

Inclusion, Diversity, and Intercultural Dialogue in Young People's Philosophical Inquiry

Ching-Ching Lin and
Lavina Sequeira (Eds.)



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Edited by

Ching-Ching Lin

Touro College Graduate School of Education, USA

and

Lavina Sequeira

Montclair State University, USA



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DAVID KENNEDY

FOREWORD

In Search of the Third Space

In an age of acceleration, this volume of chapters could be said to represent another generation, following fast on the heels of the last, of Philosophy for Children (P4C) and its distinctive pedagogical praxis, Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI). One senses that these chapters are cries from the heart as much as communiqués from the intellect, goaded forward by the dramatic inequities of wealth and power, by the injustices and violations of human dignity and fundamental human rights that threaten us at this epochal moment; by the corresponding rise, worldwide, of political cultures of cruelty, indifference, authoritarianism, kleptocracy, open genocide, permanent war and naked corruption; and by the sense of hope that not only persists in spite of, but even *because* of our global situation.

No doubt the species has been here before—perhaps more often than not—but this particular moment is exacerbated by the specter of, if not species extinction, then draconian adaptation to catastrophic degradation of the biosphere in the relatively near future. It might even be suggested that it is this particular concern that drives the sense of urgency we find in these chapters—that it operates on the implicit assumption that, in the Anthropocene, all that will save the natural world is the reconstruction of the human world, and that reconstruction is not just a legislative but a constitutional one, by which I mean effected at the level of “human nature,” or deep-seated habituation, to the extent that we understand the latter as in great part a product of education, understood in the broad sense of that term.

Indeed, what also shines like a bright flame through all of these essays, in spite of their fierce and insistent criticism of monological and hegemonic discourses, of ideological, cultural, ethnic, linguistic, economic and political fundamentalisms, is the more fundamental optimism that CPI, and especially CPI with children—that is, P4C—embodies, and the reasoned belief that dialogical inquiry, and in particular communal dialogical inquiry, most often mediated by a skilled facilitator, nourishes the possibility, not just of noetic transformation, but of the emergence of those habits of heart and mind that make cultural, social and political transformation possible. In fact many of these essays present CPI as a sort of de-programming from the cult of culture-as-usual and unexamined belief—which, it could be argued, has been philosophy’s role at least since Socrates sat down in the agora.

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Philosophy for Children's optimism is, as I understand it, most deeply grounded in the persistent and ineradicable presence of childhood in the human evolutionary landscape, which triggers and evokes for adults the signs of natality—the presence of the singular, of that unmitigated sense of the new, the unexpected, and the possibility of the realization of freedom and *shalom*—a form of peace that results from the sublimation as opposed to the eradication of conflict. The extraordinarily long childhood of humans invokes that “revolutionary futurity” that announces again and again our species' possibility. We are after all, according to evolutionary biologists, *paedomorphs*; the whole human life cycle is under the sign of childhood, not just physiologically but psychologically. It is not just our flat, hairless faces, our upright posture, relatively large brain weight, our thin skull bones, our small teeth and so on, that give evidence of our neotenic traits; it is our curiosity, our capacity for playful behavior, exploration, enthusiasm, honesty and trust, sense of wonder, imagination, creativity, open-mindedness, our educability and above all our capacity for love. Human childhood not only lasts significantly longer than in other species, but remains, pointing both forward and backward. At the height of the French Revolution Schiller said of children, “They are what we were; they are what we should once again become. We were nature just as they, and our culture, by means of reason and freedom, should lead us back to nature. They are, therefore, not only the representation of our lost childhood, ... they are also representations of our highest fulfillment in the ideal, ...” (p. 85).¹

It is this liminality—or should I say intersectionality?—between adulthood and childhood that creates and nourishes the philosophical impulse—the impulse to interrogate, to de- and re-construct, not just our conceptual but our existential understanding of our shared experience of the world. And philosophy as reconstructed by P4C/CPI as a *communal* practice sharpens the interrogatory edge, leading to a different image of philosophy, which has traditionally been either an individualistic or a cultish practice. In order to trace its genealogy, we need to go back to the early Socratic dialogues, to before the moment that Plato, the Spartan sympathizer, took his deceased master hostage to his own grand narrative—before, that is, he began working for the state tyrants of Syracuse. As Walter Kohan has suggested,² in rendering philosophical inquiry communal and dialogical, P4C/CPI rescues the child Socrates from the adult Plato—Socrates the gadfly, the *bricoleur*, the Fool, the one who listens to his *daemon*, the one who knows he knows nothing, the one who does not attempt to overcome contradiction through big theory, the master of the aporia, hence the “corrupter of youth [childhood],” worthy of death at the hands of the Authorities.

