

2015

## Promoting Student Teachers' Reflective Thinking Through a Philosophical Community of Enquiry Approach

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### Recommended Citation

Demissie, F. (2015). Promoting Student Teachers' Reflective Thinking Through a Philosophical Community of Enquiry Approach. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 40(12).  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2015v40n12.1>

This Journal Article is posted at Research Online.  
<http://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol40/iss12/1>

## Promoting Student Teachers' Reflections Through a Philosophical Community of Enquiry Approach (PCOE)

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*Abstract: This article outlines how student teachers' experiences of a philosophical community of enquiry (PCoE) facilitated their pedagogical reflections. Although reflection occupies an important place in teacher education curricula and pedagogy, it is a contested and problematic concept. In this study, a group of second year student teachers took part in a module based on Matthew Lipman's Philosophy for Children (P4C) programme, designed to improve children's thinking through a PCoE. Using data from a series of reflective activities and an in-depth interview, I examined if and how student teachers' experiences of PCoE facilitated their readiness to reflect on pedagogical concepts such as the role of dialogue and inquiry in learning. The findings show that most had reconsidered/questioned their views, suggesting that giving student teachers experience of PCoE type of learning contexts could open up alternative ways of promoting reflection. The findings from this practitioner enquiry provide teacher educators with useful insights into the potential of a PCoE approach/orientation for promoting student teachers' reflective thinking.*

### Introduction

This paper takes up the issue of student teachers' reflections and its pedagogy in the context of a renewed emphasis on reflection from policy makers (Sahlberg et al., 2014; DfE, 2014; Burn & Mutton, 2013), educators (Gay & Kirkland, 2003) and the recurrent debates about the process, content and outcomes of reflection (Zeichner, 2008; Hatton & Smith, 1995). In particular, it is about the significance of these debates on my role as a teacher educator and my experiences of students' reluctance to fully engage in reflective learning experiences, (e.g. in tutorials, assignments and class discussions) that contrast with their relative readiness to reflect during philosophical communities of enquiry type seminar contexts. In this article I draw on Calderhead's (1989) critique of the concepts and practices around reflection in teacher education to examine if and how student teachers' participation in a philosophical community of enquiry (PCoE) impacted on their willingness to take a reflective stance to typically problematic pedagogical concepts such as the role of enquiry in learning and the nature of knowledge.

In the text that follows, I justify the paper's focus on student teachers' reflections through a review of the literature on reflection and its problematic dimensions. I follow this with a discussion of the origins and potential of PCoE, and present data from two reflective activities and an interview that examined the extent to which the experience facilitated the

students'<sup>1</sup> willingness to consider alternative perspectives. I conclude by arguing that whilst more evidence is needed, PCoE, with its emphasis on community, enquiry and reflection has the potential to address some of the barriers to reflective thinking, and to open up an alternative way of thinking about the pedagogy of reflection.

### **Teacher Education and reflection**

Since the 1970s educators and teachers have advocated the value of practice that is informed by reflection (Pollard, 2008); a perspective that originated from Dewey's distinction between '...impulsive and routine activity...' and reflective behaviour that converts action that 'is merely repetitive into intelligent action' (1933, p.17). More recently, Schon's reflection in/on action (1987) and Van Manen's hierarchy of reflection (Calderhead, 1989) have also been widely influential with regards to reflection's role in teachers' professional development. Recent international and national policy initiatives in teacher education also show its continuing significance. This is evident in the latest international reviews of teacher education (DfE, 2015; Sahlberg et al., 2014) and renewed calls by educators for pedagogies that provide more opportunities for critical reflection so that student teachers are better prepared for the increasingly complex and diverse classrooms in which they teach (Gay & Kirkland 2003).

