

Developing ethical formation through literature and philosophy in school

Lisa Rygaard Frost Kristensen
University College of Northern Denmark
lrk@ucn.dk

Abstract

When working with literature in the philosophical classroom, teachers can take pupils on journeys through time, history, other cultures, and fictional universes. Since literature invites readers into the lives and minds of others, the pupils can *try on* another person's thoughts, emotions, life experiences, perspectives, attitudes, and worldviews. Thus, literature offers a unique window of experiences that has great potential for the philosophical classroom.

In this—primarily theoretical—article, it is argued that the combination of literature and philosophy is valuable when practicing philosophy for children in the classroom. First, the combination may cultivate the pupils' dispositions for being caring, creative, critical, and collaborative thinkers. Second, it may add to the pupils' ethical formation with special attention to (i) the pupils' understanding of values, (ii) their sense of individuality and sociality, (iii) the development of their cognitive flexibility and empathy, and (iv) their ethical awareness through ethical argumentation and reflection. In addition to presenting these points, this article will offer brief examples suggesting how school practitioners may use literary texts to prompt ethical reflections through philosophical questions and enquiry.

Keywords

ethical formation, literature in schools, philosophy and literature, philosophy in schools

Introduction: The differences and similarities of literature and philosophy

Through literature, we can explore human thought, human life, human relations, and that which is universally human. In that way, literature revolves around the same field as philosophy, although the nature of exploration may differ. Roughly speaking, a philosophical approach typically appeals to reasoning, questioning, conceptualisation, and argumentation, whereas fiction, to a greater extent, appeals to our emotions and may provide more life-like experiences.

An illustration of this difference can, for instance, be found in Jean-Paul Sartre's writings. In his works, there are examples of him using different genres and different forms of appeal when exploring certain existential phenomena. More specifically, this is demonstrated when Sartre presents his philosophical idea of the existential concept of *nausea* in an academic text versus a fictional work.

Example from Sartre's (1992) philosophical work *Being and Nothingness* (academic philosophy):

The phenomenon is what manifests itself, and being manifests itself to all in some way, since we can speak of it and since we have a certain comprehension of it. Thus there must be for it a phenomenon of being, an appearance of being, capable of description as such. Being will be disclosed to us by some kind of immediate access—boredom, **nausea**, etc., and ontology will be the description of the phenomenon of being as it manifests itself; that is, without intermediary. However for any ontology we should raise a preliminary question: is the *phenomenon of being* thus achieved identical with the being of phenomena? (p. 7, my marking in bold)

Example from Sartre's (1964) novel *Nausea* (fiction):

Objects should not *touch* because they are not alive. You use them, put them back in place, you live among them: they are useful, nothing more. But they touch me, it is unbearable. I am afraid of being in contact with them as though they were living beasts. Now I see: I recall better what I felt the other day at the seashore when I held the pebble. It was sort of sweetish sickness. How unpleasant it was! It came from the stone to my hand. Yes, that's it, that's just it—a sort of nausea in the hands. (pp. 10–11)

The first excerpt exemplifies a rich use of explanations, reasoning, arguments (cf. 'since', 'thus', 'that is', 'however'), and questions concerning the phenomenon of being. Through philosophising, the text encircles how the human experience of *being* may manifest itself as existential *nausea*. Within the same theme, however different in style, the second excerpt from Sartre's novel illustrates the protagonist's existential experience of holding a pebble in his hands. Here, it is vividly described how feeling this presence of *being* makes the protagonist feel sick and nauseous. Through this text, we are invited into the protagonist's existential emotions as he narrates how he is

‘afraid’, how he deals with something ‘unbearable’ and ‘unpleasant’, etc. This simulated experience of how this nausea feels may act as a stimulus for philosophising over the concept of *nausea*, which could involve categorising, questioning, and analysing what it means, what may cause it, and how we may understand it from an existential perspective.

Essentially, this example only serves to point out that there are different ways of encouraging philosophical thinking through texts. A part of philosophising includes questioning, categorising, identifying, and conceptualising thoughts, ideas, and emotions. Another part is about relating and connecting concepts, experiences, and ideals to your own life, human existence, and co-existence.

With a special focus on literature, this article proposes that fictional stories may serve as excellent stimuli in the philosophical classroom as they present small examples of human life, human thought, and emotions to connect with in the act of philosophising. Specifically, it is the combination of literary examples and philosophical enquiry that ensures pupils will not only practice *thinking* and *reasoning* (conceptualising, questioning, arguing, etc.), but also engage in *feeling* and *experiencing* emotionally and experientially when connecting with characters in literary fiction. In this way, they will have a rich opportunity to bring their conceptions, thoughts, and emotions into play, thus qualifying the philosophical dialogue. But what, more specifically, is it that literature can do? The following section will point to some of the potentials of literary fiction.

