Philosophy for Children in the Middle Years of Schooling:

Findings from a Year Seven Case Study

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This paper reports the findings of a year long qualitative study in philosophy for children conducted in a Year 7 classroom. A single case study was chosen so that a close examination of the effects of the implementation of the philosophy program could be identified. An important feature of this study was the use of student perspectives accessed through multiple sources of data. The importance of this study was in its explicit connections between the education of young adolescents in the context of current educational debate on the middle years of schooling.

According to Hargreaves (1994) education and schools must be understood within the context of a postmodern world. This study began by exploring current educational issues in relation to the education of young adolescents in contemporary society. Being cognisant of the harsh reality of the present world and demands on young people at a time when they are struggling to find their own identity and place in society is fundamental when discussing curriculum. Philosophy for children programs must be seen in this light. Moreover, the findings of current educational research and the resulting recommendations should not be ignored when implementing new programs in schools. Philosophy for children programs should not be exempt from this. The present study is nested in these wider concerns with the view to justifying the place of philosophy for children in the curriculum in the middle years of schooling.

Through my work in schools and in teacher education over the past twelve years, I have gained an intimate knowledge of philosophy for children. I am also aware that secondary schools are endeavouring to find suitable ways of working with young adolescents to address some of the issues relating to the middle years. In my view the connection between the middle years issues and philosophy for children has not been explored in depth. This study aimed to do this.

I am also aware of the struggle many teachers face once they have had training in the pedagogy of philosophy for children as they implement the program in their classrooms often without peer support or outside help. It was my aim to bring these issues to the fore. For this reason, a single case study was

chosen. A close look into the classroom offers the chance to explore the «unique complexities» (Stake 1995, p. xi) of the case as the students, teacher and the philosophy for children program come together for the first time. In this study it was not my intention to act as a trainer or facilitator but observe the natural progression of the program within the hands of the classroom teacher. However, my relationship with the classroom teacher was one of «connected knowing» (Belenky 1997, p.113). We were equal partners in having the common goal of finding out what happens in the philosophy classroom and why.

As this was an emergent study broad focus questions served to give an initial focus and became more refined as the study progressed. These questions were:

i) What approaches (e.g classroom strategies, resources, assessment procedures) does the classroom teacher use when introducing children to philosophy for children in a junior secondary school classroom?

ii) How do the students respond to these approaches?

THE MIDDLE YEARS OF SCHOOLING - *SOME* KEY FINDINGS

The term «middle schooling» is generally applied to the phase of schooling that bridges primary and secondary levels. It is during these years that young adolescents are at a critical phase of their development and are also most at risk (Australian Curriculum Studies Association 1996).

The issues concerning the education of young adolescents are universal. In Australia, for example, the salient findings of the research - concur with those in USA and UK. Such findings show that many young people are experiencing a lack of interest in the curriculum to the point that they are leaving school early without having developed the necessary basic skills for purposeful living (Beane 1993; Newmann, Wehlege & Lambon 1992).

A particular concern is underachievement in literacy and numeracy especially in boys aged 10-14 years (Hill & Russell 1999; Barber 1999). Leaving school with inadequate skills and a sense of failure affects young people's life chances in career and personal happiness. It becomes particularly difficult for young people to have a positive view of their future when they' have not developed the practical skills or the attributes to' become independent and self-fulfilled. Alienation and disenchantment with the curriculum leads to frustration and failure (ACSA 1996). Inevitably both the individual and society suffer, not only because of the wasted potential of youth, but because of social problems such as drug addiction, violence and' crime and homelessness (Berkley 1994).

For today's teenager, life in the postmodern world is complex and bewildering. Schooling may have little purpose for many students living in a fragmented, fast moving world where their future is unimaginable to them. The picture is a pessimistic one and has far-reaching implications for all educators including philosophy for children practitioners.

