

## **Burgh, Gilbert/Thornton, Simone (eds.) (2019): Philosophical inquiry with children: The development of an inquiry society in Australia, London/New York: Routledge.**

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A group of philosophers in Australia inspired by the work of Matthew Lipman and Margret Sharp (1980)<sup>1</sup> set out to teach philosophy in schools. Their efforts over about thirty years led to the development of an inquiry society in Australia. While this is an ambitious task and many efforts are moving in opposition such as curriculum efforts that were and are excessively career-oriented and, to that extent, anti-intellectual, this group of philosophers, educators, administrators, and classroom teachers continued toward the goal of an inquiry society. This book creatively integrates several strains of this development in a more or less chronological manner.

### **Overview**

The book is divided into four parts and an Editorial Introduction. Gilbert Burgh (Senior Lecturer in the School of Historical and Philosophical Inquiry at the University of Queensland) and Simone Thornton, who teaches in the same School wrote the introduction. Their introduction begins by recognizing the value of critical thinking as a quest for active and informed citizens and goes on to argue that philosophy plays an important part in reaching that goal. A greater vision than merely raising the status of philosophy in schools as a sufficient outcome is required in their view. They write:

Lost is Dewey's vision of thinking as inquiry; a kind of knowing in action. Inquiry us both critical and creative: a dialogue that lends itself naturally to classroom discussion elicited from student curiosity that can provide a natural basis for learning (Burgh/Thornton 2019: 1).

Their introduction places Lipman's project as well as the subtitle of the book *The development of an inquiry society within a context for educational improvement and innovation*. A wide reading of John Dewey is obvious to those familiar with Dewey's corpus. For those less familiar with his work, an awareness of John Dewey's perspective on democracy and education is helpful as a prerequisite for an understanding of the Australian project as stated in the title of the book under review. Toward that end, *Dewey's Democracy and Education* (1916/1944) makes a case for both.

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<sup>1</sup> See Lipman, M., Sharp, A.M. and Oscanyan, F.S., 2010. *Philosophy in the classroom*. Temple University Press for the title of their seminal work.

Since a democratic society repudiates the principle of external authority, it must find a substitute in voluntary disposition and interest; these can be created only by education. But there is a deeper explanation. Democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a form of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. The extension in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his *or her*<sup>2</sup> own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his or her own, is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which keeps *us*<sup>3</sup> from perceiving the full import of *our*<sup>4</sup> society (Dewey, 1916/1944: 87).

John Dewey's grounding of education in democracy is central to understanding *Philosophy for Children and Community of Inquiry* and all its applications and modification in Australia and worldwide. The book is organized into four parts: The development of philosophy for children in Australia, Ideas into books, Philosophy in schools, and Reflection. After a short introduction by the editors, each section has a short introduction of its own, followed by four to six chapters, except for the last section which contains only one chapter.

### **Part I: Developing philosophy for children in Australia**

Laurance Splitter and Jennifer Glaser led a collection of committed individuals beginning in the mid-1980s to implement philosophy for children in Australian classrooms using the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children curriculum. This section documents how, where, and with whom this project was undertaken. In "Getting started: the early use of the IAPC curriculum" Glaser with Anita Bass explores how the early IAPC curriculum highlights a unique vehicle used to spread the word on a community of inquiry and philosophy in schools was the use of a series of 26-episodes of one hour in duration. "One of the radical ideas behind this series was that a philosophical concept would anchor each segment. These concepts were explored explicitly in the Munch Kids animations, providing a conceptual framework for the episodes overall and could be used on their own as a new stimulus for inquiry" (29). Each chapter features different and sometimes overlapping aspects of these early efforts ranging from a presentation of the challenges of working to develop in national network within a federation structure (Chapter 3 – Laurance Splitter and May Lecky), and the role played by newsletters and journals in influencing educators, philosophers, administrators, and teaching toward implementing this project (Chapter 4 – Stephen Miller). The fifth chapter is called "Australian practices goes overseas" (Megan Lafferty) documents the comings and goings of Australian philosophers and educators who traversed back and forth beyond the Australian continent, some to level permanently and some to return.

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<sup>2</sup> "Or her" was added to update the outdated use of the male pronoun previously considered gender neutral.

<sup>3</sup> "Men" was changed to us, see above footnote for reason.

<sup>4</sup> See above footnote.

