



# Engaged Philosophical Inquiry

A self-directed inquiry group guide

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This inquiry guide is dedicated to teachers and other educators and made freely available for their use. The resource was developed by the Centre for Addictions Research of BC with funding provided by the Government of Canada. Any views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Government of Canada or the Centre for Addictions Research of BC.

Using this guide requires you to read several articles and excerpts. If you do not have access to these required readings, you are invited to contact [carbcan@uvic.ca](mailto:carbcan@uvic.ca).



# Introduction to the Guide

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This guide is meant to support professional learning among educators but may also be useful to parents or other adults who interact with children. It is designed to be used in self-directed inquiry groups but can also be used for personal study. It builds capacity for using engaged philosophical inquiry in drug education but the concepts and skills apply to education generally.

The overall aim of this guide is to develop a ‘philosophical way of thinking’ or a ‘philosophical attitude.’ This means we develop and discuss questions that explore our common beliefs, values and ideas. Such questions do not have a clear or specific answer. Rather the philosophical attitude is created through thinking, reflecting and discussing with others. This way of thinking or attitude requires openness, sensitivity to ambiguity, courage to follow uncommon or unusual (and sometimes annoying) ways of thinking as well as being humble about our own ‘believed knowledge.’ Most of all, this way of thinking requires time. That is, over time and through questioning and engaging in dialogue with others, we can develop this philosophical way of thinking.

Engaged philosophical inquiry (EPI) is particularly appropriate for drug education. It avoids assuming drug use results from a deficit in knowledge and instead helps children develop the skills to process the often conflicting information about drugs to which they are exposed. The teacher’s role in the process is to help children learn to think (not tell them what to think).

In the process of philosophical thinking, we focus on ‘questions’ (rather than answers). One way to categorize questions is to see if they are open or closed. Closed questions have specific answers. They can be textual (the answer is in the text) or intellectual (the answer is already known). Open questions are like an open door to a world of possibility. Again, they can be textual (exploring or speculating about elements within a text) or intellectual (thinking about ideas and their implications or utility). The latter—the open, intellectual questions—are what you will encounter in this guide. They stimulate thinking, open up possibilities and are essential for facilitating philosophical discussions (more details in Session 3).

The material in this guide is arranged as an 8-session inquiry, but you can adapt it to fit your own availability and needs. Each session includes:

- a theory reading and a practice reading
- a short introduction to the material
- discussion questions that emerge out of the readings
- activities to work on individually, with colleagues or in the classroom
- suggestions for reflection and recording thoughts in your journal

The *theory and practice readings* have been carefully selected to provide an accessible introduction to the material and stimulate the application of the ideas into practice. They familiarize you with foundational ideas and theories of philosophical inquiry and how they can be applied to different learning environments. They discuss different philosophical content (e.g., questions) and philosophical methods (e.g., analytic, phenomenological and hermeneutic) to help you with facilitation. They are meant to stimulate thinking not provide all the answers.

Each session starts with an *introduction* to the ideas presented in the readings. This is meant to connect you more to the readings and to stimulate your thinking. You can read the introduction prior to or after the readings.

The *discussion questions* are meant for use after you have read the readings. They were developed to help you engage with the material. You are encouraged to pursue other questions that might present themselves or experiment with other activities. It is important you reflect on questions, engage in dialogue with others and explore different perspectives through an intentional process of inquiry.

The *activities* are designed to embody the praxis of philosophy and the ideas presented in the readings. There are a variety of activities that can be implemented individually or with another teacher or group of teachers or in classroom settings with students.

The *reflection questions* are to deepen your personal inquiry and to help you think more about the implications of the readings for your teaching. They also encourage you to think about what you learned from the readings and the discussions and whether your understanding of the topic was enhanced or changed through the dialogue.

As teachers, you are invited to have a notebook set-up for your coursework. You may divide it into sections that work parallel with the content of this guide (e.g., sections on: ideas/questions on the reading, class discussions and activities, personal reflection, etc.). This helps you keep track of all your thoughts and reflections, what you have learned, and keep a routine. You may suggest the same to your students. They can have a set-up in their notebook or a section in their binder for their reflections or a section for key vocabulary words. This helps them have a recording of all their thoughts and reflections, easily find the space they need to write them down, and maintain a routine. It also gives space to the students who are not comfortable to share their ideas in class to record their thoughts. It is highly recommended to give your students a few minutes at the end of each session to reflect more and write.

I am very grateful to Dr. Barbara Weber, my valued colleague and friend, who generously shared her EPI materials with me as I was preparing this guide. I am also very thankful to Dan Reist for his insightful comments, input, and the stimulating discussions.

## Session 1:

# Matthew Lipman and the Philosophy for Children curriculum

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*“The aim of a thinking skills program such as P4C [Philosophy for Children] is not to turn children into philosophers or decision-makers, but to help them become more thoughtful, more reflective, more considerate and more reasonable individuals.”*

~Matthew Lipman

### Introduction

Matthew Lipman (1922-2010) was an analytical philosopher who focused on logical reasoning and critical thinking. He first studied at Columbia University, and later studied in Europe, where he was influenced by continental philosophy. During his teaching career at Columbia, he became aware of the underdeveloped reasoning skills in his students. He asked himself, “Why?” These students, who had already passed through the school system, should have learned to be more reasonable and critical by now.

He then started developing a curriculum to build logic in young children. Unlike Piaget, Lipman believed that children have the ability to think abstractly from an early age. Together with Ann Sharp, he developed philosophical children’s stories with accompanying manuals for teachers. In the last three decades of his life, Lipman was a professor of philosophy and the director of the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children at Montclair State University. He is recognized as the founder of Philosophy for Children (P4C).