THE NATURE OF ADOLESCENTS

According to Eyers, Cormack and Barratt (1992) the heterogenity of adolecents as a group needs to be considered when planning curriculum. They argue that:

> *While some seem bold, argumentative and assertive, others are withdrawn and even submissive. They pass through developmental stages at differing times and in uneven ways. Some have difficulties, others do not. In one moment, a teacher may feel that she is dealing and reasoning with a virtual adult in mental capacity and insight; at next with a child needing care, reasurrance and direct structural scaffolding* (Eyers et al. 1992,
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> p.8)

In a practical sense this diversity presents a challenge for teachers not least those teaching philosophy in the middle years. Constant reflection on collective characteristics and needs of the young may assist teachers and others in making decisions on how to utilisie diversity productively. Braggett (1997) brings attention to the main areas of development of adolescents. Broadly speaking these are; physical, cognitive, social and psychological.

For philosophy for children practitioners these interdependent characteristics are worth noting. For example the profound changes in adolescent cognitive ability has direct implications for philosophy for children as it aims to capitalise on students' developing capacity to think in abstract ways. Ethics and morality are recognised as compelling interests of adolescents as they are at the juncture of childhood and adulthood and are confronting ideas and responsibilities with fresh awarness (Braggett 1997; Beane 1993). Such interests resonate with the aims of philosophy for children which includes the promotion of intellectual curiosity and strengthening of judgment on ethical and moral issues.

METHODOLOGY

This study placed strong emphasis on student perspectives. Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) make the point *that* while educators *have* students' interests at heart in times of reform, students themselves are rarely consulted. As students were the main stakeholders in this research, it was not unreasonable that they should be asked their views on the philosophy program as it was implemented in their classroom. Besides, encouraging students' views and opinions is in keeping with the reflective nature of philosophy for children. By taking students' views and ideas seriously, this study recognised specific needs of adolescents as identified by the literature on adolescents; e.g. engaging students in «viewing the world critically» (Barratt 1998, p. 29). By gathering feedback in this way and using it to further develop and refine future practice, students were seen as «central partners in curriculum» (Cummings 1998, p.22).

In order to capture the uniqueness of the case under study, multiple methods of gathering data were used. Maycut and Morehouse (1994) suggest that one- dimensional instruments are too narrow to capture the complexities of human situations and behaviours. If the findings of this study had rested one instrument such as a student questionnaire for example, then the results would have been quite different. Also, the valuable insights gained from other sources such as participant observation, in-depth interviews with students and the classroom teacher, and the examination of student philosophy journals and other writing would have been lost.

The quantified results of a questionnaire to all 28 students in term 3 provided a basis for further questioning and deeper exploration through in-depth interviews with 8 students. Jackson's (1993) and Palsson's (1994) evaluation forms were used as a basis for one section of the questionnaire. This was a semantic differential scale. The design of this instrument had, in turn, been planned to accommodate the emerging themes in the classroom as identified through participant observation and ongoing conversations with the classroom teacher. Part two of the questionnaire aimed to find out students' views on the ways they worked in class; how well they understood the concept of the community of inquiry and their depth of understanding of cognitive processes of philosophical inquiry such as giving reasons and asking questions.

Student philosophy journals were accessed regularly and they proved to be a rich source of data. So too were the examples of students' expository writing on the topic «Thoughts, imagination and what is real?» inspired by the class English novel The Secret Garden. These collective student perspectives went a long way to providing a holistic picture of the effect of the philosophy for children program on these eleven and twelve.year old students in their first year of high school.

FINDINGS

Key findings emanating from this research provide a view of learning and teaching philosophy with children that is both illuminating and problematic. While the dominant findings reflect a high degree of negativity in students, there is evidence of exuberance and passion for ideas along with individuals' strongly expressed desire (and frustration) to be heard during the community of inquiry.

Among the findings were those that affirm outcomes of other studies in the middle years of schooling. These include a measure of boredom on one hand and positive socialisation on the other (Hill & Russell 1999; Barber 1999). Other findings support those from the research in philosophy for children where students demonstrated a high level of critical thinking and analysis. One of the most dominent findings of this study showed that students were highly critical of the philosophy program and in particular of the novel Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery. Of great concern was the finding that students did not understand why they were doing philosophy.

These are among the many paradoxes that are revealed in this case study. Considering that this case study features young adolescents, such paradoxes are not surprising. Apple (1982) makes the point

that it is typical of young adolescents to react to schooling in varying ways from wholehearted enthusiasm to outright rebellion. A summary of the findings are listed below:

Finding 1: Students were generally negative about the program.

Finding 2: Students had little understanding why they were doing philosophy.

