

# The Philosopher's Pedagogy

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“How come your students are so engaged?” “What are the reasons your students perform so well on the Hawai‘i State Assessments and Advanced Placement Exams?” “What makes the student experience in your classrooms so different?” “How do you use philosophy to teach language arts and social studies?” “The students are always talking about your class. What is it that you do in your classrooms?” “What is philosophy for children?” This short article is our best attempt to answer these questions by describing the complex relationship we see between philosophy, education, theory, and practice. We are calling this relationship the philosopher’s pedagogy, and it is an approach to teaching that builds on the Philosophy for Children (P4C) movement started by Matthew Lipman in the 1960s.

Philosophy for children is at the heart of our teaching practice. This may be due to our shared educational experiences in teacher preparation in the Masters of Education in Teaching Program (MEdT) at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa—a program that placed a high value on inquiry. It is also where we were first introduced to philosophy for children. The theories, ideas, and concepts presented in philosophy for children were attractive to Amber because of her philosophically rich childhood experiences; her father possessed a background in philosophy and would often engage her in meaningful “dinner table” inquiries, while her Deweyan elementary school instilled values of problem solving and creative thinking. Chad was initially drawn to philosophy for children because of the importance of his undergraduate philosophy degree in shaping his own education.

These experiences, coupled with a strong desire to create an engaging and meaningful schooling experience for our students, provided the perfect context to bring together our interests in philosophy and teaching. However, after seeing Thomas Jackson model his p4c Hawai‘i approach to education, we both realized that philosophy had a much greater reach than simply connecting to our own life narratives. We saw (and experienced) firsthand how p4c Hawai‘i could transform traditional classrooms into intellectually safe

communities. We soon became committed to creating ways to incorporate p4c Hawai‘i into our practice as pre-service public high school teachers. Now, ten years after Amber’s initial experiences, she continues to use p4c Hawai‘i methods to design and implement curriculum in her social studies classes, while Chad has done the same in his language arts courses. Unlike many educational reform movements, p4c Hawai‘i is not an off-the-shelf program that can be implemented directly into the curriculum; it is a transformative approach to teaching that affects the way one teaches.

To sustain commitment to improving our philosopher’s pedagogy, we have developed a professional relationship where we continually dialogue, philosophize, test new activities, and critically reflect on the role that p4c Hawai‘i has in each of our classrooms. Some of this inquiry has been in response to questions posed by others, but most of this ongoing dialogue has been driven by our interests in finding ways to rethink and adapt p4c Hawai‘i to more effectively meet the needs of our students, and our goals as teachers. The philosopher’s pedagogy presented in this article, while still evolving, represents the most current state of our thinking and understanding of this approach to teaching. It is our contribution to the ongoing dialogue concerning philosophy for children and its relationship with philosophy, education, theory, and practice.

## The ongoing P4C dialogue

Our professional dialogue fits into a much larger discussion that begins with the work of Matthew Lipman (1980 with Sharp and Oscanyan, 1988, 1992, 1993, 2008), the creator of the Philosophy for Children program.<sup>1</sup> What began in 1969 with a single philosophical novel called *Harry Stottlemeier’s Discovery* and an accompanying teacher manual, both designed “to help children learn how to think for themselves” (Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyan, 1980, p. 53) evolved into a K–12 program composed of seven novels and companion teacher manuals. In 1970, Lipman created the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC)<sup>2</sup> to advance his call for overall school redesign and

educational improvement. By adopting an innovative approach to philosophy and education, Lipman became known as the pioneer of the movement to assist classroom teachers in engaging their students in the activity of philosophical inquiry. However, Lipman has not been alone in this endeavor. For example, Gareth Matthews' approach to philosophy for children (1980, 1984, 1994) has aimed at modeling a distinct pedagogy, while Thomas Wartenberg (2009) has created lessons and a five-step plan to help teachers use children's books to bring philosophy into their classrooms. Thomas Jackson, a professor in the philosophy department at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, is another major contributor to the philosophy for children endeavor. Dubbed p4c Hawai'i to distinguish it from Lipman's P4C approach, Jackson has devoted his efforts to experimenting with fresh approaches to teaching philosophy to children and teachers in the public schools in Hawai'i (2001, 2011).

From the beginning, Jackson has identified several limitations in Lipman's approach,<sup>3</sup> and awareness of these issues has pushed Jackson and the teachers he works with to create a set of innovative instructional strategies that can be used effectively to bring the philosophy into school classrooms. After thirty years of work, p4c Hawai'i is a refined set of classroom conditions that promote values of community, intellectual safety, thinking, reflection, and inquiry. These values are realized in classroom practices that build a sense of intellectual safety and promote reflection and respectful sharing of ideas.<sup>4</sup>

The conditions and practices detailed in Jackson's p4c Hawai'i provide a more flexible approach than Lipman's original philosophy for children curriculum. Jackson's approach moves the focus of classroom activity from philosophical content, as represented in Lipman's novels and teacher manuals, to the thoughts, ideas, and questions of the students. This shift in focus from text to student allows teachers to use p4c Hawai'i to teach across all grade levels and within different content areas. It also provides adaptive structures so that teachers can modify p4c Hawai'i practices in order to respond to the cultural, emotional, and intellectual needs of the students. This freedom from Lipman's more traditional and inflexible philosophy for children curriculum appealed to both of us because we teach in a multicultural high school. In addition, the courses that we teach contain specific content and accompanying standards to measure student performance. Thus, we need a pedagogy that provides

the intellectual and academic content for our students to meet state standards as well as an approach that encourages them to think philosophically about what they are studying. As a result, the last ten years have been spent on modifying Jackson's p4c Hawai'i approach to construct a method of our own. This was the birth of what we refer to as "the philosopher's pedagogy." We view it as our personal contribution to the ongoing dialogue about how to engage school-age students in philosophical reflection.