Philosophical practice with children takes an inquiry approach towards learning and teaching. It focuses on students questioning a text or an idea rather than the teacher raising questions and directing the class discussion. Often the teacher and the children sit together in a circle. They read a storybook, watch a video clip, engage with a newspaper article or in some other way stimulate their interest in a subject. Together with the students, the teacher creates “the community of inquiry” where the students are engaged in an open discussion, posing questions and exploring ideas. If the class is large, they may split into small groups or pairs to discuss questions before they come back together for a whole-class discussion.

Through participation in the philosophical discussion, the students inevitably encounter others’ perspectives. This helps them understand the complexity of any issue. The ultimate goal is to explore issues and ideas in a collaborative, non-judgmental fashion while moving towards sounder reasoning and mutual understanding and developing the capacity to be critical and creative yet community-minded and caring thinkers (Lipman, 1991).



If you do not have access to the following readings or any required reading in this guide, you are invited to contact [carbvcvan@uvic.ca](mailto:carbvcvan@uvic.ca).

### Theory reading

Lipman, M. (2009). Philosophy for children. Some assumptions and implication. In E. Marsal, T. u. Dobashi and B. Weber (Eds.), *Children Philosophize Worldwide* (10-27). Frankfurt am Main: Lang

## Practice reading

Lipman, M. (1996). Philosophical discussion plans and exercises, *Analytic Teaching*, 16(2), 64-77.  
<http://journal.viterbo.edu/index.php/at/article/view/635/422>

## Discussion questions

1. Do you think children are able to discuss abstract concepts or have the capacity to reason philosophically?
2. Do you agree that children have a right to their own point of view and should be allowed to express it? Why or why not? What is the role of the educator or parent in this process?
3. What do you think about the statement, “Children can teach other children”?
4. Good questions can spark ideas and lead to discoveries – personal or otherwise – like Isaac Newton’s, “Why should the apple always fall to the earth?” In this session’s theory reading, Matthew Lipman’s questions about his students’ lack of logical thinking led him to design a philosophical inquiry program for youngsters. How do you see the role of asking *good questions* in education? Have you ever asked a question that made your students look at something from a new perspective? If so, what made it work?
5. In his paper, Lipman talks about “caring thinking.” What does “caring thinking” mean to you? Can you give an example? Is thinking always caring and is caring always thinking?
6. During inquiry and dialogue in a philosophical discussion, self-correction may happen. How do you know when this is happening in your classroom? What are ways to motivate children to self-correct?
7. Empathy and critical thinking are complementary concepts that work together. How can we empathize when we explore, analyze and think critically about each other’s ideas?
8. How can you create a “community of inquiry” in your classroom? What are first steps? Are there things you fear as a teacher? What would be the worst thing that could happen? What could you do if that happens?

## Activity: Developing a discussion plan



There are examples of discussion plans in the practice reading for this session.

Choose a topic related to drugs or drug use. Find a stimulus (e.g., a storybook, video clip, song, or picture) that somehow relates to your topic. Then develop some open-ended (rather than content-based) questions that will encourage dialogue related to the topic and the stimulus. Pair with a colleague and exchange your discussion plans. Give each other feedback.

## Reflection journal

- What did you find the most interesting, surprising or problematic in this session’s readings and discussion?
- How can you integrate Lipman’s approach into your own teaching?
- What did you learn from this session’s readings and the discussion?
- Is there a question or a thought that is still lingering in your mind? If so, what is it?

## Session 2:

# John Dewey and the philosophical community of inquiry

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*I believe that education, therefore, is a process of living and not a preparation for future living. ~John Dewey*

### Introduction

John Dewey (1859-1952) was an American pragmatic philosopher and educator, and a professor at the Universities of Michigan, Minnesota and Columbia. He was an advocate of democracy and characterized democracy as a way of living and communicative experience. To develop a democratic community, Dewey emphasizes two factors. First, the interests of the whole group – everyone is involved and responsible to build the community where all the members share common interests. If some members or groups within the community seek their own advantage or private gains, there is no democratic community. Second, freedom of communication, open interaction and cooperation between groups is essential.

In such a community, *knowledge* is public, distributed and shared, and *thinking* is part of a conjoint activity. That is, thinking is a response to uncertainty, hesitation or doubt that we usually address through communication and dialogue (rather than monologue). It is through thinking/inquiry, communication and interaction with the world around us in dialogue that we acquire meaning. This kind of communicative interaction is what Dewey sees as education – the kind of education that leads to growth.

More specifically, Dewey talks about education in relation to experience. He does not mean that all experiences are equally educative. Rather, experiences that open up possibilities in the future, that help us do what we feel like doing in the present, and that show us the kind of efforts and perseverance required in overcoming obstacles are *educational*. On the other hand, experiences that have the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience, produce lack of sensitivity and responsiveness, promote the formation of a careless attitude, or tend to make us repetitive or scattered when pursuing meaning are *mis-educative*.

To Dewey, it is important to develop a critical, inquiring and reflective way of thinking and living. We need to be aware of our thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. We become aware of our beliefs, prejudices and opinions only when challenged and faced with differences or when we are asked what we think and have to explain ourselves, i.e., engage in authentic dialogue.

