

## Book Review

*Philosophy with Children and Teacher Education:  
International Perspectives on Critical, Creative, and Caring Thinking*

Edited by Arie Kizel

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Review by Aaron Yarmel

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In *Philosophy with Children and Teacher Education: International Perspectives on Critical, Creative, and Caring Thinking*, Arie Kizel has curated a collection of 23 chapters authored by 34 insightful P4wC theorists in a conveniently slim volume of only 234 pages (absent the reference section). Each chapter contains valuable introductions to concepts, perspectives, and projects that can be enjoyed without the commitment of a full-length book chapter or article. Since it would be impossible to provide each contribution the space it deserves in this brief review, I will instead focus on notable examples from each of the volume's five parts and conclude with a few big-picture comments.

**Part 1** is dedicated to the topic, "Transforming Teacher Education and Teacher Training with Philosophy with/for Children," and I will begin by focusing on Viktor Gardelli's, "Philosophy For/With Children, Teacher Training, and Value Transmission: Contradictions, Problems, and a Solution." Gardelli defends P4wC's *inquiry ethics approach*, where students learn to reason about ethical issues in dialogue with others, against the *value transmission approach*, in which substantive ethical principles are inculcated in students. He argues that the former provides superior training for democratic participation and is more conducive to fostering the future wellbeing of students (pp. 19-20). Although this chapter covers well-trodden ground, it remains an invaluable resource for anyone seeking a concise presentation of one of P4wC's major selling points: due to its reliance on *procedural values* (e.g., coherence, comprehensiveness, and consistency) that guide the structure of philosophical inquiries without presupposing the philosophical conclusions that such inquiries will reach, P4wC provides an education in moral reasoning without indoctrination.

My only constructive comments for an otherwise excellent chapter relate to Gardelli's defense of P4wC's procedural values against criticisms. One such criticism is that P4wC's procedural values contain or imply moral content after all, and Gardelli responds along two lines: procedural values (a)

can be discussed in the context of an inquiry (rather than merely being imposed on students) and (b) are not meant to be used in non-inquiry contexts where they do not apply (e.g., coherence and comprehensiveness needn't characterize make-believe forms of play). While I agree that P4wC's use of procedural values does not amount to moral indoctrination, I found the logic of his response unsatisfying. This is because neither (a) nor (b) succeeds in distinguishing between moral and non-moral values, as both are characteristic of at least one class of ostensibly moral values: role-specific moral responsibilities. The moral responsibilities associated with being a tennis doubles partner, car mechanic, student, or soldier are specific to particular domains or activities (rather than guides for how one ought to behave in all areas of life), and they, *along with all other moral values*, certainly can be discussed in the context of a philosophical inquiry rather than merely imposed. Moreover, it would have been helpful for Gardelli to address the sorts of critiques developed by Nell Rainville (2000) and Darren Chetty (2018), both of whom have criticized, in different ways, the procedural norms used in P4wC on the grounds that they either allow or fail to adequately address objectionable manifestations of racism and colonialism. Although such criticisms may not be decisive, it is a mistake for a chapter defending P4wC's procedural values to entirely ignore them (see Amy Reed-Sandoval (2018)).

It is instructive to compare Gardelli's chapter with the subsequent one: Rhiannon Love's, "Using Philosophy For/With Children in Initial Teacher Education as a Pedagogical Approach to Challenge Neoliberalism in Education." In Love's view, training teachers in the theory and practice of P4wC will allow them to "deliberate collaboratively on issues such as justice, truth, and freedom," learn to see children as "political beings capable of social critique and transformation," and challenge neoliberal performativity (p. 28). Although "performativity" is never defined, it seems to refer to a reliance on performance metrics in the evaluation of students, teachers, and schools (pp. 24-25). Her chapter is an inspiring celebration of the radical potential of P4wC to direct the power of philosophical inquiry towards the political realities in which education takes place.

Nevertheless, Love's expectation that a philosophical inquiry in the P4wC tradition is a reliable method for *challenging* neoliberal performativity (when construed charitably) struck me as a step too far in the direction of a value transmission form of pedagogy in which facilitators intend, from the outset, to reach a particular substantive normative conclusion about a politically controversial question. This is not to deny that P4wC's methodological commitments themselves stand in contrast to the most pedagogically irresponsible examples of neoliberal performativity (e.g., referring to a 6-year-old as a failure simply on the basis of her performance on standardized tests), for Love is surely correct about this. But my reading of her text—especially in conjunction with her later co-authored chapter—is that her point is not quite so modest. A truly open-ended inquiry may, to a facilitator's chagrin, ultimately conclude with novel defenses of (rather than an antidote to) a focus on performance metrics and many of the other features that she associates with neoliberalism (e.g., markets, competition, and individualism).

