Philosophy in Schools

An Introduction for Philosophers and Teachers

Edited by Sara Goering, Nicholas J. Shudak, and Thomas E. Wartenberg

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8 Philosophical Rules of Engagement

Thomas Jackson

To the reader of this chapter: I love the work I do, learning and doing philosophy for children (p4c). I began and have continued to learn to do p4c in Hawaii since 1984. I love what p4c has made possible for me and the teachers, students, and educators with whom I have met in Hawaii, the mainland United States, China, Japan, Brazil, Korea, Austria, and Switzerland. I love how teachers and students come to love p4c; what it does for them in school and out, changing and enriching their lives; and, for the teachers, how it empowers their professional practice as they internalize what we in Hawaii now call "the philosopher's pedagogy." I love the excitement in the K–12 classrooms I get to spend time with on a regular weekly basis when the teacher and students realize that it's "p4c time," a special time where we will inquire together, in the intellectually safe community we have developed, into topics and questions *they* have chosen, questions that have arisen out of their interests, be it in English, Social Studies, Math, or questions that arise out of their own wonderings about the world in which they find themselves. The questions range across the landscape from "Could Santa die?" (K) and "Who made numbers . . . because they never end!" (1st grade) to "Why do kids have to judge each other by the way they look, act, etc.?" (8th grade).

For most of the teachers and students with whom I work, there is no longer a question of the value of what we are doing together. Indeed, together we are working to expand the impact of p4c throughout our schools and communities. In addition, the "hard data" that this approach works and has impact beyond standardized test scores continues to grow as well.

What follows is an effort to share with you the framework we have developed and some of the concrete strategies for implementing this framework that is producing the exciting results indicated above. I will assume that many of you reading this are encountering p4c for the first time and so, hopefully, begin at the beginning.

PILLARS OF P4C

At p4c Hawaii we have found that the adventure of doing philosophy with children (K–8) is supported and enhanced when the adventure is

conceptualized in pillar form. As this chapter will show, the pillars we use are *Community*, *Inquiry*, *Reflection*, and *Philosophy*. In the space that follows, each of these pillars are explained in terms of both why and how they are part of doing philosophy for children.

It is not an accident that Community comes first in this list. As indicated above, the intention of doing philosophy in a classroom setting is to inquire together into topics that arise from the interests of the community (students and their teacher) in philosophically responsible ways. For this to happen, it is *essential* to begin by building and sustaining an intellectually safe community conducive to philosophical inquiry.

Pillar 1: Community

At the outset, it is useful to think of your community as something that will grow and develop through stages of beginning, emerging, and mature communities. This is important because, as this development occurs, the role of the teacher will shift from teacher/facilitator/participant to participant/teacher/facilitator. In other words, as the community matures, the student members will internalize the roles, vocabulary, and protocols (social and cognitive) that are the hallmarks of an intellectually safe philosophical inquiry community. Students will become co-facilitators as well as participants, allowing the teacher to become a participant among participants. Indeed, in a mature community, apart from the teacher's physical size, identifying the teacher would not be an easy task. In a beginning community, the teacher's role will be strong and direct as students gradually learn the "rules" of the community.

At the outset it is also important to be mindful of the nature of your community. Two important factors are age and backgrounds of your students. We have found that beginning to do p4c at the pre-K, K–1 levels is importantly different from later grade levels. We have developed a "Start-Up Kit" for pre-K and K–1 levels precisely because of the wide range of developmental experiences young students bring to the classroom. For example, it may or may not be their first experience in a group setting. They may or may not have attended preschool. They may or may not have experienced sitting in a circle, taking turns, and so on. They also will have come from a wide variety of family and cultural backgrounds. All of this just adds to the adventure!

At the upper end of the age level, in middle school, a different set of challenges presents itself. Depending on the school experiences to that point, students may resist the idea of sitting in a circle, taking turns, speaking out in front of their peers, or responding to questions to which they may not know the answers. The very idea of an inquiry where no one knows in advance where the discourse may go can be confusing, frustrating, even threatening for some students. Don't be discouraged! There is plenty of evidence of success once students come to see that this "game" is very different. The initial resistance melts as they come to see that p4c time is *their*

time, where *their* thoughts and ideas are central. It is not about what the teacher thinks, or about a predetermined answer the teacher is looking for but what the community (teacher and students) can develop together out of their thoughts about what matters to them. Some examples will follow later!