## **Part II: Ideas into books**

After a short introduction to Part II by Gabrielle Mardon, Laurance Splitter's chapter is the first entrée in *Ideas into books*. The dominance of Splitter's writing in this work is a reflection, in part, of his role in Philosophy for/with Children (hereafter P4wC) in Australia. "Meno to Harry Stottlemeier and friends: you are not wanted here" appears to be intended to make a point about at least part of the way Australian educators responded to the introduction of "foreign" curriculum. However, Splitter's reference to the richness of the original curriculum produced by the IAPC which "stands as an historic paradigm in the development of a movement designed to bring the discipline of philosophy for children" (Splitter and Sharp 1995, 105) is some indication of the complexity of the Australian project.

The ideas of a curricular framework by Jennifer Glaser in philosophy provides the reader with some sense of how essential aspects of Lipman's original project are integrated and rethought. Much of her struggle with the IAPC is captured here. "P4C invites children of all ages, abilities and backgrounds to join this dialogue on their own terms, but also on equal term with each other" (Glaser, 2019: 84).

Susan Wilk's chapter, "Resourceful teaching and teacher resources" captures one of the key elements of Australian P4wC. Wilks presents two sides of what makes Australian P4wC unique, that is, using non-Lipman materials developed in Australia and assisting classroom teachers by creating tools that encourage student to discuss concepts and ideas philosophically.

"From picture books to science" by Tim Sprod captures an interesting quality of the Lipman material as he works to apply picture book stories to philosophical discussions. He argues that all teachers interested in teaching philosophy in schools would benefit from reading and accessing the Lipman and Sharp manuals but that P4C can also be used using picture books for children and in science education. Philip Cam succinctly and powerfully captures the essence of how a Community of Inquiry (COI) works, at least in its ideal form in his chapter "Writing for children and teachers".

A handy metaphor is to think of COI as maintaining an elliptical orbit around two foci. One may exert a stronger influence at one moment and the other at another, but their conjoint influence is always present, so that the COI builds a disposition and capacity to inquire that is inseparable from developing the forms of regard and social concern that help sustain an open and democratic community (Cam 2019, 123).

The metaphor of an elliptical orbit with two foci also seems to this reader to inform his two foci in writing, that is writing for children and writing for teachers.

John Dewey's contributions to teaching and curriculum come to the fore in Clinton Golding's chapter "Connecting concepts and developing thinking classrooms". Golding imaginatively integrates Lipman and Dewey to provide a framework for "thinking classrooms" in New Zealand and Australia. It is clear that Golding has read deeply in the work of John Dewey, even though there are only two references to him. Dewey's ideas permeate Golding's application to connecting concepts and developing thinking in the classroom.

### **Part III: Philosophy in the schools**

After a short interlude of photographs reflecting the events and people involved in variety of turning points and accomplishments, Mardon writes a preview and overview of the next six chapters. This introduction, as all previous ones, helps orient the reader to the framework of this part of the book, allowing easy access to a full reading of each individual chapter or the selection of chapters that match the interest and taste of the reader.

In Jannette Poulton's article she characterizes the lack of teacher educators with considerable knowledge in philosophy and philosophers with qualification in education is a problem for effective and widespread implementation of philosophy in the classroom. In some form or another, this is a persistent problem in Australia and many non-European countries, and even in Europe it is unlikely that many philosophy classrooms are widespread in primary schools. Poulton ask a key question that needs to be addressed when thinking about philosophy in the classroom: What is the collaboration between the philosopher and the classroom teacher supposed to look like?

The next two chapters, "Philosophy and the curriculum" by Monica Bini, Peter Ellerton, Sue Knight, Stephan Millett and Alan Tapper, and "Philosophy in schools across Australia" (Kate Kennedy White with Liz Fynes-Clinton, Lynne Hinton, Jill Howell, Emmanuel Skoutas, Daniel Smith and Matthew Wills), are reviewed together to illustrate the interconnection of themes in this work and the manner in which one topic informs another topic throughout this work. Bini et al in their chapter focus on defining a space for philosophy in an Australian curriculum, while White and colleagues focus more on the day-to-day, school district-to-school district implementation of philosophy instruction in the schools. Both chapters follow how working on a national approach within the structure of a federal system influences these compatible but unique projects. While these chapters lean heavily on Australian philosophers and educators the innovations and applications of Jerome Bruner, Lawrence Kohlberg, Howard Gardner, David Perkins<sup>5</sup> as well as lessons learned from the work done in Reggio Emilia are also implicitly and explicitly discussed in these chapters.