However, despite its ubiquity in the literature (Zeichner, 2008; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Pollard, 2008), reflection remains a contested concept. In addition to debates about its political and ontological dimensions, (Fendler, 2003; Zeichner, 2008), the notion of reflection also draws on distinctive theoretical perspectives. These range from Dewey's emphasis on doubt/uncertainty about theories and beliefs and the necessary preconditions for reflection (such as open-mindedness) (Dewey, 1933), to Schon's suggestion that teachers' professional knowledge is a valuable resource for reflection, and Van Manen's view that reflection is a '...moral as well as a rational process of deciding what ought to be done' (Calderhead, 1989, p.44). Thus, it is possible that when educators and teachers talk about reflection, they may have different notions about its meaning and definition, the necessary conditions, the processes as well as the outcomes of reflection (Calderhead, 1989). For example, whilst both policy makers and teachers value reflection, they may not necessarily see the outcomes of reflection in the same way. Policy makers may see the outcomes of reflection purely in terms of teacher effectiveness, whilst teachers may also value the social justice and inclusive dimension of their practice.

Reflection is also seen as a desirable and important dimension of teacher education. (Loughran, 1996, Hatton & Smith, 1995; Korthagen, 2001). However, the contested nature of reflection also impacts on student teachers because the implicit assumptions that underline reflection influence policy and the practice of reflection (Calderhead, 1989). For example, in Van Manen's levels of reflective thinking, the dialectical (highest) level of reflection takes into account the wider moral and ethical context, whilst the technical/rational (lowest) level is primarily instrumental because it focuses on solutions to problems in practice (Calderhead, 1989). Yet, in the context of student teachers' practice the technical/rational level may be more valuable than other, more sophisticated levels of reflection; for example, an instrumentalist reflection may be more appropriate when considering the impact of different teaching approaches (Hatton & Smith, 1995). Another example of how theoretical assumptions can influence policy and practice relate to policy makers' current emphasis on

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<sup>1</sup> For stylistic purposes, I use 'student teachers' and 'students' interchangeably to refer to those undertaking a teacher education course at university.

more school-based teacher education programmes. The policy seems to be primarily driven by the assumption that more experience will address the problem of student reflection (Burn & Mutton, 2013) without considering if students have the necessary dispositions for reflective thinking.

A problem with these 'idealised approaches' is that they disregard the complexities of student teachers' teaching contexts (Calderhead, 1989). For example, in Tripp's (1993) widely used reflection rubric (involving a series of questions such as 'what happened?', 'what do you think about it?', and 'why?'), it is assumed that the students already have the necessary skills, attitudes and dispositions (such as open-mindedness and evaluation skills) for reflection (Calderhead, 1989; Moon, 2008). Teaching approaches may also assume that student teachers have the required knowledge and experience of the curriculum in practice. But in order to self-evaluate, 'how well did I teach?' they need to draw upon knowledge of '...alternative teaching approaches of children's typical performances and achievements and criteria for judging teaching' (Calderhead, 1989, p.48). In addition, the kinds of knowledge (about children, teaching and learning) they use to reflect with can also be problematic as these are often based on outdated yet powerful beliefs about teaching and learning (Calderhead, 1989; Britzman, 2003). For example, a transmissionist view of teaching and learning could limit students' readiness to explore alternative learner-centred pedagogical approaches.

To sum up, the contested nature of reflection has implications for the practice and pedagogy of student teachers' reflection. However, attending to the barriers to reflective thinking may be one way of addressing this important but problematic aspect of student teachers' practice. In this article, I focus on a specific aspect of the thinking process; a readiness or willingness to 'look at things as other than they are' (Brockbank & McGill 2007) that could be seen as a pre-cursor for in-depth reflection. In the following section, I outline the features of a philosophical community of enquiry (PCoE) and discuss its potential for addressing some of the barriers to student teachers' reflections identified above.

### **The affordances of a Philosophical Community of Enquiry (PCoE)**

As discussed already, reflection is a problematic area for pre-service students as they often lack the necessary life and classroom experience and curriculum and pedagogical knowledge on which to base their reflections (Calderhead, 1989). At the same time, they teach in increasingly complex contexts that are often conflicting and multi-faceted and require them to make judgments about their teaching strategies (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). In this section, I outline the features of a community of enquiry approach and its potential for opening up an alternative way of thinking about the pedagogy and practice of reflection.