We gain freedom through others, because public space offers us different ways of engaging in the world. Dewey says that we should engage in inquiry, reflection, and critical thinking through school education. We need to turn our schools into communities of inquiry, which requires that, “... we foster communication among our students instead of isolating them from one another; that we engage them in open inquiry rather than simply teaching them by authority; that classroom activity and school life should expand students’ interests by building upon them; that schooling should build on cooperation and reciprocity of interest rather than focusing upon competition and social division...” (Cam, 2000, pp. 165-166)

### Theory reading

Cam, P. (2000). Philosophy, democracy, education: reconstructing Dewey. In In-Suk Cha (Ed.), *Teaching philosophy for democracy* (158-181). Seoul: Seoul University Press.

## Practice reading

Cam, P. (1998). *Thinking together*. Sidney: Hale & Iremonger.

## Discussion questions

1. According to Dewey, a democratic community takes into account *the interests of the whole group*, and creates *freedom of open interaction*. How can you create such a democratic community in your classroom? Think of some strategies and explain.
2. What do you think about the concept of *reflective thinking* proposed by Dewey and Lipman? How important do you think reflective thinking is in learning?
3. Dewey emphasizes freedom of inquiry, welcoming diverse views, freedom of communication, and active participation of diverse groups in a democratic society. In other words, only when we confront diversity and differences and are asked what we think can we become aware of our own prejudices and biases. How can we cultivate such *diversity* and *inquiry* in our classroom, school or community?
4. In the paper, Dewey's definition of education is described as "reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience." In other words, education is described as growth. What do *you* think about the role of education in a human being's growth?
5. In a community of inquiry, it is important to engage the members in a dialogue rather than monologues. What can you do to encourage dialogue in your classroom?
6. How can you create a safe community of inquiry for your students to think and speak? Think about the possible *visible* and *invisible* behaviours that may risk the safety of a community.
7. How have Dewey's ideas influenced our current school system? How could they still bring further change?

## Activity 1: Creating a safe community of inquiry

Discuss the topic of community with your students. Ask them how they define community, what the features of a community are, and whether people have different roles and responsibilities in a community.

- Explore what kinds of communities they know (e.g., home, school, sport teams, etc.)
- Ask them how they can make a community safe (both physically and emotionally). What does "a safe place" mean to them? (Write their ideas on the board and keep them for the last question below). Ask for examples of safe communities.
- Discuss what kinds of behaviour and attitudes can bring a conversation forward and what can hinder the fruitful development of a discussion.
- Invite the class to examine the above ideas for a "safe community." Then have them co-construct a set of rules or guidelines for their community based on some of these ideas. Write the rules/guidelines on a big poster and post it on the wall. Share your experience and community rules with your colleagues.

## Activity 2: Conceptual tools in a community of inquiry

Choose a conceptual tool (e.g., SWAP, TARGET or BRIDGE) from chapter 6 of *Thinking Together* by Philip Cam. Develop an activity related to "drug use" based on the tool of your choice. Share it with your colleagues.

### **Activity 3: Evaluating a community of inquiry**

Develop some questions to evaluate your classroom community of inquiry (e.g., How well did students listen to each other? Did they stay on track during the discussion?) Share these with your colleagues.

### **Reflection journal**

- What did you find the most interesting, surprising or problematic in this session's readings and discussion?
- How can you integrate John Dewey's or Philip Cam's ideas into your own teaching?
- What did you learn from this session's readings and the discussion?
- Is there a question or a thought that is still lingering in your mind? If so, what is it?

# Session 3:

## The philosophical question

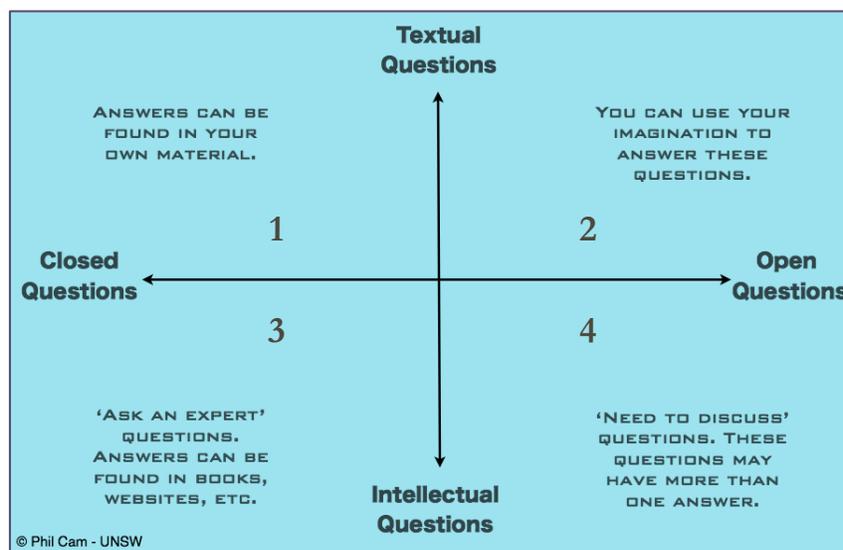
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*“To be able to question means to want to know, and to want to know means to know that one doesn’t know.” ~Hans-Georg Gadamer*

### Introduction

Questions can be categorized in different ways. For example, we might say that there are questions that can be answered and questions that cannot be answered. Another classification involves rhetoric, pedagogical, open and slant questions. In 2006, Philip Cam developed the *Question Quadrant* created by the intersection of two axes: closed to open, and textual to intellectual. Quadrant 1 consists of closed, textual questions or the reading comprehension ones. In quadrant 2, there are textual, open questions that encourage speculating from the text. Quadrant 3 has closed, intellectual questions or factual knowledge questions. And quadrant 4 contains intellectual, open questions – inquiry questions.

