

**“educating children for wisdom”: reflecting on the philosophy for children
community of inquiry approach through plato’s allegory of the cave**

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abstract

There is a widespread belief in Philosophy for Children that Plato, the famed Greek thinker who introduced philosophizing to the world as a form of dialogue, was averse to teaching philosophy to young children. Decades of the implementation of P4C program’s inquiry pedagogy have shown conclusively that children are not, in fact, incapable of receiving philosophical training and education. But was Plato wrong? Or has he been largely misunderstood? Does his theory of education show the value of cultivating virtues in the young? This paper attempts to answer these questions by reading the *Republic*, specifically Plato’s theory of education and the allegory of the cave, as an education manual that can strengthen one’s understanding of the pedagogical approach of P4C and the importance of educating children in wisdom and other intellectual virtues. It demonstrates that the Platonic conception of education is consistent with P4C’s theoretical position of education being transformative, facilitative, and virtue-based. By unpacking the symbolisms and meanings of the cave metaphor, it also discusses effective facilitation, teacher capacity building, and sharing of responsibility in education. Ultimately, drawing from Plato’s theory of education can recalibrate and improve the way one sees the role of education in building caring communities that empower learners and educators for democracy, higher learning, and achievement.

keywords: philosophy for children; education; community of inquiry; wisdom; plato.

**“educar a niños y niñas para la sabiduría”: reflexión sobre el enfoque de la comunidad
de investigación de filosofía para niños mediante la alegoría de la caverna de platón**

resumen

Existe una creencia generalizada en Filosofía para Niños de que Platón, el afamado pensador griego que introdujo el filosofar en el mundo como una forma de diálogo, era reacio a enseñar filosofía a los niños pequeños. Décadas de implementación de la pedagogía de la indagación del programa FpN han demostrado de forma concluyente que, de hecho, niños y niñas no son incapaces de recibir formación y educación filosóficas. Pero, ¿estaba Platón equivocado? ¿O se le ha mayormente malinterpretado? ¿Muestra su teoría de la educación el valor de cultivar virtudes en los jóvenes? Este artículo intenta responder a estas preguntas leyendo la *República*, concretamente la teoría de la educación de Platón y la alegoría de la caverna, como un manual de educación que puede fortalecer la comprensión del enfoque pedagógico de la FpN y la importancia de educar a los niños en la sabiduría y otras virtudes intelectuales. Demuestra que la concepción platónica de la educación es coherente con la postura teórica de la FpN según la cual la educación es transformadora, facilitadora y basada en virtudes. Al desentrañar los simbolismos y significados de la metáfora de la caverna, también se analiza la facilitación eficiente, el desarrollo de capacidades del profesorado y el compartir responsabilidades en educación.

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En última instancia, inspirarse en la teoría de la educación de Platón puede recalibrar y mejorar el modo en que se concibe el papel de la educación en la construcción de comunidades solidarias [*caring*] que capaciten a alumnos y educadores para la democracia, el aprendizaje superior y el logro.

palabras clave: filosofía para niños; educación; comunidad de indagación; sabiduría; platón.

“educar crianças para a sabedoria”: reflexão sobre a abordagem de comunidade de investigação da filosofia para crianças a partir da alegoria da caverna de platão

resumo

Existe uma crença difundida na Filosofia para Crianças (FpC) de que Platão, o famoso pensador grego que introduziu a filosofia no mundo em forma de diálogo, era contra ensinar filosofia para crianças pequenas. Décadas de implementação da pedagogia de investigação do programa de Filosofia para Crianças mostram conclusivamente que as crianças não são, na verdade, incapazes de receber treinamento e educação filosófica. Mas será que Platão estava errado? Ou será que ele foi amplamente incompreendido? Sua teoria da educação mostra o valor de cultivar virtudes nos jovens? Este artigo busca responder a essas questões através da leitura da *República*, especificamente a teoria da educação de Platão e a alegoria da caverna, como um manual de educação que pode fortalecer a compreensão da abordagem pedagógica da Filosofia para Crianças e a importância de educar crianças para a sabedoria e para outras virtudes intelectuais. Mostra-se que a concepção platônica de educação é coerente com a posição teórica da FpC de uma educação transformadora, facilitadora e baseada em virtudes. Ao destrinchar os simbolismos e significados da metáfora da caverna, também se discute a facilitação eficaz, a capacitação docente e a partilha de responsabilidades na educação. Por fim, partir da teoria da educação de Platão pode recalibrar e melhorar a forma como se vê o papel da educação na construção de comunidades solidárias que capacitem estudantes e educadores para a democracia, o aprendizado superior e o sucesso.

palavras-chave: filosofia para crianças; educação; comunidade de investigação; sabedoria; platão.



