

P4C and Voice: Does the Community of Philosophical Inquiry Provide Space for Children's Free Expression?

"The best part of camp is being able to talk and no one judges us."
-Thinking Playground camper, age 10

Anastasia Anderson

"During summer camp one year, a group of six to eight year olds are discussing the book, *The Gift of Nothing*. Their facilitator asks them: Is a gift of nothing a good present? During the dialogue, the children explore fertile philosophical ground such as the concepts of "nothing" and "everything," the importance of friendship, and what makes a gift valuable. They do a good job of giving reasons, building on each other's ideas using phrases such as "I agree with..." and "I disagree with..." and noting when they change their minds. When asked how they would feel if they got an empty box as a birthday present, one camper, Nina, notes that she would not mind getting such a gift because being with a friend on your birthday is more important than getting a present. At lunchtime immediately after the CPI, as the campers line up at the door with their lunch kits, the counsellor continues the dialogue with the children near her. She asks again how they would feel about getting a box of nothing as a birthday present. Nina immediately says, "Oh, it would be horrible. I would hate it!" The camp counsellor expresses surprise and reminds her of what she said during the CPI. The child replies, pointing to the circle of chairs in the center of the room where the CPI took place, "That is just what I said in there. That isn't what things are like really."¹

There are several ways to interpret Nina's explanation of the difference between what she said during the CPI (Community of Philosophical Inquiry) and what she said later. She might have been pointing out the distinction between how one should feel and how one actually feels. She might have simply been explaining that she changed her mind. However, there is one interpretation of what Nina said that merits particularly careful consideration and illustrates the central concern of this chapter: Nina may have been telling the counsellor that she was not free to express her real beliefs and feelings during the CPI. In other words, there was something about being "in there" that stopped her from expressing what she really thought or led her to believe that she was not supposed to say what she really thought. If this is what Nina meant then her words raise troubling questions. P4C (Philosophy for Children) is founded on a respect for children's rational abilities and their expressive capacities. It is a pedagogical approach that is designed to provide children with the opportunity to freely express themselves and practice the skills necessary for making well-reasoned

¹ Anastasia Anderson, "Categories of Goals in Philosophy for Children", *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, vol. 39, no. 6, (2020): 608-609.

choices. Indeed, in the UNESCO report, *Philosophy: A School of Freedom*, the importance of P4C is supported with reference to the three articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child that set out children's rights to freedom of expression and thought (i.e., 12,13,14).² An individual child may feel unable to express her genuine thoughts during a CPI for many reasons that relate to her particular circumstances. These reasons should be considered and addressed, as far as possible, by P4C facilitators. However, if children are restricted from freely expressing their beliefs during a CPI due to their shared status as children, this would be a foundation-shaking problem for P4C. It would mean that there is a serious inconsistency between what P4C does in theory and what "things are really like." Nina's comment may represent a fundamental challenge to the P4C ideal. Does a CPI really give children a space in which to be heard? Does P4C provide children with genuine opportunities for free expression?

The goal of this article is to establish that P4C can and should provide children with an opportunity to freely express themselves and have their voices heard. However, much of it will be dedicated to considering how children's expression might be restricted during CPIs due to adult attitudes and control. The first section sets out Young-Bruehl's definition and analysis of prejudice against children. Young-Bruehl's controversial position challenges complacency about social attitudes towards children and will be used as a touchstone when addressing the question of whether P4C gives space for children's free expression. Her analysis of the beliefs that ground prejudice against children will be a starting point for reflections about P4C and how it may be affected by adult beliefs about children and childhood. In the second section, different ways in which children are constrained when doing P4C will be discussed in order to shed light on how adults may, unknowingly, be limiting children's ability to express themselves freely. The third section explores critiques of the instrumentalist view of P4C that the function of a CPI is not primarily to give children a space to freely express themselves, but to teach them the skills they need to express themselves fully and rationally in the future. The fourth section concludes that despite the constraints that children experience during P4C programs, the structure does give children the opportunity to freely express their views and have their voices heard as long as facilitators understand the importance of reflecting on their assumptions about childhood and allow children to pose the inquiry questions.

The Challenge of Childism

A thoughtful response to the question of whether adult facilitated CPIs provide a space for children to freely express themselves must involve reflection on adult attitudes and beliefs about children. P4C theorist and philosopher of childhood David Kennedy has claimed that an adult's capacity to listen to children is impacted by the beliefs and assumptions the adult has about children and childhood.³ It can be added that these beliefs and attitudes also impact whether the structure and implementation of P4C activities give children the opportunity to speak in their own voice. Young-Bruehl has recently claimed that in some countries (her example is the United States) there exists a systemic prejudice against children that is based in distorted and mistaken beliefs about children and

² *Philosophy: A School of Freedom*. (UNESCO Publishing, 2007), 3.

³ David Kennedy, "Practicing philosophy of childhood: Teaching in the (r)evolutionary mode," *Journal of Philosophy of Schools*, 2, no.1, (2015): 6.

childhood. In this section, her analysis of that prejudice will be outlined and presented as a starting point for an examination of children's free expression in P4C.