Cam argues this question quadrant is useful for practical purposes. Some questions may overlap in quadrant boundaries. Furthermore, an apparent closed question can be reframed as an open question by an experienced facilitator. In a community of inquiry, it is important to understand what kind of knowledge or truth one is looking for and what the intention of the questioner is. For Gadamer, “the essence of a question is to open up possibilities and keep them open” (1960, p. 304). This happens when the questioner is *open* to new insights and possibilities. This openness and readiness helps the questioner to grow.



According to this session’s readings, one needs to know one’s own hurdles and ignorance. This awareness of one’s poverty of knowledge/insight can lead to inquiry and questioning things around as well as one’s own beliefs. Such a person needs to be able to hold beliefs and opinions in suspension and depart from a familiar place into an unfamiliar one. This departure needs bravery and wisdom. Gadamer says that such departure, which can lead to a ‘hermeneutical experience’ needs openness. The questioner must be open, considering different possibilities, new ways of experiencing oneself and the world. This, Gadamer describes as expanding horizons: “the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point”

(1960, p. 307). In other words, it means to go beyond what is close by. As one moves, one's horizon changes too.

It is essential that one becomes aware of one's horizon and knows that by inquiring and moving toward something unfamiliar, the horizon changes. He or she can see things beyond what is nearby and encounter others. But it is not easy to push the boundaries, put one's beliefs on hold, be vulnerable and open to new experiences and meanings—as Gadamer says, “Those kind of experiences are always an adventure and, like every adventure, they are dangerous” (cited by Weber & Wolf, 2016).

## Theory reading

Weber, B. and Wolf, A. (2016). Questioning the question: how to cultivate philosophical questioning in a community of inquiry. In M. Gregory, J. Haynes & K. Murriss (Eds.), *The Routledge international handbook of Philosophy for Children*. London: Routledge.

## Practice reading

Scholl, R. (2010). The question quadrat. A stimulus for negotiated curriculum. *Primary & Middle Years Educator*, 8(2) 3-16.

## Discussion questions

1. Using Gadamer, discuss how we can better understand each other and have a ‘hermeneutical experience’?
2. What do you think about Philip Cam’s question quadrant? In what ways do you think it can be helpful? What could its limitations be?
3. What are some examples of ‘rhetoric’, ‘slant’, and ‘open’ questions? What other forms of questions can you think of?
4. What kind of questions are asked today in schools and by whom? What is the purpose of those questions?
5. What kind of a power structure is being established by those questions?
6. What kind(s) of questions are *you* interested to ask when you are in the classroom?
7. What kind of questions do children usually ask? Are they different from the kinds of questions asked by adults? If so, in what ways?
8. Why do you think there isn’t more space for open ended questions in schools today?
9. How does the intention of the questioner and listener change the quality of a question?
10. Did the readings/discussions on different kinds of questions have any impact on you? If so, in what ways?

## Activity 1: *Dead Poets Society*

Watch this short [video clip](#) from the movie *Dead Poets Society* and discuss the following questions:

- How does this make you feel as an educator?
- How would you describe the teacher Robin Williams portrays in this clip?
- What kind of teaching and learning approach does the clip criticize?
- How would you describe the role of the teacher in this clip?
- When having discussions, how would you describe the role of the facilitator in a community of inquiry?

## Activity 2: Developing different types of questions

From *Lunch with Lenin and other stories* by Deborah Ellis, read the short story “The cactus people” (2008, pp. 151-169) and do the following:

- Develop a few questions for each quadrant of the Question Quadrant. Share your questions with another teacher.
- Can you turn one (or more) of the closed questions into an open one?
- What is your biggest question in life (an open question)?

## Reflection journal

- What did you find the most interesting, surprising or problematic in this session’s readings and discussion?
- What implications do this session’s readings have for your teaching?
- What did you learn from this session’s readings and the discussion?
- Is there a question or a thought that is still lingering in your mind? If so, what is it?

## Session 4:

### Philosophy of childhood

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#### Introduction

Gareth Matthews (1929-2011), born in Argentina, was an American philosopher who specialized in ancient philosophy and philosophy of children. He was a professor at the Universities of Minnesota and Massachusetts Amherst. Matthews had a high respect for young minds and wrote stories for children that would facilitate discussion around philosophical concepts. His stories usually have an open end, allowing children to finish them by themselves according to their own thoughts and solutions.

Matthews challenges common assumptions and dogma about children. He demonstrates that children have the capacity to think about questions that deal with knowledge, values, and life. He wants to encourage adults to craft such philosophical questions that they can reflect on with children. Matthews argues that children are interested in asking philosophical questions—the kind of questions that do not have a definite answer and to which adults cannot provide answers. He takes children’s questions very seriously and believes that children’s uncertainty is much like the philosopher’s.

Matthews disapproves of Piaget’s theory of cognitive development that states children develop slowly according to a pre-established schedule. There is no doubt that Piaget was one of the most influential psychologists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and his theory freed us from the narrow vision of children espoused by earlier psychologists. But the problem is that his developmental theory does not leave any room for children’s philosophical thinking. The theory underestimates children’s mental ability and assumes that young children are unable to think about abstract concepts or engage in complex reasoning. This ignores children’s real capacity to do philosophy.

#### Theory reading

Matthews, G. (1994). *Philosophy of childhood*. Cambridge: University of Massachusetts Press, Chapters 3 & 4: pp. 30-53.

#### Practice reading

Aries, P. (1962). The discovery of childhood. In *Centuries of childhood* (33-49). New York: Vintage Books.

