Reflections Spring 2014

University of Washington

Center for Philosophy for Children

Spring News

The Center has had a banner year this academic year! With over 50 faculty, graduate students, undergraduates, and volunteers leading philosophy sessions in Seattle public schools, co-coaching local high school Ethics Bowl teams, and working to develop new relationships with teachers and administrators at various Seattle schools, we have been able to teach philosophy in over 25 classrooms around Seattle this year. Many of these have been weekly or twice monthly classes that have continued all year long, in classrooms with teachers with whom we've worked for years.

We hope you'll like the Center's second newsletter issue!

In the Newsletter

High School Ethics Bowl

In February, the Center hosted the first Washington State High School Ethics Bowl, sponsored by the UW Philosophy Department, Program on Values in Society, School of Law, and College of Arts & Sciences Social Sciences Division, as well as several law firms. An Ethics Bowl is a collaborative yet competitive experience in which student teams analyze a series of wide-ranging ethical dilemmas, deepening their awareness of interesting ethical, legal and philosophical issues.

An article about the event appeared in the Seattle Times.

The competition was held in Savery Hall on Saturday, February 1, 2014, with 22 high school teams participating. Over 200 people attended, including 100 high school students and their coaches and more than 50 volunteer lawyers, judges, faculty, graduate students and undergraduates from around our region.

First place went to **Seattle Academy**, and in April that team advanced, with expenses paid, to the National High School Ethics Bowl at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. The winning team coach, Steve Schroeppel at Seattle Academy, sent us the following email message about their experience:

The NHSEB tournament experience was wonderful all around. The students had a splendid time competing and meeting the kids from other schools all over the country, and the NHSEB folks did a great job of hosting us all. The outcome for us was a little bit crushing, sadly, but not because the team fared badly -- rather because we came agonizingly close to a superb result. The official final results were finally posted today on the NHSEB website, and we finished in a tie for 6th place, which is certainly admirable. The disappointment is that, of the 4 preliminary rounds, we won 2, lost 1, and tied 1. A single point more from either of two of the three judges in the tie round would have put us at 3 wins, and even the round we lost was described by one of the judges as "absurdly close" -- either of those turning out differently would have put us into the semifinals. Argh. Oh well, many of life's best lessons come in defeat, and I know that some day the kids will be able to look back on all they accomplished, with nothing but pride.

This entire ethics bowl experience -- from the initial preparations and discussions, through all the meetings and practicing, through the Washington Ethics Bowl, and then the national tournament -- has been so good in so many ways for all of us involved -- so many opportunities for challenge and serious growth for the students, and loads of enjoyment for everyone. Enormous thanks go out to you and all of your staff and volunteers for launching this whole thing and making it such a superb experience.

Other awards were as follows:

Second place: **Lake Washington High School**
Third place: **Roosevelt High School**
Fourth place: **Chief Sealth High School**
Spirit of the Ethics Bowl (tie): **Lakeside School and STEM High School**

From the Director

The surge in the development of our Center's work this year has been exhilarating and inspiring (and exhausting)! It's especially gratifying to be working with so many talented and committed undergraduate and graduate students, whose enthusiasm about introducing philosophy to children is contagious.

I'm particularly excited about the expansion of our Philosophers in the Schools program, the success of our first High School Ethics Bowl, and our increasing connection with University of Washington's College of Education, made possible in part by our new graduate fellowship program. The growth of our work came home to me this past month, when our annual summer workshop filled up in weeks, with 30 elementary, middle and high school teachers joining us next month.

A fourth grade student recently said to me, "There is so much freedom in philosophy class to think about the things that matter to me, and not to be afraid that I'll say something that's wrong." This gets to the heart of why we do what we do. Taking young people's ideas and questions seriously lets them know that their voices matter, and enhances their confidence and skill in developing and expressing their own points of view. In my view, there aren't many things more important in life than the ability to think well and to trust your own judgment.

- Jana Mohr Lone

Philosophers in the Schools

Faculty, students and volunteers working with the Center led philosophy sessions in over 25 different K-12 classrooms this year, including four elementary, two middle, and three high schools. Recent pieces in the Seattle Times and on Seattle NPR Station KPLU highlighted this work.

Our first philosopher-in-residence program in the Seattle public schools started this fall at John Muir Elementary School and has been made possible by a three-year grant from the Squire Family Foundation. We have been thrilled to have philosopher Karen Emmerman, who received her Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Washington in 2012 and started working with the Center in 2010, as the John Muir philosopher-in-residence this year, and Karen will return to this position next year.

Karen Emmerman - Philosopher in Residence Project

This year, the UW Center for Philosophy for Children received a grant to start a Philosopher-in-Residence program at John Muir Elementary School. The Center has had a strong presence at John Muir for several years and the grant enabled me to spend even more time at the school working with the wonderful teachers and students.