In the book, *Childism: Confronting Prejudice against Children*, Young-Bruehl attempts to persuade the reader that prejudice against children exists and must be eliminated.⁴ She offers the following examples of this prejudice.

America incarcerates more of its children than any country in the world...Some of the 'delinquents' are there because they were arrested for a crime and are awaiting trial. They will be tried in courts that are permitted to sentence children convicted of a homicide to life without parole in adult prisons...Others were incarcerated without arrest: they were simply found on the streets, sometimes homeless, sometimes mentally ill and judged to be out of control and dangerous "to themselves and others." No one knew what else to do with them.⁵

She quotes a 2009 Children's Defense Fund report that states, "14.1 million children in America, or 1 in 5 are poor...Almost 900,000 children each year in America are abused or neglected, one every 36 seconds...Each year, more than 800,000 children spend time in foster care..."⁶ In light of statistics of this kind, she maintains that children must be recognized as a target group for prejudice. Young-Bruehl calls prejudice against children, "childism" and provides an analysis of this prejudice. One of her stated goals is to enable clearer thinking about the vast range of "anti-child social policies and individual behaviors directed against all children daily..."⁷ She emphasizes that childism is not confined to particular abusive individuals, but is a prejudice that has been institutionalized in the United States and is found not only in the country's practices of child imprisonment, but also in poor schooling and laws that privilege a family's right to determine children's lives. She uses the United States' refusal to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as one particularly clear example of American prejudice against children. Recognizing and analyzing childism is essential because it allows the root causes of childism to be addressed. Her claim is not that all adults are childist, but she warns that even those adults who work to make children's lives better may not recognize the existence of prejudice against children or the forms that it takes because it is so socially pervasive.

Young-Bruehl argues that in order to fully understand individual acts of child abuse and neglect, as well as the policies that harm children, one must not focus on the acts or policies alone. One must consider the attitudes and beliefs that ground the acts and justify them in the minds of individual agents and policy makers. The prejudiced beliefs and attitudes that abusers rely on to try to legitimate their acts are not the only reason for child abuse, but are a necessary condition for such abuse. Young-Bruehl identifies the basis of the beliefs that undergird prejudice against children as involving stereotyping children and childhood. What makes any group a target of prejudice, according to Young-Bruehl, is that the members of the target group share common features that those who are

⁴ Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Childism: Confronting Prejudice against Children*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012.)

⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

prejudiced focus on and distort for their own purposes. Children form a target group for prejudice because children share the features of being born dependent and relatively helpless. Children also share the characteristic that they are affected by any social, cultural, and political construction, evaluation, and distortion of the very concept of “child” and “childhood.” As in all prejudices, according to Young-Bruehl, there are sets of beliefs about the target group that ground prejudiced acts. She maintains that it is not sufficiently illuminating simply to claim that children are the targets of prejudice. A full analysis of childism must identify the beliefs that underlie the prejudice. Childist adults believe that adults should be privileged over children, but the question she tries to answer is why they believe they should enjoy this privilege.

Young Bruehl’s psychoanalytic answer is that childism is “a belief system that constructs its target group ‘the child,’ as an immature being produced and owned by adults who use it to serve their own needs and fantasies.”⁸ Like other prejudices, as analysed by Young-Bruehl, childism involves projection of certain fantasies onto the target group. And, as with other prejudices, because people are projecting their fantasies onto the target group, they find the target group to exhibit what they believe about them and this serves to reinforce the prejudice. Childism is a prejudice against children on the grounds of the beliefs that they are property that should be controlled, enslaved, or removed to serve adult needs. The three fantasies she sees as grounding childism have versions that are either wildly negative or unrealistically positive. She describes one fantasy as being of self-reproduction and ownership of offspring: for example, children need to be controlled and indoctrinated so that they assume a certain religious or cultural identity and are stopped from overthrowing or threatening their parents’ rights; or, children are required to conform to an ideal of the perfect child that reflects the parent’s idealized vision of accomplishment and character. A second fantasy is one of having slaves and often involves projections about sexuality: for example, children are dangerously sexual and must be repressed or given pseudo-adult roles; children can be used, enslaved, or prostituted to serve adult needs. The third fantasy is the fantasy of elimination: for example, children are a burden, an infiltrator group that is depleting resources and must be put away, segregated, or removed. Young-Bruehl describes target groups of prejudice as phobic objects. People with phobias project unwanted aspects of themselves onto others and then come to fear those people or objects. So, the deep root of childism is that childists project their fears and self-contempt onto children, turning them into things to be feared, hated or owned.

Childism is, in many ways, more complex than other prejudices. According to Young-Bruehl, childists project immaturity and stereotypes associated with immaturity onto a population that actually is immature. Moreover, even childist adults were once children and their own experiences can appear to add credence to their attitudes and beliefs. These complicating factors make prejudice against children particularly difficult to recognize and overcome. Young-Bruehl holds that to combat childism, we must advocate for children’s rights as formulated in what has come to be known as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child’s 3 Ps: provision, protection, and participation. Children must be provided for and protected, but the key to ending prejudice against children is finding ways to ensure more child participation. She believes that only by hearing children’s voices can we start to understand the different ways that childism infiltrates our beliefs and behavior towards children. In

⁸ Ibid., 36.

the same way that the struggle against sexism has involved listening to women's voices, children must be heard in order to eliminate childism.