#### Discussion questions

1. What do you think about Piaget’s theory of cognitive development? What assumptions about childhood do you see in his theory?
2. Gareth Matthews criticizes Piaget’s theory of cognitive development because he sees children differently. In what ways does Matthews regard children differently? How does he challenge Piaget’s assumptions?
3. What do you think about including children in making decisions at home or in school?
4. What are some of the general assumptions about children/childhood (e.g., children should be disciplined)? And, what do *you* think about these assumptions?
5. In ancient Greek, children were associated with nature and the gods. How do you think children are regarded in North American culture today? How about other cultures in the world?
6. How do our ideas and beliefs about children/childhood affect the way we interact with children? How about our own childhood memories?

7. How can we deepen our interactions with children?
8. In a discussion with grades 4-6, a student asked, “What is my power? Why do adults have more power than children?” Think about these questions and explain some of the things that make children think of themselves as powerless, helpless or weak.

### **Activity 1: Being a child**

Sit down in a comfortable position and try to reflect on your childhood memories. Take a piece of paper and write down your ideas after reflection:

- What do you remember? When was it? What was the situation? Were you interacting with someone?
- Now try to remember who you were back then. Were you the same person or a different person? Were your feeling and way of thinking similar or different?
- How did you relate to adults? How did they treat you?
- Did you ever feel you were treated unfairly because you were a child? What did it feel like?
- Is the child that you were back then still within you? If so, what is it thinking and feeling?
- How can you become the adult that the child back then would have loved?

### **Activity 2: Assumptions about children**

During this session, try to see if you can find any “assumption about children” in conversations you hear around yourself or in media, on the internet, in ads/commercials, books, posters, or other kinds of images about children. Write them down with the contexts in which you found them.

Watch [this video](#) and imagine how children must feel if they are treated this way. Analyze the language that is used and facilitate a discussion around this kind of language used by adults.

### **Reflection journal**

- What did you find the most interesting, surprising or problematic in this session’s readings and discussion?
- In which way did you find this session’s articles and discussions helpful for your teaching or facilitating?
- What did you learn from this session’s readings and the discussion?
- Is there a question or a thought that is still lingering in your mind? If so, what is it?

## Session 5:

# Critical thinking and sound arguments

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### Introduction

This session's readings focus on critical thinking and judgement in inquiry. Critical thinking is applied thinking. That is, it includes both the process of understanding and the product. Critical thinking refines the end product or the meaning that a discipline produces. In general, we can define critical thinking as thinking that 1) facilitates judgement because it 2) relies on criteria, 3) is self-correcting, and 4) is sensitive to context.

The *criteria* are reasons or a basis for comparison. Good reasons are relevant and strong. By means of reasons, we can justify and *defend* our thinking. Good critical thinkers aim to discover the weaknesses of their own thinking and then resolve what the problem is. Thus, critical thinking is *self-correcting*. It is also *sensitive to context*, particularities and uniqueness. In critical thinking we need to be aware that each situation or behaviour should be examined on its own terms and not forced into some general set of rules and regulations.

In school, we want students to not only think but also exercise good judgment so that they are able to weigh and grasp what a text states, assumes, implies or suggests. This needs good reasoning and inquiry skills. Such critical thinking enables students to both draw meanings from a text and impart meaning to what they write and say. Moreover, it is equally important that other kinds of thinking such as *creative* and *caring* thinking are practiced along with *critical* thinking.

### Theory reading

Lipman, M. (2003). Education for critical thinking, In *Thinking in education* (205-243). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

### Practice reading

Gardner, S. (2009). *Thinking your way to freedom: A guide to owning your own practical reasoning*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, Section 1: The Possibility of Freedom, pp. 9-42.

### Discussion questions

1. What is knowledge to you?
2. Are there different types of knowledge (e.g. knowledge of experimental science, perceptions, or intuitions)?
3. What kind of knowledge is of value/the most valuable to you?
4. What is the price of knowledge (e.g. tuition fee? time? efforts? etc.)
5. Do you think that the knowledge we gain and the kind of thinking we are engaged in schools prepare us for the decisions we need to make in everyday life? Explain.
6. Matthew Lipman explains that critical thinking is "thinking about thinking" (p. 211). For example, a "critical geologist" thinks about rocks and the assumptions that people have made about rocks in their thinking. What do you think a "critical teacher" would be?
7. Do you think there is a difference between knowing and understanding? Explain. (e.g., I know Spanish/I understand Spanish or I know Paul/I understand Paul).
8. What makes a reason a good reason? Explain using an example (cf. Susan Gardner's discussion of counter example/falsification, local and global sufficiency).

### **Activity 1: Exercising critical thinking**

Choose a topic (e.g., “taking turns,” as discussed in “Education for Critical Thinking,” pp. 221-222) and develop an exercise for your students to practice critical thinking. The exercise can display the *sensitivity to context* (as in “taking turns”) or it can be related to other features of critical thinking skill, such as *self-correction*, *guided by criteria*, or *making judgment*. Share your exercise with another teacher and discuss it together.

### **Activity 2: Experiencing negation**

Divide your class into small groups of 5-6. Come up with a controversial question that can be answered with “agree”/”disagree” or “yes”/”no” (e.g. Does drug prohibition contribute to adolescent drug use?).

- Ask your students to discuss the question in their small groups and express their agreement or disagreement, giving reasons and supporting their positions
- Discuss the reasons with the class as a large group
- Later, discuss the experience with your inquiry group or other colleagues

### **Reflection journal**

- What did you find the most interesting, surprising or problematic in this session’s readings and discussion?
- What implications do this sessions’ readings have for your teaching?
- What did you learn from this session’s readings and the discussion?
- Is there a question or a thought that is still lingering in your mind? If so, what is it?