The beginning of the p4c Hawaii classroom experience is seating everyone in a circle. For this first and most, if not every subsequent session for p4c time, the class, including teacher, sit in a circle. For many this may be their first experience in such a configuration. The importance of the circle cannot be overemphasized! In a circle, each participate is able to see each other, to make eye contact with each other, to see directly the impact on each other of what is being said or done. The circle creates the possibilities for more intimate engagement and commitment, vulnerability and trust. Participants are better able to hear what others are saying and also to see how they are saying it; in other words, the facial expressions and mannerisms of those who are speaking. The circle also facilitates seeing the impact on each other of the interaction. What is the impact of acceptance or rejection? Of careful listening as opposed to indifference?

Your first activity together, an experience central to every beginning p4c community in Hawaii (K–University) is the making of a Community Ball (CB). The CB will become a moving source of focus and energy that facilitates weaving together the voices that will contribute to each inquiry that unfolds in all the sessions to follow. Here are the materials you'll need to make your first CB: (1) an empty cardboard paper towel core, (2), a skein of multicolored yarn, (3) one zip-tie, (4) scissors.

Here is the procedure:

(1) Place the zip-tie through the center of the paper towel core. The teacher begins wrapping the yarn around the paper towel core while the student next to him/her feeds the yarn from the skein. As the teacher is wrapping, he/she is responding to the questions she has prepared for this first session. These questions can be anything the teacher thinks will draw out the children, such as, "What is your favorite food (or music)?" or "What do you like best about school?" The objective is to select questions that will be easy, yet engaging, drawing out each student in some degree. When the teacher finishes speaking, he/she passes the cardboard to the student beside her, who begins to wrap and respond to the questions as the teacher takes over feeding the yarn. This process—one person wrapping and speaking, and his neighbor feeding the yarn—continues until all have had the opportunity to speak to the question. This activity creates a sense of mystery and excitement and often the beginnings of intimacy as students share some surprising responses to the questions.

(2) When finished wrapping, hold onto the zip-tie while pulling the yarn off the core.

(3) Zip-tie must remain in the center of the yarn coil.
(4) Loop and fasten the zip-tie, pulling it as tight as possible, forming a bagel shape from the yarn.
(5) Cut through the yarn at the outer edge, creating your own pom-pom CB!

There is often delight when the CB emerges as the end result of these efforts.

Once the group has made the ball, the teacher presents two rules: (1) the person with the ball is the speaker of the moment. That person, when finished, may pass the ball to whomever he or she wishes. (2) If one receives the ball, one *always* has the right to pass. In a beginning community, the teacher, of course, has the right and responsibility to intervene, even without the CB, if circumstance requires.

This activity anticipates many of the features that will be central to the community. First, everyone is seated in a circle. (We've done this with up to 40 high school students in the circle.) Second, each person has the opportunity to speak, allowing everyone in the circle to hear every other voice in the circle responding to questions that invite an easily accessible response from each participant, including the teacher. Third, upon completion, the CB becomes a symbol of a powerful symbolic shift in the circle regarding the authorization of the right to speak.

This activity has proven effective with groups from kindergarten through university, and in places as diverse as China, Japan, Brazil, Austria, and Kenya.

Having completed the making of a CB, which can take more than one period, an early, vital concept to introduce and explore together with the community is that of "Intellectual Safety": *All participants in the community are free to ask virtually any question or state any view so long as respect for all is honored.* It is important to share this statement with the community in age appropriate ways and to discuss together behaviors that contribute to and detract from intellectual safety in the community. The presence or lack of safety is one criterion of a "successful" session that is discussed later in this chapter.

Creating and maintaining intellectual safety allows for thoughts to be expressed that might not be expressed otherwise. "Raw thoughts"; tentative, not yet formed thoughts; "spontaneous eloquence" all become possible in an intellectually safe community. Intellectual safety does NOT mean participants are simply being "nice" and "polite" with each other. Intellectual safety makes possible intellectual courage (to speak one's authentic thoughts). Speaking one's authentic thoughts then brings with it the intellectual responsibility to clarify, to ask for and give reasons for what one says. (See "Good Thinker's Toolkit section below.)