Potentials of integrating literature in philosophy teaching

Opening a book is opening a mind, a culture, and a world

‘Books give a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, and life to everything’ (Hawthorne 2023). These words vividly describe the potential of literature¹. Literature may actually lift its readers’ minds to places they would not be able to reach without it. Opening a book offers a unique window of experiences—it may open a mind, a culture, and a world. Through books, we can travel through time and place. We can explore other cultures, worlds, and realities and how others think, feel, behave, and act.

¹ The quote has been attributed to Plato. However, the source of the quote has been disputed (Estes-Sykes 2017).

In Plato's *The Republic* (2000) and in Aristotle's *Poetics* (1984), the relationship between literature and human life is addressed through the concept of mimesis. Although they approach it with different nuances, Plato and Aristotle both explore how art mimics, imitates, simulates, and acts as a re-presentation of real life (Baktir 2003). As Aristotle explains in *Poetics*, the role of a tragedy is 'to imitate actions arousing pity and fear', suggesting that literature—or art—evokes real emotional reactions in its audience (Aristotle 1984, p. 2325). Although art is fictional, the emotions we have in the fictional encounter are real (Oatley 1999). The impact fiction has on our thoughts and emotions may count as equally valid—or maybe even more powerful—compared to real-life experiences.

Along these lines, Richard Gerrig (1993) uses the metaphor of *transportation* to capture the phenomenon of being absorbed in a narrative. As he points out, 'a narrative serves to transport an experiencer away from the here and now' (p. 3). Bal and Veltkamp (2013) further explore transportation and point to how readers undergo a 'mental journey' and may experience fictional events 'as real within the story context' (p. 3). They write:

The mental journey elicited by transportation makes it possible for readers to change as a consequence of reading fiction, because it elicits various processes, including emotional involvement in the story and identification with the characters. (Bal & Veltkamp 2013, p. 3)

When being transported into a story, it is not just a matter of momentarily living in a story world and identifying with the characters; it is also about connecting with and exploring yourself. You may even change as a result of it. As also addressed by Aristotle, you can learn something from what is portrayed in the imitation (Aristotle 1984, p. 2318). In line with this, Boyd (2009) points out that, 'through pretend play and fiction we learn to try out the positions of others, we attune ourselves spontaneously to the shifting emotions of an unfolding story, and we encounter story after story that embodies prosocial values in memorable, emotionally compelling images, actions, and outcomes' (p. 106). Hereby, Boyd also underlines the power of stories and the effect they have on us. Cron (2012) takes a similar standpoint as she points out that with stories, 'we explore our own mind and the minds of others, as a sort of dress rehearsal for the future' (p. 9). These points suggest that stories might affect the reader's aspirations, actions, and attitudes in life, thus potentially pushing personal growth and formation processes.

Combining literature and philosophy

'If philosophy is a search for wisdom about ourselves, philosophy needs to turn to literature', Martha Nussbaum writes (1992, p. 290). Thus, she points to literature as a stimulus for thought and insight. Already in the early 1970s, the idea of using stories in the philosophical classroom was introduced by Matthew Lipman, who is credited as the founder of philosophy for children (P4C). In his early research initiatives, Lipman explored how using stories could encourage and strengthen the pupils' reasoning. In one of his early studies, where he focuses specifically on developing the pupils' logic, he points out that stories have great potential in combination with philosophy in terms of exploring 'a wide variety of philosophic domains' (Lipman 1973, p. 15). According to Lipman (1973), it is essential that stories 'should serve as springboards for intellectual discussions, and that these discussions should serve in turn to promote a heightened awareness of and understanding of the world these children inhabit, as well as of their own identities in that world' (p. 15). The idea promoted here is that the philosophical classroom should be about engaging pupils in philosophical discussions that will widen their horizons and broaden their understanding of the world, other people, and themselves. In line with this, one may argue that philosophy with children has the potential to support critical, ethical, and democratic formation processes (Kristensen & Madsen 2022).

In 2003, Lipman pointed to *critical thinking*, *creative thinking*, and *caring thinking* as essential components of P4C. Roger Sutcliffe, one of the founders of SAPERE (Society for the Advancement of Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education), suggests that *collaborative thinking* acts as a fourth important dimension of P4C, thus defining the 4Cs of P4C (Sutcliffe 2017, p. 59).² With this understanding in mind, the primary goal of philosophy for children in school is not to reach final answers and find universal truths. Rather, the philosophical classroom is a place where pupils are encouraged to ask questions and think critically, to use their cognitive creativity, to connect with, care for, and identify with others, and to engage collaboratively in searching for and arguing for possible answers.