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introduction: a case for reading the republic as an education manual

Plato’s *Republic* is a classic of political philosophy, but it is also an invaluable text for those who are interested in education. Indeed, the book is an essential text for political philosophy because it explores the structure of a just society in great detail. However, it is also a text rich in educational concepts, with instructional strategies and teaching philosophies carefully embedded in the complex exchanges of ideas between Socrates and his interlocutors. Seen in this light, one may appreciate the Plato of the *Republic* not only for his concern with the cultivation of justice² in society but also as a champion of admonishing the old to invest in carefully guiding the young, as this is the path to sustaining the goals of a just and well-ordered society³.

In his analysis of the entire text of the *Republic*, Yunis (2007) calls the educational aspect of the dialogue the “protreptic” quality of its discourse. By definition, a protreptic is any material that serves to instruct and persuade one to move in a particular direction, from the Greek word *protrepein*, which means “turning someone forward”, to “propel”, “urge on”, and “exhort” (Yunis, 2007, p. 4). The *Republic*, as a protreptic, may not be educational in its entirety. Reading it does not and cannot bring about education in virtue on its own, but it could set the stage for such an education to become conceivable. In the words of Yunis (2007), “It aims to get education in virtue underway, to get the reader or auditor turned

² The discussion of the concept of justice in society is indeed central to Plato’s *Republic*. Here, it is important to note that the concept of justice proposed by Plato is unique in that it is different from the common modern conception that links it with equality and fairness, among many other concepts. Platonic justice has to do with the soul, and how man takes his own place in society and functions according to what his soul is “predisposed” to do. Thus, the soul of the nature of gold must rule following what the metal in his soul dictates, and the same applies to the natures of silver, brass, iron, etc. (See the Myth of the Noble Lie in *Republic* 414-15).

³ Although Plato could be said to have been promoting his own notion of a political utopia that divides members of the community within a three-class structure (gold, silver, iron/brass/bronze), he is very much concerned about institutionalizing a quality education for all intelligent children, which explicitly includes girls. The Myth of the Noble Lie confirms this view. Although souls are made from different metals, we are all brothers and sisters from the same earth.

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and moving in the right direction, and to make the acquisition of virtue an urgent priority” (p. 4). In fact, it is impossible to read the *Republic* without being a bit moved by the story of the Ring of Gyges; anyone can imagine oneself in the shoes of somebody contemplating forsaking the good with the assurance of getting away with mischief. The same goes for the cave dweller who escaped to see the real world and is compelled to return to the dungeon to inform his friends of the truth, as well as the man in the myth of Er who received the extraordinary opportunity to see how justice benefits the soul as it lives a life of virtue. Indeed, placing oneself into the literary devices Plato employs in the *Republic* urges the reader to rethink her own life actions and decisions, which in turn jumpstarts the quest to understand and live a life of moral character and intellectual virtues.

It seems Plato had one eye toward the question of education while writing the *Republic*, as Yunis (2007) observed, and another toward building a just society. More than providing a blueprint for a just society, what Plato may have intended was to make Philosophy, or more precisely, the pursuit of wisdom, justice and other intellectual virtues, accessible and attractive to the ordinary reader, an approach contrary to the Sophistic method popular at the time. The *Republic* exhorts to live in a certain way – to change the way one lives from a life of unrestrained passions and uncontrolled appetites to a life tempered by rationality and goodwill – in pursuit of what truly matters. It is no surprise that the book starts with apparently ordinary conversations among friends and companions, with the elderly Cephalus ruminating on the life he has lived – as though the writer is inviting the reader to take part in the conversation and see herself in the characters. Also, the dialogue naturally progresses until it touches on topics of profound significance, just as everyday conversations among friends fully engrossed in their thoughts proceed. The dialogue delves into the issue of justice and the implications of its absence in society, as well as the soul and how it is corrupted by unrestrained pleasures, thereby providing a protreptic warning to readers. As it ends the discourse with attempts to address the concerns of the aged Cephalus, the *Republic* bids farewell to its readers with reflections on what it means to have pure or true pleasures (Book 9) and, through the myth of Er, on

what tyrannical souls are ultimately bound to experience i, thereby reinforcing the idea that a life of virtue is a life worth living until the very end (Book 10). Yunis (2007) suggests that Plato is concerned with how society was changing and what precisely may be done to address its corruption through governing justly and educating youth in virtues.