## A Reconceptualized Understanding of Philosophy

The philosopher's pedagogy has been built upon a reconceptualization of philosophy that fits more appropriately into the task of doing philosophy with children. We begin with Jackson's distinction between "Big P" philosophy and "little p" philosophy (Jackson, 2010). Each approach to philosophy represents a particular orientation to philosophical content and the kind of activity associated with that content.

### "Big P" philosophy

"Big P" philosophy refers to the traditional understanding of philosophy as an academic specialization. In this view, philosophy is represented in the thought and writings of the great philosophers. They include, among other illustrious names, the works and ideas of Plato, Descartes, Hume, Kant, and Nietzsche. "Big-P" philosophy also deals with the "big" questions—questions of being, truth, and justice, which are most notably represented in the philosophical sub-domains of metaphysics, ontology, epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics. Thus, teaching of Big P philosophy is directed to the mastery of an established canon and initiation into a domain of knowledge that is the preserve of the specialist. The activities associated with this conception of philosophy concern the maintenance, examination, critique, and presentation of ideas within the canon. "Big P" philosophers engage in philosophy through the study of these canonical texts. Professional philosophers must show a certain command over these ideas and be able to converse in the language of "Big P" philosophy by engaging in critical discussions of ideas and offering interpretations of recognized texts. They conduct their work at academic conferences and publish literature in scholarly journals (Jackson, 2011; Lipman, 1988, p. 11). This activity is typically engaged as a dialectical contest between

individuals and competing schools of thought (Jackson, 2011). Philosophy in of the Big P sort is familiar enough to anyone who has taken a philosophy course at the university level.

Philosophy is an elite academic discipline, in which entrance into the field is reserved for those who have obtained a PhD in the subject and who labor to add to the philosophical literature. However, the sheer number and difficulty of philosophical texts, and the “hermetic terminology” (Lipman, 1988, p. 5) of academic philosophy, acts as a barrier to the non-specialist. Like Plato’s philosopher kings, “Big P” philosophers are members of an exclusive club, accessible only to those rare souls who have endured a long period of academic preparation.

### “little p” philosophy

In Plato’s *Theaetetus*, Socrates tells us that it is the “sense of wonder that is the mark of the philosopher. Philosophy indeed has no other origin” (1961, 155d). Understood in this Socratic light, each one of us enters the world with the basic capacity to engage in philosophy (Jackson, 2011). Thanks to our natural ability for curiosity and wonder, we are born “little p” philosophers. This natural disposition to wonder is the first step in a process of making sense of our world. Dewey writes that “the curious mind is constantly alert and exploring, seeking material for thought, as a vigorous body is on the *qui vive* for nutriment. Eagerness for experience, for new and varied contacts, is found where wonder is found” (Dewey, 1910/1997, p. 31). New experiences and reflections help us shape our understanding of highly complex abstract ideas—ideas such as love, compassion, and equality; and even ordinary, routine matters, such as lunch time, the weather, and fashion often provoke deeper questioning that arises from our sense of wonder about the world. Confused thoughts and feelings of perplexity are often the first step towards reflective resolution. Regardless of the weight or depth of the belief, such ideas and experiences create the motive force for engaging in “little p” philosophy. Dewey believes that philosophical questions arise out of some confusion or perplexity when we are compelled to question our habits and beliefs. Something new, something unexpected in our world requires us to sit up and think, and it is this thinking that is the beginning of philosophy (Dewey, 1910/1997; p. 12, 13). The aim of “little p” philosophy is to nourish this incipient thinking and direct its development.

Society, culture, and, in many cases, “Big P” philosophy, shape these beliefs, but our ability to wonder, to ask questions, and to seek out answers that modify our beliefs lies at the heart of philosophical thinking. “Little p” philosophy is about our involvement in inquiries that develop out of these moments when our experiences become problematic for us, and the realization that we need to rethink our position. It is this active process of trying to figure out the world that constitutes the beginning of philosophy. We humans are philosophically active from the very beginning (Jackson, 2011). Ownership of belief, the ability to wonder, and our willingness to reflect upon those beliefs are the prerequisites for engagement in “little p” philosophy.<sup>5</sup>

