

Philosophy for Children Hawaiian Style—“On Not Being in a Rush...”

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We're not in a rush to get anywhere...” is the spirit that animates, guides, informs the work of P4C in Hawaii. When presented at workshops and talks this opening thought elicits surprise, an occasional smile, puzzlement and even discomfort. It is, after all, so completely at odds with the reality of the world we experience every day.

The crushing reality is that in fact we—parents, teachers, administrators, business people, politicians, all of us, including increasingly our children—ARE in a rush. We ARE in a rush to get somewhere—to get the kids to soccer practice, to respond to the latest email, to submit that proposal, to raise the test scores, to be sure “No Child is Left Behind,” to bring democracy to the Iraqi people, on and on.

Not as readily apparent or acknowledged is that in this rush to get somewhere, something very special, precious, essential to being and becoming fully human is being lost: our sense of wonder.

Most of us are prepared to admit that, if all goes well, children enter this world filled with a sense of wonder. The world is a mysterious, fascinating, puzzling, wonderful place. Yes, it is also a terrifying, awful, wretched, depressing, discouraging place. And yet, if things go well, young children fill the world around them with their wonder, their joy (as well as their tears and frustrations), their tenacity and resilience. From their wonder spring an abundance of questions, “Why this?” “How come that?” Practically every waking moment an adventure!

If good fortune smiles, that sense of wonder continues to grow until one momentous day children enter school. If our ears, eyes and hearts are still open to young children, *if*

we are not in a rush, we will soon be in awe of the things children wonder about and the questions that flow from this wonder. In a very natural way, they overflow with questions, questions that go very deep into the heart of things. The world, they recognize, is puzzling, beautiful, sometimes frustrating, even dangerous, yet all the while mysterious. They remind us deep down of how it once was.

If we revisit these children as they progress through school we will assuredly find that their sense of wonder, and the questioning that flows from it, diminishes with dismaying predictability. As schooling progresses, even in some of the “best” schools, the sense of wonder is replaced by anything from indifference or hostility to enthusiastic participation in the “program.” Too many “experts” are there to assure and persuade us that this is a “natural part of maturation.” “Raging hormones,” not yet complete brain development, growth spurts, all are cited to account for the change. Whatever the purported explanation, in the end, those authentic childhood voices become increasingly muted, diffuse, if not lost altogether. The wonder that remains has become prosaic and utilitarian. By the time students enter university, questions tend to be on the order of “Will this be on the exam?” or “What do I have to do in here to get an ‘A’?”

So what! Is it not in the nature of things that this be so? Assuredly not! What is lost with the sense of wonder, and the questions that flow from it, is a particular quality of thinking/feeling, a way of engaging and being in the world. Wonder, as Plato noted, is the wellspring of philosophy. In this sense, we begin our lives as philosophers, and philosophy, as Socrates noted, is a call from deep within us to live an “examined life.” A person who is committed to living life in this way possesses a quality of thinking/feeling that is open, creative, caring, empathetic, ready to move outside of established “boxes.” Such thinking/feeling is innocent and sensitive, yet penetrating and “critical” in the best sense

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of that now overworked concept. Such a person has a grounded sense of who they are and of what is important. They have an ability to think for themselves, to make sound judgments and to act in responsible ways. They are citizens in the best sense. Such individuals are keenly aware that there are situations in the world that demand our urgent attention, but they have a capacity to reflect rather than rush to judgment.

For the past 18 years, P4C Hawai'i has been engaged in the effort to establish, as an accepted part of *every* classroom, a time that is devoted to recovering, sustaining and developing the sense of wonder. For most its life, the Hawai'i Project (also known as the "Philosophy in the Schools Project") has been a joint effort of the State of Hawaii Department of Education (DOE) and the University of Hawai'i Philosophy Department. Until two years ago, the DOE funded the philosophy graduate teaching assistants, whose task it is to assist teachers in creating places and spaces for wonder. For an entire school year, on a once a week basis, these graduate students participate, in partnership with the teachers, in classroom P4C sessions. They learn from each other, while at the same time learning from the students. They are often surprised at the depth and power of the thinking that young students are capable of, if given a space and place within which to wonder.