I have been working in a kindergarten, first grade, second grade, and two fifth grade classrooms since the fall. We have tackled a diversity of questions and had tremendous fun thinking together as a community. For example, in all the classrooms we read the book *Let's Do Nothing* (Fucile). In the book two children who have done everything they can think of decide to do nothing. This proves difficult due to the intrusion of thoughts, fidgeting, and breathing. The students from kindergarten through fifth grade thought very carefully about the possibility of doing nothing. Does it count as doing something if your body is performing a process you haven't willed it to do, like breathing? What do we mean when we respond that we're doing "nothing" when someone inquires about what we are up to?

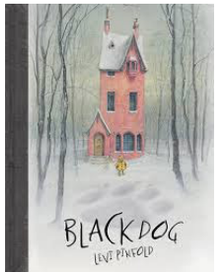
The theme of friendship has also percolated to the surface quite a bit this year. Through stories like *The Giving Tree* (Silverstein) and "*Owl and the Moon*" (Lobel), we have explored the boundaries of friendship. The second-graders, for example, had a robust discussion about whether teachers and students can be friends which enabled us to talk about power dynamics in friendships.

A great feature of the philosopher-in-residence program is that I have the opportunity to work closely with teachers to integrate philosophy sessions into their other classroom work. For the fifth graders, this meant working on argumentation skills while they practiced persuasive writing in their classes and thinking about endangered species while they studied the environmental impact of human behavior on the non-human world in science.

As the school year comes to an end, it is a thrill to hear the students come together as a cohesive community of thinkers. I hear more "I disagree with so and so because..." now than I did in October and am often greeted with "yay, philosophy!" when I walk through the classroom door.

From the Blog

Black Dog



Levi Pinfold's Black Dog tells the story of a black dog that arrives outside a family's home one morning. The father in the family wakes up first and calls the police, reporting that, "There's a black dog the size of a tiger outside my house!" The police officer tells him not to go outside. The mother wakes up next, and yells to her husband that, "There's a black dog the size of an elephant outside!" One by one, the other family members wake up and cower at the sight of the huge black dog.

Finally, the youngest member of the family, called Small ("for short") wakes up and sees that her whole family is hiding from the black dog. "You are such sillies," she says, and opens the front door to confront the black dog. Read More

Picture Books and Aesthetics

I write a lot about picture books and the role they can play in encouraging children to develop their philosophical thinking. I've been thinking about the special role of picture books for inspiring inquiry about aesthetics. Picture books are a unique mixture of literature and visual art, and generate the discovery of meaning through a combined visual and verbal experience. The whole of a picture book - not just its meaning or story, but its illustrations and book cover - provides fertile ground for thinking about aesthetic qualities and questions about art, beauty, ugliness, and elegance.

For example, in a conversation that lasted several class sessions, a group of second grade students and I discussed the picture book *Fish On A Walk*, about which I've written about elsewhere in this blog. The book has no text other than a pair of adjectives for each page spread - "Happy-Sad," "Brave-Afraid," etc. - along with very detailed and often odd illustrations that tell their own stories. The discussion we had included topics that ranged from wondering about whether the paired adjectives were really opposites, to noting how the illustrations left room for many interpretations (Is the rabbit gripping the clarinet scared or brave?), to exploring how the pictures were capable of telling stories. Were the pictures effective in creating meaning? What makes art an effective way to communicate? Read More

Snapshot of a Philosophy for Children Graduate Fellow

Janice Moskalik has been involved with the Center's Philosophers in the Schools Program for a couple of years, and this year she was one of the Center's inaugural Graduate Fellows. Janice writes:

This year I continued working weekly with fourth and fifth grade students at Whittier Elementary - many of whom I'd worked with last year - and added two weekly kindergarten classes. As a teacher, teaching philosophy to kindergarteners was a very new experience for me, although as a parent I have had lots of experience working with kids of this age. Teaching philosophy to elementary school children of very different ages this year has been a fun and rewarding experience for me, and it's exciting as well that Whittier now has philosophy classes at many different grade levels.

This year, I also mentored a number of UW undergraduates who were involved in the department's Philosophy for Children courses. These undergraduate students accompanied me, and sometimes ran lessons, in one or another of the classrooms in which I taught at Whittier. As they became more proficient, some of these students developed thoughtful and original lessons, and taught them to great success. I enjoyed working with such creative and enthusiastic students, and look forward to seeing some of them next year as they continue in the Center's program.

This year, I also had the privilege of developing and teaching a class for fourth and fifth graders with Dustin Groshong, a former undergraduate major in the Philosophy Department, at the Robinson Center's Saturday Enrichment Program. We co-taught for two quarters, which was great fun, and a wonderfully collaborative experience. Dustin has continued teaching a class for fourth and fifth graders for the Robinson Center this quarter, and has developed and is now teaching a Saturday class for middle schoolers as well.

