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Minds, Personhood, and the Gingerbread Man: Integrating Philosophy into Emergent Pre-school Curriculum

Sage Weber

Literature Review

The philosophy for children movement (P4C), originally developed in the early 1970s, is based upon the idea that philosophical inquiry can be immensely beneficial to the development of young people and also meet the goals of educators. Nowadays, P4C is recognized as a valuable pedagogical method by academics and educators alike. A large number of organizations promote the use of P4C, such as the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC), the Society for the Advancement of Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education (SAPERRE), the University of Washington Center for Philosophy for Children, and the Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization (PLATO). These organizations are largely responsible for coordinating the methods through which P4C is executed, including developing philosophical curriculum to be used with children.

In large part, current P4C implementation is directed at middle and elementary school students, with little work with children below the age of eight. Based chiefly on the research of P4C icons such as Matthew Lipman and Gareth Matthews (as well as some recent work), curriculum development in most cases involves the use of distinct lesson plans on given philosophical topics. Organizations such as IAPC and SAPERE publish these lesson plans and other curriculum materials intended for educators, so that they may learn how to use P4C in their classrooms (Montclair State University, 2016). The Center for Philosophy for Children conducts workshops

for teachers and parents, and also sends philosophers trained in P4C directly into schools to lead discussions (University of Washington, 2016).

Very young children have been largely excluded from the scope of P4C. Additionally, the curriculum seems rigid and with little variation, in many cases eliminating the relevance of philosophy to the daily lives of those participating. This project explores these holes in P4C by studying the implementation of philosophy with a group of preschool children, using principles of emergent curriculum.

Introduction

Philosophy seems to tote around the unfavorable image of being a discipline only for the old and privileged. This is unfortunate, as it seems to me that young children are much more passionately committed to philosophy than many in the academic world. Any educator could testify that young children are constantly studying and questioning the very foundations of the world around them, striving to make sense of the corner of the universe in which they must function. Nonetheless, it is understandable for educators to balk at the idea of doing philosophy with children who haven't even started formal schooling. The way that philosophy is generally done (both in academia and in the P4C arena), is through cooperative argumentative dialogue in a structured environment. It seems like this sort of method in an early childhood classroom would lead to chaos at worst, and an educational dead-end at best. For the intentional practice of philosophy to be successful in an early childhood setting, I firmly believe that it must be as natural as possible and play to the inherent talent that children have as philosophers.

Emergent curriculum in early childhood settings is intended to make young children's learning meaningful by building on their genuine interests. In contrast to preplanned curriculum

which must be implemented in a given way regardless of interest and community context, emergent curriculum is created collaboratively by every team of children and educators. This method of curriculum seems paradoxical, because “the course of this curriculum is not know at the outset. It is emergent - that is, its trajectory develops as a consequence...of the particular connections that develop as participants bring their own genuine responses to the topic and collaboratively create the course to follow out of these connections” (Wien 5). Emergent curriculum is unplanned, but it is entirely intentional. Key values and ideas guide the effective implementation of emergent curriculum. Under this approach to education, children are respected as resourceful, creative, and valuable citizens of a community. Collaboration is valued as necessary to the education process, with children and educators working together to create meaningful learning environments (Wien 7-9). Rather like illuminating philosophical dialogue, emergent curriculum is focused around the mutual benefits that a community of engaged learners can offer one another.

The principles of emergent curriculum transfer meaningfully when considering how to implement philosophy with young children. An emergent curriculum approach could put philosophy into a context that builds on the natural philosophical abilities of the children, builds on their interests, and yet provides enough facilitation to allow them to engage in deeper thinking. I chose to conduct this project in order to see if the use of emergent curriculum could allow space for intentional philosophical pedagogy in an early childhood classroom.

This paper will describe the process of developing philosophical curriculum for preschoolers in an emergent environment, outline the most critical veins of philosophical inquiry that the children engaged in, and illustrate the array of developmental and educational benefits that arose from the project. It should be noted that this paper covers only a fraction of the information that

was obtained through the course of the project, and was winnowed down to what I believe to be the most critical results of the children's inquiry.

Methodology

A. Background

This project was conducted at the University of Wyoming Early Care and Education Center (ECEC). The ECEC is devoted to the use of emergent curriculum, making it a perfect place to attempt philosophy in an emergent setting. The ECEC caters to parents who are associated in some way with the University of Wyoming, and charges about \$9600 in tuition per year for pre-school students. Therefore, the children come from highly educated families with relatively high socioeconomic status. This project was implemented in a mixed-age preschool classroom of 15 children, all between the ages of three and five. It took place over the course of two months.