² The field of P4C has changed since the 1970s (Vansielegheem & Kennedy 2011) and has given rise to different interpretations, variations, and practices, such as PwC (philosophy with children) and philosophical enquiry (PhiE). Despite differences between the approaches, there are definitely components that unite them (Sutcliffe 2017; Worley 2016). It seems highly relevant to point to the 4 Cs as representing four common components of the philosophical classroom regardless of approach. Philosophy in school will typically involve a critical aspect, encourage cognitive creativity, promote collaborative enquiry and dialogue, and encompass normative and/or emphatic aspects (cf. caring thinking, Lipman 2003).

In defining his approach to the 4Cs, Sutcliffe notes that it is more precise to view the 4Cs as *dispositions* rather than thinking skills (Sutcliffe 2017; Worley & Worley 2019). Following that, this article argues that literature combined with philosophy can strengthen pupils' *dispositions* to be critical, creative, caring, and collaborative.

When using literature in combination with philosophy, the literary stimulus encourages pupils to use their imagination (to be creative), engage in philosophical enquiry, dialogue, and group work based on the literary encounter (to be critical and collaborative), and empathise with both the characters in the stories and their classmates during discussions (to care for others).

In *Teaching Philosophy through Children's Literature*, Thomas Wartenberg (2014) also promotes the use of literature in the philosophical classroom. He advocates for a learner-centred model in philosophy teaching since this takes account of 'the innate curiosity of children' while at the same time promoting joint investigation and dialogue in 'the social situation of the classroom' (p. 18). Wartenberg (2014) describes how a read-aloud may be used 'to initiate a philosophical discussion in which the teacher is not the center of attention but the facilitator of a child-centered discussion among peers' (p. 22). Wartenberg's approach is to give pupils a 'chance to pursue their natural inclination for philosophy in the formal setting of the classroom by initiating discussions of basic questions about human life' (p. 15).

In that sense, Wartenberg poses a parallel point to Lipman's idea of why we should integrate stories in the philosophical classroom. Stories may encourage a deeper understanding of the world and ourselves, and may serve as stimuli for intellectual—or perhaps rather—philosophical discussions. As mentioned, literary fiction may also act as a stepping stone for ethical formation, which the next section will consider.

Ethical formation through literature in the philosophical classroom

As argued above, one of the potentials of literature is that it can transport children to a world of simulated experiences. When we are transported into the minds of others and become emotionally invested in a story, we are given a rich opportunity to experience ethical matters. Through such fictional encounters, pupils can explore values and reflect on right and wrong based on a character's thoughts or actions. They may also experience different emotional reactions as they empathise with the characters in question. These potentials in the literary encounter may be used as a springboard for philosophical dialogues about ethics.

Exploring ethics is indeed a cornerstone of the philosophical classroom, and an ideal of teaching ethics may be to develop pupils' ethical formation. But how can we understand the concept of ethical formation and how can literature play a role in this?

When cultivating ethical formation processes in the classroom, there are five central components to pay attention to: *understanding values*, *cognitive flexibility*, *empathy*, *ethical reflection*, and *ethical argumentation* (Kristensen & Madsen 2022). In the following sections, I will adopt this understanding of ethical formation while focusing specifically on how literature may play a role in cultivating it. Here, I will argue that using literature in combination with philosophy can develop the pupils' ethical formation by adding to their (1) understanding of individuality, sociality, and values (2) development of cognitive flexibility, (3) sense of empathy, and (4) ethical reflection and argumentation.

A perspective on ethical formation: Values, individuality, and sociality

The concept of ethical formation, as presented in Kristensen and Madsen (2022), first and foremost rests on the understanding of formation defined in Lars-Henrik Schmidt's thesis (1999). Schmidt coins the term *individuality-affirming individuality-transcendence* (my translation), which points to formation being a simultaneous production of individuality and sociality (1999). In the philosophical classroom, it is crucial for the pupils' ethical formation that they are open to other people's views, beliefs, perspectives, standpoints, and the better argument, but it is also essential that they learn to take a stance and argue for themselves. They need to master a dialectical process between giving voice to their own ethical beliefs and being able to transcend them. The key here is finding a balance between being open to others—their thoughts and beliefs—and being sure of oneself.