The *Republic*, thus, is a book that promotes the education of youth in virtues. Establishing justice in society may have been the apparent topic of the dialogue; however, upon close examination of Plato's theory of education and the allegory of the cave, it becomes clear that justice in society is inconceivable if people are not educated in the right way – if people do not invest in raising philosopher-kings (or just rulers) through education, and subsequently, if the rulers are not concerned with educating the youth in this way. I argue in this paper that the Platonic conception of education expressed in the allegory establishes an inextricable link between conceiving a just society and properly educating the youth. Establishing justice in society and cultivating wisdom in the soul are one and the same goal because one can never be generated, propagated, and preserved without the other. In a way, the persecution and death of Plato's beloved mentor, Socrates, confirmed the reality of the link between a just society and an enlightened citizenry. Socrates, the wisest person of all, fell prey to the bigotry of his time, having been condemned to death precisely because of his quest to rouse the Athenians from a deep slumber. Had justice and the love of wisdom ruled Athens, Socrates may not have died cruelly. More specifically, the *Republic* provides a rationale for educating children in the virtue of wisdom (the love for truth and the pursuit of what matters), a central philosophic virtue.

Plato outlined a society conducive to cultivating wisdom in the youth. Wisdom must be taught because it is instrumental to producing wise rulers (or philosopher-kings) who will, in turn, safeguard the values of a just society. Notwithstanding the discussions of how guardians in the Callipolis are educated in early childhood and teenage years (discussed explicitly in Books 3 to 6), Book 7 of the *Republic*, in the words of Plato himself, contains his theory or philosophy of education, specifically an education that aims to cultivate virtues in learners that

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are instrumental to establishing justice in the society⁴. Book 7 mentions it in a telling way as it opens the conversation on “thinking about the effect of education – or the lack of it – on our nature...” (514a). What follows in Book 7, then, is Plato’s theory of what education is about, its benefits, and the arguments for its centrality in rearing philosopher-kings in the Callipolis. This conception of education is not only beneficial for philosophers but for anyone who envisions living in a just and flourishing society.

Book 7 discusses the aim of education by exploring the consequences of its lack, by recounting the experience of the cave dwellers. The allegory explores the transformative effects of education. In 518d, Plato succinctly defines it as:

the art of directing [the soul’s capacity for reason], of finding the easiest and most effective way of turning the [soul] round. [It is] not the art of putting the power of sight into it, but the art which assumes it possesses this power – albeit incorrectly aligned, and looking in the wrong direction – and contrives to make it look in the right direction.

It can thus be surmised that an educative act, in and of itself, activates and enlivens a person’s capacity for thought, which apparently has fallen into disuse, and reorients the soul toward the right pursuits.

What follows is an attempt to examine an inquiry pedagogy based on an educational philosophy similar to that of Plato – the Philosophy for Children (P4C) approach in education. Reflecting on and inferring from Plato’s theory of education and the allegory of the cave in Book 7 of the *Republic*, this essay seeks to supplement and strengthen the P4C framework. Furthermore, reflecting on the role of a teacher as a facilitator of inquiry and meaningful learning in the classroom can help one to rethink the role of education in building caring communities inside classrooms, empowering children for democracy, and

⁴ In Books 3-7 of the *Republic*, Plato expressly mentions that the practice of philosophy as a dialectical method requires preparedness. Certain subject areas such as mathematics and music must be taught until t50 years of age, before the student becomes ready for the dialectical method of philosophizing. While this could be interpreted as Plato cautioning people against introducing subjects like philosophy to children, it is also evident that Plato sees education as a form of training and cultivation – which is also the reason why he introduced physical, musical, and mathematics training to the youth. Engaging children in activities that provide opportunities to train not only the body but also the mind is understood here as consistent with Platonic insight. This insight will be further analyzed in later sections.



involving other stakeholders in education, such as parents and communities, to invest in the education of the youth.

the “community of inquiry” approach and philosophy for children program as a platonic educational ideal

In the 1960s-1970s, the world witnessed the introduction of the Philosophy for Children program of Matthew Lipman and Ann Margaret Sharp, an inquiry-based pedagogy. The program was in response to the need to reorient education towards cultivating rationality in young people, an urgent educational agenda at the time. The project was intimidating, but Lipman understood what needed to be done and where to start. He simplified the task to an extent by creating a storybook and infusing the story with what he knew how to teach – logic and critical thinking – and specifically targeting an audience – young children. As a logic and critical thinking instructor, Lipman inserted these insights into the characters’ dialogues in the first storybook he wrote, *Harry Stottlemeier’s Discovery*, which became the basis of the first P4C curriculum. Due to his limited experience with curriculum development, Lipman collaborated with Ann Margaret Sharp, a Foundations of Education faculty member at Montclair State University. This partnership led to the creation of the P4C curriculum and the establishment of an institute in 1972 that will forever be known as the original home institution of P4C – Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC) at Montclair State University, New Jersey. After writing the first few chapters of the storybook, Lipman conducted a 10-week experiment with 5th-grade students. After the study, there was an improvement in the reasoning capacity of students based on pre-test and post-test performances on a reasoning test Lipman also constructed (Lipman, 2011). Significant effects on other achievement areas were also noted, lasting for at least two years (Lipman, 2011). It is IAPC which published the curriculum, organized the experimental research and prepared teachers to disseminate the P4C program in schools throughout the world (Lipman, 2011).