Conducting the project in this classroom was critical for impactful teaching, because I have been an assistant teacher in the classroom for the past two years. Because of this past experience with the children and lead teacher, beginning facilitation of philosophy was a smooth process. Unlike other P4C studies, I was not a stranger brought in for the express purpose of doing philosophy. Facilitating philosophy discussion became just another aspect of my everyday role as an assistant teacher, and the trust necessary for successful discussion with young children was already established. Being present in the classroom on a daily basis and having an established role made the use of emergent curriculum in a philosophy context possible.

Another factor contributing to my ability to effectively use philosophy as emergent curriculum was the opportunity to work closely with Adina Bitner, the lead teacher in the preschool room where I conducted my project. Adina has many years of teaching experience with young

kids, and a wealth of knowledge on the practical use of emergent curriculum. Her understanding of the different learning styles and behavior patterns that young kids exhibit was also critical in making the philosophy accessible to all students in the room.

As a philosophy major, I went into the project with a strong background in philosophy, allowing me to implement flexible philosophical discussion without the use of pre-determined lesson plans. This was also conducive to the use of emergent curriculum, as I had enough background knowledge in philosophy to identify the consistent themes that the children were bringing up and attempt to develop them further. This knowledge basis allowed for more natural integration of given philosophical themes as they came up in the childrens' discussion and play.

The project was documented through the use of voice recordings, photographs, and artifact collection. Every discussion with the children was recorded, and photographs were taken of engagement with the philosophical material that naturally occurred during play. Artifacts of the children's philosophical work, such as drawings, were also collected.

B. Planned Curriculum

Before the project began, a tentative curriculum outline was planned. Following in the footsteps of Sara Stanley, an educator with SAPERE who has done some philosophy work with young children, I decided to begin building the skills necessary to advanced philosophical inquiry with the use a "Question Board" (Stanley 12). The Question Board was designed to present the children with questions on a daily basis that would require them to choose between two options (for example, the question "Are babies people?" would require yes-or-no response on the board), which would then serve as a stimulus for group inquiry. Theoretically, answering these questions and being asked to defend their choices in group discussions would build the skills of

argument, as well as prompt deeper thinking about knowledge assumptions. However, rather than have a set list of questions to ask every day, I decided that the questions would be formulated around the responses and interests of the children revealed in discussions or in their play.

Operating under the assumption that philosophy ought to be done in the form of large group inquiry, I intended to approach all philosophical practice in the format of discussion sessions. These discussions were originally planned to take place in small groups of about seven children, and then progress to large group discussions when the necessary skills had been sufficiently developed. The ultimate goal was to achieve large group discussions that were consistent, sustained, and meaningful. In my original planning, I did not consider other methods that might be relevant for the expression of philosophical thinking.

Gareth Matthews and Thomas Wartenberg have documented the effectiveness of using stories as stimuli for philosophical inquiry with children, so I intended to eventually make our discussions more literature-based (Wartenberg 26-50). I planned to select stories that expressed the philosophical themes that the children were interested in, and use those stories to provide Question Board stimuli questions. I envisioned that the use of stories would encourage the children to begin providing their own questions centered on the stories that could be used as stimuli for our discussions, so that the questions we discussed as a group would be coming directly from them. I also hoped that the children would begin raising questions on philosophical theme with what they were interested in exploring in the stories, but with relevance to the daily issues and occurrences in their lives. Ultimately, my goal was to move away from any contrived or story-based curriculum and allow the children to run the discussions based entirely on their own concerns and experience.

C. Emergent Modifications

The fact that my original intentions were completely reformed as the project went on is a testament to the effectiveness of emergent curriculum, reflecting the key value of modifying different learning processes to fit the needs of each distinct community of children. The first modification I had to make was establishing micro-groups to practice active listening skills, so that large group discussions could run more smoothly. This effectively created individual children as models for large group discussions, encouraging the process of peer scaffolding. Many benefits were reaped from our large group discussions, such as creating an inclusive discussion community and allowing the children to hear the perspectives of all their classmates. However, there were also significant downsides to relying on large group inquiry as the method of doing philosophy with children. There were problems with children paying attention, and while the large group allowed us to hear everyone's perspective, it prevented certain children from going further with their thinking. It was also not an environment that was conducive to every child. Two 4-year-old boys, Olson and Tommy, felt uncomfortable sharing in the large group. The experience was overwhelming and unpleasant for them, and because of this nobody in the room was getting the chance to understand their thinking.