Finding 3: Students were thinking critically.

Finding 4: The class formed a cohesive community.

Finding 5: There was evidence that students' literacy skills were developing.

Finding 6: Girls progressively lost interest in the philosophy program.

Finding 7: There is a need for clear procedures for assessment and evaluation of the philosophy program.

Finding 8: The classroom teacher was working in isolation from other teachers.

Finding 9: There were structural and organisational barriers to effective teaching and learning in the philosophy classroom.

To deal adequately with each of these findings within this paper is not possible. However, I use these findings as a basis for suggested ways of refining practice of philosophy for children. These are intended as starting points for further debate and to stimulate ideas.

It is clear, from these findings, that implementing philosophy with young adolescents is paradoxically troublesome and rewarding. I have endeavoured to account for surprising or anomalous findings by relating them to broader concepts as suggested by Coffey and Atkinson (1996). By going beyond existing theories of philosophy for children and embracing the literature of the education of young adolescents and other literature related to teaching and learning I gained a new interpretative framework from which to view this case study

There is evidence in this study to show the successful outcomes of the philosophy program in terms of student critical thinking and reasoning. Also noted in this case study are the advances made in literacy development, particularly in boys who were reluctant writers. Significant too is the way the students became an organic community as new relationships were formed in the context of a new educational setting. The teacher's constant striving to build a community of inquiry, I believe, was a contributing factor in bringing this about.

Paradoxical was the finding that noted the gradual reluctance of the girls in the class to participate in the community of inquiry. This was the result of some dominant boys seeking the teacher's attention. While this may appear contradictory to the claim that the class was an organic community, it needs to be noted that there were two levels of «community». One was the casual interplay of relationships as students gradually grew together as a group of Year 7 students coming together for the first time. The other was the more public level of classroom discussion that provided opportunity for the vying of the teacher's

attention. Interestingly, the research on the middle years of schooling claims that the level of socialisation of adolescents, rises during the first year of high school (Hill & Russell 1999; Barber 1999).

A major concern was that the majority of students found the program boring. The novel, «Harry Stottelmeier's Discovery», and the long discussions which were dominated by a few loud voices contributed to this. As found in the literature on young adolescents, boredom in students of this age is commonplace and sadly, a waste of the capabilities of the young. If boredom can be overcome then the promise, so often articulated by the proponents of the philosophy for children program, could be realised.

A contributing factor to students' disenchantment with the program relates to another finding of the study; students did not understand the purpose of doing philosophy. They did not see how what they were doing in philosophy connected with their lives in general or in other school subjects.

As previously mentioned, the findings in this study came from multiple sources of data. Essential here was the prolonged engagement on the site where participant observation enabled me to pick up on interplay of relationships and events, time and place. My continued interaction with the classroom teacher gave me a unique opportunity to explore the case, to some degree, from his perspective. While I make no claims to fully understand his role as a teacher, I came to know that it was multifarious, complex and demanding. For example, the following elements had an effect on the implementation of the philosophy program:

- Dealing with young adolescents in their first year of high school,
- The dominance of the timetable and the 45 minute period,
- The physical environment (small crowded classroom),
- The lack of professional support from peers and lack of leadership from the top,

Of concern was the sense of isolation experienced by the teacher in trying to sustain interest in the teaching of philosophy in the Year 7 and Year 8 English curriculum. His colleagues did not share his passion for philosophy and while there was no active resistance, there was limited moral and practical support.

Throughout this case study, as the world of the teacher and students gradually unfolded to me over the year, the insights and discoveries that I made helped me broaden my view of teaching and learning generally and of the teaching of philosophy specifically. In this case study I have tried to maintain a sense of the «whole» so that my perceptions were not limited to a few fragmented parts. And while recognising that my findings are based on a single case study, I believe that these have relevance for those in the broader community who have the interests of young adolescents at heart. It is from this perspective I make the following recommendations.

1. Adjust and modify the program to suit the interests, needs and characteristics of ***young people so that there is engagement.***

If philosophy for children is truly «child centred and teacher sensitive» (Splitter & Sharp 1995), then it follows that the program should recognize and act on the diversity of each class community. There are many layers to this diversity. It is impossible to write a program that can deal with diversity to this extent. As Beane (1993, p.16) states, «A curriculum that is developed apart from the teachers and the young people who must live it is grossly undemocratic». Beane advocates a responsive approach to the curriculum where there is an emancipatory pedagogy leading to the enfranchisement of the young.