I have enjoyed my time this year as a fellow with the UW Center for Philosophy for Children, and look forward to continuing to work with the Center again next year.

Focus on the Classroom

If It's Not Fun, Why Do It?
Ice cream entrepreneurs Ben and Jerry famously made the question, "If it's not fun, why do it?" the core of their corporate strategy. And while there are no doubt innumerable answers to the question that would reasonably justify doing things that aren't particularly fun, it's nevertheless an excellent question.

Lesson Plan: "What is Fun?" Game
Created by Education Director David Shapiro
Topic/Question: What is fun? What does in mean for something to be fun?
Age Group: 3rd grade and up
Time: about 30-40 minutes
Materials: Each student needs three 3" x 5" notecards or three small sheets of paper: cutting or tearing an 8"x11" piece of paper into three strips can work, too.

Then, pass out to each student an index card or slip of paper - if you can use different colored index cards for each team, it makes the activity easier. Ask each student to write down two activities on the paper, one that is fun, and one that isn't. Instruct them to indicate on the paper which one is the fun activity and which is not.

After students have done this, collect all the papers, making sure to keep them in two stacks, separated by team. Flip a coin to decide which team will go first. Let's say Team A begins. Then, take a paper from Team B's stack, read the pair of activities aloud to team A. The team has to identify which of the two activities listed is the fun one. If they choose correctly, that team earns a point. Go through both stacks, alternating teams until all (or some number) of the papers have been read.

In round two, students are again asked to write down two activities, one that's fun and one that isn't. This time, however, they are trying to trick the other team; their team will earn a point if the other team chooses incorrectly. The wrinkle is that the writer has to sincerely believe that the activity that they identified as fun is indeed fun. They must be prepared to explain why it's fun. So, for instance, suppose a student's pair of activities are: 1) writing a 10-page philosophy essay and 2) riding a roller coaster. Suppose the student has said that writing the essay is the fun activity. He or she has to be prepared to explain why that's the case and if he or she is unable to do so, his or her team won't earn the point for "tricking" the other team.

For round three of the game, students write down just one fun thing, along with three reasons why they consider it fun. This time, the reasons are read and the opposing team tries to come up with what the fun activity is. They earn points for their team for correctly identify the activity. So, for example, suppose that my fun activity was fishing and my three reasons were 1) It's relaxing; 2) You get to eat what you catch; and 3) I get to spend time with friends and family while doing it. The other team would earn a point if they come up with the activity based on the reasons. Sometimes the facilitator will have to be a bit coy; if the activity is specified by name in the reasons, the reason can be modified a bit. (There is some room for creative interpretation on the part of the facilitator here; that's fun, too.)

After each round, you can make time for discussion afterwards; the fun part of this game is not who wins, but rather the shared inquiry that's involved.

Philosophy in Kindergarten

Different Kind of "Testing Patience"

Sara Goering, the Center's Program Director, writes:

In a recent session with Kindergarten students at John Muir Elementary School, we read the story "The Garden" from *Frog and Toad Together* by Arnold Lobel. In this story, Toad envies Frog's garden, so Frog gives him seeds to plant a garden of his own. Toad plants the seeds, and is frustrated when they don't immediately start growing. He yells at them, then tries a softer approach, reading them stories, singing to them, playing them music, and reciting poems. (All the while days pass, and the seeds are soaking up sun and rain). Finally, sprouts begin to poke out of the ground, and Toad tells Frog that making a garden is indeed HARD WORK.

The kids find that last bit very funny, because Toad really didn't need to do all those things to get his seeds to grow. They know that, because they've grown their own beans in the classroom, without all the hoopla. They couldn't believe how impatient he was. We turned our attention to the topic of patience: what is it, why is it good, and why didn't Toad have it? These topics led to an interesting discussion - raised by one of the children -- about whether it counts as exercising patience if you turn your attention to something else while you're waiting. One girl wondered, is a hungry child waiting for dinner, patient if she plays a game instead of bugging her dad while he's cooking? Most of the kids thought so. But what if someone forgets they're even waiting/ being patient, and gets so distracted

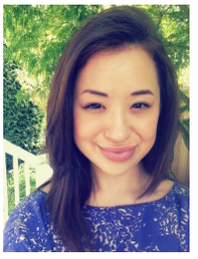
(continued on page 5)

(continued from page 4) that the awareness of the need for patience seems to disappear? Some of the kids were very confident that is the best example of patience, because it means the person was able to completely avoid the responses like frustration, being annoying to others, etc. that often accompany impatience. Others were just as sure that it couldn't possibly be patience, because it didn't make sense to think of the person as waiting in any way at all anymore.