Because of these issues, Adina advised me in making certain modifications. We continued with the large group discussions, but provided Olson and Tommy with paper and allowed them to sit at the back of the room while discussions took place. This turned out to be an amazing tool to explore a different language of learning, and allowed me to see just how much the two were absorbing. Olson specifically incorporated everything that was being said in the group as well as

his own thoughts into a drawing, and was then able to verbalize those thoughts to me when describing his drawing. This alone opened me up to the possibility of allowing philosophical inquiry to happen in nontraditional ways, which might be more beneficial to preschoolers.

Another modification we made was experimenting with smaller group sizes. Though these groups lost the community value that the large groups held, they allowed individual children's voices to be heard and for deeper inquiry to take place. They also allowed me to move away from the teacher-directed style of discussion that was prevalent at the beginning of the project, because the dialogue flowed naturally in a smaller setting. The children were able to build the skills of responding directly to one another without relying on the Question Board's specified topic, and I did not feel the need to direct and filter the discussion. This transferred to a much more natural, dialogical facilitation of our discussions and the elimination of the Question Board, which allowed the children to truly pose their own questions and guide discussion.

The story-based curriculum was also drawn away from my direction, which was an amazing development. The children were reasonably engaged with the stories that I chose to use (which I personally felt provided a stimulus that was in line with the philosophical themes they were exploring), but when we switched to stories that they had been discussing in the context of philosophical themes on their own, the dialogue became far more rich. From that point on I continued to supply the stories that they requested, rather than ones that I considered philosophically relevant, and the results were amazing. This truly demonstrates the importance of a less structured, responsive, and interest-based approach when doing philosophy with preschool children.

The decision to write their own stories also belonged to the children, and I never would have had that to impose that on them. However, those stories became one of the most important tools I had for evidence of their philosophical thinking. Allowing them a new avenue to

express how they had absorbed the themes we had been discussing for weeks yielded impressive results that would have gone unnoticed if pure dialogue had remained my only method of assessing their philosophical progress. Likewise, when we decided to incorporate the use of physical materials, the philosophical themes we had been discussing temporally relevant and engaging. Observing and engaging in play scenarios was another nontraditional method that was beneficial to philosophical thought. All of these challenge assumptions of the way philosophy ought to be done, but in working with children their effectiveness was apparent, and allowed me as an educator and researcher to identify and facilitate that philosophical themes that they were most interested in.

Results

A. Philosophy

I. Essential Properties of Personhood

Throughout the semester, the preschoolers raised and discussed a number of conceptual topics related to the theme of personhood. This theme first arose in the second week of the project in a discussion about “Coconut”, a beloved wooden stump on the playground that was used by nearly all members of the class in dramatic play scenarios. Coconut nearly always took on the role of a baby, and was widely recognized as such throughout the class. Having witnessed several play scenarios involving Coconut, and hearing him talked about regularly in the classroom, I decided to pose the question, “Is Coconut a person?”.

The discussion surrounding this question was tricky in that the children seemed to be attempting to quantify an imaginative experience into a conception of reality. While this is philo-

sophically rich in itself, the discussion was notable to the theme of personhood in that the children identified Coconut's physical properties in defending his status as a person. One child, Emma, stated that Coconut "can't be a real person because he looks like a log", and another child, Walt, countered with "he is because he has a bump that is his arm". The children consistently picked out physical properties as evidence for Coconut's status as a person, demonstrated clearly in this exchange:

Sage: Olson, you said Coconut's not a person. Why did you say that?

Olson: Because he's the color of wood.

Fiona: But some people do have brown skin.

Olson: Well, he's made of wood, and no people are made of wood. The color is the same, but the skin is not.

Not only does this show clear thinking about what properties necessitate personhood, it is also an excellent example of argumentation. Olson's proposition was countered by Fiona, and he was able to consider this and modify it in a way that supported his argument. After limited experience with this sort of discussion, certain children were already demonstrating the skills of structured argumentation.

This discussion of properties transferred to our next discussion on the questions "Are babies people?" and, surprisingly, "Would you chase the Gingerbread Man if he didn't want to be caught?". In our discussion on babies, the listing of physical properties continued to dominate the children's defense of what makes a baby a person. They listed things such as babies have "eyes, mouths and arms", "they wear clothes", and "have heads". When I challenged their thinking by saying that animals also have many of the physical properties they identified, the discussion shifted some to the abilities that a person ought to have, such as "making noise like talking"

and “moving, like walking”. One child addressed the idea that personhood only comes after certain critical abilities have been achieved, which raised some serious concern in the group:

John: When my baby grows up he’ll be a person. When I grow up I’ll be a person.