If Young-Bruehl is correct about the existence of childism and how to eliminate it, P4C could play a pivotal role in fighting childism because in a CPI setting, children are encouraged to express themselves, listen to each other, and build on each other's ideas and experiences. P4C asks children to take their own ideas and other children's thoughts seriously, and to strive for answers together. Conceived both as an education for democracy and an education for autonomy, P4C provides children with a safe haven in which to express themselves on matters of fundamental importance to human existence such as the nature of moral action, personal identity, and knowledge. Engagement in CPIs during which children are invited to offer and test answers to philosophical questions allows them to speak their minds, develop thinking skills, create their own positions, values, and the sense of self that comes with this development. These opportunities to speak are valuable in and of themselves, and are also fruitful in that they support children's readiness to participate in other arenas. In the countries around the world that have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, including Canada, children have the right to express their views on matters that affect them. In British Columbia, for example, children who are affected by foster care arrangements, custody suits, and health care are to be consulted before final decisions on these matters are reached.⁹ P4C can support and help develop children's capacity to express themselves effectively on these sorts of topics which are of the greatest importance to their personal lives. P4C can also support children's participation as citizens of democracies through the improvement of their critical, cooperative and caring thinking. Furthermore, the CPI's dialogic approach to education might even untie the Gordian knot created by the fact that democratic governments control children's education and yet must avoid their indoctrination because democracy relies on the rational decision-making powers of free-thinking, autonomous citizens.

The child's right to freedom of expression is not unlimited. In Article 13 of the UNCRC, this right is subject to restrictions necessary to respect the rights and reputation of others and to public safety. The freedom of expression that can be offered to children during a CPI is also not a wholly unrestricted freedom. The CPI requires children to show respect for each other. For example, a child is not free to speak so much that other children are not heard, and children are not free to threaten each other with harm. In other words, the freedom of expression within a CPI is limited by certain responsibilities to the CPI community. Furthermore, the CPI primarily offers a space for verbal expression. In Article 13, freedom of expression includes the "freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice." While P4C practitioners provide children with opportunities to express themselves on philosophical topics through various media including art, movement, and poetry, the CPI is primarily a space for philosophical dialogue. As participants in a philosophical dialogue, children are engaged in an inquiry and will be asked to relate their expressions to that inquiry and give reasons to support their views. A child may choose to express ideas without providing supporting reasons, but those thoughts might be tested by the group to determine whether or not they should agree. Despite these restrictions, P4C can provide an

⁹ BC Family Law Act 37, 2b; BC Infants Act, 17; BC Child, Family, and Social Services Act, 70.

important area of liberty. Laura Lundy, Professor of Education Law and Children's Rights at Queen's University, Belfast, conceptualizes the participation rights of children as set out in the UNCRC, Article 12 into four elements: space, voice, audience, influence. While the four elements together constitute participation, the elements of space and voice are understood as primarily related to freedom of expression. Her influential model suggests that to meet their participation rights, children must be given opportunities to express themselves (space), must be facilitated to express their views (voice), the view must be listened to (audience), and the view must be acted upon, as appropriate (influence).¹⁰ The CPI can satisfy all four requirements. The space and voice available to children in the CPI provides children with the opportunities to say, with frankness, what they think about the topic at hand, freedom from the power of adult authority on the topic, freedom to agree or disagree with each other's ideas and arguments, freedom to change their minds, and freedom that comes from the opportunity to voluntarily engage in inquiry that is meaningful and of interest to them. The facilitator's role is not to dictate what is said in the dialogue, but to help the children reason together. The audience for and influence of children's views are also evident in P4C. The adult facilitator and the entire community listen to one another with respect. The metacognitive dialogue at the end of a CPI and the activities testing hypotheses outside of the CPI allow children's views to be influential. The metacognitive dialogues in particular, when facilitated effectively, can give children influence over the ways in which future CPIs are conducted and helps them to create the conditions necessary for their voices to be heard.

P4C has much to offer in support of children's participation rights. It is for this very reason that P4C practitioners should, as Young-Bruehl might recommend, look closely at how the sorts of social or personal beliefs that ground childism and, more generally, how adult conceptions about childhood might be affecting children's liberty to express themselves and to have their voices heard during CPIs. After all, although Young-Bruehl's analysis of prejudice against children focuses on horrendous forms of child abuse by individuals and large scale abuse such as perpetrated by the American criminal justice system, she also notes that a history of childist assumptions has been at play in work meant to address and eliminate child abuse, and that these assumptions can even be found in the work of so-called "child liberationists." The perniciousness of systemic prejudice is that it often goes unnoticed. Even if one completely rejects the claim that prejudice against children exists or doubts Young-Bruehl's analysis of it, if one conceives of P4C as child-centered and as supporting children's right to freedom of expression, it is worthwhile doing a thorough and sincere check for implicit beliefs, attitudes, and practices that suggest children must be controlled, enslaved, or removed. To do this, we must consider the context in which the offer to speak freely is being made.