When looking at the combination of literature and philosophy in the classroom, there is a significant learning potential in terms of both enhancing the children's understanding of their *individuality* and fostering a better understanding of *sociality*. Art may be considered a laboratory of simulated experiences through which we can discover new perspectives and learn about ourselves intellectually and emotionally. As Oatley (1999) points out:

The simulations that are novels, plays, movies, and so forth can allow people to find out more about the intimate implications of their emotions. They offer a laboratory space that, relative to real life, is safe

and can make the relations of emotions to goals and action easier to understand. (p. 112)

This suggests that fiction offers an opportunity for us to explore our own thoughts, emotions, and individuality. That fictional encounters have and have had a major impact on human development and cognition has also been explored in the field of psychology and cognition studies. For instance, Raymond Mar (2018) writes, 'Engaging with fictional stories and the characters within them might help us better understand our real-world peers. Because stories are about characters and their interactions, understanding stories might help us to exercise our social cognitive abilities' (p. 257). Through stories, we do not only explore our individuality, but we also practice and play with our understanding of sociality. We practice how to relate to and understand other human beings through our encounters with characters in a story. Thereby, the teacher has a rich potential to use fictional experiences and scenarios as stimuli for philosophical dialogue about human values and relations.

Martha Nussbaum (1992) points out that in ancient Greece, '[literature was] ethical in the largest sense of that term, that is, bearing on the question how human beings should live' (1992, p. 212). In this understanding, literature and stories can be seen as expressions of human life, offering unique and complex views on values and on the ethical question of how one should live. Nussbaum further argues that there is a dialogical relationship between literary analysis and philosophy, since they are both concerned with this very question (1992, p. 289). In that sense, both literature and philosophy leave room for discovering one's own and other people's values and reflect on what constitutes the good life. It becomes relevant to ask: *What does the child believe in comparison to the character in question? Does the character offer a new set of values that inspires the children? Or will the children stand even more firmly by their own values when encountering another set of values? How does the character act, treat, and approach other people? Which actions will the pupils in the classroom consider ethically right in a similar situation?*

These questions are only examples of what may be relevant to consider for the classroom dialogue when following a character through a narrative. The way the teacher initiates and facilitates philosophical reflection and dialogue based on the fictional encounter plays a vital role here. Later, I will exemplify how the school practitioner may do this. For now, I will only highlight the point that a fictional encounter may provide the child with an impression of a character's set of values, which could serve as a stimulus to kickstart a philosophical conversation in class

about values. Furthermore, this act of connecting with a fictional character's understanding of values may stimulate the pupils' disposition for normative and affective thinking, or what is known as *caring thinking*. With the character's values as a starting point, this may be taken to a broader exploration of which values can be considered essential in constituting a good life, not only for the individual but also for our life with others and for a good society. Hereby, the pupils work on their ability to decentre and think critically. In terms of ethical formation, it is important that they are willing to transgress—or suspend—their individual attitudes and beliefs when engaging in a collaborative thinking process exploring moral ideals of individuality and sociality.

A perspective on ethical formation: Cognitive flexibility and empathy

As mentioned, *cognitive flexibility* and *empathy* can be considered central components of ethical formation (cf. Kristensen & Madsen 2022). The European Council (2014) defines cognitive flexibility as 'the ability to change and adapt one's way of thinking' and empathy as 'the ability to understand and respond to other people's thoughts, beliefs, values and feelings' (p. 20; see also Kristensen & Madsen 2022). In this section, I will elaborate on the understanding of these concepts and specify how literary fiction may have specific potential for cultivating cognitive flexibility and empathy in the philosophical classroom, thereby contributing to the pupils' ethical formation.

As a concept, cognitive flexibility has a rich history in fields such as psychology, philosophy, medicine, pedagogy, etc. (Savchuk et al. 2020). When focusing on philosophy, one can argue that, with its tradition of questioning, the philosophical approach challenges cognitive rigidity and thereby necessitates cognitive flexibility. Cognitive flexibility involves the ability 'to restructure one's knowledge' (Spiro et al. 1992, p. 131) and 'to produce alternative solutions and to switch thoughts' (Orakcı 2021, p. 2). On the one hand, one may say that cognitive flexibility is a prerequisite for thinking philosophically—or at least that there must be a 'willingness to be flexible' (Orakcı 2021, p. 2). On the other hand, the actual practice of philosophical thinking in the classroom may play a crucial role in actively developing the pupils' cognitive flexibility. Here, the questioning practice—based on philosophical questions to which there are typically no definite answers—may open or nurture new forms of cognitive flexibility. In other words, reflective, critical, and philosophical thinking processes require cognitive flexibility and may, to some extent, foster its development.