Sage: When will you be a person?

John: In two days. Kids know more, babies don’t know about people and don’t respect things. They don’t have money or houses.

Olson: John, am I a person?

John: No.

Olson: Yes I am!

John: Well, maybe yes. Because sometimes you listen.

John’s willingness to give up his own personhood was surprising, but gets to the heart of more complex properties that the children would continue to explore as necessary to qualifying as a person. In this exchange, John is picking out given cognitive and behavioral properties that a person ought to have. For example, he seems to view knowledge and respect as conditions necessary for being a person. These also seem to imply a necessity for rationality, as is revealed when John was confronted by Olson. He was willing to give Olson tentative personhood on the basis that he is able to listen, a behavior that involves rational and intentional control.

After this discussion, I mistakenly felt that our line of inquiry on personhood was at a dead end. I was more interested in how they might view the moral rights that a non-person should be assigned, which caused me to raise the question “Would you chase the Gingerbread Man if he didn’t want to be caught?”. The discussion of rights did come up in this discussion, but the children seemed more interested in identifying the Gingerbread Man’s status as a person

through the search for essential and defining properties. Some children maintained that his physical properties (such as legs, eyes, and arms) defined his personhood, as well as functional properties such as “he can run”. This was the first discussion into which emotional capabilities came into play in the discussion of personhood, with Fiona stating that he was a person because “he can hurt and feel sad”. One child was insistent that he wouldn’t eat him “because he’s a person that’s just made of cookie, he doesn’t like me to eat him”. Philosophical views that take the ability to feel pain into account (such as that of Peter Singer) are used to counter a view that bases personhood purely on rational cognitive powers (such as that of Kant). Both these views were expressed, albeit in simpler language, by a group of preschoolers.

Building on this interest in personhood, I decided to use the story “Horton Hears A Who” by Dr. Seuss to stimulate further discussion on the essential properties of a person. This story follows an elephant named Horton who, because of his excellent hearing capacities, is able to hear an entire town of tiny invisible people living on a dust speck (the Whos). Because other animals in the jungle can’t see the Whos, they conclude that Horton is crazy and don’t believe in the existence of these people. As a first prompt from the story, I asked the children to draw a person and draw a Who side-by-side on a piece of paper. We then discussed the differences in these drawings, which provided more insight into their thinking on essential properties of people.

Though the children were reasonably engaged and attentive in these discussions, we seemed to be hitting a philosophical dead end. There was continuous circular discussion about the physical properties a person should have, but the children themselves did not seem satisfied with defining personhood based on these properties. They were frequently contradicting themselves, saying things like “people have to have ears, but the Who's don’t have ears and they’re still people”. I

wasn't sure how to move forward with the discussion, and was considering how I could shift to facilitating a different line of inquiry when the children had been so interested in this topic.

Then, Adina informed me that the children had brought up the theme of personhood when she read them the story of *The Gingerbread Cowboy* as part of their daily routine before lunchtime. *The Gingerbread Cowboy* is a variation on the story of the Gingerbread Man, set in the wild American west. When the Gingerbread Cowboy taunts the people and animals chasing him, his rhyme is mostly the same as that of the traditional gingerbread man: "Giddyup, giddyup, as fast as you can, you can't catch me, I'm the Gingerbread Man!". As Adina said, "We had a lengthy discussion on if the Gingerbread Cowboy was the same as the Gingerbread Man. They were shocked to discover that he calls himself the Gingerbread Man". In this discussion, the children passionately identified the properties that made these two characters distinct. For example, they didn't believe that the Gingerbread Cowboy could identify as the Gingerbread Man because his clothes and environment were so different.

Although I never would have thought to do it on my own, I decided to switch our story-based theme to different versions of the Gingerbread Man. We used four different versions of the Gingerbread Man over the course of a month, and it was these stories that prompted our most interesting discussions on personhood. In true emergent curriculum fashion, the children expressed their interests in the philosophical theme of personhood in a place that I never would have anticipated. The inquiry became far more advanced when using these stories, because it was the vehicle through which they were able to see this theme in a way that was relevant and meaningful to them.