Dewey's adoption of a community of enquiry approach in educational contexts was based on his belief that such a process can nurture the necessary skills (of enquiry, reflection) and dispositions (collaboration) that are needed by a democratic society (Dewey, 1944). Although some have criticised its overemphasis on shared cognition rather than the individual's role and responsibility for thinking and action (Socolincov, 1999 p.45), the concept of community of enquiry has become an influential pedagogical model for experiential and reflective educational approaches (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Nilson, 2010). Much like a scientific community of enquiry, in a classroom that operated as a community of enquiry, a group of people with a shared/common concern test ideas and hypothesis through dialogue and enquiry (Lipman, 2003). Thus, knowledge is seen as contestable and the teacher acts as the guide/facilitator who provides a supportive and enabling learning environment for enquiry and dialogue (Lipman, 2003). More importantly,

the community of enquiry is about the search for 'truth'; so it is '...neither teacher-centred and controlled nor student-centred and controlled, but centred on and controlled by the demands of truth' (Gardner, 2015, p.75)

An example is the Philosophy for Children (P4C) programme that Lipman designed to improve children's thinking and has, despite some criticisms (Hand & Wistanley, 2009) become a highly influential educational pedagogy (SAPERRE, 2010). Lipman argued that if children were to become active citizens in society, improving their thinking was a priority and that this required the cultivation of '... the critical caring and creative' dimensions. Moreover, that the pedagogy will involve the '...community of enquiry' and the epistemology '...the reflective equilibrium... understood in the fallibilistic sense', i.e. that knowledge claims are seen as contestable (Lipman, 2003, 197). Thus when a classroom is converted into a community of enquiry, '... students listen to each other 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' (Lipman, 2003, pp. 20–21). In addition, Lipman also specifically highlighted inclusiveness, face to face relationships, impartiality, thinking for oneself, reasonableness, and the philosophical (such as beauty, justice) as a focus for the discussion.

The underlying principles of a philosophical community of enquiry and the accessible methodology (see next section) has the potential to support student teachers' reflections. For example, the philosophical (e.g. concepts of fairness, justice, inclusion) as the focus for reflection means that they can draw on their own life experiences. Furthermore, the community's role in self-correcting assumptions and beliefs through the caring, creative and critical thinking and through language such as 'why do you think that?', 'I disagree with you because' or 'I would like to build on X's idea' promotes the idea of knowledge as contestable, whilst at the same time introducing them to the language of reflection. Such an approach could address some of the cognitive and affective barriers Calderhead identified and the kind of experiences Gay & Kirkland (2003) argued are necessary to cultivate student teachers' critical consciousness, e.g. about race and social justice.

But facilitating a community of enquiry is a highly complex undertaking (Gardner, 2015). The facilitator needs to have a sufficient level of philosophical orientation (i.e. sensitivity to the problematic), the skills and dispositions to manage a complex learning environment, and preparedness to challenge the community to question and test claims through interventions such as 'how do we know that?' (SAPERRE, 2010). At the same time he/she also needs to model the general enquiry skills (e.g. ask for claims to be supported by evidence), reasoning skills (e.g. make balanced judgments), and dispositions (e.g. open-mindedness) (see methods section for more details) (Gardner, 2015).

There is emerging evidence to suggest that using a philosophical community of enquiry can benefit teacher learning. For example, after using PCoE in professional development activities for teachers, Haynes and Murriss (2011) found that it provided a transformative critical space for exploring epistemological and pedagogical questions about experienced teachers' practice. Similarly, Scholl et al. found that it was a catalyst for in-depth reflection because of the way it challenged and extended teachers' pedagogical orientations towards more learner-centred and enquiry-based approaches (Scholl, 2011). Bronwelee et al.'s findings are particularly relevant because they found that PCoE enabled student teachers to reflect on their assumptions about children's capacity for learning through enquiry (2014).

These studies justify the article's focus on PCoE as a potential tool for supporting not just children's thinking in school, but also for student teachers' thinking about practice. Thus, in this article, I examine if and how participation in an elective module that was based

on a PCoE facilitated a group of 2nd year student teachers' reflections (i.e, their willingness to consider alternative perspectives) on problematic concepts that could act as potential barriers for pedagogical reflection (Moon, 2008; Calderhead, 1989; Brockbank & McGill, 2007). In what follows, I describe its methodology in more detail, the methods and the findings, and go on to discuss the extent to which a PCoE approach could open up an alternative way of supporting reflective thinking.