Cognitive flexibility is also called for—and something we practice—when experiencing literature. Since literature can transport people into the minds of others,

it can serve as a classroom ‘laboratory’ where pupils can use and practice their cognitive flexibility. As they engage in literature, pupils are encouraged to ‘switch thoughts’ (Orakcı 2021, p. 2) and to ‘understand and respond to other people’s thoughts, beliefs, values and feelings’ (European Council et al. 2014, p. 20).

In his comprehensive work, *On the Origin of Stories*, Brian Boyd (2009) explores the connection between evolution, cognition, and fiction. Boyd centralises the role of stories, art, literature, and fiction and the impact these have and have had on human cognition from an evolutionary perspective. When defining fiction and its role, he writes:

Fiction, like art in general, can be explained in terms of cognitive play with pattern—in this case, with patterns of social information—and in terms of the unique importance of human shared attention. (p. 130)

Regarding the potential of using stories in the philosophical classroom, one may say that fiction invites pupils to engage in *cognitive play with patterns* related to human sociality and human existence. Pupils can ‘try on’ how another person thinks, feels, and acts. In addition, fiction does not only offer a mirror or simulation of reality or possible realities (cf. Aristotle), but it can also involve the reader emotionally and ‘give rise to insight’ (Oatley 1999, p. 109).

When thinking of the 4Cs of P4C, cognitive flexibility requires creativity/creative thinking in the sense that we must use our imagination (Lipman 2003). Cognitive flexibility is an essential part of ethical formation since it has to do with our ability to put ourselves in another person’s shoes. In light of interhuman ethics (Løgstrup 1975, 2005), the way we meet another person is essential since our every move, saying, or doing will affect that other person’s life. The view presented here, based on Danish life philosophy, is that since humans are interdependent, there is an inherent ethical demand in our interpersonal encounters calling on us to take care of the other human being through the specific actions we judge appropriate in the given situation (cf. situational ethics). The argument is that cultivating good ethical judgement relies heavily on the ability to shift perspective and that we can put ourselves in another person’s place (Løgstrup 1975). Furthermore, this ability to take on another person’s perspective can be seen as a prerequisite for meeting this person with empathy. As Matthew Lipman (2003) notes:

The term ‘empathy’ has a wide range of meanings, but for my purposes here it has to do solely with what happens when we put ourselves into

another's situation and experience that person's emotions as if they were our own. As such, the importance of the term is primarily ethical. That is, one way of caring is to step out of our own feelings, perspective, and horizon and imagine ourselves instead as having the feelings, perspective, and horizon of another. (p. 269)

Lipman relates this idea of empathy to *caring thinking*, which is considered essential for the P4C classroom. Literature may serve as an excellent medium for fostering such empathetic thinking in the philosophical classroom since the literary work offers a playroom for imagining what it is like to be another person.

When looking at other definitions of empathy, Mark Davis (1980) distinguishes between a *cognitive dimension* of empathy, which involves perspective-taking, and an *affective dimension* involving empathetic concern and emotional reactivity. The cognitive dimension of empathy aligns with the aforementioned concept of cognitive flexibility, also referred to as cognitive empathy. This encompasses an intellectual understanding of the other person's situation and that one can 'recognize the emotion portrayed' (p. 4). The affective dimension, on the other hand, encompasses an 'emotional reaction to the stimulus' (p. 4). If following this idea and relating it to a school context, this conceptual framework draws attention to the fact that pupils may be differently invested in the story used in the classroom. Some may just recognise and understand the characters, while others experience emotional reactions. Some pupils may experience neither of the two, while others may experience both. The point here is that literature has the power to affect children in the classroom, to challenge them cognitively and emotionally, and, due to this, there is also a vital potential for formation.

Especially within the field of psychology, numerous empirical studies have been conducted to research the relationship between literature and the development of empathy. Kidd and Castano (2013) point out that 'understanding others' mental states is a crucial skill' (p. 1) in human sociality, and they have researched how different reading experiments affected this skill, which is also known as Theory of Mind. Like Davis, Kidd and Castano distinguish between the cognitive and affective dimensions, and their studies show that both of these elements are enhanced through literary fiction. Along the same lines, Pino and Mazza (2016) state the point that '[t]he abilities to read, understand and enjoy stories imply both cognitive (e.g., attention and memory) and affective processes (e.g., emotion and empathy)' (p. 2). Based on their study, they conclude that 'reading literary fiction enhances mentalizing abilities' but

also point out that ‘it does not appear to change our internal emotional sharing, that is the capacity to feel what people feel in a painful situation’ (Pino & Mazza 2016, pp. 10–11). Bal and Veltkamp (2013), however, specifically emphasise emotional transportation as having potential for personal change, and based on this, they conclude that ‘transportation into fictional narratives influence[s] empathy over time’ (p. 10).