II. Identity and Functionality

In our discussions on different versions of the Gingerbread Man, the reliance on physical properties as essential properties for personhood faded. The children became more concerned with consistency of identity, and the functional properties that defined a person but also necessitated this consistency. We had several discussions about the differences between the Gingerbread Man and the Gingerbread Cowboy, focusing on what made each fictional being a person as well as what made them distinct from one another. The fact that the Gingerbread Cowboy refers to himself as the Gingerbread Man sparked this discussion, and the children mostly seemed to think that the Gingerbread Cowboy's clothes were what allowed his identity to remain consistent. When I challenged their thinking by asking if the Gingerbread Cowboy would become the Gingerbread Man when he took off his cowboy clothes, they began expressing interesting views on identity consistency driven by imaginative dramatic play.

Defying past conceptions (such as those of Freud and Piaget) that children are cognitively confined to present happenings and are unable to distinguish fantasy from reality, researcher Alison Gopnik has chronicled imaginative play as an expression of children's understanding of counterfactuals (Gopnik 21-23). To take on different roles in imaginative dramatic play is to, in some sense, actualize a counterfactual, and begin formulating conceptions of causation. Numerous cognitive studies have revealed that children use imaginative play as context for essentially testing counterfactuals; that is, seeing in what ways the actual world can be manipulated to become an imaginable possible world. This experimentation is far from purposeless, because it allows children to develop causal understanding of the world in a low-stakes manner (Gopnik 38-41). I would theorize that counterfactuals relating to identity, as they arise in imaginative dramatic play, carry a significant amount of weight in terms of the causal understanding

that the children are experimenting with. Listening to what troubled the children about the identity of the Gingerbread Cowboy, as well as observing the way they philosophically experimented with identity in their play scenarios, allowed me to see how critical the complex concept of identity was to this class.

Initially, the children were insistent that putting on the cowboy hat and boots was what made the Gingerbread Cowboy identifiable as a cowboy. The majority of them maintained that if the Gingerbread Man were to put on a cowboy hat and boots, he would become the Gingerbread Cowboy. After putting on those clothes he would be able to, as one child said, “do what a cowboy can do”. However, those who maintained this didn’t seem to think that it worked in reverse. If the Gingerbread Cowboy started as the Gingerbread Cowboy, then taking off his clothes wouldn’t turn him into the Gingerbread Man. Likewise, many said that when they put on a costume they turn into the being whose role they are taking on, and return to themselves when the costume is removed. When asked what happened when he put his Superman costume on, Walt said that “then I can save people”. Despite these insistences, the children also were adamant that changing clothes didn’t change their own identity. As Valerie put it, “When you take off your clothes and put on pajamas you’re still you”.

Frustrated that the children weren’t coming to any consistent conclusions about personhood and identity (stating paradoxically that physical properties like clothes could change your identity and also not change your identity), I attempted to push this reasoning by placing myself in a play scenario created by the children, where one child, Elizabeth, was wearing a tiger costume. Elizabeth would not speak to me when she had the tiger costume on, but rather roared emphatically. I asked children around her where Elizabeth was, saying that “all I see is a tiger”. Fiona responded that “she’s in there, but she’s just a tiger right now”. Elizabeth removed the

tiger costume in order to reveal herself to me (saying, “I’m here!”), maintaining that when she put it back on she would become a tiger again.

I would theorize now that the inconsistency between the different conceptions of identity the children were expressing is due to the importance of identity counterfactuals in their imaginative dramatic play. It appears that these identity counterfactuals are centered around the idea of functional properties; that is, what a given individual being can do. The physical props used in dramatic play are not the defining characteristic of a given identity, which is what I assumed the children were believing. Rather, function is what the children are really experimenting with in terms of shifting identity; when they are acting as another being, they are testing out an identity counterfactual, seeing what it would mean to be something other than what they currently are. They are trying to determine what defines an individual, and their focus is on the functional properties that come with a given identity. The props and costumes merely serve as a signal to others in a dramatic play scenario that an identity shift has taken place, allowing the child room to experiment with the functionality of the role. When Walt adamantly stated that his Superman costume gives him superpowers, he was referring to the identity counterfactual that he explores, experimenting with function as a necessary and defining property. When Elizabeth refused to do anything but roar in her tiger costume, she was experimenting with an identity counterfactual and using the costume itself as a tangible visual change to organize her thinking and also signal what she was doing to her playmates. Costumes and props help to organize experimentation with fluid identity, but investigation of function as essential property is what defines this play and helps lead to understanding of a complex topic.

The children recognize this experimentation as a group, but in doing so also seem to understand that there is something deeper to identity. This can be seen in the following exchange surrounding the tiger costume that Elizabeth had been wearing:

Adina: When you put on the tiger suit what happens? Erin?

Erin: You be a tiger.

Adina: Katie, you wear that sometimes. What happens when you put the tiger suit on?

