to be its purpose—it does provide enough of an introduction to several possible ways of doing philosophy with children, along with resources for further study, that one can get a good sense of what has worked for others and where to look for more information.

In part, the text can be useful to philosophers who are wondering just what this "p4c" movement is all about and what kind of philosophy one could do with children. For those of us who have only taught philosophy to college or university students, and for whom such courses usually focus on reading, discussing and writing about primary texts, the idea of doing philosophy with, say, primary school students may seem impractical. But even very young children can be said to be doing philosophy when they engage in discussions about philosophical questions, learning how to listen to others and disagree respectfully, to provide reasons for their claims, to consider objections, and to revise their original views in light of the discussion. In addition, those who teach philosophy may find, as I did while reading this text, that some of the methods for doing philosophy with children could be effective with university students as well. Indeed, one of the chapters, by David A. Shapiro, is devoted precisely to talking about how he found resources for solving problems with his university philosophy course through what he was doing with younger students.

As a parent, I also found several ideas in the book for how I might engage my own child in philosophical discussions. Some of the methods for doing philosophy with children could be done within a family, such as reading books that raise philosophical issues and engaging children in a discussion about those issues.

*Philosophy in Schools* is divided into four parts. Part I introduces various models for how philosophy might be done in schools, and there is quite a wide range. For example, Thomas Wartenberg provides a

description of using picture books to engage primary school children in philosophical discussions, John Simpson discusses a successful summer camp program in philosophy, Maughn Gregory explains a professional development program at the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children that trains teachers to begin to do philosophy in their classes, and Nicholas J. Shudak talks about introducing more philosophy in preservice teacher education to help teachers see the importance of philosophical work (and thus perhaps be more likely to consider doing it with their own classrooms). Benjamin Lukey describes an experimental “philosopher in residence” program through p4c Hawai’i, in which he served as a support person for teachers introducing p4c at a high school. This chapter serves a dual purpose in that it not only describes how this “PIR” program worked, it also discusses some of the major principles and practices of p4c Hawai’i, as Lukey explains how they helped him overcome challenges during his time as a philosopher in residence.

Parts II and III provide chapters that get into more of the specific ways one might begin to do philosophy with children, with Part II focusing on primary schools and middle schools (and earlier!), and Part III on secondary/high schools. I have chosen a couple of chapters from each to describe in more detail, in order to illustrate some of the ways philosophy can be done in schools.

For younger children, the emphasis is on getting children involved in a discussion, usually after reading a story or a chapter to them. Berys Gaut and Morag Gaut, for example, explain a method they have used successfully even in children as young as three to five, in which a facilitator reads a story, using props to help illustrate what is going on, and engages the children in a highly structured inquiry. Gaut and Gaut give the example of a story about what is fair when sharing a cake between bears who are small and a bear who is bigger—is it fair to divide the cake equally, or to give the bigger bear a bigger share? Gaut and Gaut have written their own texts, and provide not only questions to start the inquiry, but follow up questions for the different answers the children might give, including ones that invite children to generalize their answers or consider possible objections. The discussion can be followed by an optional post-discussion activity (in the case of the bears and cake story, the dividing of a real cake according to what the children have said is fair between smaller people and bigger ones!). This way of carefully structuring a discussion, Gaut and Gaut argue, “helps teachers who have little or no background in philosophy (which will be true of the majority of teachers) to be confident that they are doing genuine philosophy, by providing them with philosophical questions and examples of philosophical techniques” (134).

With older children (grades K-8), Thomas Jackson explains a somewhat different method of doing philosophy when he discusses the five pillars of the p4c Hawai’i model. Here the inquiry also begins with a reading, though it could also be a video, a piece of music, a work of art. Then, each child is asked to generate a question or comment about what they have heard or seen, these are posted for all to see, and the group votes on what they would like to discuss first. In this way, the inquiry “arises out of the questions and interests of the community, begins where the community is in its understanding, and moves in directions that the community indicates” (103). The discussion is guided by tools from the “Good Thinker’s Toolkit,” including offering reasons, identifying assumptions, recognizing inferences being made, asking about the truth of claims, and looking for examples and counterexamples. The inquiry is followed by a reflection in which the students evaluate how the discussion went.