## **Context and Background**

Promoting students' capacities for critical reflection has always been an important part of my professional values. However, after a decade as a teacher educator, I was still dissatisfied with my students' willingness and readiness to reflect on their academic and practical work. This practitioner enquiry was designed to support my own reflections about the extent to which my practice enacted the values I hold about my students' reflective thinking (McNiff & Whitehead, 2013) by evaluating a group of student teachers' perceptions of a module that was based on a philosophical community of enquiry (PCoE).

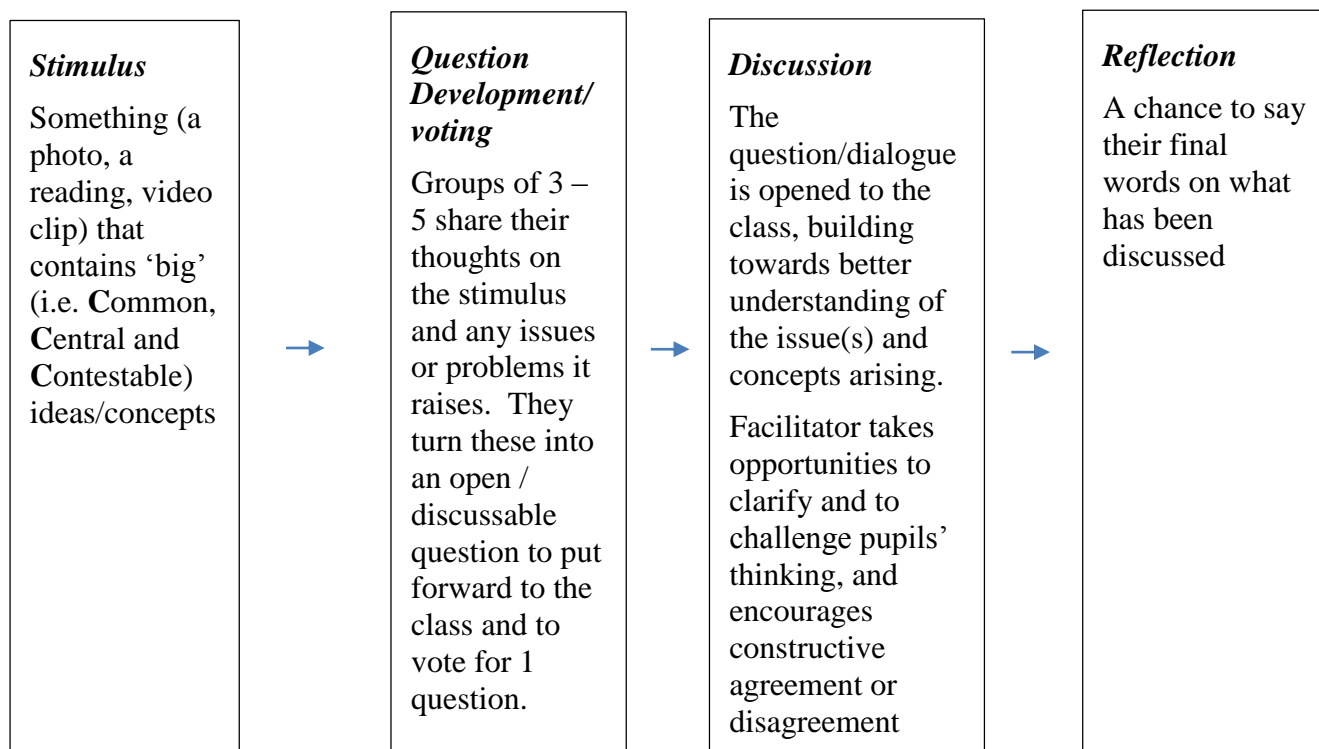
The enquiry took place in an English university in the North of England. The student teachers were in their second year of study and had chosen 'Philosophy for Young Children' as their elective module. The module lasted for 8 weeks and took place prior to their second school placement. It was designed to include a practical element (taking part in enquiries at university and leading philosophical enquirers at school – see below) and the theoretical dimension of the P4C pedagogy. The students learnt about the aims of the P4C methodology, its key influences, the theoretical perspectives and the features of a community of enquiry. In addition, they also explored the role of the facilitator and the strategies they could use to develop their facilitation skills.