I hadn't thought about patience very thoroughly before the discussion, apart from wishing I had a little more of it. Their comments made me realize that what counts as patience is itself quite philosophically interesting. We delved deeper into the idea as we considered whether one could be too patient and what that might look like. In so doing, we returned to a previous discussion about Martin Luther King Jr., and his insistence that he not be told to wait, to be patient, in his search for justice. The kids were convinced by this example that one could be too patient, and left the discussion pondering what appropriate patience would be for a 5 year old. Good luck to the dinner makers that night!

Interview with Undergraduate Gabriela Hirata

Gabriela "Gobe" Hirata is graduating from the UW Honors program this spring with a double major in Philosophy and Comparative History of Ideas and a minor in Environmental Studies. This spring she is facilitating philosophy sessions in several classrooms at Whittier Elementary School.



What drew you to philosophy for children?

Initially, I was intrigued by the idea of getting to work with kids and hear their perspectives on philosophical questions and ideas. Doing philosophy with children seemed like a very natural interaction to me and one I was genuinely excited about diving into. It wasn't until I started sharing my experiences with others that I realized how surprising this endeavor was to many people. This made me really want to share more about what I was doing and how incredibly enriching the experience was for me and the students I worked with. Explaining how a philosophical conversation with children might go helped me also explain how thrilling and inviting philosophy as a discipline was and could be to anyone at any age or walk of life. Children in particular though, have a keen ability to ponder some of life's questions with such a profound honesty and genuine curiosity that you really can't help but be captivated by their thoughts and reasoning and I think this is what continues to draw me to the practice today.

Please say a little about your experience with philosophy in elementary schools.

In my junior year of college, I took UW's Philosophy for Children class taught by Jana Mohr Lone and David Shapiro and I absolutely loved it. In this class we, as college students, participated in the discussions and activities that Jana and David conducted with children in elementary schools in the Seattle area and I have to tell you, it was one of the best educational experiences of my college career. I looked forward to that class every week, as did my classmates. When I had the opportunity to pick a topic for my senior thesis, I began reflecting on what experiences I really enjoyed at UW and this one definitely stood out. I contacted Jana and soon started shadowing her at John Muir and Whittier Elementary Schools in the greater Seattle area. Quickly, I decided I wanted to do my project on this fantastic experience and started developing a plan to attend weekly elementary school classes and eventually develop lesson plans of my own. Now I am teaching two classes at Whittier Elementary in kindergarten and 4th grade and I couldn't be happier. Each group of students gives a lesson an entirely new life and it is amazing to be a part of the process. I've been able to have fantastic conversations with 4th graders about topics ranging from the aesthetics of costumes to the shifting perception of American identity, and with kindergarteners about things like the nature of lying or the differences in music that make some worth dancing to more than others. It has been an absolutely wonderful experience working with these kids, the highlight of my week, and what inspires me to wonder about the world in new ways.

Do you think being involved with philosophy for children will affect your plans for your future? If so, how?

My involvement with UW's Center for Philosophy for Children has completely shaped my senior year of college and helped guide my plans for the future. I hope to continue working with the Center and the students who continue to fascinate me. Also, I started developing an interest in children's literature doing philosophy with kids and I plan on pursuing this endeavor and writing stories and planning activities for children that I hope to compile into a book to share with others. Finally, this experience has made me really appreciate philosophy in a new way, one that inspires me to question life like a child and engage with others in wonder unlike I ever have before.

Resources for Parents

Raising a Philosophical Child: Session of the American Philosophical Association Committee on Pre-College Instruction in Philosophy APA Pacific Meeting San Diego, CA - Video

Can Animals Think? Talking Philosophy with Children - here's the link: http://philosophynow.org/issues/84/Can_Animals_Think_Talking_Philosophy_With_Children

Help! My Child is a Philosopher - A forum for parents of very thoughtful kids - here's the link: http://www.mychildisaphilosopher.com

Philosophize With Your Children: Ideas for Dialogue

NEW PROGRAM!
The Center is considering a new program to begin next year that would train parents to be "Philosophers in the Schools" volunteers in their children's schools, reading stories and facilitating philosophical discussions in the classroom. If you are interested in this program, please contact Jana at mohrlone@uw.edu

Our Donors

The breadth of the Center's work is made possible by individual donations. This year gifts from donors helped fund the growth of our Philosophers in the Schools program, three Philosophy for Children graduate fellowships, and our ability to run our annual summer workshop for teachers, including food, parking and clock hours, without any charge.

We hope you will consider supporting our work.

You can donate online here.

You can also send a check to the Center for Philosophy for Children, mailed to:
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Your gifts make all the difference - thank you very much!

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