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The P4C curriculum is a reading curriculum that provides children with philosophical topics to ask and talk about, all embedded in the everyday conversations and dialogues of the children in the storybooks. The P4C program is aimed at introducing philosophical thinking skills to young learners from preschool to high school by engaging them to reason with others in a community context, giving birth to the “Community of (Philosophical) Inquiry” (COI or CPI) approach. This approach is an “inquiry pedagogy” which drew from the Socratic method of questioning that was initially pioneered in Plato’s dialogues (Norris *et al.*, 2013, p. 34). P4C’s focus is on teaching students how to ask questions and respond to those questions with others, which leads to the cultivation of philosophical thinking and inquiry (Norris *et al.*, 2013).

As conceived initially, P4C is a curriculum that introduces and implements philosophy in primary and secondary education, consisting of seven subprograms for use at different educational levels (Lipman, 1993, p. 296). Each subprogram consists of a story (or a fictional narrative) and an instructional manual which (contains discussion plans, exercises, and explanations of fundamental concepts or leading ideas (Lipman, 1993). The pedagogy transforms classrooms into communities of inquirers, and the role of the teacher is relegated to that of a facilitator. The primary task of the teacher is to facilitate the students’ inquiry. As facilitators, teachers do not endeavour to indoctrinate students with their personal opinions and ideas. Each philosophy session is a form of inquiry which introduces learners to the doing and the practice of philosophical thinking.

Philosophy thinking skills include asking critical questions, clarifying ideas, spotting errors of reasoning, summarising, and building on other people’s thoughts, to name a few. In the COI session, the teacher facilitates the session by engaging students in inquiring about a philosophical topic. The session starts with reading a short excerpt from a featured storybook or philosophical novel. The children then ask questions about the story together and build on each other’s ideas until the community reaches a reasonable, provisional judgment in answer to the question. Texts such as stories and novels serve only as prompts for questioning. As part of the community, children are encouraged to ask their



questions and choose the topic to be inquired about in the session from among those questions. The inquiry is argument-led – the students share their ideas, and the teacher facilitates the discussion by observing where “reason” leads it. As Sharp (1992) notes, the dialogue is a “quest for self-knowledge” and “a love for wisdom” (p. 46). Everyone in the community participates in “good questioning, paying attention to the details of one’s experience, dialogue with others, open inquiry, recognition of one’s ignorance, and a willingness to follow the inquiry where it leads” (Sharp, 1992, p. 46).

The Philosophy for Children program focuses on the whole child’s development (cognitive, socio-emotional, affective, and personal). Lipman (2003) states that thinking is naturally multidimensional, and the COI approach specifically caters to this multidimensionality. The COI approach, which cultivates the 3 C’s of thinking (creative, critical and caring), taps into imagination and reflection (the creative aspect), mobilizes reasoning and argumentation (the critical aspect), and engages the affective and value component of thought (the caring aspect). In the COI, children are not only cognitively engaged, but they also tap into their emotions as they show care and concern for the other members of the community and the community as a whole. This is particularly evident when, instead of sticking to what they initially thought of as correct, they accept constructive criticism and allow their views to be shaped by reason and discourse. Children begin to see that the judgment of the entire community is something they share with others and personally identify with because it is what the whole community worked together to build. Their loyalty to the community translates into self-correction and strengthening their commitment to truth. They also exercise socio-ethical skills as they practice thinking with others and develop loyalty to the community whose thoughts and ideas they identify with and share. Children get to listen to others, correct and be corrected by others, and develop their ideas. Values and principles of respect, justice, trust, and loyalty are practiced, learned and imbibed not through inculcation or conditioning but through the experience of collaborating with other learners. In COI dialogues, it is possible to end sessions without having a complete and perfect answer to the

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question chosen. The whole session could give rise to more and more questions. With this, learners begin to get used to uncertainty and open-mindedness, criticality and creativity, and having more questions to explore.

Also, the Philosophy for Children program highlights the critical role of the facilitator of a dialogue. Although the discussion is argument-led, it is the facilitator who helps the learners remain sensitive to the flow of the discussion. The facilitator functions as a guide in assisting students to navigate the dialogue. The facilitator listens, observes and makes observable what is otherwise unobservable for children. The whole session is dialogue-driven and collaborative, which makes it all the more conducive to the development of critical, creative and collaborative thinking skills in the participants.