There is a range of different approaches to doing philosophy in high schools, though they often involve giving students a chance to read primary source texts in philosophy. Michael D. Burroughs discusses “Philosophical Horizons,” a community outreach program of the University of Memphis Philosophy Department, which offers for-credit courses in philosophy for high school students. In this program he has used dialogues, sometimes written by himself, to introduce philosophical topics; these dialogues

often portray characters of the same age as the students, discussing issues they face in their everyday lives. This, he notes, not only brings philosophical topics to students in an accessible and engaging way, it also allows them to speak of the views of the characters rather than each other. Then he provides short readings of primary philosophy texts that address similar issues.

Kirsten Jacobsen runs an outreach program at the University of Maine called “Philosophy Through the Ages” that connects undergraduates with high school students as well as seniors in retirement communities. High school students meet every two weeks for two hours in a voluntary, after school program. They are given primary texts in philosophy to read and discuss. Before each meeting Jacobsen meets with undergraduate students who are helping with the program, and they come up with questions to start the discussion with the high school students, as well as help facilitate it. Once a month the undergraduates and high school students meet with seniors at a retirement community, where they do readings “on the spot” and hold discussions afterwards. This program stands out for connecting thinkers of multiple ages and providing valuable educational experiences for all involved.

Though many of the chapters in the text discuss reasons for why doing philosophy in schools is a valuable endeavour, it is in Part IV that empirical evidence is provided of its value for learning. Deanna Kuhn, Nicole Zillmer and Valerie Khait describe their assessments of a twice-weekly philosophy course at a middle school in which students work in teams to provide reasons and evidence for one “side” of an issue, practice discussing with students on the “other side,” and finally engage in a whole class debate. They report that in comparison with a control group, students who have participated in this philosophy program “show not only greater attention to the opponent’s arguments but increased use of direct counterarguments ...” (263). They also did better than a control group at creating an argumentative discourse between two imagined people on different sides of an issue, showing the discussants addressing each other’s arguments rather than just “‘taking turns’ asserting their own positions” (263-264). I only wish there had been some further detail on how these things were measured and what the results actually were, though I believe these details may be found in some of the articles by Kuhn and others cited in the chapter.

Stephen Trickey and Keith Topping discuss a multi-method study of a philosophy program for primary school students in Scotland that involves students in philosophical discussions for one hour per week. The authors compared students who had participated in this program with students who had not, and used the following methods to determine the impact on those who had: standardized tests of cognitive abilities as well as students’ perceptions of themselves as learners, given as pre- and posttests; video analysis of class discussions, also pre- and post-philosophical activity (or other activity, in the case of the control group), to see how often students supported their views with reasons, the ratio of teacher speaking to student speaking, and more; and analysis of surveys given to students who had completed the philosophy program. These measures showed that, compared to the control group, students in the philosophy program improved significantly in terms of their cognitive abilities as measured on standardized tests (even two years after the fact), the frequency of giving reasons for their views as shown in video analysis of class discussions, and perceived improvement in their “communication skills, confidence, and concentration” as shown on the surveys (296).

Throughout *Philosophy in Schools* there is often repeated the theme of co-creating knowledge between teachers and students, of actively involving students in determining the starting points and directions of the philosophical inquiry (see, e.g., the chapters by Walter Omar Kohan, Thomas Jackson, David A. Shapiro, and Michael D. Burroughs). Some of the methods of inquiry in p4c devoted to involving students in this activity could be quite useful for teaching in college or university classrooms as well. More importantly, if philosophy in schools can help children to grow up to be better critical thinkers,

reasoners, and participants in discussion, as I think there is good evidence it can, then it's important to support more such philosophy programs. And this volume provides an excellent overview of the various methods of doing p4c, specific suggestions on what has worked well at various levels, and evidence for the value of doing philosophy with children, all of which could help to raise awareness and garner support for p4c. I certainly wish philosophy were offered at my child's school!

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