### **The Philosophy for children (P4C) methodology**

In Lipman's P4C methodology (1988, 2003) (see table 1), an important first step is to ensure that the chairs are arranged in a circle so that participants can see each other. After establishing the community's/group's ground rules, the facilitator invites the students to sit in a circle and presents the stimulus for the discussion - this could be a story book, a picture/photo, a reading or a film clip. Then, after some thinking time, the students are invited to generate questions in pairs or individually. The facilitator records all the questions raised and invites the participants to vote for one question so it becomes the community's shared concern. This question then becomes the basis of the dialogue/discussion. For example, in one enquiry, students based their questions around a stimulus that depicted classroom photographs of children from around the world, before finally voting for the question 'Are children in a class of 50 lucky or unlucky to attend school?'

In the next stage, participants offer their 'initial thoughts' about the question and the facilitator encourages everyone to use their critical, creative and collaborative thinking to clarify the main questions/big ideas under discussion and to help students to evaluate each other's responses. However, the facilitator needs to be open-minded, avoid imposing views, and model critical dispositions such as questioning assumptions and asking for evidence (Lipman, 2003; Splitter & Sharpe, 1995). In the example above, I invited the participants to explore the concept of 'luck' through questions such as 'what does luck mean?', 'is there a difference between luck and fate?' or 'what would it be like if everyone got lucky?'. In the reflection stage, they shared their final thoughts about the question, (e.g. on whether they had

changed their views about ‘luck’) and about the process of the enquiry (e.g. what they thought about how the community operated and what could be changed/improved).



**Table 1: a summary of the stages in a P4C enquiry, adapted from SAPERE Level 1 Handbook (2010)**

### **Research Design/Analysis Strategy**

The enquiry took place in three stages. At the first seminar, the student teachers were given a large piece of paper to record their views about the nature of knowledge. Subsequent seminars were interspersed with discussions about the theoretical aspect of P4C and the structure of a P4C enquiry (see table 1). On the last day, they revisited their original drawings about knowledge, and completed a questionnaire about their perceptions of the module on their thinking about pedagogy. The final part of the research was an in-depth interview with one of the students. The following provides a more detailed description of each stage of the enquiry.

First phase: at the start of the module, I asked the students to draw their conception of knowledge at school and university, for example, in terms of ‘who owns it’, ‘where it resides’ and how it changes in different educational settings. Fifteen students completed the drawings

Second phase: eleven students attended the final session; they revisited and annotated their drawings/representations about their perspectives on knowledge from the first session. They then completed a reflective/module evaluation activity (on a scale of 1-5) about the module’s impact on their thinking in relation to their own and children’s learning in terms of the following: teachers’ roles as facilitators, seeing the classroom as a community, knowledge as constructed rather than received, development of thinking skills, the role of enquiry/questions in learning, and learning through dialogue (all these categories were drawn from the P4C methodology (Lipman, 2003)). Eleven students completed the questionnaire with varying levels of detail – for example some did not include any comments. As the questionnaire was part of the module evaluation, ethical approval was not sought but

permission was requested to use the drawings.

Third phase: to get a more in-depth insight into students' perspectives, I invited students to participate in in-depth interviews. Although two students expressed an interest, only one student Ellie (pseudonym) was able to attend the interview. After Ellie completed the consent form, I recorded and transcribed the data. The findings below outline the data from the group's reflective activities and the single case study. I analysed the data by undertaking content analysis (drawings), comparing scores on the reflective activity, and highlighting key themes in the interview data.