Over decades of implementation worldwide, several challenges confronted the integration of Philosophy for Children in educational systems. Issues with facilitation were at the forefront. How can one ensure the effectiveness of inquiry facilitation (Canuto, 2015)? Is formal training necessary to become an effective facilitator of a COI session (Gazzard, 2012)? How, exactly, should facilitation be done (Castleberry & Clark, 2020)? How can one ascertain the effects of the inquiry session on a student’s academic performance (Green, 2015-16)? Reflecting on the inquiry process itself and the distinct role of the teacher-facilitator and education at large may provide insight into these issues. This essay addresses these important issues by revisiting Plato’s theory of education and the Allegory of the Cave, which he used to explain the theory completely. Plato’s theory of education and the journey of the enlightened cave dweller provide readers with an understanding of what education should consist of and how teachers can effectively facilitate the learning process.

taking cue from the allegory of the cave

It is tempting to read Book 7 of the *Republic*, specifically the allegory of the cave, strictly as an “analogy of the human condition” (Losin, 1996); that is, the cave dwellers represent “humanity broadly construed,” and the cave represents “the visible world of human experience” (Zamosc, 2017). Without contradicting



widely accepted interpretations of this famous allegory, this section explores the possibility of interpreting the allegory as “pedagogical material”. In the other books of the *Republic*, Plato recommends specific ways of training children to become philosophers and, eventually, philosopher-rulers. In Book 3, Plato mentions the subjects, like music and gymnastics, that must be taught to children to initially prepare them and issues a stern warning against distorting the truth and producing cowardice in children through poetry and art. Book 7, on the other hand, explores the centrality of education in rearing guardians who will eventually become philosopher-rulers.

Here are some key points in the Allegory of the Cave that can be used to supplement some insights in the facilitation of a P4C-COI session:

the education process is, and must be, transformative

Philosophy for Children is a development in the history of education which can be thought of, first, as a “hypothesis” and, second, as an “experimental intervention based upon that hypothesis” (Lipman, 1993, p. 297). The program is based on a theoretical assumption similar to the one espoused by Plato in Book 7, concisely expressed in the allegory of the cave. Plato mentions, “Education is not what some people proclaim it to be” (518c). Traditional education is based on the information-acquisition model in which ideas are forcibly instilled in students (Lipman, 1985). In this model, students are seen as powerless or incapable of deciding and thinking for themselves. Teachers, on the other hand, are seen as something similar to “bank clerks”, depositing information into students, as Freire also put it (Freire, 1970). Through the Philosophy for Children program, Lipman hypothesized that if children are exposed to the process of inquiring about meaningful topics and are engaged in philosophical thinking about matters that directly pique their interest, learning will be purposeful and transformative.

The banking approach to education, according to the proponents of the P4C program, does not get the job done because education, in the first place, does not consist of this. The purpose of education is not knowledge transmission. It is “to equip children with the skills and dispositions they need to create new knowledge

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and make better practical judgment... a traditional classroom of ‘telling’ is not appropriate” (Sharp, 1991, p. 34). On this topic, Plato further argues that education does not simply equip learners with skills and dispositions, “like putting sight into eyes which were blind” (518c). Children have innate capacities for thought waiting to be triggered and reoriented. The ability is “in every soul” (518c). Children learn through the invigoration of these capacities in the soul. Education, therefore, must be concerned with tapping into the reasoning capacities of children that have long been waiting to be put to use. Educators must constantly remember that learners have an innate capacity for rational thought and reflection, and this should have an effect on the design of classroom activities and settings.

The educational process, by its very nature, is and must be transformative. A transformative education can spur the soul to exercise the capacity of reason and direct it toward pursuits related to the objects of reason. This important Platonic insight, when applied to the facilitation process, can improve the way a facilitator sees her role in the inquiry. If learning the methods of engaging in meaningful dialogues with others are the end goals of the inquiry, a child in a COI session must not only be taught how to argue. Instead, the child must be propelled to love the truth, which is to say that the child must learn the value of what he is doing and the goal of the pursuit, which is to come to a higher level of understanding.

Here one can draw an analogy between the child’s participation in the learning process of the inquiry and the cave dweller’s ascent to light. The child in the inquiry is carefully being assisted in moving upwards, gradually being taken to higher levels of appreciation of a concept. Plato outlines it clearly and mentions that it starts from the examination of one’s assumptions (CONJECTURE), moves to the exploration of one’s opinions (BELIEF), progresses into reaching more precise conceptions and thoughts (THINKING), and eventually culminates in understanding fully (KNOWLEDGE), which is patterned after the Simile of the Sun and the Analogy of the Divided Line embedded in the Allegory of the Cave (533b-d). The process is gradual and may take a while, but the process must be one of ascent. The inquiry should be, if not wholly, something reminiscent of the



dialectical method, which is “the only one in which its determination to make itself secure proceeds by this route – doing away with its assumptions until it reaches the first principle itself” (533d).