Katie: You roar.

Jake: You're still you but you're roaring and in a tiger costume.

Sage: How do you know you're still you?

Jake: Because when you take the costume off you're still you. And when it's on.

Sage: How do you know that you're still you when it's on?

Emma: You still are you, just in the inside. Like when you put a costume on and some people don't see you, they might think you're not you anymore. But the you is in your body.

The children recognized that what they were changing in terms of identity when they put on the costume is function. Yet, they also seemed to be playing with the notion of an essential property that guaranteed not just consistency of identity, but personhood in the context of our larger line of inquiry. When the concept of minds came up through our engagement with the different gingerbread stories, they latched on to minds as the true essential property or the “you inside you”.

III. Minds

The question of minds came about because of a single line in the story of *The Gingerbread Girl*. The line is, “As the new cookie baked, her mind woke up, and she heard everything”. The Gingerbread Girl’s ability to hear things from inside the oven allows her to formulate a plan for running away. When the children began writing their own stories, the notion of minds were

revealed as something that had risen to the front of their debates on personhood. I organized group stories by selecting a few children to be in each group, and then helping them map out the story they wanted to write. They collectively brainstormed and told me the story they wanted to write, and I recorded their ideas on sheets of paper that the children then illustrated. In all three group stories that were written, there was a mention of minds. Fiona, Valerie, and Erin's story was about several different types of gingerbread creatures: girls, boys, cowboys, stars and hearts. Their story (transcribed word for word) states that "their minds woke up when they were baking. Their feelings woke up too, and their bones". The story written by Emma, Jake, and Daniel, in which they create an entirely new gingerbread character called the Gingerbread Gurgy, states that "when her mind woke up, she jumped out of the oven". In Olson and Tommy's story, their gingerbread character (a firefighter) was "put in a life oven. He grew his mind in there".

Minds became an essential part of the children's definition of personhood. In small group discussions while the children were illustrating their stories, they consistently expressed the view that minds are independent from distinct physical structures. Fiona was in charge of illustrating the page that describes the how the gingerbread beings' minds waking up. As she drew her mind, she revealed deep thinking about the relationship between mind and body that was elaborated on by the other girls:

Sage: Where is his mind?

Fiona: In his head, and outside of him.

Erin: Mine lives in my head.

Sage: Do the gingerbread stars and hearts have minds? They don't have heads.

Valerie: They live in their whole bodies. It's how they think.

Erin: And how they talk. In all of them.

This reveals how these children began to associate minds with specific functional properties that define personhood. This conception grew to be shared by the other children in the class, who expressed things about the mind's relation to what a given being could do as we read the different gingerbread stories repeatedly. Minds came up in play contexts completely outside of designated philosophical inquiry, such as in this conversation that took place when Tommy was building a "gingerbread person" out of kinetic sand:

Tommy: I'm gonna make an x-ray so we can see his mind. Look (*drawing lines on the sand person's body*), there's 1, 2, 3, minds!

Sage: What do his minds do?

Fiona: They help you think.

Tommy: Yeah. What else do minds do?

Fiona: Just think.

Sage: Wow, your gingerbread person has so many minds.

Tommy: He has lots because he thinks a lot. He thinks about different things.

Sage: Does each mind think about the same thing?

Tommy: No, they all think about different ones.

The function of minds and the relationship between mind and body was further explored at the end of the project, when the children were given the opportunity to make gingerbread creatures. Many made cookies that were not shaped like people, such as stars, flowers, and squares. Nonetheless, when we peeked to see how they were baking, Tommy stated that "I can hear their minds in there! They're wiggling around". The other children responded enthusiastically to this, saying that they were excited to talk to their gingerbread cookie.

When asked if their cookies were people the vast majority of the children said yes, because they were convinced that their cookies had developed minds and feelings in the oven but

that they were “just not showing us” . This created a bit of a moral dilemma when the kids were given the option to eat their cookies. Many originally refused, but the lure of sugar lead to some compromise in reasoning. Fiona and Erin ate their cookies and informed me that it was alright because the cookie minds had told them that they “wanted to run in their tummies”. John stared at his cookie for a long time before picking off and eating the candy he had used to decorate it, telling me that “my cookie said it wouldn’t hurt him”. One child, Steven, refused to touch his cookie, saying “He’s a person made of gingerbread”. These struggles reveal how deeply the children were invested in these themes of identity and personhood. And, as it turns out, a child turning down sugar on principle is the ultimate moral high ground.