As part of the requirement for the university credits they receive, teachers agree to conduct two sessions each week and to attend an after school session once a week with their colleagues. These after school sessions aim to develop among the teachers and graduate students their own inquiry community. We have found the two times a week plus after school sessions absolutely essential if P4C is to have a chance of surviving in the midst of the rush to get somewhere. Some teachers try to simply do "P4C" throughout the day, rather than having a special time. This simply does not work. What results is a watered-down, still teacher-centered curriculum with no chance for student-centered wonder and inquiry. Currently, veteran P4C teachers, undergraduate philosophy students, and graduate students are continuing the work of assisting new teachers with their twice-weekly sessions.

In these 18 years, convincing teachers of the need to create and then maintain space and time for wonder has proved the most daunting task. The rush to get somewhere profoundly impacts teachers who find themselves overwhelmed by too much to do, too many often conflicting demands from parents, administrators, boards of education. Added to this are the widely varying needs of their students. Though teachers begin P4C with enthusiasm, without ongoing, sustained support, many choose not to continue. Their own sense of wonder, briefly re-ignited, falters and is again overwhelmed by the rush to get somewhere. Why is this?

When I began this work, it soon became apparent that the Lipman materials in and of themselves, though inspired in many ways, were simply not up to the task. First of all, the survival of wonder in a school setting requires, in addi-

tion to an appropriate starting point for wonder, a special kind of community. A powerful idea from traditional Hawaiian culture is that of a "Pu'uhonua" or "Place of Refuge." In a sense, the survival of wonder, deep wonder and questioning, requires a refuge and safety. The harsh reality is that too many classrooms are not safe. Some are not even physically safe, either for teachers or students. More, perhaps most, lack the prime requisite for wonder and inquiry: intellectual safety.

Anyone who knows how to pretend they understand something even though they do not, or can pretend to be interested even if they are not, or has not spoken because of a fear of ridicule, however mild, has been in a place that is not intellectually safe. Too many classrooms are not safe in this sense. A number of factors contribute to this lack of intellectual safety. The rush to get somewhere is one. The rush translates into the message that questions, other than those to clarify the agenda at hand, are not welcome. As Lipman points out, the current system is answer driven, not question driven. Teachers, pressured to cover an impossibly large amount of content, coupled with the pressure to prepare students for standardized testing, think/feel that they really don't have time for too many questions. Students get

Magic Words

- **SPLAT** = Speak a little louder, please. SPLAT means that what a person said just barely got out of their mouth and then went "splat" onto the floor. In other words, we need you to speak louder so we can hear you.
- **IDUS** = I don't understand. IDUS can empower students to be able to say when they don't understand. It has proven much easier for students to say IDUS than "I don't understand." Teachers find it encouraging when IDUS begins to show up in other content areas.
- **POPAAT** = Please, one person at a time. Once students learn that during inquiry time the group is *very* interested in what they have to say, they often all want to speak at the same time. POPAAT is effective in this context. When people start speaking out of turn, someone says POPAAT, which means that all must stop talking. The person holding the ball then continues.
- **OMT** = One more time. OMT is a request for the speaker to repeat what he has said.
- **NQP** = Next question, please.
- **LMO** = Let's move on.
- **PBQ** = Please be quiet.
- **GOS** = Going off subject. A group member can say GOS when the discussion is losing focus.

Source: From *Philosophy for Children: A Guide for Teachers*, by T. Jackson, 1989. Unpublished manuscript.

this and keep quiet.

Peer culture is another factor that contributes to the lack of intellectual safety. Students are often not kind to those who would question more deeply or thoughtfully. "Nerd", "geek", and other such labels convey the message that there is a narrow band of tolerance for questions, let alone inquiry. Two children of a long time P4C teacher at Hahaione, who had six continuous years of P4C at Hahaione, said to their mom one day soon after starting middle school: "Mom, we're weird!" "What do you mean?" she asked. "Well, we like to ask questions and discuss in class but our classmates find this strange."

Teachers are aware of the safety issue and employ various strategies of "classroom management" in an effort to control things, to keep it "safe." These strategies, of themselves, have little impact on the situation and loss of wonder. Something deeper is needed: a different *kind* of classroom community.