In other words, there are several empirical studies within psychology showing that literature may support the development of either the cognitive or the affective dimension of empathy, or both. Considering this potential of using literature, there are compelling reasons to integrate it into the P4C classroom. Regarding the aforementioned categories of the 4Cs, the cognitive dimension of empathy—or cognitive flexibility—is connected to *creative thinking*, as it fosters perspective-taking and imagination through literature. The affective dimension of empathy is linked to *caring*. As stated earlier, Aristotle points out that the spectator/reader might experience emotional reactions to what happens in the story. For instance, it could be an experience of feeling pity when presented with a sad destiny in a Greek tragedy. We may also experience fear, anger, joy, relief, or sadness alongside the literary characters. In that sense, a literary meeting may elicit strong emotions from which we can learn something. It can help us identify what feels right and wrong, thus working as a sort of magnet for our ethical compass.

In *Love’s Knowledge*, Nussbaum (1992) emphasises the importance of allowing *imagination* and *emotion* in combination with philosophy, and she states ‘emotions, and their accomplices, the stories, [are] required in a fully human philosophy’ (p. 389). Nussbaum (1992) further concludes that to gain ‘an understanding that is both emotional and intellectual, we need literature in philosophy’ (p. 227). In other words, literature is vital in terms of ensuring a nuanced understanding of human life and human philosophy.

Facilitating ethical reflection and ethical argumentation

Finally, I want to address the role of ethical reflection and ethical argumentation in a classroom approach that combines philosophy and literature. I will also point out how these elements may contribute to ethical formation processes. So far, this article has focused on how literature can transport pupils into story worlds and into the minds of others. Now, when addressing ethical reflection and ethical argumentation, the primary focus is on how the teacher brings pupils from the story world into a collaborative thinking process. The idea is that by facilitating enquiry using

philosophical questions and dialogue, the teacher can elicit and scaffold the pupils' ethical argumentation and reflections.

To structure the reflection process, the PhiE (philosophical enquiry) model, as presented by philosopher Peter Worley, is useful. These steps—here shortened in their descriptions—provide a framework for the philosophical enquiry:

1. Present stimulus (e.g. a read-aloud)
2. Give the pupils the opportunity to gather their first thoughts (also talk/comprehension time)
3. Task question
4. Talk time in pairs/groups
5. Whole-class enquiry
6. Second task question (repeat 3–5) (adapted from Worley 2019, p. 18)

As seen above, the fictional story may be used as an aesthetic stimulus. If relevant, this stimulus may be used alongside a picture or other artefacts. The chosen literary stimulus will ideally function as a sort of thought opener followed by philosophical dialogue (pupil–pupil, teacher–pupil) and by open task questions to facilitate the pupils' philosophical reflections. When engaging in class dialogue, the task questions may ideally follow the question X method (Worley 2015, 2019). Essentially, Worley's question X method is based on the teacher using conceptually open questions posed in a grammatically closed structure (*Is the mind the same as the brain?*) to recruit initial pupil responses before further opening the reflections and conversation (*Can you say why/why not?*) (2015, 2019).

To exemplify, we could imagine a class reading *The Little Prince*, which is a story about a little prince who travels from planet to planet and meets many different people and animals along the way. The prince meets a fox who gives him this advice about friendship: 'It is only with one's heart that one can see clearly. What is essential is invisible to the eye ... For what you have tamed, you become responsible forever' (Saint-Exupéry 1995, p. 82). These statements may be formulated into questions relevant to the theme of an enquiry. Such questions could be centred on relationships, on the responsibility we bear for others, on what the most essential elements in life are, and on how we determine what is essential. For instance, the teacher could ask: *Are you responsible for what you have tamed?* (Conceptually open but grammatically closed question, cf. Worley 2019). *Why—why not?* These statements may lead to further enquiry and questions about ethical responsibility, friendship and its reciprocity, and the good life. Relevant questions could be: *Can a friendship be one-*

sided? Are friends (or other people) necessary to have a good life? As Wartenberg (2014) points out, after reading or doing a read-aloud, the children should be asked 'a question that contains a philosophical puzzle about a big idea central to the story itself' (p. 21). This approach is somewhat parallel to the basic PhiE model, which also begins with a narrative stimulus that leads to a philosophical question and then into a deeper enquiry. When working with *The Little Prince*, it is relevant to focus on friendship as it unfolds throughout the narrative, examining the prince's relationships with the fox, the rose, the narrator, and the other characters he meets. The posed philosophical questions encourage pupils to reflect on their own positions and argue ethically—primarily in the Aristotelian sense—about what constitutes a friendship and how it may be important for building a good life.