It is recommended therefore that philosophy for children should be recreated by teachers and students to suit their own needs. Empathy, deep reflection and action are necessary for this to happen. Only by «reading» students and empathising with them can a teacher make the adjustments necessary for productive and relevant learning. Empathy is a demonstration of «care»; it is a moral stance and a vital component of good citizenry (Noddings 1992). When teachers demonstrate empathy and act on it they are working productively in ways that the young could emulate. The philosophy classroom is well suited to this.

A good starting point with young adolescents is to be mindful of their characteristics and needs suggested by the middle years of schooling literature (Forte & Schurr, Braggett, Eyers)To achieve empathy, however, means going beyond check lists and theoretical guidelines. It means paying attention to the individual's living presence and imagining being in their shoes. A further suggestion here is to use negotiation with students so that they are curriculum partners in learning and teaching.

Recommendations from the literature on young adolescents are in keeping with these suggestions. (See Barratt 1998; Newman et al. 1992 and Boomer 1982).

2. Assessment and evaluation must identify the uniqueness *of* the student in the context *of* the community *of* inquiry.

In keeping with the previous recommendation, a responsive approach to assessment and evaluation is suggested. There is a dual context for assessment and evaluation in the philosophy classroom. The community of inquiry needs careful monitoring and evaluation in order that astute planning can occur so that the community of inquiry can further develop. This is different but not unrelated to the assessment of individuals in the community of inquiry. The recommendation here suggests that these distinctions be made so that one or the other is not overlooked.

Following from this, procedures need to be considered, implemented and reflected upon as to the contribution they make in allowing teachers make the best possible judgements on students individual and collective performance and capabilities. Evaluation and assessment procedures could include the following:

Evaluation of the Community of inquiry

l. Whole class evaluation of progress during the closure of a community of inquiry.

2. Individual reflection on the progress of the community of inquiry and on the individual's role and responsibility in this. Could be recorded in philosophy journal.

3. Regular teacher evaluation and reflection on progress. (The manual to accompany Harry has many guidelines for this. See Lipman, Sharp & Oscanyon 1984)

4. Teacher peer observation on progress.

Assessment of individual students

In light of the richness of data gained through multiple sources in this case study, a suggestion could be that a similar approach be taken by teachers in assessing students. Sources could culminate in the building of a student profile. The purpose of this would be to gather as much information on individuals to note growth and development. This could include:

1. Student creative and expository writing (such as the examples in this case study).

2. Journal entries. The encouragement of journal writing to capture ideas and reflective moments (Lipman, Sharp & Oscanyon 1984, p. 44; John-Steiner 1997; Fulwiler 1987).

3. Student self-assessment in a philosophy journal.

4. Teacher generated checklists on observations on the cognitive and affective domains (based on well thought through outcomes).

5. Input from other teachers on their knowledge of individuals

6. Input from parents.

It is recommended that all assessment procedures and criteria are made explicit to stakeholders such as students and parents.

3. Resources need to be contextually relevant to young adolescents.

Involving students in philosophical inquiry is not a matter of pandering to their interests or motivating them through resources or activities that turn them on. Noddings (1992, p.29) argues that if we are to succeed in teaching students those things we believe to be worthwhile in democratic life, then we must work more closely with «students own motives». This means that openness, clarity of purpose, collaboration and negotiation are essential.

If we want young people to fulfil the obligations of citizenry, then they need practice in dealing with the issues that impact on their everyday lives. While a philosophical novel such as Harry has

imbedded in it concepts that are central to human experience, it may be that these are not directly relevant to student's moral or ethical concerns at a given time. Why side-step moral and ethical issues by using a set text when such issues abound in the world?

It is recommended therefore that a range of resources are used in the philosophy program as long as they are in keeping with those issues that are important to students and treated in ways that advance their cognitive and social development. (Misson 1993) suggests that popular culture provides a relevant springboard for adolescents to examine their place in the world. It is recommended, however, that the topic for inclusion in philosophical inquiry or the materials used as a basis for philosophical inquiry needs to be carefully selected.