“Little p” philosophy is primarily a way of approaching and dealing with content in order to come to a deeper understanding of it. This shift in perspective moves philosophy from canonical texts and the problems of philosophy to the activity of inquiry. Thus, as Jackson (2011) explains, the “center of gravity” of philosophy moves from the published and/or established ideas of others, to our own thoughts, questions, experiences, and reflections. The focal point of the activity resides in us and in our dealings with the world and the problems that life throws our way. “Little p” philosophy encourages individuals to examine their lives and experiences in order to come to a deeper understanding of the world and their place in it, instead of exclusively focusing on the established ideas and questions of others. Accordingly, the dominant mode of practice in “little p” philosophy is engagement in actual inquiries (Jackson, 2011). This conception of philosophy as an activity is not tied to a specific predetermined content. And this means that it can be included across the disciplines, and that it can be integrated in different school subjects. The principal task of the teacher is “to keep the sacred spark of wonder alive and to fan the flame that already glows...to protect the spirit of inquiry, to keep it from becoming *blasé* from overexcitement, wooden from routine, fossilized through dogmatic instruction, or dissipated by random exercise on trivial things (Dewey, 1910/1997, p. 34). Our philosopher’s pedagogy is built upon this understanding of philosophy as something that you do, which makes it possible for us to link philosophy with different subjects in K–12 classrooms. Thus, the philosopher’s pedagogy is an approach to teaching that helps teachers think in concrete ways about how to bring this kind of reflection into the school curriculum.

## The Educational Commitments of the Philosopher's Pedagogy

In adopting the philosopher's pedagogy in our classrooms, we have found that it requires a set of six interconnected educational commitments. The first is that the teacher must live an examined life. Secondly, the teacher must see education as a shared activity between teacher and student. Thirdly, the teacher and students must re-conceptualize the "content" of the discipline as a reflection of the interaction between the classroom participant's beliefs and experiences and the subject matter being taught. This connects with the fourth commitment: that the teacher must hold, with Dewey (1916), the view that philosophy is "the general theory of education." Fifth, teachers, and students, must make philosophy a living classroom practice. And finally, teachers must be willing to challenge contemporary measures for classroom assessment. The next six sections provide a more detailed exposition of each of these commitments.

### The examined life of the teacher

The first characteristic of the philosopher's pedagogy is the commitment to an examined life. In the *Apology*, Socrates' famously remarked that life is not worth living if it is void of investigation and inquiry.

*Let no day pass without discussing goodness and all the other subjects about which you hear me talking and examining both myself and others is really the very best thing that a man can do, and that life without this sort of examination is not worth living (Plato, 1961, 38a)*

According to Socrates, the examination of one's beliefs and conceptions of the world gives life purpose. Teachers who are committed to the philosopher's pedagogy share this belief as a fundamental value. For such teachers, the examined life pervades the work they do in the classroom, and in turn lends teaching and learning a philosophical purpose.

To bring this sense of purpose into schools, the philosopher's pedagogy requires teachers to incorporate their sense of wonder, curiosity, and critical analysis of life's meaning into the curriculum they design and into the relationships they develop with their students. The content of the classroom, in addition to the methods of instruction, are an extension of the teacher's examined life outside the classroom. The philosopher's pedagogy does not begin when we walk into the classroom; nor end when we leave at the last bell.

Instead, the art of philosophical teaching is an extension of the teacher's (and students') growth and development both within their job and beyond.

We have found that when teachers live and model an examined life both inside and outside of their classrooms their students sit up and take notice. When our students observe us engaging in genuine inquiry about life's experiences, situations, products, and people, they are more willing to engage in this process of inquiry along with us. As a result, students begin to internalize the skills and dispositions needed to thoughtfully engage in the examination of their lives; their schoolwork becomes not only a place to engage in meaningful inquiry, but a space to sharpen and hone philosophical tools of inquiry. Dewey says of teaching that the teacher's claim to rank as an artist is measured by (their) ability to foster the attitude of the artist in those who study with (them), whether they be youth or little children" (1910/1997, p.220). We claim that what is true of the teacher as artist is true of the teacher as philosopher. Leading an examined life is a contagious condition and once one experiences the engagement in the activity of "little p" philosophy, it becomes by degrees ingrained in the practice of the students.

### Education as a shared activity between teacher and student

In addition to living an examined life, teachers who practice the philosopher's pedagogy conceptualize education as a *shared* activity between teacher and student. This is a departure from the traditional role of the teacher—the know-it-all who is the "sage on the stage." Based on the theories of social constructivism, this conceptualization of education "rejects the notion of objective knowledge and argues instead that knowledge develops as one engages in dialogue with others" (Palinscar, 1998, p. 347). The dialogue is characterized by mutual thinking and shared communication between teachers and students. Collectively they work to create what Lipman (1991) calls a classroom community of inquiry where students and teachers "listen to one another with respect, build on one another's ideas, challenge one another to supply reasons for otherwise unsupported opinions, assist each other in drawing inferences from what has been said, and seek to identify one another's assumptions" (p. 15).

The idea of the classroom as a community of inquiry is an essential part of the philosopher's pedagogy. It is the prerequisite to all other learning (Vygotsky, 1978) that takes

place in school; it is not just a feel-good “ice breaker” activity at the beginning of a semester, but an ongoing and purposeful activity where teachers facilitate relationships, practice equity pedagogy, and design curricular opportunities for students to learn alongside their peers and their teacher. In this socially constructed learning environment we recognize that “people cannot separate *how* thinking takes place from *what* knowledge is available in the place *where* learning happens” (Oakes & Lipton, 1999, p. 77).