Adult Imposed Limits on Children's Freedom

The summer after Nina made her comments about a gift of nothing, a ten-year-old child named Anna comes to camp after recently being moved to a new foster family. She loves camp, but voices her suspicions about one inquiry in no uncertain terms. Through a game of Bigger and Better, the

¹⁰ Laura Lundy, "'Voice' is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child," *British Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 6 (2007): 927-942.

children have amassed 32 large donuts from a local coffee shop.¹¹ The inquiry question the facilitator supplies to the 15 children is: Should we share the donuts with the children in the group next door? The facilitator allows the children to eat one donut each while they engage in dialogue since they agree that at least each person in their group should have one. The question of how to divvy up the rest remains. One child claims that the donuts should not be shared with the other group because their group worked to get the donuts by trading up during the game. Another child disagrees and claims they should be shared because sharing is good for everyone. After a few more children speak, Anna addresses the other children in frustration, "Don't you see that no matter what we say, she is going to make us share! We shouldn't even bother talking about it. Even talking is just doing what she wants."

Anna is keenly aware of the control adults have over children's lives and her comment raises questions about how that control may extend into the CPI. Adults might believe that they are providing children with opportunities to speak freely, but the difference in power between adults and children is so great and the context within which P4C is done is controlled by adults in so many ways that she is right to question whether children's freedom within the context of a CPI is an illusion. To explore this question, we will consider the different ways in which adults determine what happens during P4C programs and whether children are free enough from this influence that we can say they have the space to voice their own views. Similar observations about adult control over children can be found in several works on children's liberation,¹² but listed together they highlight the extent of adult power in the contexts in which most adults do P4C. This section's observations are about a specific summer camp program because of the key differences between camp and school that make camp a more democratic environment for children than most Canadian schools. Nevertheless, even in summer camps dedicated to children's enjoyment, constraints on children's freedom are not difficult to find.

The Thinking Playground¹³ summer camps provide fun games and activities for children with a variety of different philosophical themes. Throughout the day, the camps implement the P4C approach of providing stimulus material, determining an inquiry question, and engaging in CPI dialogues. While the summer day camps are organized with a focus on fun, they have the educational goals of P4C programs run in schools. The camps, however, are not supposed to feel like school and children should be (and are generally reported to be) eager to get up and go to camp. A key difference between camp and school is that some children are asked by parents which summer camp they would like to attend and some are asked if they would like to attend any at all. However, just like school, there are camp rules and structures that might suggest an acceptance of the belief that children must be controlled or segregated. Once children arrive at camp, they are not free to leave without permission from a parent or guardian. During the camp, children are not free to leave the camp

¹¹ In the game Bigger and Better, children are given a paper clip and then approach people on campus to try to make a series of trades to end up with something 'bigger and better'.

¹² For general discussions of the children's liberation movement see David Archard, *Children: Rights and childhood* (second edition). (New York: Routledge, 2004), 30-84. For a general discussion of freedom in education and experimental schools see Joanna Haynes, "Freedom, Inclusion and Education," in *Perspectives on Participation and Inclusion: Engaging Education*, edited by S. Gibson and J. Haynes. (London: Continuum, 2009), 76-90.

¹³ The Thinking Playground summer camps take place at the University of the Fraser Valley in Abbotsford, BC, Canada.

grounds, and they are not free to leave the supervision of adults whenever they wish. They are not free to make contact with people outside of camp without adult permission. Children are grouped by age and mostly segregated from children of other ages and from adults who are not in charge of their care. Children do not choose the adults who supervise them or the details of the curriculum which is generally developed before the camps start. Food can only be eaten at times determined by adults. There are rules about when children can go to the bathroom.¹⁴ The timing of activities is generally chosen by adults and activities are directed and facilitated by adults. Children are allowed to sit out or find something else to do, however, this requires isolating oneself from the others who are engaged in the activity and singling oneself out as different which may inhibit the freedom to opt out.

These are the basic structures of control and segregation in most environments children in Canada find themselves in when not in family situations. The effect of these structures on children's own understanding of themselves and their understanding of their own capacities should not be underestimated. At summer camp, rules of conduct are created in a group composed of adult camp counsellors and children on the first day of camp. However, there is likely a certain amount of theatre in this. The rules are discussed; the reasons for the rules are discussed; children suggest rules, but do children really have or believe they have the power to make the rules? For example, if children decided as a group that they should do nothing but play videogames for the week, that would not get on the list of rules. If they decided that taking turns in CPI dialogues meant only one person would be allowed to speak per day, that would most likely not be acceptable to the counsellors.¹⁵ The adult and child co-creation of rules allows for a discussion of the reasons behind rules, but the rules are ones that both adults and children are probably quite sure will make it onto the list. In fact, it is a testament to the socialization of children that in the reported experience of the camp counsellors, the only rule that adults have needed to suggest modifying has been the consequence for breaking rules because the children chose consequences that are unreasonably harsh. For example, as a consequence for breaking a rule, one child suggested sitting in a corner for the whole day and another child suggested sitting in a box in a corner for the whole day. Children can occasionally be quite willing to take the opportunity to control each other in imitation of the ways in which they have been controlled. Children, themselves, can have quite set ideas of how childhood should be understood, and these ideas can be derived from their own experiences of social expectations. For example, during an activity that took place in an empty art studio space in which there was an undressed mannequin of the type you would find in a clothing store, a young girl commented with seriousness that "this is not appropriate for children." On a different occasion, during a CPI on the question of whether children should run the world, the dialogue began with one child saying that adults should run the world because they are smarter and when that answer was challenged, a second child claimed that adults should run the world because "children are crazy and they would make the world go crazy."