Students as curriculum partners

There is no reason why students can't be involved in the selection of resources once they have had significant experience of the philosophy program. In the interviews conducted in this case study, students volunteered many ideas on improving the philosophy program and made suggestions on the choice of texts.

To extend the notion of student negotiation, students could develop their own criteria and justify it. Conducting such an activity in a community of inquiry would have philosophical merit as well as providing for authentic learning. Reviewing the criteria from time to time would also be beneficial.

Regardless of who chooses the resources for philosophy, the responsibility of the teacher is to ensure that the quality of inquiry is not compromised by inferior texts. The following criteria could extend students' thinking and reasoning when they suggest texts or topics for philosophical discussion:

1. Does this topic lend itself to «deep exploration»? What makes you think this?
2. What are the key issues here?
3. Is it important that we should discuss these issues in our class? Why?
4. How will discussion this topic (issue) help us?
5. Is this topic similar to others we have done recently? In what ways? How is it different?

Guidelines for choosing resources for philosophy

Similarly, when teachers choose resources for the philosophy program, guidelines such as the following could be useful so that the focus is on the students rather than the resource:

1. Will students connect/engage with this material? How important is it to them in their lives?

2. Will the material provide enough intrigue so that disequilibrium is generated? («That is, is it puzzling enough?)

3. Will the activities enable disequilibrium to be challenged and overcome so that new meaning is gained? (This is important, for if equilibrium is not achieved confusion and frustration may set in and the result is boredom and resentment - it depends on the students confidence and ability in handling confusion and on their capacity to rationalise).

4. Will there be opportunity for students to test out new concepts and apply them in different ways?

5. Will students be able to approximate the new meaning to other people so that it will be affirmed or challenged through further inquiry? (Dialogue is one way of testing out ideas, though not the only way. Writing is another.)

6. Will students be able to explain why this material and this learning material are useful to them? (For example in other curriculum areas, in life experiences?)

Creating a balance between student and teacher choice could lead to the enhancement of a community of inquiry that enacts democracy as far as it dares. However, it is ultimately the teacher's responsibility to decide what is best for students. Astute choice of topic or resource should depend on the social context for learning along with an approximation of the zone of proximal development. This ought to be one of the features of assessment

There are many examples of resources suitable for use in the philosophy classroom. However the recommendation is not to dismiss the novels especially written for philosophy for children.

Novels such as Harry *Stottlemeier's Discovery* have an important role in demonstrating the acts of thinking and the interrelationships between people in making discoveries and puzzling over moral and ethical issues (as well as aesthetic, and metaphysical). Such novels have their place when used in accordance with students' interests. Since the philosophical novels are not restricted by plot or character development, they can be dipped into at the relevant sections to support the contextual learning of students. Moreover, the manual to accompany «Harry» is rich in ideas and discussion plans on topics that have direct appeal to adolescents.

The suggestion then is to use specially written philosophical novels when they are judged relevant to the needs of students at a given time, but that they should not be the feature that drives the philosophy program. Korzak-Field's (1998) study on philosophy specific and non-philosophy specific teaching materials where she recommends a balance of texts to ensure relevance and student interest is in keeping with this suggestion.

Ideally, students could refer to the novel as a resource to support the concepts chosen for discussion. And, radical as it may seem, why not ve students access to the teacher's manual to browse, explore and suggest ideas for discussion and activities? Such a move would need careful and sensitive handling over time in accordance with students' evolving grasp of the process of philosophical inquiry. The timing of such a move

would depend on the teacher's sensitivity and judgement of students' readiness. Once again, monitoring and assessment therefore are important considerations here.

The recommendation for the careful consideration of resources and topics for philosophical inquiry is directly related to the finding in this case study where students reacted negatively to the imposed novel. If the source of frustration is removed, then there exists many possibilities for achieving the aims of philosophical inquiry. By involving students in the choice of topics we are demonstrating trust in them for their capacity to think and act as reasonable and thinking people. Cook (1982) suggests that we don't trust students' judgement enough. This case study has shown the capacity of students in thinking critically and sensibly about the practicalities of the philosophy program.