According to Dewey (1916), teachers need to “engage students in activities, because it is through the process of engaging in activities that he learns” (p. 168). We argue that teachers must be equally engaged in these learning activities because “learning occurs during situated joint activity” (Vygotsky summarized in Samaras, 2002, p. xxii). In this setting, both teachers and students become “self-activated makers of meaning,” (Schiro, 2008, p. 103) because they are working together in order to construct knowledge. The philosopher’s pedagogy challenges teachers to remove themselves from the center of classroom activities, and to take a seat beside their students where they can learn together as co-inquirers. In this “reflective paradigm, students and teachers query each other” (Lipman, 1991, p.14). As Freire (1970/1987) writes,

*through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with student-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow (p. 80).*

Teachers and students recognize they are in the process of becoming educated together. In such a classroom, teachers and students are constantly working (and in some instances, struggling) to communicate their complex thoughts, ideas, and questions, because it is necessary for both to be “in charge of their own lives and learning,” (Schiro, 2008, p. 105). Because the philosopher’s pedagogy is not simply a recipe or model to be followed (Dewey, 1916, p. 170), teachers and students must find their way together as they engage in an intricate dance between building relationships and applying good thinking to the construction of new knowledge concerning the content they study.

### **Content is the interaction between the participants’ beliefs and experiences and subject matter**

The focus on engaging students in classroom inquiry distinguishes the philosopher’s pedagogy from typical approaches to teaching content in schools. Traditionally, classroom instruction concerned the transmission of content knowledge to students. Under this approach, “effective” teachers develop or employ strategies to help their students understand and retain a certain set of skills and knowledge specific to their content area. The teacher and the texts possess the knowledge the students must attain in order to be “successful.”

For example, in the traditional approach, students are taught F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* using a teacher-centered approach. Prior to reading each passage, the teacher supplies students with a corresponding vocabulary list and after the students have defined all of the terms, she checks to make sure the students defined them in the “correct” manner. Then as the students read each chapter, the teacher identifies the important passages that describe the key character traits, plot lines, and use of literary devices. The students take notes on specific details and perceived meanings such as Gatsby’s car, the Valley of the Ashes and Wilson’s representation of the lower class, and the symbolism of hope that was laden within the green light at the end of Daisy’s dock. There is virtually no opportunity to question the teacher’s “expert” interpretation, offer connections, or bring up ideas the students (or teacher for that matter) may have found personally interesting. Rather, the students are to “bank” (Freire, 1970/1989) all of the teacher’s knowledge before they can properly enjoy the novel and understand its meaning. Students who are successful on the quizzes and test are the ones who correctly supply the meanings and information that have been fed to them by the teacher. This is counter to the manner in which the philosopher’s pedagogy views the teaching of literature and other content matter (scientific research findings, primary documents from history, mathematical concepts, great works of art, etc.).

So what does it mean to teach a subject using the philosopher’s pedagogy. The primary content, which is the same regardless of the school subject or grade level, is composed of the beliefs and conceptions of the world that shape our “little p” philosophy. This shift in content, like the shift that occurs from the content of “Big P” Philosophy to that of “little p” philosophy, moves the “center or gravity” from the texts

of the specific subject areas (i.e., English, social studies, science, math), to the thoughts, ideas, and beliefs of the students in the classroom community. However, it is important to note this shift is not simply concerned with discussing the feelings and ideas of students, devoid of subject matter. The texts are still very much relevant and are used as a catalyst to initiate meaningful philosophical inquiry. The sensitivity of the teacher towards the beliefs of the students provides the incentive to engage the texts and to begin a conversation about their meaning.

This alternative relationship to content requires that teachers must be thoughtful when choosing the subject-specific content and materials to use in their classes (i.e., books titles, primary documents, topics for labs, art assignments, videos, mathematical problems, etc.). In fact, the content and materials of the course should be selected with the intention of engaging students in meaningful inquiry and in the examination of beliefs, experiences, assumptions, and ideas. “The curriculum should bring out aspects of the subject matter that are unsettled and problematic in order to capture the laggard attention of the students and to stimulate them to form a community of inquiry” (Lipman, 1991, p. 16). Each discipline, whether it is the performing arts or mathematics, has content that is complex, provides multiple perspectives, and is relevant to the diverse backgrounds and experiences of our students. Therefore, it is necessary for the teacher who employs the philosopher’s pedagogy to know her students and wisely choose classroom materials to stimulate students’ prior knowledge and wonder.

The central focus of the pedagogy is to engage students and the teacher in the activity of philosophy born out of the questions and curiosities that emerge from their engagement with the respective content of each course. The ideas of the students are to be considered, heard, and tested by all members of the classroom community through an ongoing dialogue.

*At the heart of philosophy is...dialogue; at the heart of this discipline is therefore what is essential to education. The craft of philosophy contains itself a pedagogy—the need for dialogue, the need for questioning and a method of inquiry—which are essential characteristics of education in general. This is why education cannot be divorced from philosophy and philosophy cannot be divorced from education (Lipman & Sharp, 1978, pg. 259)*

This active (and sometimes laborious) process of understanding the beliefs that emerge from our upbringing, experience, and spirit of curiosity is an ongoing inquiry to modify, correct, enhance, and deepen our views of the world. It is the process of self-correction, in which we re-conceptualize our beliefs and adapt and develop new tools of understanding that is “small-p” philosophy.