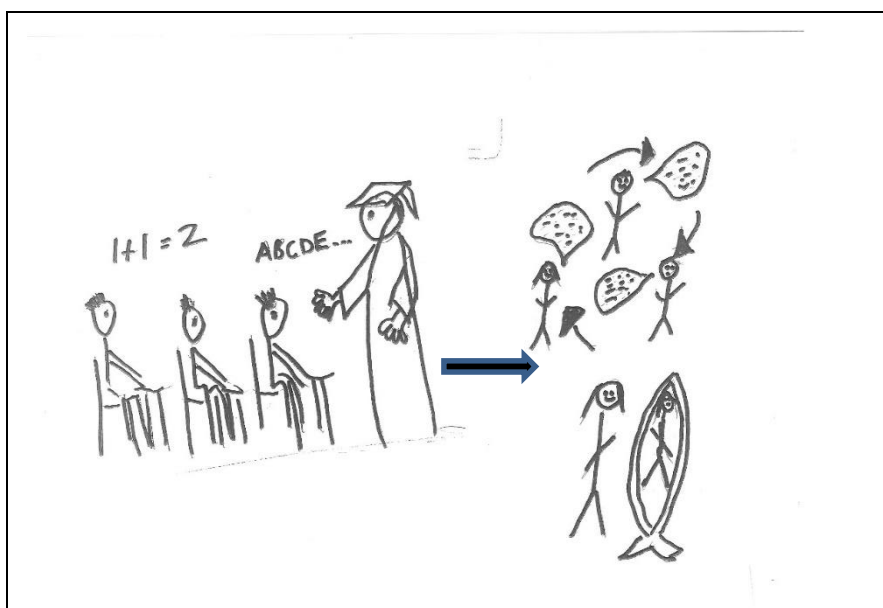
### **Students' Perceptions of P4C's Influence on their Thinking about Knowledge and Pedagogy**

In the following, I describe and analyse data from their drawings (before and after the module ended), the reflective activity and the interview data outlined below, to examine if and how the experience of taking part in a philosophical community of enquiry led the students to reflect on their ideas about pedagogy and knowledge.

#### **Drawings**

There was a clear change in the students' perspective of knowledge before and after taking part in the module. In their initial drawings all had drawn typically common views about knowledge such as books, computer screens or, as in the example below, rows of desks and chairs, a whiteboard/blackboard and the teacher standing at the front of the pupils. Their drawings on the last day of the module, however, were noticeably different: six out of the eleven students had altered their initial drawings through adding new illustrations (as above) or annotating their original drawing to record their changed perspectives. Some of these comments referred to their views about knowledge in relation to who owns knowledge '*all learning/subject must be questioned - I did not think this before the module*' and where knowledge comes from '*before the module I thought we were taught knowledge, now I think as a group we can construct and create knowledge*'





**Figure 1: an example of a 'before' and 'after' drawing**

The above example (figure 1) richly illustrates how the module impacted one student's view of knowledge. The drawing on the left shows a popular view of knowledge: the students are sitting in rows, knowledge is represented in abstract terms ( $1+1=2$ ) and emanates from the authority figure, and the students are receiving rather than constructing knowledge. The drawing on the right has contrasting features: the mirror suggesting knowledge as generated through reflection, the speech bubbles indicating dialogue, and the arrows and circle of people implying knowledge as collaboratively generated by the participants.

### **Reflective activity**

To assess how far the module influenced their views about teaching and learning, the student teachers completed a Likert-scale type questionnaire about the module's impact on the following: teachers' roles as facilitators, classroom as a community, importance of thinking skills and the role of enquiry/questions in learning and learning through dialogue. Overall, eight out of the 11 students rated the module's impact as high or very high in relation to the importance of dialogue and ten rated the significance of enquiry in learning as high or very high as a result of taking part in the module.

However, the data presented a mixed picture. In terms of the module's impact on the role of dialogue and enquiry, all rated its impact as high or very high in relation to their own and children's learning contexts. However, for the majority, (7/11), P4C's impact on the role of the teacher, the importance of the community, and the development of thinking skills was higher in relation to children's learning rather than their own learning. In other words, whilst the module had positively impacted on how they saw the role of the teacher in the classroom (as a facilitator rather than a 'teacher'), it had less impact on how they saw the role of their own tutors. For example, one of the students justified this by arguing that in contrast to the children in school, 'we must be taught knowledge, we have come here to learn'. Thus, whilst there was some consistency in terms of P4C's influence on the role of dialogue and enquiry for their own and children's learning, there was less agreement about P4C's role for

their own learning in terms of the classroom as a community and the teachers' roles as facilitators.