¹⁴ Some of these rules may sound harsher than they actually are. Food is eaten during lunch time and snack times. Due to the nature of the physical space, children must walk to the washrooms with an adult. The curriculum is largely determined by adults before camp begins, but the counsellors often take pains to modify or change activities in response to children's ideas and interests.

¹⁵ There are some situations in which a P4C facilitator might allow children to experiment with different protocols for CPIs, but the camps are so short that there is little time available for this kind of experimentation.

The effect of adult-imposed restrictions on children must be considered when trying to determine whether children are free to express themselves because these restrictions and the power imbalances implied by them may serve as constraints on such freedom, and they also imply a particular conception of childhood that suggests children, unlike adults, need restrictions. However, it is doubtful that Young-Bruehl would identify the rules and structures that have been noted above as stemming from prejudiced fantasies of control and elimination. The constraints on children described thus far can be understood as necessary for their protection, one of the 3 Ps that must be respected in order for childism to be addressed, according to Young-Bruehl. One can reasonably argue that children need rules to keep them safe. Yet if systemic childism exists, we should undertake a thorough investigation into what sorts of controls are needed for child protection. Firestone, for example, argues that just as oppression of women involved a “myth of femininity” that was used to justify the restrictions that were put on them, so the “myth of childhood” reinforces the idea that children need to be rigidly supervised, disciplined, and segregated by age for the sake of their own protection and developmental needs.¹⁶ If the understanding of children’s needs is colored by social constructions of the concept of childhood then that understanding should also be analyzed for signs of prejudice. However, such a difficult and wide-ranging investigation is far too ambitious for this article. Therefore, we will provisionally assume that children require the commonly employed supervision and rules for the sake of their protection. The question then becomes whether or not within that area of control, children are given genuine opportunities to express themselves. What counts as freedom of expression in this context? To really fulfil the purpose of combating childism and to meet the goal of hearing what children have to say without the distortion of adult projections about childhood, the space for a child’s expression during a CPI must be as free as possible from the obstacles of adult control and adult censure. In order to determine whether CPIs provide children with the opportunity to exercise free speech within a system with rules aimed at protecting them, we will turn to P4C curriculum development and facilitation.

The goal of the facilitator at summer camp is to provide fun activities that stimulate philosophical questions and generate opportunities for successful CPI dialogues. But curriculum development is largely dependent on adult beliefs about children. The curriculum is determined by a wide variety of assumptions such as those about children’s interests, about what children find fun, about children’s knowledge, about what children have and have not experienced, about children’s capacities, about what is emotionally “safe” for them, and about what is, as the camper said, “appropriate.” Children’s feedback on activities and the designers’ past experiences with children help determine curriculum choices. Furthermore, the counsellors frequently adapt the curriculum in response to the campers’ input during the camp itself. However, the final decision on curricular matters rests with the adults. Another task adults set for themselves is the management of children’s behavior during a CPI. Strategies and goals of behavior management depend on assumptions about dangers that children face, acceptable use of language, noise levels, and what constitute signs of interest and disinterest. As previously noted, the freedom of expression possible in a CPI is limited by the children’s responsibility to be respectful of each other. However, the interpretation of whether that responsibility is being met is mainly in the hands of the adult facilitator. Adult assumptions color how they interpret or “listen” to children in many different ways. Does the adult assume that the

¹⁶ Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*. (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), 86-104.

children feel safe and comfortable in the setting they find themselves? Does the adult recognize the pressures of social expectations and how a child's own assumptions about childhood may be affecting them? In the context of doing P4C, the curriculum revolves around efforts to provide engaging stimulus material. However, this material is almost exclusively adult generated: the picture books, games, museums, and philosophical novels used in P4C are written and created by adults. Lipman's philosophical novels contain an adult's ideal images of the child philosopher for children to use as a model.¹⁷ In all of the curriculum development, games, stories, books and activities of various sorts that have been designed, written and created by adults with specific purposes, we might reasonably ask where there is room for a child's self-expression. Where is the opportunity for adults and other children to listen to what children genuinely think without the constraints of the various assumptions that adults and society make about childhood and what children should be and become? We might reply that the child is given the opportunity to freely express his or her ideas in response to the adult generated stimulus material. However, adults need to consider this response carefully. There is a danger lurking here that the response is tantamount to the adult saying to the child, "Well, enough about me. What do you think about me?" P4C practitioners should question the extent to which children can express their own concerns, ideas and beliefs in response to material provided by adults and within the structures enforced by adults who rely on their own ideas and expectations of childhood.