The intention in creating and maintaining this intellectually safe community is to provide a foundational context for inquiring into and achieving a deeper understanding of questions and topics that arise out of and are sensitive to the interests of the community: that is, to say, to conduct a p4c Inquiry.

Pillar 2: p4c Inquiry

The idea of Inquiry covers a large territory. There are different discipline-specific forms of inquiry such as mathematical, scientific, historical, psychological, and philosophical, each with its own criteria. A p4c Hawai'i philosophical inquiry has the following five characteristics:

(1) **The source of the inquiry**—Whenever possible, the inquiry arises out of the questions and interests of the community, begins where the community is in its understanding, and moves in directions that the community indicates. A salient feature of p4c inquiry is its sensitivity to the interests and questions of the community, their thoughts, and where they take the topic. In an intellectually safe community, even very young children generate sophisticated lines of inquiry from deceptively simple beginnings. One kindergartner, in response to the question, "What do you wonder about?" answered: "The other night, while I was gazing at the stars, I wondered whether anything came before space." In the discussion that ensued, the children's exploration ranged from dinosaurs to God. Other inquiries have explored such topics as "Could there be a greatest number?" (3rd grade); "What constitutes a right?" and "What is the purpose of rights?" (5th grade); and "What is more important—friends, fame, or fortune?" (6th grade). Once children realize that the topics can indeed come from them and be pursued along lines they are interested in, the quality, creativity, and insight in their thinking is truly astounding.

There are a wide variety of possible sources, occasions, and topics for inquiry. Plain Vanilla is one strategy or "how to" for finding a topic and then giving shape to an inquiry. The name "Plain Vanilla" was inspired by the idea that just as there are a variety of possible triggers for inquiry, so too are there a variety of ice creams, vanilla being only one. "Variety," as they say, "is the spice of life!" There are lots of ways to begin an inquiry! A Plain Vanilla sequence proceeds as follows:

Read—The community reads a paragraph or two, an episode, a chapter, or a whole story. Alternatively, the community could look at a painting, watch a video, read a poem, listen to a piece of music, or select a topic from a "wonder box" into which questions have been placed.

Question—Each member of the community is asked to pose a question or comment based on the reading or other option mentioned above. These questions are then posted for all to see. (Optional: each person also writes his or her name next to his or her question or comment.)

Vote—The community votes for the question or comment they would like to inquire into first.

Inquire—The community inquires into the question selected, using WRAITFC (from the Toolkit).

(2) **Co-inquiry**—In p4c inquiry, no one, not even the teacher, knows either "the" answer to the question (if the inquiry begins with a question) or where the inquiry will lead. Any effort to guide an inquiry to a predetermined answer or outcome will compromise the process from the start. A p4c inquiry develops its own integrity, its own movement, going where "it" wants or needs to go. At various points it may bog down and need an occasional nudge, but in the main, the inquiry emerges from the context.

p4c inquiry is co-inquiry in the best sense. The teacher is an important, but not a privileged knower. In such inquiries, the children are not infrequently ahead of the thinking in the community, opening the inquiry down unexpected paths. What someone already "knows" too confidently in advance can interfere with participation in the unfolding inquiry.

(3) **The self-corrective nature of the inquiry**—Matthew Lipman, following in the pragmatist tradition of the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, emphasized the centrality of self-corrective inquiry. In classrooms where inquiry has become an essential and ongoing activity, community members will change and develop their thought about a particular topic. "Before I thought . . ., but now I realize that. . . ." becomes an increasingly common comment in a maturing inquiry community in the course of a school year.

(4) **Inquiry tools (WRAITEC)**—p4c inquiry is more than a conversation or sharing of ideas within a group. It is characterized by an intellectual rigor that certain cognitive tools help facilitate. These seven tools comprise the "Good Thinker's Toolkit." They are an important means for giving shape and direction to the notion that, although we aren't in a rush to get anywhere, we *do* have an expectation that we will get *somewhere*.