Furthermore, Barber (1999) suggests that in order to combat boredom and complacency in young adolescents, we need to «make their heads spin». By sharpening students critical judgement on the world and incorporating their ideas in resourcing philosophy we are utilising what is arguably the finest resource of all, the students themselves.

4. Offer a range of learning experiences to cater for adolescents' needs/characteristics while building a community of inquiry.

This study has shown that the ideal of a dialogic community of inquiry is not easy to master and maintain with a large group of lively adolescents. The teacher in the present study aimed for prolonged in-depth dialogue during philosophy sessions. The result was boredom for many students who were not interested in the topic under discussion.

A recommendation, therefore, is to use small group discussion at some stage during a session. Freakley and Burg (2000, pp. 30-35) make suggestions for integrating «collaborative learning groups» into the organisation of the whole class community of inquiry. In the present study, similar strategies were beginning to work for the Year 7 class. The data showed that the students generally viewed small groups as the most valuable way of working. The girls in particular, along with some of the boys who were often reluctant to participate, responded positively to small communities of inquiry and then reforming as a whole class.

This in not to claim that in small groups some students won't dominate. However, as some students in the present study have suggested, it is more comfortable to say what you think in a small group than in front of the whole class. In time, hopefully this degree of comfort will extend to such students participating in a whole class dialogue. Teachers need to be mindful of student growth and development in this regard especially during adolescence when students are particularly self-conscious. Careful monitoring of small groups is essential to note such growth and observe equity. This is not only the teacher's role to monitor for equable practice in the building of the community of inquiry; the students need to be encouraged to take that responsibility too.

The inclusion of all students in community of inquiry, whether it is as a whole class or as a small group is important to combat alienation. The concerns raised by the ASCA (1993) report «From Alienation to Engagement» on students' negative reaction to school could be overcome to a large degree if all adolescents had a sense of belonging. Philosophy for children logically offers this opportunity through the community of inquiry. However, recognition of the learning styles of students would make such inclusion more powerful. Varying shapes and sizes of groups is one consideration, there are others.

Freedom of expression can flourish through the interweaving of strategies that best suit the individual learning styles of students. It is true that philosophy for children is not only about freedom of expression, but about the collective making of meaning and the intellectual pursuit of wisdom through dialogue with others. Strategies such as those suggested by Gardner (1983) to take account of the multiple intelligences of students could play an important role in the search and the transfer of meaning.

Carefully thought out strategies should not compromise the depth or quality of thinking as long as:

1) Reasons for strategies are made clear to students.
2) Expectations are made clear to students.
3) The constituents of good thinking are revisited.
4) There is emphasis on the responsibility of the individual to the collective inquiry.
5) Dialogue is used as a part of the process.
6) The effectiveness of the inquiry and the procedural behaviours are reflected upon as a whole class.

The last point here is one way to approach closure, regardless of the strategies used throughout a session.

In employing a range of strategies for the building of a community of inquiry and for the advancement of critical and creative thinking, one needs to be mindful of the dangers of bombarding students with too much too soon. Assessment procedures should note the individual's and the community's zones of proximal development and consider the strategies most suitable for challenging and productive learning.

Careful planning of an activity and time spent in following it through, so that it becomes an accomplished act and a recognised part of the students' repertoire, is preferable to exposure to ad hoc strategies that fail to consolidate learning. Time spent in reflecting on the activity with students would be well spent. Besides, accessing students' views on what the activity meant to them and to the community a whole would be in keeping with metacognitive aspects of their learning. In the end, the measure of a community of inquiry while it builds and sustains itself is to be found in the demonstration of endurance and commitment of the group. Students need to know this.

5. Incorporate strategies for transference of philosophical thinking to other domains, subjects and settings.

In addition to the recommendations above, there are many activities that have the power to enhance thinking while assisting in the process of community development. The ultimate test of an effective strategy or activity however, is in its capacity to enable students to relate new understanding and skill to different aspects of their lives. While dialectical skill is the ultimate power for the individual as a citizen, there are many other processes to discover and demonstrate meaning so that in the end, the dialogue is enhanced.