The final chapter I will discuss in Part 1 is, "Transforming Teacher Education with Philosophy for Children," in which Lizzy Lewis provides a compelling picture of the ways that teachers are transformed through their P4wC training. When teachers learn how to facilitate in the P4wC tradition, they are instructed "to engage as themselves" in philosophical inquiries facilitated by other people, and this allows them to consider what it means for students to bring their whole selves into a

classroom (pp. 52-54). P4wC training also allows teachers to reflect on the possibility of relationships and school environments in which students and teachers are genuinely co-inquirers, and it similarly opens their eyes to possibilities for modifying and expanding school curriculum (pp. 55-58).

Lewis's chapter is an insightful and inspiring lesson from a masterful Pw4C theorist and practitioner, and my only constructive comment concerns her rather abrupt response to teachers who are afraid to facilitate inquiries about sensitive topics like religion and death: "Trainee teachers need to understand that it is their duty and responsibility to facilitate difficult conversations with children" (p. 54). In the United States, teachers are under threat from well-funded conservative organizations and politicians, as well as activists from across the political spectrum, who have mobilized campaigns against them simply for teaching politically controversial topics or making genuine mistakes while seeking to manage classrooms with sensitivity. In my opinion, greater consideration of the risks that teachers face is needed when discussing their reluctance to facilitate inquiries about sensitive subjects.

Let's now turn to **Part 2**, "Between Professional Knowledge, Assessment, and Professional Development," beginning with Roger Sutcliffe and Diane Swift's chapter, "Moving Beyond Official Prescriptions Towards a Professional Pedagogy of Reasoning and Dialogue in Initial Teacher Education." Sutcliffe and Swift tell a nuanced story, which I will simplify (while avoiding a sea of acronyms) as follows: England has adopted set standards for conferring professional status on teachers, but these standards wrongly treat teaching as craft knowledge, such that it is sufficient for teachers to know *what* to do in the classroom regardless of whether or not they understand *why* they are doing it (p. 76). Swift's teacher training partnership sought to overcome this deficit by introducing teachers to a rich conception of *pedagogy*, which she and Sutcliffe characterize as the theories, values, evidence, and justifications behind the concrete actions performed by teachers in their classrooms (p. 77).

Her partnership introduced explicit training in P4wC and, following the Philosophical Teaching and Learning approach, sought to instill a set of *dispositions* for teaching through Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI) discussions about the dispositions associated with five core areas: assessment, behavior, curriculum, pedagogy, and professional behaviors. Swift's next chapter, "Committing to Concepts: Making Explicit the Significance of Philosophical Dialogues in the Professional Formation of Teachers," is a further exploration of what it means to train teachers in pedagogy as opposed to mere craft knowledge (in the sense described above), as well as a practical case study in which CPIs were used to help trainee teachers deepen their understanding of the dispositions and concepts relevant to teaching. These two chapters are excellent, and, when viewed as a pair, present a crucial insight: P4wC's techniques, and especially the CPI, are not merely useful in the education of children; on the contrary, they can also foster the philosophical development of adults.

**Part 3** is called, "Embedding Philosophy for/with Children in Teacher Education," and I will focus on the two chapters that seemed most directly to fit within the part's advertised scope: "Embedding Philosophy For/With Children in Initial Teacher Education: A Stealth Model," by Rhiannon Love and Emma Goto, and "Integrating Philosophy For/With Children Within: A Final Year Teacher Education Curriculum in South Africa," by Lena Green and Janet Condy. Love and Goto begin by suggesting that P4wC "could be a potential means of resistance to the dominant

neoliberal discourse” that they assert is increasingly characterizing education in England (this part of their discussion echoes Love’s earlier chapter, so I’ll avoid rehashing that argument here). They then describe a 7-year journey to incorporate P4wC into the initial teacher education training program of the University of Winchester (UoW). Although they use the terms *stealth* and *subterfuge* to characterize their approach, such descriptions seem entirely inappropriate in this context, as they connote a level of deceit and manipulation that (thankfully) do not actually characterize any of the methods that Love and Goto claim to have employed. A more apt description is *gradual*, as the authors describe a process of initially sharing “positive messages” about P4wC with their colleagues, then offering P4wC professional development opportunities through SAPERE (with the support of the director of the teacher training program), building a partnership between UoW and SAPERE, and finally incorporating P4wC into UoW’s curriculum in the form of lectures and modules.