*Education should be the art of orientation. Educators should devise the simplest and most effective methods of turning minds around. It shouldn’t be the art of implanting sight in the organ, but should proceed on the understanding that the organ already has the capacity, but is improperly aligned and isn’t facing the right way (Plato, 1961, Republic, 518d).*

As Socrates indicated, we are philosophically active from the beginning. First, we wonder, then our wonder leads to questions, and our questions lead to possible answers, and these lead to more questions, and so on (Jackson & Makaiau, 2011). Dewey also understood philosophy to be “a form of thinking, which, like all thinking, finds its origin in what is uncertain in the subject matter of experience, and then aims to locate the nature of the perplexity and to frame hypotheses for it clearing up to be tested in action” (1916, p. 331). It is the sense of wonder that helps students remember the content they study. The object is to create learning that is personally meaningful and that engages students at a deeper level of thinking.

### **Philosophy as “the general theory of education”**

To ensure philosophical wonder is at the heart of classroom activities, teachers who use the philosopher’s pedagogy commit to seeing philosophy as *their* general theory of education. Good teachers develop a theory or philosophy of education that centers their work and clarifies their actions and judgments in the classroom. A teacher’s theory of education provides a foundation for their practice that rests upon and directs the myriad of decisions related to teaching. One’s teaching philosophy, therefore, directly influences curriculum design and implementation, the physical structure of the classroom, and how to artfully respond to an unexpected comment made by a student. Teachers who adopt a philosopher’s pedagogy have constructed a teaching philosophy that is grounded in “little p” philosophy. In short, these teachers fundamentally believe the activity of philosophical inquiry is an inherent and necessary aspect of learning.

This commitment places teaching in a unique context. Education, in this sense, is not about test scores, performance indicators, mechanical teaching, standardization, centralization, and scientific policy rationales. We denounce teaching that reduces students to just another commodity in the market place. Instead, the philosopher's pedagogy concerns the shaping and developing of character as a means to improve the overall well-being of society.

Dewey (1916) noted that such a pedagogical commitment makes a fundamental connection between education and philosophy.

*If we are willing to conceive education as the process of forming fundamental dispositions, intellectual and emotional, toward nature and fellow men, philosophy may even be defined as the general theory of education (p. 328).*

Philosophy as the general theory of education conceptualizes schools as a place where human beings, who have thoughts, feelings, cultures, and experiences, come to engage in personally meaningful learning. The person, not the content, forms the core of the philosopher's pedagogy.

The purpose of education, according to the philosopher's pedagogy, is to tackle the same philosophical task that Socrates' addressed—to lead an examined life. For him, "little p" philosophy is part of the answer to this timeless challenge, and for teachers who employ the philosopher's pedagogy, the activity of "little p" philosophy must lie at the conceptual foundation of their practice. In this light, our theory of education is identical to or, at the very minimum, resonates with our theory of life. Why else would we seek education if not to improve our life through a process of questioning it?

### **Philosophy as a living classroom practice**

The philosopher's pedagogy does not simply require teachers to think of philosophy as an important part of teaching; teachers must also make philosophy a living classroom practice. This is a challenging task. "Due to a variety of pressures, both internal and external, the typical classroom teacher does not appear to have time for children's genuine wondering and questioning from which structured inquiries can grow" (Jackson, 2001, p. 459). We know that many teachers believe in the importance of students' wonderment and questions. However, when it comes to structuring classroom activities and assessments their practice often

does not match their beliefs about children and learning. In this current era of high stakes testing, many teachers find themselves teaching to "get through the material" because of the pressure to help their students pass "the test." As a result, the students' time for genuine wondering, questioning, and thinking are ignored, and the teacher is led to abandon their convictions about what constitutes a good education. For many reasons, theory is frequently not translated into classroom practice.

The philosopher's pedagogy represents a commitment to bringing theory into classroom practice. Not only must a teacher believe education and philosophy are inextricably linked, they must also create opportunities for their students to engage in the activity of philosophizing in their classrooms and via their assignments. We realize this is no simple task. As we suggested earlier in this paper in regard to Dewey's ideas, teaching is an art, and so is the practice of "doing philosophy" in our contemporary public school K-12 curriculum.

In many of our loosely structured "Big P" graduate-level seminar courses, it is common for the teacher to ask the class to "discuss" a reading without any guidance, structured activity, and assessment. In order to bring philosophical activity into the context of the classroom, teachers must thoughtfully design and implement organized philosophically rich classroom activities and assessments. These do not emerge organically by simply arranging students in a circle or around a table. It takes creativity, knowledge of subject matter, an understanding of human development, and the willingness to experiment, reflect, and try again. We have engaged in this process for the past decade and in our effort to translate theory into practice, p4c Hawai'i has been especially helpful.

p4c Hawai'i offers teachers a set of classroom structures and provides students with a clearly articulated set of tools for bringing philosophy to life in the classroom. From the perspective of p4c Hawaii, these structures, procedures, and tools are works in progress. How these tools can be modified and expanded to better meet the needs of their unique student populations is left to the teacher's discretion. We don't intend to limit the philosopher's pedagogy to the activities suggested by p4c Hawai'i. In fact, we constantly invent new activities and assessments to bring philosophy into our specific content and grade level. However, we have found that within the p4c Hawai'i curriculum there reside a

number of proven classroom practices and procedures that have helped us (and many of our peers) bring our general theories of education to life. Among the most important and frequently used are the concept of intellectual safety, and strategies such as the community ball, Plain Vanilla, and the Good Thinker's Tool Kit (Jackson, 1984; 2001).