B. Developmental Change

Outside of the amazing philosophical themes that the children explored, the process of philosophical inquiry led to a huge amount of educational benefits for the children. I witnessed cognitive, social, and linguistic developmental gains, as well as significant advances in literacy skills. In order to establish the educationally viable role that philosophy can play in the early childhood classroom, it is critical to note the specific developmental changes that were observed.

I. Cognitive

From an educational and developmental perspective, integrating philosophy into this preschool’s classroom provided a host of cognitive benefits. In terms of the reasoning of preschoolers, the notion is generally held that preschoolers are chiefly egocentric and have difficulty understanding how the world looks to others (Copple and Brandekamp, 135). While this seemed

evident at the beginning of the project, with children struggling to accept the arguments of others and steadfastly holding given opinions, as time went on I witnessed the growth of an amazing ability to encompass the opinions of others in their understanding. As we painstakingly practiced the skills of active listening in small groups, children began to demonstrate the ability to attend to what others were saying in a large group setting. Not only were they able to focus on another's expression of views, but listening to different views changed their own perspective. At the end of every meeting with the Question Board, children were asked to make their choice and answer the question once again. When asked what their reason was for making a given choice at the end of the meeting, I began to see the reasoning of other group members affecting each individual child's decision. They would change their mind on questions, and then cite one another's reasons as the motivation for changing sides. As Steven told me at the end of one Question Board discussion in which he had changed his mind on the yes-or-no issue we were talking about, "the 'no' people had better reasons". These occurrences clearly demonstrate a jump in cognitive development that was spurred by the process of philosophical discussion.

The method in which the preschoolers understood and responded to questions also showed a shift in cognitive processes. While at the beginning of the project it was difficult to get more than a "just because" response from a "why" question, the children eventually became experts at identifying and expressing their thinking. We spent a lot of time as a group identifying silly reasons and good reasons, and talking about why silly reasons weren't helpful for discussion. Several children also had to be pushed to give responses that were their own, as at the beginning of the project they would frequently choose something "because my dad likes it" or "because my brothers say so". By the project's end, all the children were making arguments based on their own thoughts, consistently providing detailed reasonings when asked a given question,

identifying their assumptions, and relying on foundational knowledge rather than more illogical statements in their reasoning. In a recent conversation with Daniel during a play scenario, he was talking about humans having bones. Without prompting, he told me “I think they have bones because I can feel them under my skin. And my mind tells me that people have bones because I saw it in a book, and because my mind knows people have bones from when I was a baby”. This statement took place naturally in the context of Daniel’s play, whereas at the beginning of this project I would have had to push extremely hard for a response as detailed as that. He provided reasoning that relied on empirical data as well as intuition, and instances as complex as these have become almost commonplace in this preschool classroom.

II. Language and Literacy

I also witnessed developmental strides in the areas of language and literacy development. A chief goal for educators in the preschool years is to scaffold a vocabulary that will allow children to adequately express their thoughts and emotions to others (Copple and Bredekamp 142). The vocabulary of argument filtered in to the classroom, and the children developed the ability to use advanced critical language in the context of their daily lives. In disputes with one another, they used agree/disagree vocabulary to clearly express their feelings and challenge each other. The following exchange took place when Valerie and Walt were arguing over a toy that Valerie had been playing with and Walt angrily grabbed it away from her.

Walt: I want it and I’m taking it because I’m a bad guy!

Valerie: So you’re not a good kid? Because mean kids and bad guys take toys.

Walt: No, I’m a good kid!

Valerie: You can't be a good kid and a bad guy at the same time. That's contradiction.

Walt: I disagree with you!

Valerie: Well, you don't make sense.

Walt: Fine, I'm just a good kid. Not a bad guy.

Walt then calmly returned the toy to Valerie without the need for any adult intervention. This language development empowered the children to resolve their own conflicts as well as de-escalate emotionally intense situations. Many children began verbalizing their reasoning as they were playing, using private speech, as when Daniel discussed bones. The close relation between private speech and thought has been well-documented; it is recognized by educators that private speech formulates a method of thinking about actions and behavior when it becomes internalized (Copple and Bredekamp 143). Evidence of philosophical thinking in language points to changed cognitive powers of reflection.