Putting it into practice, the teacher-facilitator should usher children into a state of recognition that they may be entertaining some form of “morass of philistinism” (i.e., narrowmindedness and relativistic tendencies), and they must be pulled from it and led out of it, upwards (533d). Plato calls it a “process of conversion” (533d) because education must be such – an activity that transforms the person to pursue the path of wisdom and understanding. The learning process is tedious and tricky; inquiry with children should give them the same feeling of disequilibrium and doubt in order to direct them toward pursuing the truth. Learning should be challenging and disorienting at times, similar to the experience of the cave dweller as he encountered a temporary loss of vision while adjusting to light. But it should also propel children forward and upwards toward a higher understanding and appreciation of the truth.

On the topic of the transformative nature of the educational process, Plato’s allegory of the cave offers an additional insight. The cave dweller’s ascent was made possible because its body was completely turned toward the exit. Transformative learning takes place when “the entire soul turns with it, away from what is coming to be, until it can bear the sight of what is, and in particular the brightest of it” (518d). What this might mean for a transformative education is that the learner must decide to reorient her whole perspective and commit herself to the process of learning. The role of a teacher is facilitative. While teachers are responsible for setting up a classroom environment conducive to transformative learning, learners are given the liberty to take the leap and commit themselves to truth and the love of wisdom. Education aims at turning the soul in the right direction by providing prompts or triggers. Teachers act as facilitators of the educational experience. With proper assistance and guidance, the students will hopefully “ascend to light” for themselves, with an honest and sincere appreciation and commitment to pursuing knowledge. Practically, this means that learning experiences in the classroom must motivate students to pursue inquiry

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outside the classroom, in their own homes, and wherever they go, because learning should not stop inside the classroom. In a COI session, with time limitations, the inquiry may be put on hold or abandoned prematurely. Still, the goal is to get the students to engage extensively and inquire continuously with other thinkers beyond any apparent constraints. Plato mentions in 518e-519a, “The virtue of rational thought is different. It seems that it is made of some more divine material, which never loses its power but becomes beneficial, or useless and harmful, depending on which way it is facing”. Cultivating the reasoning capacities of children, when done effectively, will naturally lead them to using these capacities to embark on other pursuits of knowledge or follow the quest to know wherever it leads them, because “the virtue of rational thought” is beneficial even outside the classroom.

the motivation for education (to teach) is a by-product of the motivation to be a philosopher-king (to rule justly)

The motivation to educate children correctly is the same as the motivation to govern justly; both are the result of a transformative education. Miller (2007) asserts that “the crux of the philosopher’s ruling activity, Socrates says at 540a, is ‘using the Good as a paradigm, to order city, [the individuals within it, and themselves’, and a core part of this ‘order[ing]’, he goes on to say, is ‘teaching’” (p. 334). What this means is that once the philosopher has been freed from the chains that held him in the cave and comes to understand and deeply appreciate the Good, he will be disposed to “participate in the Good” by ordering the city, himself, and finally others, through the education of the people. Returning to the cave is a direct effect of knowing the Good. Indeed, returning may subject the philosopher to ridicule and put him at risk (517a). Still, it is a necessary function of a philosopher to teach because it is ruling and consequently teaching that assimilates oneself to the Good, which is the philosopher’s way of participating in it. The example of Socrates going down to the Piraeus at the beginning of the *Republic*, Miller (2007) argues, is Socrates’ giving of himself, which is the “human-existential ‘likeness’ of the Good” (p. 339). Miller (2007) continues,

Don't we now have occasion to recognize a deep connection between the two kinds of education that Socrates prescribed for Callipolis, the external "shaping" of character by models and the quickening of the soul's internal "capacity" for insight? It is in the culminating experience of the latter, the understanding of the Good, that the philosophical soul receives its ultimate model; and it is through its "assimilating itself" to this model, in turn, that the philosopher is moved to "rule", that is, "to educate others like himself" (p. 339).

Teaching and ruling are ways of giving of oneself for the Good, which should in turn motivate the art of education and governance.

Thus, teaching must be motivated by the desire to be and to act for the Good. Additionally, just as a just ruler rules for the benefit of the ruled, teachers must teach for the benefit and the good of the students. Teachers should prioritize the needs of students, be sensitive to possible impediments to learning, and accommodate individual differences in learning. Philosophy for Children is premised on the idea of teaching inspired by the progressivist philosophy of education of John Dewey that advocates reflective and meaningful learning (Bleazby, 2012). Children must be involved in the entire learning process – from choosing topics that are relevant to them for discussion, to being allowed to explore their ideas at their own pace.