## Session 6:

### Eckeard Martens and the Five Finger Model

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“...the philosophical questions which are at stake are not just pseudo-problems, but rather questions that deeply influence the way we think, act and treat others.” ~Eckeard Martens

#### Introduction

Eckeard Martens is a German philosopher who studied Ancient Greek and Latin as well as pedagogy. He was a high school teacher for several years and then got his PhD in Philosophy and taught at the University of Hamburg. Martens discusses the notions of philosophical content, philosophical attitudes and philosophical methods. In terms of *philosophical content*, he says that philosophical questions explore common beliefs or “doxa.” Such questions do not have a single answer. *Philosophical attitude* is a disposition that one acquires and is about creating a space of openness and wonder, sensitivity for ambiguity or situations of conflict, readiness and courage to follow uncommon or unusual ways of thinking, tolerating the “itch” caused by unexpected trains of thoughts, being humble about one’s own “believed knowledge” and living with preliminary answers.

Martens believes that everyone is capable of posing a basic philosophical question about things that matter in life such as happiness, justice, creation, death, and the like. However, what is lacking is “the capacity for pursuing such questions and their possible answers while increasing understanding, in order not to arrive at an opinion just *somehow*, but to make it *as comprehensive, clear, and well founded as possible*” (2007, p.33). To address this problem, he suggests philosophical methods and his Five Finger Model. In this model, he explains that philosophizing with children can use either of these five methods or a combination of them. The five methods are:

1. **Phenomenology:** to perceive and describe how something appears to us – describing the problem precisely and thoroughly with as little interpretation as possible
2. **Hermeneutics:** to try to understand how someone else thinks and feels as well as to understand oneself – making oneself aware of their own and others’ preconceptions while interpreting a problem and yet trying to create shared space of understanding
3. **Analytic:** to think critically, look for criteria, logical coherency, clarification of thoughts – examining the interpretations in order to better comprehend the problem
4. **Dialectics:** to evaluate different perspectives and through this process to arrive at an overarching synthesis – while analyzing, be engaging in a dialogue (rather than monologues) and search for the very best grounded solution that can still be revised
5. **Speculation:** to imagine and go beyond the empirical and practical experiences – during the dialogue, imagining, inventing or creating alternative thoughts, ideas or solutions; going beyond methodology or mere instrumental reason in order to create space for new and unusual thoughts

#### Theory reading

Martens, E. (2007). Can animals think? The five most important methods of philosophizing with child. *Thinking: The Journal for Philosophy for Children*, 18(4), 32-35.

## Practice reading

Marsal, E. (2007). Didactic implementation of Ekkehard Martens' five finger model. Example: the unit "Who am I? Dealing with capabilities." *Thinking: The Journal for Philosophy for Children*, 18(4), 19-22.

## Discussion questions

1. In the theory reading, Martens states that philosophy is seen differently by two groups: those who see philosophy as a professional subject being taught in universities, and those who approach philosophy as something accessible to everyone. What do *you* think about philosophy?
2. What are some of the philosophical questions you have heard from children (questions with no single answer, questions that question the common beliefs, or questions about life, death, justice, etc.)? How did you/others address those questions (if they were addressed)?
3. As a teacher, how do you think you can create a space where philosophy is practiced as part of the classroom culture, i.e., students can ask questions about everyday life and its uncertainty and they have the desire to know?
4. Speculation is a way to "widen the horizon" and going beyond immediate facts. It creates room for fantasizing and for an intuitive-creative way of thinking. How can you encourage speculation or the asking of speculative questions in your classroom?

## Activity: Implementing the Five Finger Model

Using Eckehard Martin's Five Finger Model, develop a lesson on the topic of "risk" and implement it in your class. To get started, find a stimulus (a storybook, video clip, etc.) that deals with risk in some way (see Eva Marsal's example on "identity" as a sample). Then develop some questions for the 5 categories of *phenomenology* (looking, observation), *hermeneutics* (understanding, interpretation), *analytics* (deepening, examination of interpretations), *dialectics* (back and forth), and *speculation* (imagining).

- Share your lesson plan with another teacher before implementing it in your class
- Discuss it with the same teacher after your implementation/facilitation

## Reflection journal

- What did you find the most interesting, surprising or problematic in this session's readings and discussion?
- How can you integrate five finger model into your own teaching?
- What did you learn from this session's readings and the discussion?
- Is there a question or a thought that is still lingering in your mind? If so, what is it?

# Session 7:

## Phenomenology

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### Introduction

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) was a French philosopher who was interested in the constitution of meaning in human experience. He wrote on perception, art, and politics. He believed that perception plays an important role in understanding the world as well as engaging with the world, and he emphasized the body as the primary source of knowing the world.

Phenomenology (*phainomenon* – to shine, to appear) is the study of what we perceive/experience and how those perceptions become meaningful. Phenomenologists try to go back “to the things themselves” (Edmund Husserl) as they appear to us and before we categorize or name those appearances. Merleau-Ponty says, “Consciousness is being at the thing through the medium of the body” and that our consciousness always works within an *intention*. In other words, things around us make sense in the light of our intentions. We do not see things naked or “in themselves.” Thus, one learns a concept (such as flower or paper) in its own context and in relation to what one can do with it and one’s bodily engagement with it. That is, embodiment and concept formation are intertwined – we don’t learn concepts in isolation, but always as part of our bodily engagement in a context which discloses a *particular meaning* of that concept to us.