As a pedagogy, community of inquiry discourse does even more to deliver Socrates from the authoritarian clutches of his interpreter-scribe Plato. It deconstructs Socrates as chief interrogator as well, and disrupts the monological authoritative center of the speech community. In CPI Socrates the grand inquisitor, the law school professor, the logical strangler whose interlocutors, stunned into submission, can only answer “Yes Socrates, surely Socrates, but of course Socrates, how could it

be otherwise?” abdicates his epistemological throne in favor of his own doctrine, written over the door of the entrance to this form of communal discourse—“Follow the argument where it leads.” In CPI, Socrates takes his own advice, and his or her interventions become, to quote a P4C slogan, “procedurally strong and philosophically self-effacing.” This is a political as well as an argumentative move. It represents an implicit trust in and loyalty to the spontaneous, emergent *reasonableness*—inventor/discoverer of P4C Matthew Lipman’s term of choice—of the collective that we associate with democratic—or, more precisely, anarchist—theory and sensibility. From a genealogical point of view, CPI corrects Socrates with C.S. Peirce, who coined the term community of inquiry and who famously said, “Truth is what the community of inquirers will decide is the case in the long run,”³ (Raposa 1989, p. 154), through a communal process that Kant, that reluctant revolutionary, characterized as the exercise of three “maxims” of “logical common sense”: (1) to think for oneself; (2) to think from the standpoint of everyone else; and (3) to think always consistently. The first is the maxim of an unprejudiced, the second of a broadened, the third of a consistent way of thinking.⁴

What is remarkable about P4C as a project, and makes of it a major pedagogical innovation, is just that: it is for *children*. The trust that children are capable of “following the argument where it leads” is already a statement about the nature of human reason and about how it develops through childhood. We can find precursors in Romanticism—in Schiller, Wordsworth and Coleridge in particular—and in New England Transcendentalism—Emerson and in particular and A. Bronson Alcott especially,⁵ but these expressions are still linked to a spiritualist discourse—of the child as prophet and seer, the Daoist image of the infant as unconscious master, or Thomas Traherne’s Adamic “innocent eye.” As stirring as these iconic images are, they don’t leave a dent in the secularist tradition, first articulated for modernity in Rousseau, for whom “Of all man’s faculties, reason, which is, so to speak, compounded of all the rest, is the last and choicest growth ... if children understood reason they would not need education,”⁶ and further developed in his spiritual disciple Piaget, for whom the logical development of the child is sectioned off and quarantined in a stage theory. In fact it was only with the introduction of the socialist Vygotsky’s collectivist, interactional theory—which constitutes a major element of CPI learning theory—that a pathway is opened for recognizing the operation of “logical common sense” in children’s communal discourse.

If one were generating key words for the papers collected here they would have to include “disruption,” “interruption,” “doubt,” “revolt,” and multiple others with the prefixes “dis,” “de,” “hetero,” “dia,” “pre,” “trans,” “inter,” “intra,” “multi,” “co,” “poly.” I would wager that there is not one author here who doesn’t agree with Oliverio’s (Chapter 1) statement, “there is no separation between education, politics, and morality, ... all inquiry is both political and moral.” These chapters are, as I suggested earlier, responding to a sense of global urgency that reinvents philosophy—and CPI in particular—not just as a pedagogy but as a social force promising reconstruction of existing paradigms, and in fact of cultural and political

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sensibilities and deeply embedded habits of being themselves. The times are calling upon us to change or perish.

As such, one major challenge the papers take on is how to save the practice of communal philosophical dialogue from the neutralization and domestication that follow from being embedded in the pervasive sub-cultural context of traditional schooling, which, however unconsciously, perpetuates an understanding of children as in need of protection from too-early knowledge of the harshness of “reality” — whether it be the atrocities committed by Christopher Columbus and his crew or the hidden injuries of race, class or economy with which we live on a daily basis—lest they be demoralized or brainwashed. And further, how can a professedly egalitarian safe space, a classroom community whose ethos is intrinsically assimilative, avoid an aversion to disruption, a tendency to ignore the analysis of inequalities, to mute and background differences of class, race, ethnicity, to overlook, however unconsciously the potential voices of the members of silenced, marginalized, and excluded groups?