Love and Goto have offered an instructive model for gradually integrating P4wC into teacher education programs, and anyone seeking to do the same would benefit from their insights. Green and Condy’s chapter is a sober reminder, however, of the fact that Love and Goto’s successes likely would not have materialized in an inhospitable environment. Green and Condy describe their experience of introducing and repeating a P4wC module in the final year of teacher education training at a university in South Africa from 2012 to 2018. As expected, the trainee teachers who experienced the module reported a number of benefits: acknowledging “that they had become more metacognitively aware” and reporting “that the approach fostered active and critical learning, created a context for collaboration and mutual respect, enhanced thinking and reasoning, prepared schoolchildren for democratic citizenship, enhanced awareness of different perspectives, and developed language skills” (pp. 128-129). Unfortunately, Green and Condy are not optimistic that P4wC will spread in South African schools, and this is due to the details of South African teacher training curriculum regulations, “the conditions in many South African schools,” and a number of challenges inherent in introducing a curriculum and philosophical tradition that developed in the United States into an environment where “decolonising the curriculum is emphasised and Western sources tend to be suspect” (pp. 131-132).

In **Part 4**, “Challenging the Curriculum with Philosophical Topics,” we find Susan T. Gardner’s excellent chapter, “Education in the Context of Uncertainty.” Gardner begins by noting a tension. On the one hand, educating young people to find employment requires the assumption of stability: we predict the conditions that will characterize their futures and present them with information that will foster their success in those specific conditions. On the other hand, the messy, uncertain, and absolutely crucial project of determining and discovering “who it is that we are becoming” is undermined by an education grounded entirely in this assumption of stability. An education system grounded in the assumption of stability can prepare a student to know “the beliefs of the world’s great religions” and “the causes of climate change,” but, due to its inability to “predict what sort of situations any of us might find ourselves in, given our unique strengths and weaknesses, the varying interpretations of stakeholders, unpredictable consequences of interconnected possible responses, and so on,” it cannot tell a student what *she* should do if her friend “smokes marijuana after school” or what *he* should do if “a schoolmate makes fun of [his] turban” (p. 167).

Schools ought, for this reason, to educate students to navigate a world of uncertainty, and Gardner's recommendation is to use P4wC to nurture *agency*: roughly, the ability to objectively describe and continuously evaluate the reasonableness of one's intended actions (p. 169). In particular, Gardner defends dialogue-based education programs with two features: (1) "facilitated dialogue focused on truth within the context of community" and (2) "dialogical engagement focused on potentially personally challenging situations" (p. 170). The former requires students to listen to and critically evaluate the viewpoints in their school community and, in response, intentionally change their minds when warranted. The latter feature ensures that the students are becoming authors of the stories of their own lives by facing, and determining their own responses to, genuinely complicated and character-building scenarios (i.e., as opposed to merely working through abstract thought experiments that are never connected to their lives).

Gardner's chapter begins a conversation that, in many ways, Kerstin Michalik and Claire Cassidy take up in subsequent chapters: "Philosophising with Children: Uncertainty as a Challenge for Teachers and a Learning Opportunity in an Age of Risk" and "Philosophy for/with Children and Learning for Sustainability," respectively. Michalik describes a set of novel challenges, such as pandemics and global climate change, that will introduce unprecedented levels of disruption and uncertainty into the lives of everyone living on our planet. For this reason, preparing children to navigate uncertainty will become ever more urgent as the century progresses. Cassidy, instead, focuses on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations, which seek to eradicate poverty, reduce inequalities, counter climate change, etc. Michalik and Cassidy believe that the P4wC approach provides legitimate methods of preparing students to engage with their respective topics of concern, and they describe initiatives to build P4wC into initial teacher education programs in Germany and Scotland.

Despite my enthusiasm for these three chapters, I have one broad piece of constructive criticism: when asserting that P4wC can play a role in preparing students to address important social problems, we ought to carefully consider and respond to counterarguments inspired by the relevant empirical literature. For example, due to the phenomenon of *moral licensing*, the apparently positive cognitive and emotional changes that occur within philosophical inquiries may actually produce subsequent *negative* behavioral changes in other contexts. This is because the acts of recalling past moral behaviors and (most importantly) *even simply expressing support for moral behaviors and attitudes* have been shown to lead people to engage in future immoral actions because they are thereby less concerned about feeling or appearing immoral. Katherine O'Loone (2019) surveys a range of studies that examine this phenomenon with respect to beliefs and behaviors regarding the environment, race, sex, food, and consumer behavior (p. 283). To be clear, I am not suggesting that the phenomenon of moral licensing undermines all attempts at moral education, but rather that P4wC theorists ought to be more careful when speculating about the impact of philosophical dialogues on broad social phenomena without considering empirically supported counterarguments.