According to Merleau-Ponty, our body is like a vehicle that engages us with the world. It is not an obstacle that stands between us and the world. As children, we very much rely on our *sensual* experiences and so we learn through bodily engagement. As Kant says, we are blind conceptually in the early years of our lives, i.e., we have not developed concepts or terms for what we experience, yet we have strong perceptions. As adults, we have a more developed range of concepts and vocabularies while our perceptions can fade away through too much conceptualization. Thus, children, in comparison with adults, have less conceptual experience, though they have stronger perceptions.

In a phenomenological community of inquiry, the participants are encouraged to dive into the complexity of a phenomenon while working with others and understanding themselves in relation to others and the world. In such a community, we are able to refine both our *perceptions* and *concepts* as we go back to the things themselves through the medium of the body. By using our senses and engaging with others through listening and speaking, we enhance our concepts, creating new layers of awareness and perceptions/experiences. The important thing in a community of inquiry is to put our own concepts in suspension so that new concepts and experiences can emerge.

### Theory and practice reading

Weber, B. (in press). Phenomenology as a method for facilitating philosophical inquiry with children: Assumptions, approaches and aspirations. In N. Fletcher (Ed.), *Philosophy for Children from a Canadian Perspective*. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press.

### Discussion questions

1. Phenomenology is defined as perceiving and describing the way(s) that something appears to us. It is about going beyond concepts and looking at the “things themselves.” What is the meaning of phenomenology to you or how do *you* see it?

2. In her paper on phenomenology, Weber states that Philosophy for Children should not be limited to critical thinking in a way that logic is the focal point nor should it be practiced as *only* having a good time. What do you think about this? How do *you* think philosophical inquiry with children should be practiced?
3. One of the important criteria in practicing philosophy with children is to develop a philosophical attitude, i.e., “the readiness and courage to follow uncommon or unusual ways of thinking, the toleration of the kind of irritation caused by unexpected ways of thinking as well as the readiness to continuously question one’s beliefs and actions.” How do you think you can foster such a philosophical attitude among your students and/or within yourself? Explain.
4. In the paper, we read that children, compared with adults, have less *conceptual experience*, though they have stronger *perceptions*. Weber encourages us to refine both our perceptions and concepts by a) going beyond our concept-based beliefs and diving into the actual phenomenon and b) speaking about our fresh experience of that phenomenon. Through speaking about this new experience of the phenomenon, we shed light on a new side of that phenomenon—the side that was in the shade. As a teacher, how do you think you can help the students to experience this two-fold process and create new ways of speaking to deepen their experience?
5. In a community of inquiry, it sometimes happens that we do not know how to go forward with a topic. In other words, we need to put our concepts and their attached beliefs into suspension in order to open the space for emerging new concepts and meanings. How is such suspension helpful? What happens when we bring our beliefs and values into suspension or put them on hold?

### Activity 1: Reflection

To do some phenomenological exercise, ask your students to undertake some observations while they are in class:

- Close your eyes and describe the positioning of your body. How do you know the position of your legs, arms, feet, etc.? Where would you locate the center of your body? Where do you locate your consciousness?
- Now open your eyes and pick up something on the table before you. How do you position yourself as you grab the object? How is your body involved in this project?
- Look around the classroom. *What* do you see and *how* do you see the things?
- Look at the ceiling. What colour do you see?

### Activity 2: What do you see?

Ask your students, “What colour are the clouds?” Take all different answers, and then watch [this video clip](#) and discuss the following questions with your students:

- Where does colour (or other things such as shape, size, movement, etc.) originate?
- How is the concept of whiteness created?
- Do you think it is a problem if you and your friends see things differently? What about the other concepts such as love, hate, happiness, friendship?
- If you don’t see it a problem, can you imagine a situation in which it would be a problem?
- Do you think this understanding of seeing things/concepts differently would get more complicated with different cultures? Give examples.
- Should we negotiate when we disagree with what we see or when we see things differently?

### Activity 3: Lifeworld

Our implicit knowledge (from our personal, cultural contexts) influences the way we see, interpret and understand. Choose one or more of the following exercises and explore them with your inquiry group.

- Describe a forest a) as you walk through it, b) when you walk through the forest with your friend, c) from the perspective of a forestry expert, d) from the perspective of a child, and e) from the perspective of a deer.
- Describe how people living in different cultures with different beliefs might view alcohol, cannabis, or tobacco. Why might people in some cultures value a particular substance? Why might some substances be deemed unacceptable in certain cultures while valid in others?
- Take a partner and describe an object to him/her – without ever using its name – as precisely as possible and try to integrate all the known and imaginable connections to other objects or people. The object has to be integrated in the world in a way that others can guess the object. Now describe an object by only speaking about what it is not.

### Reflection journal

- What did you find the most interesting, surprising or problematic in this session's readings and discussion?
- How can you integrate phenomenological approach into your own teaching?
- What did you learn from this session's readings and the discussion?
- Is there a question or a thought that is still lingering in your mind? If so, what is it?

## Session 8:

# Hermeneutics

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*“It is enough to say that one understands differently if one understands at all. ~Hans-Georg Gadamer*

### Introduction

This session’s reading is about Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics as applied to education. Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) was a German philosopher whose philosophical work was focused on uncovering the nature of human understanding. Hermeneutics (from: Hermes, the messenger god responsible for changing the unknowable into a form that humans could understand) is about understanding how others think and feel and creating a shared space of understanding while being open to the otherness of the others. It is also about understanding oneself; that is, to be aware of one’s own prejudices and beliefs, because our own unrecognized prejudices or beliefs can make us deaf to new ideas and meanings.