All of these perfectly understandable bargains with group life tend to mute the intrinsic provocation that philosophy represents—to turn it into a spectator sport, a form, however subtle, of sophistry. In our very pursuit of another form of peace—not *shalom* but *eiene*, an interlude in the everlasting state or condition of war—we quietly gag oppositional or counter-narratives, and as Kizel (Chapter 6) puts it, “censure the self in conformity to a meta-narrative.” This process of subtle, indirect, usually well-intentioned and gentle silencing, of shutting down difference, of—as Chetty (Chapter 4), in his analysis of how many P4C teachers approach issues associated with racism and other forms of marginalization—creates what he calls the “philosophically gated community.” The latter is a “cognitive shelter” that leaves cultural, class, ethnic, racial and gendered boundaries outside the gate and unexplored; the fundamental social and ethical challenges of our time are neatly avoided in discussions about friendship, thinking, and even justice. Epistemic violence and injustice are overlooked in the dream/sleep of reason that is the dominant Enlightenment rationality paradigm.

The authors in this volume might argue that we are being rudely awakened—that globalization has placed us in a new planetary space of unprecedented intervisibility and interdependence, whether it be racial, cultural, sexual, religious, economic or political, and it is an intervisibility from which we cannot turn away, for there is no place to turn. The effect of monological hegemonic knowledge paradigms and implicit hyper-individualistic narratives of subjectivity, of cultural, religious and political fundamentalisms and social phobias, when gone unquestioned, is to freeze and maintain those injuries which lie just under the surface of late-capitalist social and economic life. Cultural and linguistic diversity are not normative ideals, they *are us*—our basic existential situation. The authors of these essays, as explicitly stated by Thornton and Burgh (Chapter 5) may be said to have embraced the conflict produced by this rude awakening, and adopted it as the vehicle of an evolutionary impulse. Conflict is the energy that makes reconstruction possible, whereas for harmony theorists, it is the energy that destroys: “We do not, they write, “consider peace in

the negative, as the absence of conflict, but in the positive as the capacity to respond skilfully to conflict as a way of life. Therefore, we concentrate on peace education that prepares students to turn conflict into inquiry.” The theme, then, is decentering, deconstruction, disruption, interruption, interrogation, problematization, othering – whether of the Cartesian unitary self, the false appearance of cultural unity and homogeneity, monological discourses of all kinds, mono-lingualism, hegemonic forms of culture and ideology, patriarchy, domination and exploitation, and, on the positive side of the dialectic, encounter, intersection, dialogue, hybridity, negotiation, reconstruction, coordination, transition, mediation. In fact what runs through the essays, either explicitly or implicitly, is an epistemology of *revolt* that extends, not just to the social world but to the intrasubjective world of self and identity and, further, to our relationship with other species, and ultimately to our lived relationship with nature itself understood as interlocutor—an interlocutor, we are now realizing, that we ignore, de-animate, enslave, abuse and exterminate at our peril. It is a revolt against the dystopian results of a dominant western knowledge system and the technology it creates now gone global, a grand narrative that, the more powerful it becomes, the more alienating, emptied as it is of communal values, and hence the more likely to produce monsters. “The educational task,” Thornton and Burgh argue, “is to create opportunities for children to problematize the very environment they inhabit.” It is also possible that children, who are born into this situation, are more likely to transform it in the direction of revolutionary futurity than the majority of their elders.

The elements of this revolt against the rationalization of domination and hierarchy are stated clearly in the invocation of what Oliverio terms “cultural disobedience,” and Thornton and Burgh “traitorous identity,” which is, on their account, created by focusing attention on “experiences that do not fit the dominant story” (Chapter 5). Both refer to a form of inter- and intrasubjective decentering, an “interculturally qualified intersubjectivity” that makes a space in CPI for the interaction between diverse narratives, for boundary crossings and “bridgings,” and which adopts a fallibilist perspective towards all narratives—an embrace of radical doubt. All these papers seek to prepare the ground for a pedagogy that makes place for the contestation of hegemonic regimes of knowledge by opening a space in which conflict is not avoided but “turned into inquiry.” Cultural disobedience is the first of two overarching themes that traverse these essays—the call for “disruption” of existing cultural ideological and political paradigms through communal inquiry. The second is the invocation of a “third space” that is opened up through this disruption.