### Ellie – A Case Study

Ellie was a student teacher from a subsequent year group who had also undertaken the same elective module that was taught in exactly the same way as the year before. She was one of the two students who volunteered to take part in the interview but the only one who was able to attend the interview date. Ellie did not have any previous experience of philosophy; a reason she cited for choosing the elective. The semi-structured interview focussed on her experience of the module and what impact if any it had on her pedagogical thinking.

Ellie talked at length about her experience of taking part in enquiries at university sessions and her own experience of conducting enquiries at school. Her reflection touched on a number of key themes such as her teacher identity, the significance of her peers, and pedagogical aspects such as her assumption about children and how they learn. For example, in talking about her initial experience of P4C at university, she seemed surprised that her peers could be a valuable source of learning '...I learnt so much from what others were saying; ...I was just getting all these new ideas just from a group of about 10' and that others could hold different views from her '... people that I thought must think the same as me'. The experience of learning with and from others also seemed to have provided a model for her own teaching. As she reflects, 'I learnt so much from that I thought that's got to be good in a classroom'. Her reflections give a surprising insight into how P4C challenged her assumptions about the role of her peers, the realisation that they may hold different perspectives, the impact on her own learning and the potential impact it could have on her classroom practice.

The experience also seemed to have affected her teacher identity. Recounting her surprise at the children's confidence in articulating their thoughts and challenging each other's viewpoints, she states, 'I want to use it in my everyday teaching... everything coming from the children... the skills being the most important thing... It's changed all that for me definitely'. The extract below further illustrates the emergence of a particular teacher identity that is in line with the pedagogy (about ownership, community, critical thinking and dialogue) she seems to have embraced:

*The importance of ownership for them and how I want all of the learning to come from them and to be led by them, and I think just what is the important part of education and how I want them to be critical and all of these skills.... It definitely changed how I want to teach...all the time, not just in a P4C session ... how much everything needs to be about talk, and discussion, and I want them to be cohesive, I will always want my class to be communicating well... I think that is important to have when you grow up and how that is neglected and it could be a good way to benefiting that... and I just remembered reading how it teaches important values such as democracy and if we can all do that in schools how that can help them through*

This data richly illustrates the potential of a philosophical community of enquiry to encourage the 'potentiality to look at things as other than they are' as illustrated by Ellie's comment that 'it (P4C) has changed all that for me'. Ellie presents a powerful account of how her thinking about teaching and learning was transformed by her experiences on the module. However, whilst other factors are likely to have contributed to this (e.g. existing

progressive views on education, an enquiring approach) at the very least, P4C seems to have facilitated and encouraged her reflections. In the next section I discuss how far P4C can be said to facilitate student teachers' reflections.

## Discussion

The findings from the reflective activities and in-depth interview suggest that taking part in a module through, and about, a philosophical community of enquiry (P4C) facilitated the student teachers' reflections on knowledge and pedagogy. Some of these insights included changed perspectives about: the role of dialogue in learning, the possibility that knowledge could be constructed by learners, that ownership of learning could be a powerful tool for learning, and, in Ellie's case, that peers could be valuable sources of insights. The findings are consistent with the literature on PCoE's potential role in promoting reflection. Murriss and Haynes's work advocated PCoE's transformative capacities (2011), whilst Scholl's work with experienced teachers also found that using PCoE enabled reflection on practice that extended their pedagogical expertise (2011). Brownlee et al.'s, (2014) work also showed that student teachers' experience of PCoE led them to reconsider their views about children's potential. Thus, these findings suggest that providing student teachers' with PCoE could be a way of challenging the 'belief systems and implicit theories' that can constrain student teachers' reflections (Calderhead, 1989).

The second part of the enquiry was to examine how participation in PCoE facilitated the student teachers' reflection. Its theoretical underpinnings certainly suggest how PCoE might facilitate students' reflections: it challenges student teacher's implicit theories about pedagogy (as evidenced in Ellie's account about the role of peers), provides a familiar context for reflection, develops the necessary metacognitive skills, and provides a supportive and enabling learning environment (Lipman, 2003). The latter was illustrated in Bath et al.'s, (2014) findings where the participants cited PCoE's relational dimension as the most useful and significant factor in developing their reflective thinking. Similarly, Hatton & Smith, in their review of a large-scale teaching programme designed to promote student teachers' reflection, found that dialogic discussions that preceded writing activities resulted in higher levels of reflection. The reasons they gave for this finding echo some of the features of PCoE; dialogic discussions created a 'safe environment', as well as the opportunity to 'give voice to one's own thinking while at the same time being heard in a sympathetic but constructively critical way' (1995, p.41).