### **Intellectual safety and the community ball**

In order for philosophy to become part of the students' experience, it is imperative that the classroom be "intellectually safe." Although the idea of safety is not unique to the philosopher's pedagogy, the added emphasis on explicitly creating safe and caring communities of inquiry is primary and essential to our practice.

*Classrooms must be physically safe places. For dialogue and inquiry to occur they must be emotionally and intellectually safe as well. In an intellectually safe place there are no put-downs and no comments intended to belittle, undermine, negate, devalue, or ridicule. Within this place, the group accepts virtually any question or comment, so long as it is respectful of the other members of the circle. What develops is a growing trust among the participants and with it the courage to present one's own thoughts, however tentative initially, on complex and difficult issues (Jackson, 2001, p. 460).*

The importance placed on intellectual safety, as well as the strategies implemented to cultivate a respectful classroom environment, provide the context where students are encouraged to gain greater self-understanding by viewing themselves from various perspectives (Banks, 2002). In the intellectually safe classroom students learn from one another, appreciate multiple perspectives, and ultimately learn about one another. This important sense of community establishes a learning environment where knowledge is socially constructed in meaningful and responsible ways.

In order to cultivate intellectual safety, students are explicitly introduced to the concept and terminology at the beginning of the school year and are encouraged to self-correct using this vocabulary throughout the duration of the class. Quite often you will hear students in our classrooms, at all grade levels, reflect upon and identify safe and unsafe behaviors. This positive and corrective environment allows all relationships in the classroom to develop, which increases the impact the students' classroom experience has on their learning.<sup>6</sup>

One of the signature techniques incorporated into p4c

Hawai'i classrooms is the creation of a "community ball" (Jackson, 2001, p. 461). The community ball gives each student a sense of place and purpose that supports further classroom inquiry where the learning and discovery expands far beyond the content of the text. On our first day together we create a "community ball" to begin the process of building our intellectually safe classroom community (Jackson, 1984). However, as the year progresses, the community ball becomes a tool of instruction that is used to facilitate philosophical inquiry.<sup>7</sup> By passing the community ball from person to person during class discussions, students learn how to take turns in a well-regulated group discussion. The ball gradually empowers the students to feel comfortable in calling on each other and to take ownership of their inquiry. The community ball does this by establishing and making concrete certain rules and agreements necessary for a fruitful discussion to take place: 1) only the person with the community ball can speak, 2) students and teachers always have the right to pass, and 3) the person with the community ball chooses who speaks next. These rules for engagement help teachers and students keep philosophical discussion at the heart of most major classroom activities.

### **The Good Thinker's Tool Kit**

Equally important has been the development of specific tools and evaluative criteria to assist the students in the development of rigorous inquiry within the intellectually safe community. In order to learn, identify, and evaluate the type of thinking needed to move an inquiry to an intellectually deep level or to "scratch beneath the surface," the students are explicitly taught and given multiple opportunities to practice the seven cognitive components of the "Good Thinker's Toolkit" (Jackson, 2001, p. 463). The good thinker's tool kit consists of seven indicators for critical thinking which are:

**W** what do you mean by that?

**R** what are the reasons?

**A** what is being assumed? Or what can I assume?

**I** can I infer \_\_\_ from \_\_\_? Or where are there inferences being made?

**T** is what is being said true and what does it imply if it is true?

**E** are there any examples to prove what is being said? and

**C** are there any counter-examples to disprove what is being said?



Students are encouraged to back up any claim or insight, such as an inference, with relevant evidence or reasons to identify hidden assumptions and so on. In short, the Good Thinkers Toolkit is a heuristic device that is designed to promote and evaluate the student's development as responsible and critical thinkers.

### **Plain Vanilla**

In order to engage a classroom in philosophical discussion, students and teachers need a structure for classroom inquiry that supports the practice of "little p" philosophy. Jackson (1984; 2001) suggests a "Plain Vanilla" format where students generate questions, vote on the question they want to talk about, and use a set of assessment criteria to judge the progress of their community (intellectual safety, listening, participation) and inquiry (learning something new, scratching beneath the surface of a topic, remaining focused, etc.). "Whenever possible, students and teacher sit in a circle during inquiry time. Students call on each other, no longer relying on the teacher to carry out this responsibility. Each has the opportunity to speak or to pass and remain silent. In this environment inquiry will grow" (Jackson, 2001, p. 460). Plain Vanilla discussions rely on the "questions and interests of the children and move[s] in the direction that the children indicate" (Jackson, 2001, p. 462). We have found by providing this type of structure in the classroom, along with the other activities and assessments mentioned in this section, the students' sense of wonder is valued and incorporated into each inquiry.