Preparing Children to Be Free

In response to the challenge of explaining how P4C supports children's free speech despite the imposition of adult rules and adult curriculum material, we might argue that adult constructed curriculum materials are necessary because children are still apprentices when it comes to philosophical reasoning and the ability to express themselves. In CPIs they are learning the philosophical skills—the critical thinking skills—necessary to becoming capable of breaking free from various socially constituted roles and have a truly open future. In a CPI setting, children are given a chance to express themselves as apprentices, as part of developing the capacities necessary to express themselves freely as adults. So, the CPI is not primarily meant to be a space for hearing children's voices. Rather, it satisfies children's right to express themselves in the sense that it is a pedagogy designed to help children develop their capacities to freely express themselves in the future. This viewpoint suggests that P4C is related to the political goal of honoring children's freedom of expression by providing a pedagogical method that develops the skills needed for free expression even if that method itself does not provide opportunities for the child's voice to be heard.

There are at least two main lines of argument against the position that because P4C has the pedagogical goal of developing children's reasoning skills, providing space for children's voices in CPIs is of secondary importance. First, even if we understand P4C merely as a tool for developing children's critical, caring, cooperative, and creative thinking skills, it is difficult to see how this tool could be a pedagogically effective without allowing children to express themselves freely. If P4C does not allow children the space necessary to test what they are genuinely thinking and pursue inquiries that reflect their concerns and interests, it is unlikely that the skills they learn will become internalized

¹⁷ Matthew Lipman, *Thinking in Education*, second edition. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 96.

and form part of who they are as agents and citizens. Lipman's goal was not simply to teach children to be able to identify premises and recognize fallacies within a classroom setting. He claimed that the goal of P4C is to help children develop into reasonable people.¹⁸ In order to meet that goal, thinking skills need to be developed in dialogues in which children practice thinking about what they actually think and that means providing space for their voices to be heard.

The second line of argument is found in the work of a number of writers who are critical of conceiving of P4C merely as an instrument for improving children's reasoning skills. Often, these criticisms relate to the point this conception closes us off from hearing the newness of the child's voice. For example, Vansieleghem writes:

Philosophy for Children, with its emphasis on critical thinking and autonomy is nothing more than the reproduction of an existing discourse. The autonomy that the child gains is nothing more than the freedom to occupy a pre-constituted place in that discourse.¹⁹

In Young-Bruehl's language, Vansieleghem is showing concern about the projection of adult aims and goals onto children in P4C. In other words, there may be the fantasy of self-reproduction and ownership at play if CPI facilitators do not recognize the importance of children's freedom of thought and speech. Vansieleghem maintains that there needs to be a space for children's thinking that is not an exercise in problem-solving, but instead arises out of genuine experience and doubt. This experience is part of the search for meaning that should be available to children. Children need a space that accepts the importance of their "newness." Biesta, too, argues that in order to avoid basing P4C solely on a particular conception of humanity and to allow the possibility that the newcomer (child) can change how we understand "humanity," we must not limit ourselves to education that focuses on production of such an ideal (or re-production of what currently exists).²⁰ Karin Murriss writes that prejudices we have about children and childhood lead us to miss knowledge that is offered by the child.²¹ Relying on Fricker's understanding of epistemic injustice as an injustice that occurs due to someone being wronged in their capacity as a knower, Murriss urges adults to adopt a position of epistemic modesty. Conceiving of P4C as an opportunity to listen to and learn from children not only opens adults up to newness, but also honors children's right to freedom of expression in a way that a purely instrumentalist understanding of P4C cannot. Kennedy, who has written so eloquently on the philosophy of childhood, suggests that facilitators should be involved in their own philosophy of childhood in order to develop the capacity to actively listen to children.²² The recognition, deconstruction and reconstruction of pre-conscious beliefs that we as adult facilitators have about childhood will help us to recognize where we are projecting onto children and also be able to

¹⁸ Matthew Lipman, Ann Margaret Sharp, Frederick S. Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 15.

¹⁹ Nancy Vansieleghem, "Philosophy for Children as the Wind of Thinking," *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 39,1, (2005):295.

²⁰ Gert Biesta, "Philosophy, Exposure, and Children: How to Resist the Instrumentalisation of Philosophy in Education" in *Philosophy for Children in Transition: Problems and Prospects*, edited by N. Vansieleghem and D. Kennedy. (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 144.

²¹ Karin Murriss, "The Epistemic Challenge of Hearing Child's Voice," *Studies in Philosophy of Education*, 32,(2013): 245-259.

²² Kennedy, *Practicing philosophy of childhood*.

distinguish between moments when children are saying what an adult would say and when children are saying something new.