Notwithstanding the idea of letting children control their learning to an extent, it should remain clear what the teacher's role in the inquiry process is. Although children are given opportunities to discuss things that matter to them, in the way they know how, it is the responsibility of the teacher, as a facilitator of inquiry, to turn the students' attention to the True, the Good, and the Beautiful. A commitment to meaningful learning should not get in the way of letting reason take its course. In facilitating an inquiry session with children, it is natural for a teacher to get lost in the multifaceted exchanges of the students' ideas. The facilitator could be just as lost in the process as her students are, given the vast array of perspectives each community member offers. However, the facilitator should resist the tendency to get sidetracked and must keep her primary role in mind. An effective facilitator carefully observes where the argumentation is heading, redirects if the discussion goes off on a tangent, and leads everyone back to the point of the inquiry.

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To do this, the teacher must have had the same experience of escaping the cave. Training in facilitation, either by participating as a member of a community of inquiry or by practicing the facilitation of an inquiry, is critical. The teacher-facilitator must not be a stranger to the inquiry process and the art of philosophizing. She can use her experience of “navigating the cave back and forth”, that is, her experience inquiring with others, to guide others as well. In a sense, one can relate it to what Socrates mentioned as the role of a philosopher-king in 520b: “We produced you as guides and rulers both for yourselves and for the rest of the city – like leaders or kings in a hive of bees. You have been better and more fully educated than the rest, and are better able to play your part in both types of life”. Teaching is one’s commitment to be for the Good, and this commitment must be accompanied by a desire to be trained in the art of teaching (in this context, facilitating) and to surrender to the complexity of the process. Seen in this light, it is critical to recognize that teachers must be fully equipped and trained to become the best at their craft. If we want to produce the best teachers, Plato is saying, in effect, government institutions should invest and find ways to train teachers to facilitate inquiry to become experts at their craft. Investing in teacher capacity-building must be prioritized by a society that works for the good of its citizens.

Plato, through the allegory of the cave, is also saying that getting out of the cave is not the be-all and end-all of education. What good is it for many people to be transformed for the Good if the experience does not produce the desire to get as many other people out of the cave as possible? When one gets to participate in the Good, one gains a strong desire to assist others in having the same experience despite the odds. Going back to the allegory of the cave, one may not fully know what initially happened to the cave dweller when his fettered feet were unshackled and he had the chance to stand up and turn his vision away from shadowplay. Plato left this idea open. What did he see in the wall, or what sound did he hear that drove him to stand up? Who removed the fetters from his feet? Did someone whisper to him to turn his body around? While the allegory provides no clue as to how the cave dweller was freed, it gives abundant insight



into why he must return to the dungeon, how critical his return is, and how he can share the same freedom with the other prisoners and assist them as they stand up and unshackle their feet. The idea of staying outside the cave is tempting. Yet the direction of the narrative pushes the reader to embrace the risk that comes with returning rather than recoiling like a coward and selfishly enjoying the light. Teaching others is a natural consequence of being engaged in truth and wisdom. The allegory almost ended on this note: “Do you want to live in a just society? Teach, rule! That is the only way to achieve it”.

An implication for the inquiry process here is that a facilitator of a COI session must see beyond the surface. The teacher, as a facilitator, has a more prominent responsibility than the designer of a learning experience. While designing a learning experience that gets children to think and inquire with others is an essential feature of facilitation, the teacher must also be cognizant of the more significant effect that subjecting students to the process of inquiry has on their desire to replicate the same attitude in their engagements with other people and the broader implications for the larger community outside the classroom environment. Building in students the desire to “go back to the cave” does not only mean encouraging them to pursue a career in education. Engaging their friends, family members and outside communities in processes of inquiry as they have been drawn to the light would make just as significant an impact on the world. When a child begins to get the motivation to help others ascend to light, inquiry participation has been a success.

teaching is facilitating or prompting

Given the inquiry pedagogy or approach it uses, Philosophy for Children views teaching, in and of itself, as facilitating. Education, as discussed in the previous sections, provides children with experiences that spur them to exercise their capacities for rational thought.

Returning once again to the absence of a driving force that removed the shackles of the allegorical cave dweller, another interpretation is that the person responsible for the removal of the shackles is the prisoner himself. In a profound

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sense, freedom from ignorance is a personal decision. You can be provided with every reason to free yourself from your cave, but ultimately, it is the prisoner who will get up, remove the shackles, and climb to the exit to see for himself what the outside world offers. If it is correct to assume that Plato is using this as a symbol for teaching and educating others, then teaching and education should seek to facilitate the experience of turning from ignorance to knowledge. Education should not consist of forcing an idea on a student or a learner to embrace a position. Rather, education, as Plato construed it, allows the learner to exercise his reasoning capabilities and decide for himself what to do with these abilities. This is consistent with the Platonic theory that knowledge is a form of recollection. A knowing soul, despite being in a state of ignorance or forgetfulness, will remember what it knows. An exemplary teacher of Platonic transformative education is somebody who designs and facilitates an experience of remembering the Forms. Forms, which can roughly be referred to as True Ideas, are only accessible through reason; therefore, the experience must be one wherein students make use of their reasoning capacities and rational dispositions in recollecting and understanding true ideas.