In his book *Big Ideas for Little Kids: Teaching Philosophy Through Children's Literature*, Wartenberg uses *The Giving Tree* as an example of a story relevant for ethical reflections. Here a boy befriends a generous tree which gives the boy everything he asks for his whole life. The tree is happy giving, and the boy has no trouble taking what is offered. Throughout the boy's life, he takes from the tree until there is nothing left. This children's story could raise other ethical perspectives such as a utilitarian perspective about maximising happiness for the largest number possible. If the calculation here is that the tree is happy giving while the boy is happy taking, there is nothing wrong here. However, from a Kantian perspective, it could be relevant to draw on the categorical imperative about not treating the other only as a means but rather as an end in itself. This shows that, depending on the literary content, there are significant possibilities for practicing ethical argumentation resting on, for instance, virtue ethics, deontological ethics, and utilitarian ethics.

The point here is that philosophical questions, in combination with literature, provide a good basis for ethical reflection. In the philosophical enquiry, the pupils can draw on the emotions and thoughts evoked by the literary encounter. Through the teacher's philosophical questions, the pupils are not only encouraged to think ethically but also critically. Critical thinking skills encompass that they 'test the robustness of any ideas, arguments, and opinions' and are 'willing to rethink their position when necessary, according to the demand of reason' (Worley 2019, p. 228). Since the enquiry is based on collaborative elements with talk time in pairs and whole-class enquiry, the pupils will be informed by other perspectives and—maybe—better arguments to affect their own positions.

The major advantage of including literature in the philosophical framework is, first and foremost, that pupils will have a shared point of reference. Second, they will have emotional and/or cognitive responses to the characters and their life settings, on which they can base their argumentation when engaging in the collaborative thinking processes in class. It may count as a substantial contribution to the pupils' ethical formation processes that they engage in critical reflection on values and interhuman ethics and practice ethical argumentation. In doing this, they will, ideally, expand their ethical perspectives on what constitutes a good life for the individual, a good life for others, and a good society. Through the whole-class enquiry, as well as pair work, the pupils will be enriched by different perspectives on ethics and challenged to transcend their individual perspectives for the sake of the better argument. When being open to others' views, they will potentially discover new arguments and use this to take new positions or become surer of their own ethical standpoints.

Conclusion

As a normative note regarding literature and philosophy, Martha Nussbaum (1992) says: 'The right way for philosophy to be literary is to become more immersed in the complexities of human life as literature depicts them' (p. 228). To add to this idea from a philosophy in school perspective, I have emphasised how exploring human life and ideas through fictional encounters may have solid potential to cultivate pupils' ethical formation. More specifically, we may push ethical formation processes when combining literary work with philosophical dialogues about values, individuality, sociality, cognitive flexibility, empathy, ethical reflection, and ethical argumentation. Ethical formation should be regarded as two-sided, meaning that it is not only essential to find our own place—in terms of values and how we view the good life—but it is equally important that we can transcend our individuality and decentre ourselves in the name of sociality. In addition, the combination of literature and philosophy provides the pupils with a nuanced stimulus, evoking both cognitive and emotional processes as a foundation for their engagement in philosophical dialogues. This way, they will not only think about but also feel the complexities of human life, and this may qualify their philosophical reflections. Another central point is that when working with literature combined with philosophy, pupils will ideally develop their dispositions to be caring, collaborative, critical, and creative, and learn how to advocate democratically for values and better arguments.

From a broader perspective, one may argue that it is crucial to work with pupils' cognitive and affective empathy, bring attention to interhuman ethics, and foster

ethical formation through questioning, reflection, argumentation, and philosophical dialogue in the classroom. A vital reason for this is that the globalised world needs citizens who work democratically for peaceful coexistence. Through the combination of philosophy and literature, there are valuable opportunities to ask the young citizens of the world to explore one of the most important questions in human life: *How should one live?*