Even if alternative or additional goals for P4C are accepted such that it is not conceived of merely as an instrument to teach children critical, creative, caring and cooperative reasoning skills, and even if facilitators consistently work on their philosophy of childhood as part of a professional practice that makes them better able to hear what children are saying, proving that P4C programs as they currently exist have structures that allow for a child's genuine freedom of expression remains problematic. Given that adults control so many aspects of children's experience of philosophy, the challenge is to show that the CPI can nevertheless allow the "newness" of children's voices to be heard. Do the adult-imposed rules and choice of curriculum act as insurmountable constraints, distorting the child's voice through the adult's agenda even if part of the adult's agenda is to hear the child's voice? It is possible that the various types of control adults exert over children mean that, in Young-Bruehl's terms, adults are inevitably projecting ideal images onto children and requiring them to play roles to satisfy adult preconceptions rather than allowing children the freedom to express their own thoughts. However, the next section is dedicated to showing that the P4C method, as created by Lipman, is structured in such a way that the child's autonomy of thought and freedom of expression are respected.

The Role of Children's Questions

Careful attention to one's assumptions about childhood and the different ways in which adults control children through rules, curriculum, and the interpretation of children's actions is essential to respecting children and to being able to hear the child's voice. P4C practitioners should continue to be responsive to the interests, needs, and input of children when creating activities and facilitating CPIs if they want to set up a context as sensitive as possible to children's own perspectives and concerns. However, the structural element in P4C that is central to providing children with the opportunity to freely express themselves is the child-chosen inquiry question. Adult control over environment, curriculum, and stimulus material can be consistent with giving children the opportunity to express themselves freely in a robust sense as long as children are allowed to create their own questions in response to stimulus material and to choose the inquiry question. The importance of the child-created inquiry question can be understood with reference to Shiffrin's position that the right to free speech is best understood as grounded in an agent's interest in the protection of the "free development and operation of her mind."²³ Shiffrin holds that the fundamental value of the autonomy of the individual mind is what undergirds the value of free speech. Moreover, she takes this to be true not just of adults, but also of children. Shiffrin maintains that included in the autonomy interests of thinkers is their interest in responding authentically, by which she means "that rational agents have an interest in forming thoughts, beliefs, practical judgments, intentions and other mental contents on the basis of reasons, perceptions, and reactions through processes that, in the main and over the long term, are independent of distortive influences...So too agents have an interest in revealing and sharing these mental contents at their

²³ Sean Valentine Shiffrin, "A Thinker-Based Approach to Freedom of Speech," *Constitutional Commentary*, 27, no. 2, (2011): 287.

discretion...”²⁴ When children create and choose an inquiry question, even when it is in response to adult chosen and created stimulus material, they are invited to respond authentically to it, to reveal their thoughts and reactions to that material and create the terms of the inquiry itself. The creation of the inquiry question is the starting point of free expression during the CPI. The thinking and speaking that children do in attempting to respond to a question they have chosen have their origin in the children rather than being externally imposed. The question is the initiation of a new beginning. The children have determined the goal of the discussion and the aspect of the adult created material that they wish to bring into question.²⁵ They have taken charge of the agenda. Jana Mohr Lone has argued that allowing children to choose the inquiry question helps facilitators to maintain an appropriate level of epistemic modesty and is part of setting the conditions for authentic dialogue.²⁶ But, even beyond this, it allows us to truly claim that CPI dialogues are opportunities for children to exercise their right to freedom of expression.²⁷ The ownership of the inquiry that arises from children choosing the inquiry question is buttressed by the metacognitive activity that traditionally concludes a CPI. During this stage of the CPI, children are asked to reflect and comment on the dialogue and community. These metacognitive reflections are designed to influence future dialogues and may even affect protocols such as turn taking and more generally how respect for others is understood and honored by the group. However, the metacognitive stage of the CPI only supports freedom of expression and counts as influence if the voices of the children are heard during the dialogue. If the children have no voice in the dialogue then the metacognitive stage reflects on and affects an inquiry that is the adult's rather than the children's. The voices of the children can only be fully present in the CPI when they are given control over the inquiry question.

It is no coincidence that in P4C as it was established by Lipman, children choose the inquiry questions. Lipman describes the purpose of allowing children to develop their own inquiry questions as being anti-authoritarian and sees it as allowing children to put the world in question.²⁸ However, not all P4C practitioners ask children to choose inquiry questions. And, while choosing their own inquiry questions is an essential element in allowing children's free expression in a CPI, there can be some good, pedagogical reasons to begin doing P4C with questions that have not been raised by the children. The problem is that children often do not initially understand what dialogue in a CPI is like when it involves meaningful, creative, and cooperative thinking. It may take some experience for children to recognize what kinds of questions they are being invited to ask and the kind of freedom they have in their answers. Once children have the experience of being caught by a philosophical problem—the “Aha!” moment when a connection is made or the moment of hesitation or disequilibrium when they start to think of a concept in a different way—then children start to understand what a CPI sounds and feels like, and, more importantly, recognize the extent of their

²⁴ Ibid., 290.