However, with the exception of Bath et al.'s study (2014), the findings above and those from this study do not show how PCoE facilitated reflective thinking. For instance, although Ellie described how her thinking about children's capabilities had altered, we don't know whether this was due to the collaborative environment, the facilitator's interventions or the enquiry dimension that was most pertinent. Thus, further studies are necessary not only to discount the possible impact of other factors (such as the research instruments, my positionality, and/or peer influence) but to examine which aspects of the community of enquiry the students' valued most, and how these impacted on their reflective thinking, writing and practice (Hatton & Smith, 1995).

## Conclusion

As outlined earlier, this practitioner enquiry was motivated by the disparity between my values (about the centrality of reflective thinking in teacher education in HE) and my experience of students' reluctance to engage in reflective thinking, as well as a curiosity about what I might learn about student teachers' reflections from a pedagogical approach where they seemed more willing to enquire and reflect on their experiences. These pedagogical reflections relate to the insights I gained about the content, process and outcomes of reflection. For example, the contested and problematic nature of reflection (Calderhead, 1989; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Zeichner, 2008) has raised questions about how I define reflection and how this translates into my pedagogical practices. In particular, Calderhead's work on the barriers for effective reflection has led me to reassess and reevaluate how I understand the process of student teachers' reflection. For instance, the strategies I use (such as reflective logs, guided reflection) are based on taken-for-granted assumptions that underestimate the challenges of reflection, i.e. that students have the necessary dispositions (Moon, 2008; Dewey, 1933), experience and skills for reflection (Calderhead, 1989; Gay & Kirkland 2003). This insight has given me a clearer understanding of the complexities of student reflection, in terms, for example, of how their understandable concerns about mastering the classroom routines and managing children's behaviour can make reflection-in-action (Schon, 1985) or questioning the moral and ethical contexts (Van Manen in Calderhead, 1989) of their practice highly problematic. Consequently, I have a better insight into the practice of student reflection and a revised expectation of what student teachers can realistically do, at least in the initial stages of their practice.

Another aspect of pedagogical reflections raised by this study relates to the PCoE approach itself and its potential impact on my practice. The data suggested that the student teachers generally reconsidered their views about typically problematic concepts, but the data did not show how PCoE facilitated reflection. Without more conclusive findings about PCoE's impact, this would initially seem to limit its usefulness. Despite this, however, I see PCoE as a pedagogy that can strengthen my existing approaches to developing my students' reflective thinking, particularly in relation to Calderhead's persuasive argument that the dispositions and skills for reflection are fundamental to reflective thinking and practice irrespective of the theoretical perspectives they draw on (Hatton & Davis, 1995; Zeichner, 2008; Calderhead, 1989). Moreover, as PCoE's principles are based on robust theoretical and empirical evidence (Dewey 1933, Mezirow 2009 and Brookfield & Preskill 2005; Nilson, 2010) it adds further credence to its potential. Thus, in the absence of alternative approaches that recognise students' limited curriculum experience or appropriate learning orientations for reflection, incorporating PCoE in professional studies modules is a worthwhile pedagogical approach.

The quality of student teachers' reflection continues to be a key concern for policy makers and educators (Sahlberg et al., 2014; DfE, 2014; Burn & Mutton, 2013). This paper has presented PCoE as a pedagogical approach and/or orientation that could address some of the barriers associated with student teachers' reflections (Calderhead, 1989). It has done so by revealing some of the ways in which PCoE, (an approach that prioritises the skills and dispositions for reflection) can be a powerful context and stimulus for reflective thinking. As a teacher educator, the insights gained from this study have enabled me to better understand the complexities in teaching reflection, and to re-evaluate my expectations and approaches to teaching reflection. Whilst more in-depth studies are needed to examine PCoE's impact, e.g. on students' reflective writing, discussions and practice, this article's broader significance is in highlighting a pedagogy for reflection that has the potential to nurture the underpinning cognitive and affective dimensions for reflective thinking.

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