As someone who is lucky enough to present P4wC workshops to international audiences of educators, I was hoping that this volume would help me reflect on the unique cultural challenges that teachers around the world face when implementing P4wC in their communities. **Part 5** provided exactly this sort of opportunity with respect to Japan. In "Challenges and Opportunities: Becoming a

Philosophy for Children Teacher through Informal Training: Challenges, Opportunities, and Conducive Conditions,” Kei Nishiyama et al. present their analysis of interviews that they conducted with three Japanese P4wC practitioners. All three teachers noted significant clashes between P4wC’s methodology and the cultures within their schools. For example, P4wC’s openness to discussing the legitimacy of particular school rules contrasted with the expectation that teachers will “rebuke” learners for violations of rules and take “the side of the school” (p. 210-211). Moreover, P4wC’s emphasis on dialogue conflicted with a “conditioned fear of uncertainty and distrust in students” that manifested in a reluctance to allow students to speak in class (p. 210).

Nishiyama et al. note that informal workshops were helpful for all three interviewees because they afforded opportunities for networking, collaboration, skill development, and solidarity in the face of common struggles (pp. 210-214). While these outcomes are valuable, the authors do not provide a clear account of how informal workshops actually helped the teachers address the central problem that they reported: the conflicts between P4wC and their environments. For example, did the teachers ultimately find it important to modify P4wC practice in order to continue functioning within their schools? If so, did these modifications sacrifice the core commitments of P4wC? In the end, I was left with more questions than answers.

Wakako Good and Eriko Yamabe offer a close look at four beginner teachers in Japan. Teachers A and B were the first teachers in a junior high school in Fukushima Prefecture to use P4wC methods in their classrooms. In contrast to the clashes between P4wC’s commitments and the school’s ethos that Nishiyama et al. discuss in their chapter, Teachers A and B found themselves in a school that was undergoing a shift in the direction of P4wC’s pedagogical commitments. I appreciate this contrast because it productively complicates the overall picture that the volume presents of Japanese education in a way that frustrates hasty generalizations. Teacher A experienced an initial frustration with “the lack of objectives in the P4C classes” because he was used to designing lessons for reaching prescribed learning outcomes. He described eventually arriving at the conclusion that, rather than identifying and pursuing precise learning outcomes, “the goal of P4C is to think,” and this belief led him to transform his teaching approach by seeking materials that present diverse and overlooked perspectives (pp. 227-228). Teacher B more readily embraced P4wC’s pedagogical commitments, but she struggled to identify philosophical questions and to judge when to intervene when facilitating inquiries.

Unlike teachers A and B, teachers C and D received significant training in P4wC at Tsuru University before accepting their teaching positions. Teacher C showed enthusiasm for P4wC, but, due to the large number of students she was assigned to teach, she struggled to move beyond remembering her students’ names and rudimentary practices like asking *why questions* (p. 230). While the extent to which Teacher D actually implemented P4wC in her classrooms is unclear, Good and Yamabe report that she experienced a significant amount of anxiety due to a lack of sympathy for P4wC’s approach from her colleagues and the parents of her students.

Good and Yamabe conclude that these vignettes show that “undergraduate programs of P4C enable smoother transitions,” but I am not convinced that their data support such an optimistic conclusion. Clearly, both A and B would benefit from P4wC facilitation training. In particular, A would benefit from clarity about how facilitators conceive of and pursue P4wC-specific learning

objectives in the special context of CPI sessions; B would benefit from a robust theory of how and when to intervene during inquiries. But it's also true that neither C nor D were prepared to handle the educational environments into which they were placed: C lacked an understanding of how to modify P4wC's approach when working with large classrooms, while D was unable to respond to what she perceived as a hostile environment for P4wC's methodological commitments. In other words, regardless of the fact that C and D studied P4wC at Tsuru University, none of the teachers in this study received adequate preparation for practicing P4wC in the real world.

This book review could easily have been three times as long as it was, and, while I regret that I have not discussed more of its 23 insightful chapters, it is now time to conclude with a few big-picture reflections. Overall, I am pleased to include this volume in my library because every single chapter has something valuable to offer. In particular, I plan to use specific chapters to help me describe the P4wC method to potential community partners and introduce trainee teachers to P4wC's radical potential and applicability beyond the education of children.

That said, my enthusiasm is attenuated by two factors: the large number of critical comments that I expressed above and, to be blunt, the lack of polish in the volume as a whole. I have only the utmost respect for every contributor to this volume and its editor, and it seems plausible that, given more space to develop ideas and consider counterarguments, many of my critiques would have been addressed. As a reviewer, however, my role is to evaluate the quality of the collections of words contained in the physical object sitting on the desk in front of me. Finally, although some chapters are perfectly edited, a significant number range from having small errors, of the sort that I would expect to find in uncorrected proofs, to containing numerous and serious grammatical errors. Routledge has a well-deserved reputation as a stellar academic press, and I would expect a more polished final version of all articles within a published anthology.

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