Selena Prior and Susan Wilks's chapter, "Philosophy in public and other spaces" begins with a nod to John Dewey's larger educational vision and Matthew Lipman's specific application to classroom teaching. Lipman's approach to philosophy with children while valued in Australia has been, nearly from the beginning, criticized and modified. Dewey, on the other hand, seems to have been equally valued and less cited in this as well as other chapters. It is the integration of various philosophies of pedagogy, education, and approaches to cultural transformation that is the hallmark of Australia's move toward an inquiry society, including philosophy in public spaces.

Chapter 16, "Australian research into benefits of philosophy for children" written by Stephan Miller, Rosie Scholl and Alan Tapper review and summarize the research done on P4wC conducted in Australia and also includes a number of projects done by Australians working overseas. Reviewed are both experimental studies and qualitative study. This review of the literature on research in P4wC in Australia provides a good understanding of what has

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<sup>5</sup> Many of these educators are discussed in the Prior and Wilks chapter.

been accomplished in P4wC and COI in Australia and to a lesser degree what has occurred worldwide. The authors make thoughtful suggestions as to what research might be pursued more deeply and more thorough understanding of process and outcome of P4wC and community of inquiry.

The penultimate chapter is authored by Jennifer Bleazby and Christina Slade and entitled "Philosophy for Children goes to University". The approaches of either teaching a limited number of courses or teaching for a limited time in either Departments of Education or Departments of Philosophy have led to successful but limited implementation of P4wC in schools. Many *ad hoc* workshop approaches appear to have had more success but a fourth option of "embedding of P4C within course offerings" in subjects that emphasize critical thinking, project-based learning, inquiry learning, ethics courses, and controversial subject matter approaches to history and the social sciences also provides an alternative way of teaching philosophical ways of thinking. These alternative approaches have potential for motivating students and teachers while at the same time offering opportunities to those trained in P4C to share their expertise. As the authors note, Australian curriculum already has policies such as Critical and Creative Thinking and Ethical Understanding as capabilities that must be taught in all subjects (228).

#### **Part IV: Growing up with philosophy in Australia**

The editors of this volume end by stating one of the central tenets of P4wC and COI, it is a collaborative pedagogical method based in social-cultural learning (236). This simple phrase captures much of the rich theory, development, and story of this book which began with the original work of Matthew Lipman and Ann Margret Sharp who drew on the writing and teaching of C.S. Pierce and John Dewey as well as Lev Vygotsky, Jerome Bruner, Howard Gardner, David N. Perkins to name but a few of the non-Australians who contributed to this project. It goes without saying that the focus here is on the Australian contributions many of whom authored these chapters, but as those contributors acknowledge they did not "appear full blown out of the head of Zeus". The democratic vision of John Dewey is seen in action throughout the book as expressed in this statement:

P4C is founded on the view that theories of classroom practice, as well as curriculum material and classroom materials, need to be attentive to the concerns of children and adolescents, and therefore, the larger social and political issues from which these concerns arise' (246-7).

The chapter ends with a set of questions intended to encourage further research in this area.

#### **Reviewer summary comments**

Two elements regarding the construction of the argument of this book are what makes the book of great value to readers beyond Australia and beyond philosophy for children. First, each chapter is a combination of personal stories integrated with educational, philosophical and pedagogical theory that simultaneously focuses on P4wC and COI and broader educational and

cultural issues. The second advantage of the structure of the book is the different vantage points of the authors. While some of the chapters may seem to repeat similar themes, the reader will recognize the value of the different vantage points of the writers as they look from different positions regarding, for example pedagogy and curriculum, national policy and classroom practice, elementary and secondary classroom or university instructor, ad hoc workshops or university curriculum.

The title of this book, *Philosophical inquiry with children: The development of an inquiry society in Australia*, echoes its structure and its broad challenge to all educators. – What efforts have been initiated, both successful and less successful, that will engage us in a new and ongoing project to make our society an *inquiry society*? Gilbert Burgh and Simone Thornton and their many colleagues who contributed to this book have laid before us a challenge that ought to be undertaken.

### **References**

- Dewey, J., 1916/1944. *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education*. New York: Free Press.
- Lipman, M., Sharp, A. M. and Oscanyan, F. S., 2010. *Philosophy in the classroom*. Temple University Press.