

Enabling Students' Voices and Identities: Philosophical Inquiry in a Time of Discord, by Arie Kizel (2024), Lexington Books, Lanham, MD

We live in a time of unprecedented socio-economic inequality, exacerbated by climate change, unequal access to rapidly evolving technologies, declining democracy, and the growing power of totalitarian societies. In such a world, marginalised groups are at risk of becoming even more marginalised, often lacking the cultural capital necessary for social mobility. Schools, as Ivan Illich pointed out, play an ambivalent role here. Although often seen as a ladder that helps the poor climb out of their misery, education can also reinforce cultural differences through a hidden curriculum that favours affluent students with stimulating learning environments at home. Therefore, the educational system, if it is to be true to its goal of ensuring social justice, must strive to make the voices of the marginalised heard. That is why Prof. Arie Kizel's book *Enabling Students' Voices and Identities* deserves the full attention not only of teachers of philosophy and Philosophy for/with Children (hereafter P4wC), but also of all educators committed to the democratic and social function of education.

Kizel's book begins with the observation that students from underprivileged socioeconomic backgrounds or minorities feel uncomfortable and powerless when they try to express their feelings and experiences. This is due to the often implicit hegemonic meta-narratives and ideologies. These are hard to recognise but play a powerful silencing role in the classroom. Thus, although P4wC is one of the best ways to cultivate critical and autonomous thinking in children and youth, its potential remains often untapped because the conversation in the group is hindered by invisible power forces at work.

The first chapter thus begins with the assertion that pedagogical practices in mainstream schools around the world preclude the possibility of genuine dialogue between children and educators. Indeed, classrooms are not just empty spaces where curious students are eager to learn, but rather a field of various psychological and social forces that often operate invisibly. One such ideology, Kizel says, is the scientific jargon that seeks to normalise all the differences among children and place them in a homogenised group. This ideology, which is often also individualistic, emphasising the learner not as a member of a particular social group or class, but as an individual seeking knowledge and skills, neglects the differences among students. It also subsumes education under the pursuit of results. However, as Kizel points out, drawing on numerous sources, individual narratives are crucial to self-understanding and play a central role in reflection.

Moreover, one of Kizel's central claims is that the school cannot afford to ignore the fact that facilitators and children already bring their formed identities to the community of inquiry. Indeed, the idea of a neutral philosophical discussion is illusory, and Kizel is right to point out that the identities of the students influence the questions that are asked, and that the identities of the facilitators also influence the reactions. However, one might ask whether one of the main aims of P4wC is not to influence and reform these identities in such a way that the conversations ultimately overcome the problem of identities. The relationship between identity and discussion is namely fluid and constantly evolving.

In the second chapter, Kizel first distinguishes between identity politics and identity-enabling politics. The first holds that identity is based on difference rather than universal principles and includes various movements, from (post)feminism to postcolonialism and queer movements. Identity politics thus advocates both individual and collective rights to plurality in terms of community, religion, education, gender, sexuality, and so on. However, we can note that identity politics can also subsume individuals under collective group identities, violating their individual expressions and making them perceive themselves not as individuals but as members of a particular group. In addition, the discourse of 'difference' can be appropriated by the dominant discourse, thereby exerting symbolic violence against those who are different.

Identity enabling, on the other hand, allows students to live their fundamental and primary identity while helping them to develop an appropriate group identity. In the process of philosophical inquiry, however, children from marginalised groups often experience conflict as the tradition in which they were raised is often challenged and undermined by the dominant narrative. Here, the community of philosophical inquiry should provide a safe space for all individuals to seek their identity without fear. Indeed, Kizel refers here to Levinas' philosophy of Other(ness) to suggest that the recognition of the Other is a prerequisite for philosophical communities of inquiry that seek to be safe, protective, supportive, and open to diverse identities.

Identity enabling as a process that takes place in the classroom is a concept where Kizel is perhaps the most innovative. However, while the process of 'enabling identity' is interesting and even important, and deserves considerable attention in P4wC, it sometimes seems that Kizel is being a little idealistic, if not overly optimistic. This process cannot always be implemented in different communities around the world, because it itself presupposes a relatively stable social environment. Although Kizel

strives to provide examples of this process, it is possible that in deeply divided societies, where intervention is most needed, this model will not succeed.

In this chapter, Kizel also touches on a variety of different philosophically-informed concepts useful for education. Most importantly, he talks about the pedagogy of fear, which stems from adults' discomfort with uncertainty and lack of control, which in turn stifles children's autonomous explorations and intellectual endeavours by preoccupying them with ready-made knowledge to be learned and reproduced.

In the third chapter, Kizel illustrates why and how philosophy, and P4wC in particular, can help make the voices of children and young students heard. The book's reflections in this part are marked by the optimism that is often a hallmark of P4wC educators. This chapter also marks a transition to the analysis of a concrete educational practice, making the book valuable not only for academics but also for practitioners. Kizel emphasises P4wC's 4C concept, which promotes not only creative and critical thinking, but also caring and collaborative thinking. This, of course, is crucial to fostering diversity within the community of philosophical inquiry by providing a safe space for underprivileged and at-risk students.

The last two chapters logically focus on two of the most important categories of P4wC: the facilitators and the student voices. In the fourth chapter, for example, Kizel shares his vast knowledge, infused with extensive personal experience, of facilitating philosophical dialogue in culturally mixed groups formed by young students. The advice Kizel gives is numerous, and one must always keep in mind that the facilitators can only do their job well if they themselves are in a constant process of development and openness. Indeed, one of the most important tenets of the P4wC program is that facilitators are not teachers in the sense of imparting knowledge, but fellow seekers of truth who are constantly open to revision of their old, possibly calcified beliefs. For example, the role of the P4wC facilitator is not to immediately expose and address injustice, but rather to open up raw space for reflection; the goal should not be to find quick solutions that solve problems, but rather to allow for the asking of the difficult and nagging questions.

Kizel's commitment to facilitators is, as mentioned, invaluable. However, in emphasising the central place of young people in the Pw4C discussion, following the principles of Paulo Freire's pedagogy of liberation and Ilan Gur-Ze'ev's counter-education, Kizel sometimes seems to ignore the fact that the developing philosophical discussion should encourage and empower students to become autonomous seekers without the use of facilitators. Indeed, it seems that this state is ideally the goal of a

sincere philosophical community of learners, which Kizel rightly prizes. Thus Kizel gives an important place to facilitators, although he disagrees with this privileged position by deconstructing the position of the teacher. This paradox, however, may unravel itself if we re-emphasise that P4wC discussions are an evolving process in which the traditional roles of students and teachers dissolve into equal partners in conversation.

Undoubtedly, one of the most valuable parts of the book are the children's philosophical voices on identity collected in the final chapter. Here the reader gets a glimpse into the workings of the community of philosophical inquiry and its surprising effect on students, as reflected in the original comments, compared to more traditional educational methods that often force children to reproduce the acquired narratives.

It is safe to say that Prof. Kizel, a prominent figure in the contemporary P4wC movement, has once again produced a valuable text that addresses one of the most pressing political and social issues facing many countries after turbulent decades of wars, migrations, and growing inequality. Once again, he does not seek the easy way out, but chooses instead to reveal all the issues of a community of philosophical inquiry engaged in discussions about identity. It is true that the book contains passages that readers may find difficult to absorb, and that they may have to read certain parts of the text twice before they find the thread that Kizel is trying to weave through the numerous issues that arise in his investigation, but this is less the fault of the author than of the complexity of the problem.

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