

Thea Yazbek

PHIL 2143: Philosophy for Children

Dr. Benjamin Yelle

April 22nd, 2020

Extra Credit Reflection

I still remember sitting on my couch, frustrated, trying to find general electives to fulfill requirements and stumbling upon the title of this class, my 9-year-old siblings were sitting right next to me. I asked: “do you know what philosophy is”? They confusingly looked at me, and I let it go. Intrigued – and at this point very frustrated with course registration – I signed up, not having taken a single philosophy course before. I first imagined it was going to be “easy”, thinking “how difficult would it be if I’m going to be reading children’s books?”. Clearly, I was wrong – the good kind.

The first couple of weeks were an introduction to philosophy for children. We went over what philosophy means and how children can benefit from it, even at a young age. I felt like there was some underlying pressure to prove that philosophy can be taught to children, and that we were going to show people how.

When we first started delving into the literature, I admit it was challenging to find the issue at hand, but once I got the hang of it, it was really nice to see how much philosophy content children’s books carried. “Okay but how do you teach those to children?” you might ask, well here comes the heavy work. Our roles in this class were mainly to be what we call discussion facilitators. Part of this role is to come up with questions that would help children think about philosophical issues. The other, more challenging and less “fun” part is to contain these 4 to 9-year-old children while simultaneously trying to guide a discussion about a complex philosophical topic. While this may sound terrifyingly difficult, those discussions were the highlight of this class for me. There is nothing more rewarding than listening to

children you're teaching come up with ideas it took you 2 weeks to think of, in less than 40 minutes. I definitely remember thinking about why the sky is blue, or what it means to be brave when I was a child, but seeing other children work through these dilemmas was very interesting: each and every one of them had a valid point to make about every issue we covered.

I was surprised to see that that the topics we covered were nowhere near the impossible questions most people think of when the word philosophy is mentioned. Social, political and aesthetics philosophies were the most interesting to me, especially because I hadn't thought of those before. One thing I enjoyed in this class was that I was always pushed to think more about a specific topic. I don't remember exactly what I said the first time I voiced an opinion in class, but Prof. Yelle immediately responded with "Yeah but what if...". It was a big "Oh moment" because I was starting to truly understand the definition of philosophy and the reason it's not taught as much as math and science in schools. Over the course of the semester, those responses were training me to construct a full idea with a valid reason that I would be able to argue.

Another personal goal I set for myself was to think about ways I would facilitate a philosophical discussion with children. We were faced with a number of questions and challenges when leading those discussions at the Hernandez, and always reflected back on what worked, what didn't, and how we could improve our next session. That experience pushed me to think about how I would implement the Rules of Philosophy or what kind of teacher I would be. Having the freedom to test new methods with the children helped to explore the different kinds of things one could do in a discussion.

I always had critiques and thoughts about the current education system and having taken this class now, I strongly believe that philosophy not only can, but should be taught to children. Giving them the opportunity to think out loud of things they wonder about every

day would lead them to become critical thinkers and allow them to develop both valid, constructive and composed ideas about the world.

I am surely glad to have been surprised by the turnout of this class, and even by my own progress. Leading discussions with children also helped me construct my own ideas about issues I hadn't explored before. Now that I'm back home, I keep looking back at mine and my siblings' old books to find a central philosophy to think about.