### **Challenging contemporary measures for classroom assessment**

Finally, the philosopher's pedagogy requires teachers to rethink contemporary measures for classroom assessment. Over the past two decades, the American education system has created a school culture where instruction and learning objectives are driven by state and national standards and high stakes testing. Standards explicitly state what students should know and be able to do at the end of a school year or course of study, and high stakes exams measure the degree to which students have reached the goals implemented by those standards. As a result, today's schools stress the outcomes of summative assessments such as the Hawai'i State Assessment test.

The concentration on standards and high stakes testing has had a tremendous and negative impact on classroom

pedagogy. Teachers, who are under pressure to prepare students to successfully pass state examinations, have altered and developed their instruction to focus on "end products" or what their students should be able to know or do on the state assessment. In this school culture of testing, learning has become synonymous with passing "the test" and the profession of teaching has been changed. Pedagogically, educators have moved from teaching critical thinking as an integral aspect of the learning process, to efficiently providing their students with the knowledge to pass a series of exams.

For example, in Hawai'i, one of the eighth grade US history standards asks students to provide multiple factors for the outcome of the American Civil War.<sup>8</sup> This standard will likely be covered on the upcoming statewide social studies assessment. Therefore, in order to prepare their students to pass the test, many teachers provide their students with a ready-made list of factors that they are required to memorize, rather than the engaging in a thoughtful discussion about the reasons for the Civil War.

This pedagogical trend is troubling to many educators who see teaching to the test as the "dumbing down" of the American school system. The solution has been to modify standards and assessments from an over emphasis on the mastery of content knowledge to a larger concentration on the students abilities to think. For example, many states (44 at last count) are moving towards adopting and implementing national standards like the Common Core State Standards that have a "greater emphasis on higher order cognitive demand" (Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang, 2011). The hope of the Common Core initiative is the establishment of new critical thinking standards that will create a new school culture that focuses on teaching students how to think. While we applaud this effort, changing standards is not enough. From the perspective of the philosopher's pedagogy, the contemporary American school system must also change the overemphasis that it places on the end product. The philosopher's pedagogy asserts that contemporary measures for classroom assessment must also account for the intellectual growth or philosophical progression that students experience while engaged in the process of learning. "Little p" philosophy, by definition is an activity. It is a learning process that places importance on students' abilities to think for themselves<sup>9</sup> across contexts, and in the face of new problems. The presentation of an answer to a question is part of the activity of "little p" philosophy, but not the only part.

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This is the reason that the philosopher's pedagogy requires teachers to challenge contemporary measures of classroom assessment by making the thinking process the primary focus of their assessments.

So how do we assess thinking? We start by making both teachers and students accountable for the development, progression, and methods they use to arrive at their conclusions. We recognize that when students thoughtfully engage in inquiry it often reveals how complicated a question or topic really is (Jackson, 2001, p. 463). Uncertainty; confusion; the emergence of new ideas; willingness to challenge one's thinking; increased depth of understanding; and cognitive, emotional, and intellectual connections all become indicators of growth. The process of analyzing complex ideas is a sign of progress. We ask our students at the end of an inquiry, did we see complexity in a topic that we hadn't realized was there?, did we make connections with other ideas, concepts, or experiences?, did we challenge our thinking?, and, if a possible answer did emerge from the discussion, did we use "good thinking" support our conclusions?

For example, the concept of friendship is a pervasive theme in many of the novels encountered in a high school language arts course. When these are approached using the philosopher's pedagogy, students are prompted to examine their understanding of friendship and ask about the qualities that they consider important in their own friendships. This demands that they first attempt to clarify what friendship means and identify what such relationships require. As evidence, examples, and counterexamples emerge, the concept that was so familiar to the students becomes more complex and even somewhat confusing. A similar process arises with respect to many other important concepts such as democracy in American history. Students begin with an exploration of their assumptions regarding the extent to which democracy has been realized in the United States history and then test these assumptions by gathering historical examples and counter-examples. At the end of the inquiry students begin to recognize the difficulty of defining concepts and terms without examining the historical context they are situated in.

In the process of exploring these inquiries into friendship and democracy, we provide students with the time and opportunity to reflect on their own understanding. As teachers we give students feedback and credit for their thinking process, and we evaluate the conclusions they draw (which often appear in the form of an essay, project, or test). The

intention of the philosopher's pedagogy is not to attain a unified understanding or answer; each person in the class may be at a different place at the end of the inquiry because of the specific evidence (based on personal experience or previously established information/data) they used to construct their response. The philosopher's pedagogy encourages multiple perspectives and diverse conclusions backed by sound reasoning, rather than the pre-meditated response found in most curriculum packages.

By the end of the year our students have learned that they should experience some sense of confusion over the course of an inquiry, that perplexity and confusion is an important stimulus to reflection and to "getting to the deep end of the pool." They learn to celebrate and even find comfort in uncertainty, especially if it is productive of reflection. They grow confident in the conclusions they draw because they can be articulate about the thinking process that got them to that deeper place. Our students feel prepared to face the unknown challenges ahead because they have developed some self-assurance in their practice of thinking for themselves. The reward is that our students, in spite of our not teaching to the test, regularly meet or exceed proficiency in state standards and do exceptionally well on high stakes exams.