The Good Thinker's Tool kit (WRAITEC)©

[W] = *What* do you/we mean by . . .?
[R] = Are Reasons being offered to support claims?
[A] = Are we aware of and identifying key *Assumptions* being made?
[I] = Are we aware of *Inferences* being made and possible *Implications* of what is being said?
[T] = Is what is being said *True*? How could we find out?
[E] = Are *Examples* being given, or is *Evidence* being offered to support or illustrate claims?
[C] = Are there any *Counterexamples* to the claim being made?

As soon as possible, it is important to introduce members of the community to the individual letters of the Toolkit, the important skills they represent, and their interconnections. Sessions should be devoted to each tool and their interplay. Many teachers have each student make his own Toolkit for use during sessions. Here are a couple of examples of practice lessons that are lots of fun to do!

To practice [R] Reasons, to the students, say, "Imagine you are the teacher. A student turns in a homework assignment late. What would you consider a good reason and why?"

To practice [A] Assume & [I] If . . . then . . . and [T] True, to the students say, "*Assume* children were in charge of the world. *If* this were [T] *true*, what might happen?

To practice [E] Example & [C] Counterexample, pose the question: "Are all drugs dangerous? Can you give an example of a dangerous drug? Can you give a counterexample?"

As familiarity and facility with the various toolkit letters grows, so too does the depth of questions and the inquiries, both during the p4c sessions and in other content areas *and life beyond the classroom*!

(5) **Reflect**—Using the criteria below, the community evaluates how the session went, both in terms of community (intellectual safety, etc.) and inquiry. The following criteria are suggested. The teacher can present these to the group prior to beginning the inquiry cycle and again at the end of each session. The criteria fall into two categories, those dealing with how we did as a community and those dealing with the inquiry itself.

How did we do as a community?

- **Listening**—Was I listening to others? Were others listening to me?
- **Participation**—Did most people participate rather than just a few who dominated?
- **Safety**—Was it a safe environment?

How was our inquiry?

- **Focus**—Did we maintain a focus?
- **Depth**—Did our discussions scratch beneath the surface or open up the topic?
- **Understanding**—Did I increase my understanding of the topic?
- **Thinking**—Did I challenge my own thinking or work hard at it?
- **Interest**—Was it interesting?

At the end of the session, members of the community can be asked to indicate by a "thumb-up, thumb-middle, or thumb-down," their response to each of the above criteria.

In addition to the above criteria, with a maturing community it is highly recommended to ask each student to write a written reflection on whether or not he experienced any *progress* in his own thinking as a result of the Inquiry. There are at least three possible, different, sometimes overlapping kinds of progress: (1) complexity/confusion: any encounter with a complex topic, especially in the beginning, can lead to confusion. To recognize confusion in oneself and celebrate one's courage to be with this confusion is an important

form of progress, especially in a school testing culture that is overwhelmingly about single correct answers; (2) connection of ideas: often in an inquiry, one will hear perspectives not thought of before, leading to new connections for oneself; (3) emergence of an answer: at any point *an* answer, however tentative, can emerge.

At the end of any given session, individual participants may experience any or some combination of these forms of progress, depending on the inquiry. It is important to stress that individuals can experience very different forms of progress in any inquiry depending on their starting point with the topic or question.

Pillar 3: Reflection

Reflection as a pillar of p4c Hawai'i refers not only to the reflection that occurs at the end of each inquiry, as indicated above, but also to reflection on the entire process of p4c, the pillars themselves, and the fidelity of the participants to the values that the pillars represent. One such reflection concerns the role of the teacher/facilitator.

The teacher/facilitator is pivotal to the success of p4c inquiry. In the beginning it will be the teacher/facilitator who introduces the ideas behind such inquiry. He/she will be responsible for establishing, monitoring, and maintaining the safety within the group. This will include monitoring the proper use of the CB and calling on each other and seeing that members have ample opportunity to speak as well as permission to remain silent. With younger grades, for example, one problem that often appears initially is that boys only call on boys, girls call on girls, or close friends call on each other.