This “third space” emerges in virtually every paper, in multiple descriptive forms and different vocabularies, depending on the theoretical discourse in play: in Lin (Chapter 7), who is writing about language and literacies, it is an intersectional space that is “cracked open” through communal philosophical dialogue, in which we are “allowed to “reconstruct reality collaboratively”—where difference, diversity, our multiple identities are open for negotiation, and in which the hybridity and

border-crossing, the transgressive urge that is at the heart of our “cultural disobedience” and “traitorous identity” is allowed its critical and creative play. For Oliverio it is the “cosmopolitan” space of “cultural innovation” in which the boundary work between cultures, identities, and ideologies can take place, and foster an “interculturally qualified intersubjectivity”—a zone of hybridity. In Pires (Chapter 2), this boundary-work takes place at the pre-subjective level: the third space is cracked open even before language, in the domain of the intercorporeal, where at the aesthetic level body and mind, thought and affect are one, where there is a “constant wandering,” as Paul Schilder put it, of our body images into each other—an intercorporeal dialogue,⁷ or as infant-mother interaction researchers have described it, a “dance.”⁸ In the disruptive experience of encountering, not just cultural and linguistic but ontological difference, it is the body, affect, felt flows and intensities that opens the third space. Like all the characterizations of this space invoked and described here, it is the aesthetics of community of inquiry—the universal intervisibility of the circle, the location of meaning in questions arising spontaneously from within the group, the productive confusion between the individual subject and the subjectivity of the group as a whole, felt at the somatic level—that renders this discourse disruptive of hegemonic control.

And the list goes on. Each author approaches this interrogative, interlocutive, relational space with a different disciplinary lens, and the ensuing heteroglossia gives us a fractal of the larger argument for border-crossing that is the book’s main theme. For Kizel (Chapter 6) it is the recognition and exploration of “narrative multiplicity,” including the generation of counter-narratives and the toleration of conflicting narratives in dialogical relation, that does not guarantee but offers what he calls “the fluid narrative space” or “unstable present,” a space that offers eventual, ongoing resolution of ideological divides through, first legitimating multiple narratives, then through CPI dialogue “going beyond existing constructions and boundaries” through encountering these multiple narratives in the atmosphere of intellectual safety of the CPI. Sequeira (Chapter 3) moves the analysis from language, narrativity and corporeality to subjectivity, and develops Oliverio’s broad analysis of the dynamics of the intersubjective and the intercultural in the context of dialogic self theory—thus invoking multiplicity, difference and intersectionality in the heart of the subject herself. Here the third space is represented as “intersectional identity space,” a continually shifting hybrid juxtaposition of multiple self and other positions. Again, CPI is offered as a discursive setting in which the dynamics of intersectionality can be explored. And finally, Makaiau and Chirouter offer us accounts of actual programmatic and institutional and research-based educational projects and initiatives that seek to operationalize the school itself as a third space—in which the principles, dynamics and practices of CPI—“critical thinking, reflection, listening, empathy and democratic debate” (Chirouter & Vannier, Chapter 9); “deep thinking, empowerment, empathy for alternative points of view, experience in community-based decision-making and problem-solving, and tools for reflection” (Makaiau, Chapter 8)—escape the isolated confines of the “philosophy class” and

act to shape the culture and identity of the school itself as a cultural and social zone of “revolutionary futurity.”

But just what is this third space? Is it a new zone—the emergent actualization of a virtual interlocutive space that now arises in response to the historical exigencies of complexification, of migration and border crossing both literal and metaphorical, of the increasing intersectionality of all our lives, the increasing intervisibility? Perhaps it is that cosmopolitan space on the borders where, as Oliverio puts it, the paradox of difference is at its most poignant: where a border is also a potential bridge. “As borders are places where it is not possible to stay but should be crossed, inhabiting this intermediate space, staying in-between, means being committed to a relationship by recognizing the substantial importance of otherness in order for subjectivity to come into existence” (Oliverio, Chapter 1).