## **The Philosopher's Pedagogy; So What Now?**

The preceding account sets out what we understand to be our philosopher's pedagogy. We believe it is an eminently practical pedagogy that incorporates a philosophical spirit and that is directed to encouraging classroom practices that engage students in reflection on important issues. It was born as a solution to deficiencies that we experienced as classroom teachers, and it has evolved in ways that are sensitive to our students' needs and abilities, in addition to our different needs and abilities as teachers. Over time the philosopher's pedagogy has grown from a series of activities into a belief system that concerns the practice of philosophy in the school classroom.

The philosopher's pedagogy is a commitment that we have made to our own development as teachers. The pedagogy urges our students (as well as ourselves) to recognize that our beliefs come to us from various sources, and that it is good to question these beliefs. In addition, the philosopher's pedagogy is a commitment to collaboratively engage students and teachers in directed, ongoing, rigorous inquiry

concerning values. The philosopher's pedagogy, by carefully considering the relationship between philosophy and education, aims to bring back the notion that schools are places in which we can pose questions regarding our human being and work together to understand the purpose of our lives and our contribution to the world.

Quite often philosophy has been characterized and stereotyped as an activity of the mind. However, due to its connection to our lived experiences and emotions, it is also an activity of the heart. The philosopher's pedagogy works to correct some of the shortcomings of our contemporary school system by providing students with the space and tools to sharpen their cognitive abilities, as well as their growth as individuals, which is what His Holiness the Dalai Lama (1999) refers to as an "education of the heart" (p. 85–95).

*...our current education system, rather than cultivating our sense of openness and engagement, instead heightens our feelings of isolation and insulation. Schooling, especially as inculturation, builds up preconceptions, expectations, and rigid notions of order and behavior. It breaks down our experience of an alive whole into an endless array of categories, taxonomies, concepts, criteria, and evaluative judgments...Through approaching the world in this fashion, with each year of schooling our spirit, and the sense of aliveness and richness of the world deflate. This should not be the case. Children and adults should continue to learn and grow throughout their lives, eventually becoming what some traditions refer to as elders or keepers of wisdom, (Glazer, 1999, p. 81–82).*

In order to aid in the positive transformation of today's schools the philosopher's pedagogy is not a top-down model of education reform. It is a grassroots movement that begins with teachers and students working together to fundamentally change what happens in classrooms. This movement directly addresses, and constantly keeps in mind *the central question* that is often ignored or missing during today's educational policy discussions: What is best for students?

Teachers and students should not be the only ones responsible for answering this question, of course. The task of rebalancing schools to a place where the mind *and* heart get educated requires different voices to participate in the dialogue about the relationship between philosophy and education, theory and practice. This is a dialogue that should be shared between teachers, parents, grandparents, students, community groups, colleges of education, teacher

education programs, state departments of education, and beyond. Philosophy has an important place in schools, and only by working together in thoughtful and meaningful activity will we discover or rediscover the potential that philosophical reflection has for making us individually and collectively wiser.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Traces of the idea of a philosopher's pedagogy reach as far back as the work of Socrates.
- <sup>2</sup> Matthew Lipman created the IAPC at Montclair State University in 1970 after he received financial support from the National Endowment of the Humanities (Lipman, 2008, p. 120). The Task of the IAPC was to systematically prepare teachers to deliver the P4C curriculum to students worldwide. Lipman hoped this training of teachers would be spread through departments of philosophy, rather than colleges of education, in order to maintain the integrity of the discipline of philosophy in the classroom
- <sup>3</sup> Among them were (1) the reliance of the curriculum on the presence of someone in the classroom with philosophical training; (2) the perception of K–12 classroom teachers that philosophy should be reserved for education at the college level; and (3) the cultural incongruence between Lipman's novels and the experiences of many children in Hawai'i.
- <sup>4</sup> For a more detailed description of Jackson's approach see Jackson, T. E. (2001).
- <sup>5</sup> Similarly, Dewey also argued the philosophic disposition could be found in any person who is "open-minded and sensitive to new perceptions, and who has concentration and responsibility in connecting them has, in so far, a philosophic" (Dewey, 1916, p. 325).
- <sup>6</sup> Jackson (2001) provides additional methods and strategies for establishing and maintaining an intellectually safe and caring community (p. 460–461).
- <sup>7</sup> For a detailed description on how to build and use a "community ball," see Jackson, T. (2001).
- <sup>8</sup> In the state of Hawaii, social studies benchmark SS.8.13 is, "Explain the major factors that determined the outcome of the Civil War (including leaders, resources, and key battles).
- <sup>9</sup> "The phrase 'thinking for oneself' suggests thinking that is autonomous and independent (as opposed to controlled or dependent). A person who thinks for herself is, in an important sense, free. She is able to reflect upon her own experience and upon her situation in the world. She is prepared to reappraise her deepest values and commitments, and hence her own identity...the person who thinks for herself understands that the subject matter of her inquiry can never be completely severed from herself as inquirer" (Splitter & Sharp, 1995, p. 16).