One of the profound aspects of P4C is precisely its effort to transform the character of the classroom community, to make it an intellectually safe place for the genuine pursuit of inquiry that arises from the interests of the students themselves. Most teachers currently are not prepared to do this. They and their students need to learn how to form such a community. This means developing the skills and sensitivities necessary for such a community to thrive.

Developing a P4C community begins with sitting in a circle, rather than in rows facing the teacher. To be able to see one's peers face to face, eye to eye, to see their responses to what is being said, is profound. To ridicule from the back of a class is one thing. To see the face of the one ridiculed is quite another. To see the response of one's peers to one's ideas is powerful, as is the trust that grows in a context where one knows one's ideas will be listened to, not necessarily accepted uncritically, yet always respect-

fully.

In P4C Hawaii, the making of a community ball (CB) is an important ritual that begins molding the circle into what will mature, given proper time and nurturing, into an intellectually safe community. Once made, the CB introduces a second powerful, potentially transforming element: the person holding the CB is the one authorized to speak. Some Native American traditions employ a "Talking Stick" in a similar manner. This opens up a space where all potentially have the right to be heard. In Hawaii, this power to hold the CB, along with the understanding that if the CB comes to you, you always have the right to pass, has occasioned more than one student to speak in class for the first time.

Handing this power over to students is not always easy for teachers, any more than it is for students. Most of us have internalized from our years in school a mental model of what it means to be a teacher. The teacher is the one "in the know," dispensing knowledge to students. The teacher is the expert, the students the novices. The teacher is in command and control of the agenda, especially the content. To allow the students to have a great deal more control over the flow of the discourse can be

very challenging. As teachers have noted, as inquiries become more sophisticated, students can be ahead of the teacher's thinking on a question. One first grade teacher was met with disbelief, even indignation from some of her students when she responded in an early P4C session to a child's question: "I don't know." One child exclaimed "But you're the teacher! You're getting paid!"

A number of years ago a graduate student astutely observed: "P4C doesn't necessarily create problems, it reveals them." A skillfully managed classroom with teacher in charge, students participating, might have seemed safe. Moving to more meaningful inclusion of new voices can



reveal underlying weaknesses and anxieties. P4C asks us adults to “unlearn” some of these mental models and to become open and vulnerable, to reveal our own puzzlement and wonder about questions to which we really don’t know the answer to. Children, sensing our uncertainty, have a wonderful way of coming to our aid, helping to make it safe for us! Success again requires that we not be in a rush, that we be as patient with ourselves as we need to be with our students.

Other helps, like “Magic Words” (MW’s) tend to ease this transforming process. The interpersonal dynamics of a community can make interactions cumbersome and difficult. If the topic seems to be going adrift, or lingering too long on a particular point, classrooms aren’t the only place where this can create an awkward situation. Just think of faculty meetings that drift or seem to bog down. To be able to say “LMO!” (Let’s Move On!) or “GOS!” (Going Off Subject) has proven, when used appropriately, to be very effective in moving a discourse forward. Their use carries and teaches a form of responsibility in the community to be mindful of what one says and does.

After a time, the human need to be heard can lead to too many voices in the circle at once, in spite of the CB. “POPAAT!” (Please, One Person At A Time) assists in reminding the community of this essential courtesy. More important, however, is the growing realization that in *this* time, we *aren’t* in a rush to get anywhere and so there *will* be time for all to be heard. The impact of this is most apparent in schools like Waikiki School and Haha’ione Elementary where P4C has been practiced for many years. It is at once remarkable and humbling to sit in a P4C circle with a group of sixth graders, most of whom have been P4C practitioners since kindergarten. The space for wondering is firmly established and the depth of the thinking/feeling is inspiring! Indeed, adults who participate in such a session for the first time are not infrequently left with a sense of disbelief that such a level of thinking/feeling is even possible at “such a young age”. Adults who visit even younger classes are similarly impacted. They are reminded again of what is possible.

