

The Role of Students' Identity in a Community of Philosophical Inquiry

On the book *"Enabling Students' Voices and Identities: Philosophical Inquiry in a Time of Discord"*

Author: Arie Kizel

Title: *Enabling Students' Voices and Identities: Philosophical Inquiry in a Time of Discord*

Date: 2024

Pages: 152

Publisher: Lexington (division of Rowman & Littlefield), Lanham, Maryland

Price: \$85.87 Hardcover Amazon, \$45.00 eBook.

Review by Dr. Nava Bar

Arie Kizel's latest book *"Enabling Students' Voices and Identities: Philosophical Inquiry in a Time of Discord"* (Lexington, 2024), delves into the critical role of education in fostering critical thinking, empathy, and a sense of belonging in today's increasingly polarized world. The book offers a compelling philosophical exploration of how educational practices, as a community of inquiries, can empower students to navigate complex societal issues and develop their unique identities.

The book's central claim is that one of the most significant challenges Philosophy for Children (P4C) and Philosophy with Children (PwC) face today is to enable children from silenced, marginalized, and excluded groups to make their voices heard in communities of philosophical inquiry. Pupils from underprivileged socioeconomic sectors or minorities, whose narrative does not accord with that of the dominant mainstream, often feel uncomfortable articulating their feelings and experiences. Communities of inquiry customarily remain governed—even if implicitly—by a hegemonic meta-narrative; thus some students refrain from asking authentic questions from their own perspective.

The book includes five parts. First, it discusses the exclusion of minority groups from educational discourse. Engaging in a comprehensive social analysis directly linked to classroom pedagogy, this section explores the way in which meta-narratives dominate the educational discourse, and the consequences of such narratives.

The second part explores how diverse identities and narratives operate in philosophical communities of inquiry. Distinguishing between the politics of identities of academic discourse and the identities of the participants in communities of

philosophical inquiry, it identifies two forms of tension—the external pressure exerted by the hegemonic discourse, represented by children and teachers from hegemonic homes, and the internal strain placed on children by the power relations that dictate a “right order” within communities of inquiry.

The third part presents P4wC as an educational and dialogical space designed to facilitate children and young pupils to ask questions from the perspective of their own identity and narrative. Differentiating between “sterile questions” and those “from an identity perspective,” this section explains why members from different backgrounds ask different questions that can alter how the community’s socioeconomic-cultural-religious background changes the starting point of the questions asked; it also explores the paths discussion can take and how a process of “enabling identity” can develop philosophical sensitivity to concerns around identity.

The fourth part deals with a crucial issue: the facilitators' role in communities of inquiry characterized by sensitivity to plural identities/narratives. Analyzing the moves facilitators make with the aid of critical pedagogy and other related tools, the section proposes an action-plan model. Based on reports from facilitators regarding the challenges they face and their suggestions for working with students from different backgrounds, it draws several practical conclusions and insights of use to facilitators.

The closing chapter explores children’s questions and discussion about self-identity, group identity, family identity, and participant experience in philosophical communities of inquiry.

Kizel's book is grounded in the belief that education is not merely about imparting knowledge but also about cultivating critical thinking skills and fostering a sense of agency. He argues that by providing students with philosophical inquiry and self-reflection opportunities, educators can help them develop the tools necessary to navigate the challenges of a rapidly changing world.

The core contribution of the book is combining two issues, that of students' narratives and identities with philosophical inquiry. Kizel argues that the identity of the students shape their questions in a community, and he devotes considerable attention to the power play of conflicting identities. He criticizes the school's mainstream discourse that ostensibly gives room for multiculturalism and respectful discourse but, in fact, sustains a kind of symbolic violence towards the narratives of non-privileged groups. The analysis of the difference between identity politics and Kizel's model of "enabling identity" is well articulated, especially because it enables the progress of the philosophical inquiry community toward a more inclusive space for students. In the chapter about the facilitator, Kizel explains the complexities of the role of the facilitator of a philosophical inquiry community and, for the first time, also refers to the place of group identity from which the facilitator comes. Here, he opens the door to an extensive discussion about the facilitator's challenges. These sections may be of interest not only to facilitators in communities of philosophical inquiry but also to teachers in regular classrooms around the world.

A compelling theme of the book is how it calls for creating inclusive learning environments in a diverse society. Kizel explores how educators can promote diversity and inclusion by valuing different perspectives and experiences. Consequently, the book has important implications for educational practice. It offers practical insights for educators seeking to create more meaningful and engaging learning experiences. It suggests strategies for incorporating philosophical inquiry into the curriculum, fostering critical thinking skills, and promoting empathy and understanding. By implementing these strategies, educators can help students develop the skills and dispositions necessary to become active and engaged citizens in a complex and interconnected world.

Arie Kizel's book is significant for several reasons:

- *Timely and Relevant*: the book addresses critical issues in contemporary education, such as the importance of critical thinking, empathy, and diversity and inclusion. These themes are particularly relevant in a world facing increasing polarization and social challenges.
- *Philosophical Foundation*: the book's approach is grounded in philosophical inquiry, providing a deeper understanding of the underlying principles that guide educational practices. This philosophical foundation lends the book a unique perspective and intellectual depth.
- *Practical Implications*: While the book offers a theoretical framework, it also provides practical insights for educators seeking to implement these ideas in their classrooms. Kizel's suggestions for incorporating philosophical inquiry, fostering critical thinking, and promoting empathy can be applied directly to educational practice.
- *Empowering Students*: The book emphasizes the importance of empowering students to develop their voices and identities. By providing students with opportunities for self-reflection and critical thinking, educators can help them become active and engaged citizens.
- *Bridging the Gap*: The book offers a valuable contribution to the ongoing conversation about how to prepare students for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. By bridging the gap between theory and practice, it provides a roadmap for educators seeking to create more meaningful and impactful learning experiences.

In summary, *Enabling Students' Voices and Identities* is a significant contribution to the field of education. It offers a thought-provoking and timely exploration of the role of education in shaping the future, providing both theoretical insights and practical guidance for educators.

Address Correspondences to:

Dr. Nava Bar

Dept. of Policy and Leadership in Education, Faculty of Education

University of Haifa

Email: navabar7@gmail.com