For example Yule (1992) argues that well-chosen creative activities are essential for the teaching of thinking since creative thinking is part of all thinking. It is his contention that creative thinking requires an «open-space» where all possibilities can be explored and expressed in communities. His view follows Gardner (1983) who stresses that creativity is a dynamic process that involves interaction among individuals. Yule warns however that the activity needs to have at its core philosophical concepts and the same rigorous examination of the concepts that apply in any philosophical inquiry. Yule's list of activities would assist in transference of thinking of philosophical concepts from one domain to another and from one context to another. Such activities include:

- guided imagery
- creative writing tasks
- people sculpture
- simulations
- clay modeling
- painting and drawing (Yule 1992, p.59)

There are many other ways to help students to test out ideas, examine concepts and relationships so that the essential learning of philosophy is capitalised. Concept maps, venn diagrams and flow-charts for example assist students to make connections, notice distinctions and see relationships.

The employment of such strategies should not be seen as less important than dialogue or as a last resort to engage students in philosophical inquiry. They ought to be regarded as credible, indeed essential, ways of working with adolescents in pluralist settings, of acknowledging the gifts of multiplicity and diversity. Fundamental to these ideas is the important role of dialogue as an essential part of negotiating, collaborating and affirming ways of working as a community.

6. Make it possible for students to understand the purpose of doing philosophy.

As this study has shown, students did not have a clear understanding of why they were doing philosophy. Not only should learning be about «great personal and social significance» (Beane 1993, p. 18), but students should understand that. Therefore helping them see this is crucial to their commitment to learning.

The purpose of doing philosophy should not be a teacher secret, but should also be owned by students in ways they can comprehend. By helping students understand the value of philosophy, not only in their other studies but in their lives in general, teachers are not only promoting the interconnectedness of learning through concepts but they are logically encouraging philosophical skills.

It is recommended here that an understanding of the purpose of philosophy and its relationship to other learning and to living should unfold in a natural way as students build interest and exhibit cognitive competency. It ought to be a natural part of the inquiry through questions such as:

1. Why are we doing this?
2. Why is this important to me (and to others)?
3. How will this help me (and others) immediately and in the future?
4. What are possible consequences if we don't explore this issue? (Or use these skills?)
5. How does this inquiry fit or connect with other experiences?
6. What are the benefits of this inquiry?
7. Who should or could benefit from the inquiry?
8. What follows from this inquiry?

These questions are not in any particular sequence, nor are they all meant to be asked at one time; they are merely suggestions to be use depending on the of the teacher's judgement of the zone of proximal development. Such questions promote explicitness and have the potential to add further meaning and depth to philosophical inquiry. This in turn augurs well for the promotion of effective and responsive citizenship.

It is further recommended that students should be aware of whatever structure of model is used in their learning. In fact, students should be involved in the trialling and critiquing of whatever model or structure is used for their learning. This would provide an authentic purpose for philosophical thinking.

7. Making literacy a more powerful outcome of philosophy.

Philosophical inquiry has the essential ingredient, that is oral discourse, to make literacy development possible. As shown in this case study, students who were reluctant writers were capable of writing

critically and fluently as a result of their interest in ideas promoted by philosophical thinking. To ignore the literacy benefits of the philosophy program would be to deny many students the advantages of literacy development. This is one of the most urgent issues identified in the literature on the middle years of schooling. It is suggested therefore to provide opportunities for writing of ideas. This could be done in a range of ways. For example:

1. Through written reflection on philosophical inquiry (see Appendix 16 for guidelines).

2. Specific times for writing during class discussion. This could occur as a means of closure or immediately after a segment before going on to another topic for discussion. The advantage is that students consolidate their thinking, thus providing an opportunity for more depth through reflection.

3. The habit of writing down ideas and thoughts in a reflective journal. This could be encouraged during philosophy sessions as well as at all other times (John-Steiner 1997; Fulwiler 1987).

4. The writing of metaphors for thinking and feeling (see Lipman, Sharp & Oscanyon 1984, pp. 45-46). These can be displayed or published in a class book. The exploration and relationships between metaphors can lead to substantial philosophical inquiry on how people think and also act a means of bonding and connecting with others.

5. Set writing topics such as the one discussed in this case study. Beside the obvious use of philosophical writing in the English curriculum, it can be employed in all key learning areas such as Maths, Science, Health, Physical Education, Art and SOSE.

6. Have students write philosophical stories for discussion in the community of inquiry. This could be individual or shared writing in pairs or small groups.