²⁵ In many CPIs, the children ask questions and then vote on which one they wish to discuss. So, it is not always the case that children get to discuss their own question. Nevertheless, the question is one that has been posed by a child as opposed to an adult. Moreover, some practitioners who work with the same children over several weeks, may run CPIs on every question children pose.

²⁶ Jana Mohr Lone, “Questions and the Community of Inquiry,” *Childhood and Philosophy*, 7,13, (2011):78-89.

²⁷ Joanna Haynes, *Freedom*, 86-87, describes children's reflections on their experiences of philosophy with children and notes that they claim that while doing philosophy they enjoy both negative freedom (freedom from teacher's authority and lesson plans) and positive freedom (freedom to play with ideas, listen to others and change their minds).

²⁸ Lipman, *Thinking*, 98.

freedom to raise questions. Wonder cannot be externally imposed and, as Kohan has written, “...thinking is passion-immanent, spontaneous, self-caused and not the result of some external will.”²⁹ However, children often do need to learn that wonder, thought, and freedom to question are what they are being given the space to do. Children do spontaneously raise philosophical questions and are capable of engaging in philosophical dialogues, but they do not always do this on cue. We can lead children to philosophically rich stimulus material and they will not engage, often because the opportunity to freely raise philosophical questions among groups of children and adults—particularly ones who are not family members—is unfamiliar to them. As a result, it is pedagogically sound for P4C to include dialogue on pre-determined questions, philosophical games, exercises, and other activities that are planned and initiated by adults as part of alerting children to the opportunity to express their views during a CPI.³⁰ Perhaps the childism in North American society is such that children do not generally expect to be listened to in any extended or meaningful way during organized activities. During one CPI at camp, an adult was writing notes on the board and another was facilitating a dialogue on art. One of the children had not noticed the notes on the board until the dialogue was over. When he realized that they represented the discussion, he exclaimed in amazement, “Look! She wrote what we were saying and it takes up the whole board!” Children need to have some experience of feeling as though their ideas are worth listening to as part of learning that their questions will be heard and are worth thinking about carefully.

Children as the Alpha and Omega of the Dialogue

The idea that children might need time to recognize the opportunity for free expression that is available to them during a CPI provides one explanation of Nina’s comment described at the beginning of the chapter. Nina’s distinction between what is said “in there” and what is “real” may be attributable to a lack of familiarity with the freedom she was given to respond authentically. Children are so often expected to agree with the adults in authority, to repeat the lessons that they have been taught, and to guess at what answers adults will approve of that the invitation to express their genuine beliefs and ask independent questions may be greeted with the sort of skepticism Anna exhibited. One advantage of the summer camp setting is that there are many opportunities to have informal CPIs between small numbers of campers and counsellors. These are CPIs that can arise spontaneously and do not occur in anything like a classroom setting. In Nina’s case, the counsellor took the opportunity to create a brief and informal continuation of the CPI while standing in line for lunch. It was in this less formal setting that Nina appeared to feel more comfortable expressing her real views. Taking advantage of the opportunity to speak freely during a casual, miniature version of a CPI can help children believe that the adults around them are trying to hear them by offering them a space to think and express themselves with as few ‘distorting influences’ as possible.

Although there are some practical reasons to begin doing P4C with inquiry questions that have not been created by the children, this must be considered an early or transitional step intended to

²⁹ Walter Omar Kohan, “Childhood, Education and Philosophy: Notes on Deterritorialisation” in *Philosophy for Children in Transition: Problems and Prospects*, edited by N. Vansielegheem and D. Kennedy. (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 178.

³⁰ In Lipman, *Thinking*, 100-103, he lists using exercises and lesson plans as a stage in creating a community of philosophical inquiry. Activities and lesson plans can be found in the instructor manuals accompanying Lipman’s philosophical novels.

support free expression during a CPI. It is by choosing the question that children initiate the inquiry and make it their own. If there are ways to give children choices in inquiry questions during this transitional stage, this is preferable because at least the children are playing some role in determining the focus of the dialogue. For example, children can be given a list of facilitator created questions to choose from or children can be given a list of questions that other children have asked in response to the stimulus in the past, or children can engage in exercises that do not involve CPIs that are related only to generating questions and encouraging authentic questions. However, what should be uppermost in the minds of adults is that ultimately, inquiry questions must be created and chosen by children so that the thinking that occurs in the CPI has its origin in children's interests, children's wonder, and ultimately, children's own conception of what should be questioned and how it should be questioned. When we couple an inquiry that begins from a child's question with a metacognitive stage at the end of the dialogue, we have facilitated not only voice, but influence over how future opportunities for free expression will be formed. It is by allowing children to start and end an inquiry that we can truly say that P4C allows children to express themselves freely and have their voices heard in ways that can help all of us to thoughtfully consider our assumptions about children and childhood.³¹

Address Correspondences to:

Anastasia Anderson
Department of Philosophy
University of the Fraser Valley
33844 King Road
Abbotsford, BC
Canada, V2S 7M8
Email: anastasia.anderson@ufv.ca

³¹ This paper was presented at the 2015, ICPIC conference and was modified in light of very helpful comments from Natalie Fletcher.