The community circle, the CB, MW’s, the deepening internalization of intellectual safety together create the necessary conditions auspicious for inquiry. In the end, it is P4C *inquiry* that initiates, sustains and develops the sense of wonder. As those familiar with P4C are well aware, the following aspects of inquiry give P4C its power in a school setting:

- (1) The topics, whenever possible, come from the students,
- (2) The inquiry moves with the interests of the students,
- (3) No one knows in advance where the inquiry will lead,
- (4) The inquiry is self-corrective, and
- (5) The inquiry will be suffused with the Good Thinker’s Toolkit.

The Good Thinker’s Toolkit grew out of an imperative need to provide, to teachers and their students, visible, concrete ways of deepening their own thinking/feeling, of “scratching beneath the surface” or opening up a topic.” It is crucial to the development of authentic student voices, that they be given the opportunity to discuss topics of interest to them but how to do this in ways that are intellectually responsible and rigorous? The Toolkit responds to this challenge. The seven letters each represent a way of deepening a nascent inquiry. They call attention to the need to clarify what might be meant [W], to ask for or give reasons [R] to support what is being said, to be alert for possible assumptions [A] or inferences [I] being made. They heighten awareness of possible implications [I] of what is said and whether or not an assertion is true [T]; if true, whether there is evidence [E] in support or counterexamples [C] to restrict the range of the claim made.

The Toolkit initiates, first in the community, and then, ala Vygotsky, in each person’s internal discourse, a much more sophisticated inner dialogue and sharpened self-reflection. It permeates and refines one’s inner voice in the wonder space to pose questions to oneself and others like:

Good Thinker's Tool Kit

W = What do you/we mean by . . . ? W highlights the importance of being sensitive to possible multiplicity of meanings and ambiguity; hence, a readiness to seek clarification when needed.

R = Reasons. R reflects that in inquiry one should expect that it is not enough to simply offer an opinion. Whenever possible, group members should support their opinions with reasons.

A = Assumptions. A represents the importance of making explicit, whenever appropriate, the assumptions that underlie the discussion during inquiry.

I = Inferences; If . . . then’s; Implications. I highlights the central role of inferences we might make, of possible implications of what someone has said, and of hypothetical statements such as, “If what Jody said is true, then ‘real’ can’t just be things we can see or touch.”

T = True? T indicates that a major concern in our inquiry is the question of whether or not what someone has stated is in fact true, and how we might go about finding out.

E = Examples; Evidence. E points out the importance of giving examples to illustrate or clarify what someone is saying and of providing evidence to support a claim.

C = Counterexamples. C represents an important check on assertions or claims that possibly cast too wide a net. For example, “always” or “never” frequently occur in conversations, such as “The boys always get to go first” or “We never get to stay up late.” The search for counterexamples is a way of checking the truth of such a claim. For example, “You get to stay up late if it’s a holiday” is a counterexample.

“What are they assuming here?” “What am I assuming here?” “I found my pencil missing and figured it was stolen. I now realize that I too easily assume [A] that when something is missing, it must have been stolen.” “I understand that some people have assumed that because I have difficulty reading that I’m a poor thinker.” “I see adults inferring [I] from low test scores that our school is a bad school. I now understand that this doesn’t follow. For starters, it depends on what they mean [W] by ‘bad’.”