In a beginning community, the teacher/facilitator conducts the lessons that involve making the Toolkit and follow-up lessons that focus on a particular tool. For most students and many teachers, "inference" and "assumption" are little more than vocabulary words. The group needs to spend time on developing deeper understanding of what these terms mean. Similarly, what makes a reason a good reason, how counterexamples function, and how one might go about finding out whether a given claim or statement is true may be areas where understanding is currently quite shallow. In early sessions the teacher should call attention to uses of the various tools and encourage their use.

It is the teacher/facilitator, especially in the beginning, who sets the pace for the group. "Not being in a rush" depends on a teacher being sufficiently comfortable with silence and "wait time" beyond what is typical in most classrooms. It requires a teacher/facilitator whose own sense of wonder is still alive and who is keenly interested in what the authentic thoughts of the community are on a given topic; one who is comfortable with uncertainty, not eager to push for closure but willing to allow an inquiry to move where "it" and the community seem to want to take it. He/she must be willing to risk not knowing the answer, to indeed be a co-inquirer in the quest for an answer.

Initially the teacher/facilitator needs to make the crucial judgments about using Good Thinker's Tools. The teacher/facilitator is the one who asks for reasons, examples, and clarification; at the same time displaying letters that represent the particular tool requested; at once modeling and highlighting their use.

The teacher/facilitator assists in weaving threads of conversation into dialogue, asking who agrees or disagrees or has other thoughts about the topic at hand, offering a counterexample, asking "If what Tanya said is true, would it follow that . . .?" or making some other comment to nudge the dialogue along. This is especially delicate and challenging because a major objective is for the children to internalize and thus take over these skills and behaviors. They need as much opportunity as possible to try them out, and providing these opportunities is the teacher's responsibility.

It is the teacher/facilitator who brings a given session to a close and sees to it that the group conducts an evaluation. How long are inquiry sessions? With kindergarten children they last from 10 minutes to more than an hour. Sessions with older children tend to be more predictable in terms of length, but also more subject to the time demands of the school day and curriculum.

In this kind of inquiry, the teacher/facilitator's role is to be pedagogically strong but philosophically self-effacing. The teacher/facilitator should be firmly in control of the procedures but allow the content of the inquiry to unfold, as it needs to, rather than following his/her own desires. As indicated above, this role of pedagogical strength can be especially challenging since it is asking for the students to ultimately assume greater responsibility for the success of the sessions. Indeed, it cannot occur without their active, willing acceptance of this responsibility.

A strategy that we have found effective in creating this more active participation is the use of what we call "Magic Words." These words are playful "shorthand" for situations that can slow or disrupt the flow of a session. Here are a few examples: "POPAAT—Please One Person at a Time." In a lively session there is a strong temptation to speak out of turn, even with the presence of the CB. POPAAT indicates that this function of the CB has been forgotten by the community. When POPAAT is uttered, the protocol is for everyone to stop talking and to begin again only when respect for the designated speaker has been restored. It is the role of the teacher/facilitator to vigilantly enforce this rule. Note that not observing this rule infringes on the Intellectual Safety of the session. Another example is "GOS—Going Off Subject!" GOS indicates that the person who uttered it senses that inquiry has moved away from the chosen focus. The community votes at this point to see if it agrees and if it wishes to continue with the GOS or return to the initial question. A final example is "LMO—Let's Move On!" LMO indicates that the person who uttered it senses that we're bogged down in our session and it's time to move forward. Again, the community votes to see if they agree. If the majority agrees, it moves on, perhaps to a new topic or question. Note that one need not be in possession of the CB to say a magic word.

As the community grows and matures it will move from beginning to emerging, where the other members of the community internalize the protocols, call on each other, and spontaneously begin to use the Toolkit letters and so on. Finally, in a mature community, the teacher/facilitator will be a coequal facilitator/participant.