7. Encourage written critiques of stories, news articles and other resources that are used in philosophy sessions.

8. Immerse students in the language of thinking and in products of their own and others thinking, for example wall-charts, posters (see Cambourne 1988).

Whatever a student thinks can be approximated in writing; thus consolidating thinking and literacy skills simultaneously. Also whatever is written can be discussed with others therefore endorsing the literacy and the thinking.

A final recommendation concerning writing is that there needs to be time in philosophy sessions for peace and solitude so that deep personal reflection can occur. Being still and thinking introspectively on occasions provides a balance in an otherwise oral and interactive setting (Leckey 1999). For many students this poses a difficulty as they have a strong dependence on external stimulation; they don't understand what it is to be still. By encouraging moments of uninterrupted thinking and writing, students are likely to come to know the depth and power of their own thinking. This in turn will ultimately advance the philosophical inquiry in the community since it contributes to the construction of knowledge which is ultimately shared through dialogue.

8. Focus on school structures to support learning.

For successful implementation of philosophy adjustments may need to be made to the timetable so that there is ample time for in-depth inquiry and reflection. As shown in this case study, the philosophy sessions were disadvantaged because of the time of day allocated to them. It took constant effort in settling students down to reflective thinking as a community of inquiry. As a result the diminished time barely allowed for deep exploration of the philosophical concepts. Consideration should be given to block-scheduling where classes are given double time slots so that relationships between teachers and students have a chance to develop (Fogarty 1997; Beane 1993).

However if the philosophy periods were longer, there would need to be attention paid to the format of the lesson so that boredom was not perpetuated. To spend 100 minutes or so in discussion would aggravate the situation if students were bored.

9. There needs to be ongoing professional development and support for classroom teachers of philosophy.

The concept of «interactive professionalism» (Fullan & Hargreaves 1991) provides for many possibilities for teacher support both within the school and outside. This concept endorses the importance of productive collegiality where dialogue on the issues of teaching can lead to critical review and personal reflection.

It is also recommended here that teachers of philosophy work across faculties, hence building up rapport and support for the promotion of positive student learning outcomes across the curriculum. If at all possible, a whole school approach is desirable. As well as this, there are many resources outside the school that offer reciprocal support. The place of teacher networks and subject associations, for example, can offer opportunities for substantial professional development and teacher growth.

In light of the findings of this study, further recommendations regarding teacher professional development in philosophy for children could include:

1. Ways to utilise the manuals that accompany the philosophical novels.

2. The identification of key philosophical

concepts in non-specific philosophy material and in specific philosophy material.

3. Strategies for the management of the community of inquiry

4. Strategies for transference of philosophical concepts and processes across the curriculum and outside of school.

5. Ways to assess students and evaluate practice.

6. An understanding of the needs and characteristics of adolescents.

7. Clarification of the purposes of doing philosophy with young people.

I make no claims on the universality of these findings. They are significant to the case studied. Transferability of this study to other settings would depend on the variables such as experience and culture of the participants, teacher competence, resources utilised and organisational structures of the school. This in no way diminished the validity of the research; as a qualitative study it rests on its intrinsic characteristics and complexities. However, as suggested by Marshall and Rossman (1995) the theoretical framework can act as a reference point for future research. The concepts and models described for collecting and analysing data are in themselves transferable. In this way the research here has much to offer other case studies.

CONCLUSION

In this single case study many issues concerning the implementation of philosophy for children have come to light paradoxically coupled with frustration and the joy of discovery. The insights gained here have provided for many understandings of what is involved in the implementation of philosophy for children in a middle school classroom. Most importantly they reveal many aspects of the learning of young adolescents as they discover philosophical inquiry for the first time. While these insights have significance for the teacher, the students and the school in this case study; it is hoped that they offer possibilities for practitioners whose experiences resonate with those in the present study. However there is always the lure of incompleteness, the recognition that more could be said or inferred from the many voices in this class of young adolescents. Maxine Greene (1995, p. 15) suggests that:

> *There are always vacancies; there are always roads not taken, vistas not acknowledged. The search must he ongoing; the end can never quite he known.*

In light of this, further case studies that look closely at teaching and learning philosophy for children are recommended so that the inquiry continues.

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