This project also offered a context for promoting literacy development. When using stories for our discussions, on multiple occasions the children would request to see the book so that they could search for evidence for their claims. They would pick out certain phrases or pictures to back up the idea they were presenting, such as when Tommy searched through *Horton Hears A Who* to find a picture of a Who using a bicycle. He used this as evidence for his claim that the Whos were people, saying that "We ride bikes too!". This became common practice at every discussion that involved a book; the children would request certain parts to be read to them in order to hear important phrases again, search on their own for pictures, and successfully defend their positions using evidence from the text. This is an ability that college students struggle with, and by the end of the project it had become habit for this group of preschoolers. The chil-

dren were also inspired to write their own versions of the Gingerbread Man story, and those stories revealed understanding of critical literacy concepts. Two small groups of children were able to brainstorm ideas for the story and then compile it into a single narrative. Other individual children were able to capture a single narrative concept and illustrate it. In both cases they successfully recalled and tracked the arc of the fairy tale, and modified it in a way that interested them. A number of phrases and concepts expressed in the different versions of the story were identified in the stories that the children wrote and illustrated, showing absorption of literacy and philosophical concepts in a different method. When reading books during the regular classroom routine, Adina reported that it took much longer because the kids were interested in questioning and delving deeper into the ideas that the books presented, saying “They question the reasoning in the books that we read now. They don’t just accept the stories, they point out problems and they want to know why things are presented in the way that they are”.

III. Social

Socially, integrating philosophical inquiry into the classroom developed a culture where open questioning was encouraged. I witnessed a spike in questioning from the children, both of teachers and of one another. They became comfortable with asking multiple and deeper questions because they understood that it was a safe space to do so, where adults wouldn’t simply write off their wonderings. The children also began asking more of one another, especially in disagreements. This class is already relatively advanced in mediating their own conflicts. However, philosophical vocabulary and reasoning seem to have become helpful in de-escalating emotionally intense situations.

As an educator, the process of facilitating philosophical inquiry had a tremendous impact on the way that I interacted with the children in the context of the classroom. I found myself being more engaged, because I knew that questions could be taken to a deeper level that would show me some fascinating aspect of a child's thinking. It assisted in developing relationships with individual children, because philosophical inquiry allowed me to get to know their thought process in a way that would have been difficult to achieve in the classroom alone. Adina stated that "This project has been so great not only for the kids but for me. I always knew kids were really smart, but this just showed me how much they understand about things that we don't normally talk about in a preschool setting. It also taught me that I can ask those deeper questions and it's not over their heads". Using philosophy in a preschool setting has the power to actively engage teachers and allow them to recognize the complexity of the children's thoughts, as well as empower the children to be heard and engage in more advanced thought.

Conclusion

This project brought to light the fact that, contrary to past assumptions on the part of both educators and philosophers, young children are capable of deep philosophical thinking. The critical question going forward is what the best way to do philosophy with young children looks like. The use of emergent curriculum to introduce philosophy seemed to have benefits that could not have been achieved with the more traditional method of introducing philosophy in a rigid and disconnected manner; it allowed the children to put philosophy in a meaningful context for themselves pursue the philosophical interests that were most critical to them, philosophy became part of the classroom culture linguistically and socially, and it was seen as an integrative part of classroom life rather than an extracurricular event detached from the children's daily experience.

However, there are scads of other factors that, if addressed, could enable philosophy for young children to become as effective and beneficial as possible. Demographics, group size, teacher and parent involvement, philosophy in play, and use of materials are all things that deserve further exploration in the process of researching the best way to engage children in philosophy. This group of preschool children are obviously a restrictive sample, but it seems clear that this kind of engagement could be possible for all children if a culturally and developmentally appropriate method is formulated. Perhaps the most important takeaway from the process of using emergent curriculum to implement philosophy for children is that there is a lot more wiggle room in doing philosophy than it appears. These children have shown me, at least, that the process of doing philosophy ought to be adaptable and accessible, a lesson that adult philosophers should take to heart.

Young children doing philosophy is mutually beneficial for educators, philosophers, and the children themselves. In this two-month period, I witnessed incredible social, linguistic, and cognitive leaps in the children that were brought on by the process of doing philosophy. It furthered the educational goals driven by emergent curriculum at the ECEC, unveiling itself as sound educational practice. Though these educational benefits seem more obvious, the philosophy world stands to gain from children practicing philosophy as well. Children lend new voices to age-old debates, and offer valuable perspectives that adult philosophers could never have fathomed. This could help transform the ivory tower community of philosophy, preventing it from being the sole domain of old white men. What's more, it allows adult philosophers insight into where these concepts and questionings begin to occur. Why can a 4-year-old girl express an incredibly detailed brand of mind-body dualism when she has never been introduced to the con-

cept? How did a 3-year-old boy come to think that personhood is granted only after certain abilities have been developed? There is so much to be learned and gained from this integration of early childhood education and philosophy.

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