Indeed, the “between” has a long history in continental philosophy, at least since Martin Buber. As a transitional space it is, as Hugh Silverman pointed out, a “space of difference which is neither that of the subject or that of the object.”⁹ As a hermeneutical space, it is a “place of relation,” where interlocutors are in a relation of both mutual and self-interrogation. As a subjective space it is, per Sequeira, where “the between is interiorized into the within and reversibly, the within is exteriorized into the between” (Sequiera, Chapter 3). As such, one wonders, can it always be a “safe” space? We have several educationalists’ accounts of the “safety question” in this volume—one in Chetty, who critiques “the central notion of the community of enquiry as an egalitarian safe space” as creating an uneasy paradox in the domestication of interruption, subtly gagging the potential voices of the members of silenced, marginalized, and excluded groups, and gingerly ignoring oppositional or counter-narratives, assimilating all subjects to a hegemonic model of rationality. Similarly, Thornton and Burgh argue that “it is misplaced to assume that the community of inquiry is a safe intellectual environment Unless care is taken in all aspects of inquiry, choice of materials, facilitation of dialogue, classroom structure, the inquiry is likely to create well-reasoned children only within the dominant rationality.” Makaiau, on the other hand, uses the word “safe” or “safety” thirty-eight times, and “intellectually safe” eight, all in affirmation of the absolute centrality of “safety” in a community of philosophical inquiry dedicated to a “culturally responsive pedagogy” and “social justice education.” I leave it to the reader to decide whether this apparent disagreement is in fact anything more than a semantical misunderstanding. In fact, one reason for the optimism of the P4C community may lie in the phenomenology of CPI itself and its roots in the more ancient notion of philosophy as care of the self, an intentionally therapeutic space, and as such a discursive space that can remain both “safe” *and* contested.

Perhaps, in fact, we need, first, as Lin does, to talk about this interrogatory, creative space that CPI promises in the plural—as the emergence and negotiation of third *spaces*, each with its qualitative difference; and second, as event—an embodied time-space situation, a duration composed of flows and intensities, liable to communicative “noise,” to chaos or stagnation, to unexpected transformation and

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constant reconstruction. In terms of its manifestation in communal philosophical dialogue, we see it characterized linguistically as heteroglossia, heterogeneity and hybridity; as the transitional space of the intersection of inter- and intrasubjective, ethnic, gendered, racial, linguistic, class and cultural identities in conversation; as the dance that emerges from, expresses and negotiates affectively saturated intercorporeality; as cultural boundary work and innovation; as making a space for the dialogical co-presence of multiple narratives; as the acceptance of a pedagogy of negotiation of conflict in the interest of epistemological reconstruction; and finally, moving across the borders of philosophy into the regions that are its deeper sources of energy and material—the arts. This is a border crossing that Lipman embraced in his identification of “five relatively discrete stages” of CPI practice, the last of which is exploration of the third transitional space of creative aesthetic experience in poetry, music, dance, theatre, and the plastic arts.¹⁰

One thing we can be sure of is that the third space that is CPI will never—or only in moments of *kairos*—present itself as “pure” inter-relationality: boundaries do not disappear, they are only reconstructed; the encounter with otherness, both inter- and intrasubjectively, is not always warm and fuzzy. In the space of difference, dialogue and mutual interrogation the authority of the ego is put in question, and this is not always easy. What does remain, and what makes of this volume a call to arms, is the pervasive sense that we humans are living in a global moment of dramatic transition, in a world characterized by startling social, economic and political injustices, and that we cannot but feel our involuntary complicity with the structural inequalities that maintain the systemic crises—material, political, and moral—that now stalk the planet. We are driven to think against the grain of normalization and domestication. We feel poignantly, as Thornton and Burgh put it, that our “intellectual freedom is compromised by the domination of instrumental rationality that sees all as a means to the furtherance of our currently-accepted economic and political structures,” and that as pedagogues we no longer have the luxury of separating education, politics, and morality. Our sense of urgency—as well as our sense of hope and dialectical optimism—is fueled by the generic disruption caused by our ever-increasing exposure to differing linguistic backgrounds and cultural contexts. As Pires points out, this is an affective disruption, at the level of the body, and as such both triggers and grounds the disruption “of one’s assumptions, pre-conceived notions, and semiosphere” caused by the inquiry process itself, thereby making visible “the potential of “a creative plane of ethical and political invention ... which presents infinite possibility for social and political transformation.” It is this shock of otherness and the existential experience of difference and diversity that is the first trigger of inquiry, border-crossing, doubt, and political activation.

Meanwhile, a perennial question remains, posed by every thinking parent and teacher, answered by some and avoided by others. Should children in school be shielded from the very high stakes form of inquiry and problematization that these essays goad us toward? That is, are children in school generally capable of assuming levels of doubt and interrogation of the status quo without drifting into anomie,