

Editorial

Welcome to issue 13(1) of *Journal of Philosophy in Schools*.

At the time of writing, my Facebook feed is filled with images of a UNESCO seminar on Philosophy with Children at the Thammasat Secondary School in Thailand. Organised in collaboration with the Federation of Asia-Pacific Philosophy in Schools Associations (FAPSA), the seminar focused on the benefits to children and young people of participation in philosophical inquiry and on how participation might be widened across the region. Since its inception in 1945, UNESCO has, of course, been a great champion of philosophy teaching. It conducted its first international survey of educational provision in philosophy in the early 1950s (UNESCO 1953). In more recent years it has published a comprehensive overview of philosophy teaching at primary, secondary and tertiary level around the world (UNESCO 2007), an innovative teaching manual designed to guide students through the diverse philosophical traditions of Africa, Asia and Latin America (UNESCO 2014), and an authoritative summary of research in the field of Philosophy for Children (Topping, Trickey & Cleghorn 2020). Later this year we will celebrate the 25th UNESCO World Philosophy Day. UNESCO has been, and continues to be, a key player in the ongoing effort to persuade the public that—in the words of the Paris Declaration—‘philosophy education, by training independently-minded, thoughtful people, capable of resisting various forms of propaganda, prepares everyone to shoulder their responsibilities in regard to the great questions of the contemporary world’ (UNESCO 1995).

Another notable contributor to that endeavour is Jane Gatley, assistant editor of this very journal. In her recent book, *Why Teach Philosophy in Schools? The Case for Philosophy on the Curriculum* (Gatley 2023), Gatley makes an original and powerful argument for philosophical education. The book, says one reviewer, ‘stands out as a landmark’ for its ‘impressive philosophical reasoning on why philosophy should be included in the high school curriculum’ (Pfister 2024, p. 7). We begin this issue of JPS with a suite of three papers exploring Gatley’s arguments.

In the first, Angie Hobbs contends that, while Gatley’s case is ‘lucid, rigorous and persuasive’ on its own terms, those terms are a little too narrow. Gatley concentrates on two specific benefits of philosophical education—the assistance it renders in enabling students (i) ‘to address ordinary concept questions’ and (ii) ‘to make sense of the conceptual fragmentation of their broad theoretical education’ (Gatley 2023, p. 4).

Hobbs does not dispute these benefits, but thinks there is merit in widening the focus to ‘the package of potential benefits that philosophy can offer as a whole’.

In the second paper, Kristján Kristjánsson shares the happy news that Gatley’s book has ‘cured me of my own autobiographically conditioned scepticism about school philosophy’, but nonetheless raises three challenging questions about her argument. Given the interest of contemporary psychologists in ‘concept analysis’, is it true that philosophy is uniquely well placed to assist students in addressing questions about ordinary concepts? Similarly, in light of psychological research on synthesising wisdom and metacognitions, is it plausible to claim that philosophy alone can overcome the conceptual fragmentation of the disciplines? And finally, how might Gatley’s arguments bear on the global battle in education policy between ‘the touchy-feely UNESCO’ and ‘the hard-line OECD’?

The third paper is a response to Hobbs and Kristjánsson by Gatley herself. Gatley readily allows that her arguments in the book ‘do not sum up everything that is valuable about teaching philosophy’ and contends that advocates of philosophical education should be ready to emphasise any of the benefits in Hobbs’ ‘package’ likely to have traction with policymakers. And she pushes back against Kristjánsson’s first challenge by insisting that ‘it really is philosophers who are interested not only in how concepts are ordinarily used, but in how they ought to be used’.

The next three papers in the issue were submitted in response to our recent call for papers on the theme of philosophy and religious education. Where philosophy appears on the school curriculum, we noted, it is often either in lieu of or as part of religious education. The former construes philosophy as in some sense a substitute for religion; the latter construes it as in some sense an aspect of religion. Both construals are problematic. We are pleased to present explorations of this topic by Arlen Sharp, Tarna Kannisto, and Katrina Delaunay and Amber Makaiau.

Sharp tackles head on the problematic positioning of philosophy as a subject taught either in lieu of or as part of religious education. He offers a sustained critique of the ‘separative’ approach in Finland, where pupils are entitled to receive either religious education ‘in accordance with their own religion’ or ethics education if they ‘do not belong to any religious community’ (Basic Education Act 628/1998). He argues that Finland should instead adopt an integrated model in which secular ethics is taught alongside Lutheran theological ethics in a single subject taken by all pupils.

In a direct response to Sharp's paper, Kannisto takes issue with his suggestion that Lutheran theological ethics should be taught to the exclusion of other religious worldviews. Sharp's justification is that Finnish national identity, while no longer explicitly religious, is deeply rooted in the Lutheran theological tradition. Kannisto sets out empirical, normative and pedagogical reasons for rejecting the attempt to prioritise a particular religious worldview in education.

Broaching the topic from a rather different angle, Delaunay and Makaiau aim to explore whether, and how, cultivating spirituality in the classroom can advance the aims of Philosophy for Children. They report on an empirical study in which they found that practices of ritual and reverence were conducive to honest dialogue and inquiry, and experiences of awe and wonder supported the development of intellectually safe spaces.

We conclude the issue with two regular research articles. In 'Picturebooks as stimuli for philosophical inquiry into death', Ping Su argues that picturebooks like *Frog and the Birdsong* (Velthuijs 2015) and *Duck, Death and the Tulip* (Erlbruch & Chidgey 2016) have the potential to deepen and enrich children's reflections on mortality. She identifies two key functions of picturebooks in death education: first, they provide children 'with a means to express and process their emotions'; and second, they help children to move 'from sensory experience to rational thought'.

Finally, Kylie Trask-Kerr and Jonathon Sargeant present an empirical exploration of the connections between character education and students' understandings of the purposes of education in an Australian secondary school. They found that most students see the main aim of schooling as preparation for employment, and that few consider philosophy to be a subject that helps them 'become a better person'. The authors reflect on the opportunities philosophy provides to challenge students' conceptions of education and to help them wrestle with the question of what it means to live well.

Happy reading!

Michael Hand
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