Pillar 4: Philosophy

In my experience, for a variety of complex reasons, many educators and parents I've met in my work around the world have a neutral to negative response to the word Philosophy, particularly when connected with children. They see philosophy as something rather esoteric, removed from everyday experience and concerns, difficult to understand, perhaps not even suitable for children. As a result, in working with teachers and parents in recent years I have found it useful to clarify philosophy and its connection with children in the following way: first, if it's a "live" audience, I like to ask if those present were at some point in their life a child. This is met with smiles of acknowledgment and raised hands. Next, I ask how many still think they have something of the child within them. The response is the same. I next ask them how many wonder about things. I then point out that a philosopher well known to some of them—Plato—pointed out long ago that philosophy, whatever else it is, begins in Wonder! To elaborate, I then playfully suggest that philosophy, whatever else it is, first, involves both Content and Activity; and second, that philosophy comes in two "varieties": Big P and little p, each of which has both Content and Activity. It is Big P Content and Activity that most people tend to associate with philosophy.

Big P Content includes Philosophers like Socrates, Aristotle, Kant, Wittgenstein, Nagarjuna, Samkara, Confucius, Lao-tzu, Ibn Sina, etc.; Areas such as Metaphysics, Epistemology, Ethics; and Schools, Movements, and Worldviews such as Daoism, Empiricism, Feminism, Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, etc.

Big P Activity refers primarily to professionals teaching, studying, reading, writing, publishing, and presenting their work at conferences based on the aforementioned content.

Little p Content refers to the set of beliefs we begin to acquire at birth that continue to inform our experience, becoming the framework with which we make sense of our world. To the extent that we have beliefs, we *have* a philosophy. We are social beings from the beginning, and the family and culture which meets and greets us makes possible our growth into the human community. We are, however, not passive in this encounter, as anyone with young children knows. The younger we are, the more persistent are the "But why's?" that greet our adult responses to them in our efforts to answer their increasingly deep questions. A colleague pointed out to me recently in connection with her grandchild that "A young child can take you very deep, very quickly!"

Little p Activity refers to the fact that we don't passively acquire this content but engage it almost from the beginning. Arising from our innate sense of wonder, with the acquisition of language questions soon arise naturally with the persistent "But why?"

We are thusly born philosophical, eager to wonder, engage, question, learn from and challenge the world around us. It is this child-like energy that p4c taps into and is the primary source of its joy for parents, teachers, and students. Perhaps one of the most important "lessons" of rediscovering one's own "little p" philosophical capacity is, in an encounter with one's own child or students, to resist the temptation to immediately answer their questions, but rather to see it as an invitation to an inquiry and respond by asking first "What do you think?" Children and students, sensing your genuine interest, soon jump at the occasion!

In the practice of p4c Hawai'i, the center of gravity is on little p philosophy. That is, the emphasis is on the beliefs, questions, and topics that arise from the students themselves (Inquiry, First Characteristic). Philosophical activity then grows from these initial beliefs and questions in the form of inquiry as has been outlined above. They are co-inquiries, self-corrective, informed by the active use of the Good Thinker's Toolkit. Teachers soon are applying the Plain Vanilla structure to a wide range of content and subject areas. This has been particularly important in teachers being able to practice philosophy in their middle and high school classrooms. Philosophy is no longer an "extra." It is now seen primarily as an activity, a particularly effective way of engaging any content that presents itself. Seen and practiced this way as little p, it does not require prior experience with Big P. (This, of course, is in no way to diminish the importance of Big P in its own right and as a resource to be drawn upon if desired.) Philosophy comes to be seen, when applied in a classroom context as I have endeavored to present in this chapter, as what we are now referring to as a "philosopher's pedagogy." Perhaps most satisfying of all is that when this pedagogy is applied to oneself, it leads to what Socrates called "the examined life."

I hope, as a result of reading this, you will be inspired to give p4c a try. The journey of p4c will have its ups and downs. It is most challenging if you are the only one at your school doing p4c. It is imperative that you have support all along the way if possible. The more teachers and grade levels that are involved, the better it is. In Hawai'i we have two model schools. Waikiki Elementary School, where we've been working for 12 years, has almost 100 percent participation. This means that after kindergarten, you have students who "know the routine." At Kailua High School, where we have been working for 8 years, whole departments are embracing the philosopher's pedagogy, buoyed up by students who also embrace the approach and actively participate in making it work. This book contains lots of suggestions from lots of good people who will no doubt be willing to help you if you ask!