References

- Aristotle (1984) *Poetics*. In J Barnes (ed) *Complete works of Aristotle, Volume 2: The revised Oxford translation*. Princeton University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt6wq12z>
- Baktir, H (2003) The concept of imitation in Plato and Aristotle (Aristo ve Plato'da Taklit). *Erciyes Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 1(15), pp. 167–179.
- Bal, PM & Veltkamp, M (2013) How does fiction reading influence empathy? An experimental investigation on the role of emotional transportation. *PLOS ONE*, 8(1), e55341.
- Boyd, B (2009) *On the origin of stories: Evolution, cognition, and fiction*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Cron, L (2012) *Wired for story. The writer's guide to using brain science to hook readers from the very first sentence*. Ten Speed Press, New York, NY.
- Davis, MH (1980) A multidimensional approach to individual differences in empathy. *JSAS Catalog of Selected Documents in Psychology*, 10, p. 85.
- Estes-Sykes, K (2017) Empowering preservice teachers through adolescent literature: Fostering empathy for students impacted by disabilities. *Texas Association for Literacy Education Yearbook*, 4, pp. 112–116.
- European Council, Huber, J, Reynolds, C, Barrett, M, Byram, M, Lázár, I, Mompoin-Gaillard, P & Philippou, S (2014) *Developing intercultural competence through education*. Council of Europe Publishing, Strasbourg.
- Gerrig RJ (1993) *Experiencing narrative worlds. On the psychological activities of reading*. Westview Press, Boulder, CO.

Hawthorne, E (2023) *Becoming a better you: Know Plato and how to use his wisdom* (e-book). Phileas Libris. [Saxo.com](https://saxo.com)

Kidd, D & Castano, E (2013) Reading literary fiction improves theory of mind. *Science*, 342(6156), pp. 377–380.

Kristensen, LRF & Madsen, H (2022) Filosofiens kritiske, demokratiske og etiske dannelsespotentialer i skolen. *Studier i Læreruddannelse Og -Profession*, 7(1), pp. 30–59.

Lipman, M (1973) *Philosophy for children*. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED103296>

Lipman, M (2003) *Thinking in education*. 2nd ed. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.

Løgstrup, KE (1975) *Den etiske fordring*. Gyldendal, Copenhagen.

Løgstrup, KE (2005) *Opgør med Kierkegaard*. Gyldendal, Copenhagen.

Mar, RA (2018) Stories and the promotion of social cognition. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 27(4), pp. 257–262.

Nussbaum, MC (1992) *Love's knowledge: Essays on philosophy and literature*. Oxford University Press, New York, NY.

Oatley, K (1999) Why fiction may be twice as true as fact: Fiction as cognitive and emotional simulation. *Review of General Psychology*, 3(2), pp. 101–117.

Orakçı, Ş (2021) Exploring the relationships between cognitive flexibility, learner autonomy, and reflective thinking. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 41(2).

Pino, MC & Mazza, M (2016) The use of 'literary fiction' to promote mentalizing ability. *PLOS ONE*, 11(8), e0160254.

Plato, *The republic*. Cambridge University Press (2000).

Saint-Exupéry, A (1995) *The little prince*. Wordsworth Editions, Hertfordshire, UK.

Sartre, JP (1964) *Nausea*. New Directions Publishing, New York, NY.

Sartre, JP (1992) *Being and nothingness: The principal text of modern existentialism*. Washington Square Press, New York, NY.

Savchuk, B, Kondur, O, Rozlutska, G, Kohanovska, O, Matishak, M & Bilavych, H (2020) Formation of cognitive flexibility as a basic competence of the future teachers' multicultural personality. *Space and Culture*, 8(3), pp. 48–57.

Schmidt, LH (1999) *Diagnosis 1—Filosoferende eksperimenter*. Århus Universitetsforlag.

Spiro, RJ, Feltovich, PJ, Coulson, RL, Jacobson, MJ, Durgunoglu, A, Ravlin, S & Jehng, J-C (1992) *Knowledge acquisition for application: Cognitive flexibility and transfer of training in ill-structured domains*. United States Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, Alexandria, VA.

Sutcliffe, R (2017) The difference between P4C and PwC. In S Naji & R Hashim (eds) *History, theory and practice of Philosophy for Children. International perspectives*. Routledge, New York, NY, pp. 56–63.

Vansieleghem, N & Kennedy, D (2011) What is philosophy for children, what is philosophy with children—After Matthew Lipman? *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 45(2), pp. 171–182.

Wartenberg, TE (2014) *Big ideas for little kids: teaching philosophy through children's literature*. 2nd ed. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Lanham, MA.

Worley, E & Worley, P (2019) Teaching critical thinking and metacognitive skills through philosophical enquiry: A practitioner's report on experiments in the classroom. *Childhood and Philosophy*, 15, pp. 1–34.

Worley, P (2015) If it, anchor it, open it up: A closed, guided questioning technique. In M Weiss (ed) *The Socratic handbook*. Lit Verlag, Münster, pp. 131–149.

Worley, P (2016) Fifty new ideas. *The Philosophers' Magazine*, 72, First Quarter, pp. 119–120.

Worley, P (2019) *The if-machine—30 lesson plans for teaching philosophy*. 2nd ed. Bloomsbury Publishing, London, UK.