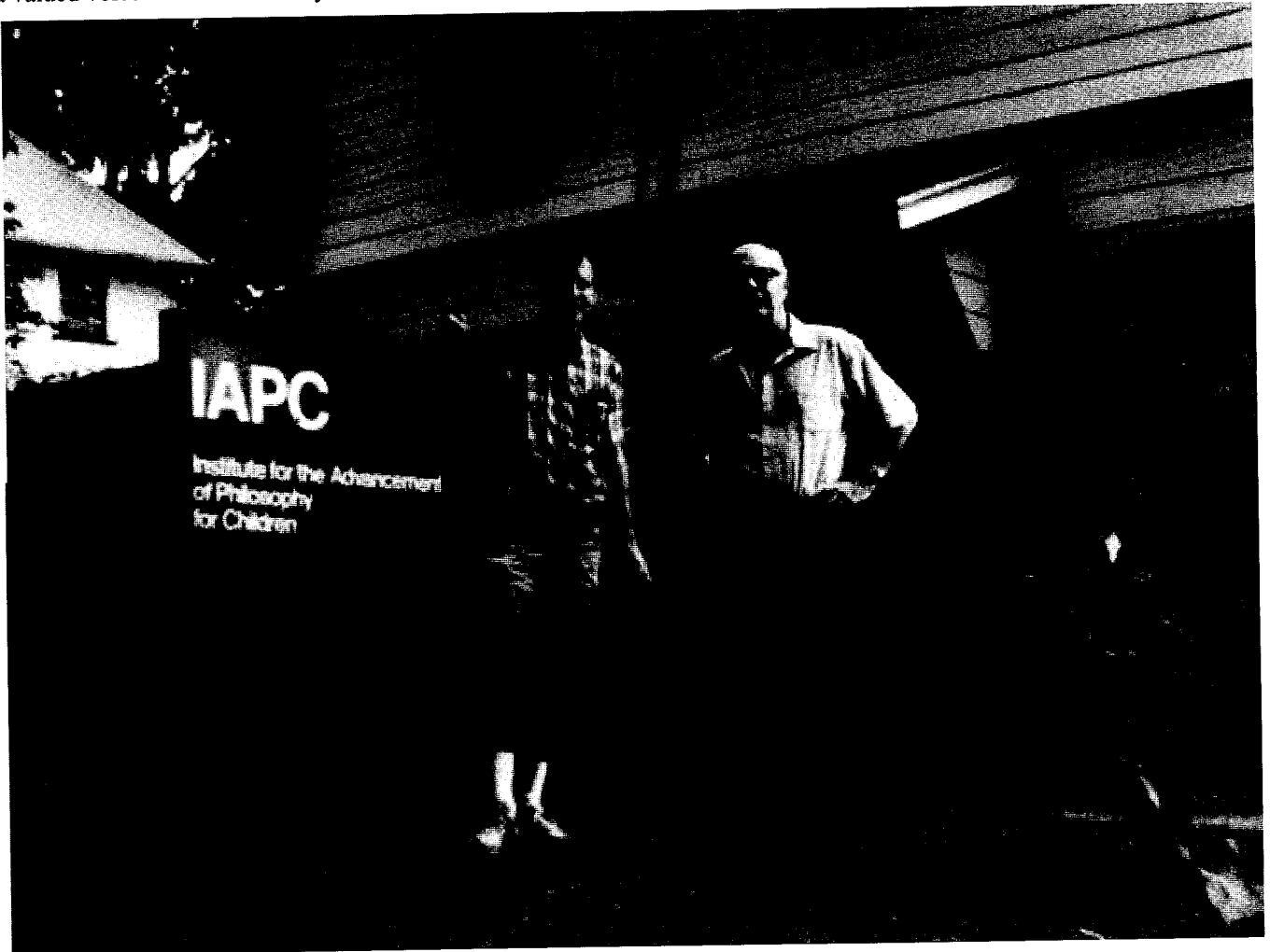
The letters give concrete shape to living an examined life. “What is most important in life?” The Toolkit helps move this question forward. I can ask “Well, what is meant [W] by ‘important’?” “What are some examples [E] of important things?” “What reasons [R] are there why some people think of these things as being important?”

Students who come to the P4C circle with these tools engage in inquiry with each other in very sophisticated ways. They give voice to their own views in reasoned, responsible ways and hear the voices of their peers, and, importantly, of their teacher as well, who comes to be seen as a valued voice in the community.

Teachers also discover that, over time, this deeper thinking appears in other subjects during the day and in the interactions of the students with each other. Most importantly, teachers find, if they persist with P4C, that they themselves have changed. The examined life has blossomed in them. Their own lives have been positively transformed, including relations with those closest to them. The space for wonder has reawakened. This change they bring to their teaching and their students, who of course, respond and are changed as well.

When all is said and done, it is this *fundamental* change in the teacher that assures that time will be found for P4C on a regular, sustained basis. The circle, CB, Magic Words, Toolkit, the community and its many inquiries collectively have done their work.

P4C Hawai’i is not in a rush to get anywhere. I am confident as you read the articles in this special issue of *Thinking*, you will agree that we have, nevertheless, gotten somewhere...and the reason we have “gotten somewhere” is because we have not been in a rush!



Thomas Jackson & Matthew Lipman, August 1987, at Montclair State University.