When we are listening to someone or reading a text, we are often looking at the presented idea and interpreting it or critiquing it from a particular point of view (based on our own beliefs). Hermeneutics challenges us to stay open to the otherness of the speaker or the text and try to make space for new ways of thinking and new ideas. Gadamer says that understanding occurs when we try to achieve a “merging of horizons.” This involves staying open to another point of view while remaining aware of our own different point of view. In reaching an understanding, we must be careful not simply to assimilate the other’s meaning into our own horizon of understanding.

In a hermeneutically based community of inquiry, it is really important to *listen attentively*. Sometimes the participants get very excited about their new ideas and so they do not listen to other people’s ideas. Or they get occupied by the presence of a superior person and they try to convince him or her of their opinion. While it seems human nature to get enthusiastic about our ideas, Gadamer says that it is more human to listen attentively and leave the space open to be reached by the other. Also, in a community of inquiry, it is important to practice (by active listening) not to stray from the speaker’s track because sometimes we can become overwhelmed with an idea of our own.

In addition to active listening, it is important to *be open* to others’ ideas and listen with care and warmth. So the other knows that the listener is not looking for any inconsistency, incompleteness, or poor reasoning in the other’s argument, but is genuinely listening and having a conversation. In such conversations, the focus is not on arguing against one another or debating but is more about raising questions that opens new possibilities. In other words, the emphasis is on the exchange of ideas and establishing a solidarity that can be felt between the speaker and the listener.

In Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics, the focus is on questions (rather than answers); and those questions are authentic and meaningful that are provoked by an inner yearning; that is, they are asked for the purpose of *yearning the truth*. This requires the questioner to know that he or she doesn’t know. And this is the existential state of children. As we grow older, we start adopting different messages, values, and prejudices of our social and cultural world. In a community of inquiry, we then need to put these beliefs into suspension and experience vulnerability. But children already exist in a constant state of suspense. Therefore, in such a

community, we need to stand face to face with children in nonhierarchical encounter (we both don't know) and be open to new possibilities where no beliefs hinder us from the unfolding of new possibilities.

## Theory and practice reading

Weber, B. (2011). Toward a democratic culture of philosophical discourse: Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as the fundament for the dialogue between adults and children. In A. Wiercinski (Ed.), *Gadamer's hermeneutics and the art of conversation* (pp. 127-157). Münster, Germany: Lit Publisher.

## Discussion questions

1. For Gadamer, understanding a text, a person, or in general a question is always already an interpretation. There is a standpoint from which the reader/listener looks at that question in order to understand it at all, and that standpoint is where the reader's/listener's expectations, ideas and prejudices exist. The important thing is to be open to the otherness of that question – what Gadamer calls “a merging of horizons” (1960, p.7). That is, understanding is about the process of merging two seemingly different horizons. What do you think about the notion of encountering new ideas/questions and the merging of horizons? How do *you* see such hermeneutic understanding?
2. How do you think an educational system can (potentially) limit hermeneutical aspects of dialogue?
3. As a teacher, how could you encourage a Gadamerian hermeneutics approach within your classroom?
4. How can we distinguish a genuine (philosophical) question from a pedagogical question? Use examples if necessary.
5. On the importance of recognizing children's authentic questions, Weber says,

*“If a teacher is to appreciate such questioning by a child, she must step back from the convenient pedagogical pattern in which a teacher asks a question whose answer she already purports to know. Within the philosophical dialogue, the present generation must admit that it does not know and must make itself vulnerable to the suspense of the unknown. This implies standing face to face with the future generation in a non-hierarchical encounter.”*  
(2011, p.16)

How do you think you can facilitate such recognition of children's questions and the dialogue around those questions within your classroom?

6. In the readings for both this and the previous session, Weber states that in order to genuinely understand each other in a community of inquiry we need more than just good reasoning or good arguments. Do you agree with her? Explain.

## Activity: Dialectics in practice



The goal of this activity is to understand various ideas and beliefs by:

- listening to each other's ideas,
- becoming aware of our own ideas on this matter (reflecting on them) and
- trying to deepen our understanding of each other's ideas and perspectives.

The goal is NOI to come up with an agreement on a specific position nor to find any solution.

Divide your class into small groups of 5-6 and give them a controversial topic of discussion such as “changing the legal age for consuming alcohol.” In their small groups, students express their ideas (individually) to the group and *why* they think so.

Then in the same groups, have students pair with the person whose ideas are the least aligned with their own. Have them conduct a sympathetic interview with each other in which each tries to understand the other's point of view. To do this, they need to put their own ideas and beliefs *in suspension* for a few minutes.

Still in the same small groups, ask them to try to state in their own words the best, most supportive case they can for the other person's perspective.

Lastly, come back to the large group and have a class discussion on the following questions:

- What was your experience when putting yourself in the other's position? Was it comfortable/uncomfortable/interesting/surprising/shocking?
- How did it feel like to push one's own limits, prejudices, biases and be forced to take the other person's perspective? Are there feelings of 'discomfort'? If so, can you explain them or make a sound for them?
- How/In what way did it affect you? Did it have any impact on you at all?
- Do you think that by empathizing with the other, you have a better understanding of the other and their ideas now?

### **Reflection journal**

- What did you find the most interesting, surprising or problematic in this session's readings and discussion?
- What implications do this session's readings have for your teaching?
- What did you learn from this session's readings and the discussion?
- Is there a question or a thought that is still lingering in your mind? If so, what is it?

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