Philosophy for Children must remain committed to its pedagogical practice of empowering teachers to be facilitators of dialogues. Dialogue is an essential component of the inquiry session. The teacher has a facilitative role in it, which emphasizes the importance of the teacher’s modeling sound critical reasoning (Castleberry & Clark, 2020). The facilitator should model reasoning in the inquiry process without taking the lead in answering the questions. A co-inquirer shares the burden of the community to look for answers by employing dialogic and reasoning moves. If students commit fallacies, the facilitator encourages them to identify them and correct the faulty argument. When the community finds the going difficult and runs into a dead end, the facilitator comes to the rescue with her toolkit and motivates students to expand their ideas by offering analogies, metaphors and other possible ways of opening up the discussion. The inquiry experience gives each community member an understanding of what it means to think critically, creatively, and caringly (the 3 C’s of thinking in P4C), which the

facilitator models. As students develop their P4C moves, they can also serve as models for one another in future sessions (Castleberry & Clark, 2020). This is what it means to facilitate the inquiry process – to empower students through modeling inquisitive thinking and philosophizing. Again, returning to the cave dweller analogy, to re-enter the cave and bring more people out of it.

It must be clear that to be a co-inquirer in the inquiry process requires that the teacher-facilitator develop a philosophical ear, which is a kind of sensitivity to the philosophical dimensions of thought and experience (Oyler, 2016). It is a kind of awareness developed through participating in the practice of philosophy and obtaining a good grasp of the topics discussed in the discipline. This is in line with the argument that teachers must be trained to be competent facilitators of philosophical dialogues, which is what getting out of the cave means. They need to be introduced to philosophy both as an inquirer and a student of it. However, this does not imply that philosophizing with children is synonymous with teaching them theories and viewpoints in philosophy. What engaging in the discipline and the practice of philosophy does to the teacher-facilitator is to create in them the love for truth and wisdom and what they entail, which is a lifelong commitment to finding meaning in the complexity of human thought and experience. This is what it means for a teacher to be a co-inquirer – to model the same values and commitment through participating in the inquiry process, with the goal of sharing the same dedication and enthusiasm with students, and in turn propel them to remove their shackles and exit the cave. Again, getting out of the cave is not the goal of education; it is to get as many people as possible empowered to go back into the cave with the same desire to share wisdom with others⁵.

⁵ Socrates did his part to get as many people out of the cave as possible as he attempted to co-inquire with other Athenians, specifically the youth of his time, as shown in the early dialogues of Plato. Socrates demonstrated what it means to be a co-inquirer with his interlocutors and was very vocal about his own ignorance on many occasions in Plato's early writings. The *Republic*, however, was generally understood as a middle dialogue in which Plato began to shift his conception of what a philosopher is. The philosopher in the *Republic* is viewed as the only proper ruler or king, as he is the only one who achieves wisdom. This does not in any way contradict the view that the philosopher-king continues to be a co-inquirer despite attaining wisdom. Socrates, although he admits his own ignorance, is the epitome of wisdom, as the Socratic irony suggests. He claims that he does not know anything, but he is wise (as a matter of fact, the wisest), not because he knows a lot of information but because he is intellectually virtuous enough to admit that the

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wisdom is an educational goal and ideal

Wisdom should be the ultimate educational goal and ideal; the same should be true of the P4C inquiry approach. But what is the virtue of wisdom, and how can children be taught through facilitation to pursue it?

Wisdom, as implicitly expressed in the *Republic*, is the pursuit of truth and understanding. As Socrates was said to have stated on many occasions, having wisdom is knowing that one does not know anything and must thus strive to know. From the perspective of the allegory of the cave, education is the act of turning the soul in the direction in which it can see for itself not only the way towards the light but also its own appalling state of ignorance. Thus, the journey to wisdom starts with recognizing the impoverished state of the soul and pursuing the way of truth with humility and complete openness. Admitting ignorance entails turning one's attention toward the quest for truth. When students begin to recognize that they do not know and are not only told but also made to feel that it is acceptable to not know anything, education becomes an enjoyable and liberating personal journey. The teacher-facilitator, as a co-inquirer, shares the same basic ignorance and, just like her students, is but a sojourner in the quest for truth – someone who shares in the pursuit of wisdom.

An education for wisdom must, therefore, be approached not as a guessing game in which answers are hidden in teachers’ cue cards, waiting to be revealed after each round. Plato makes the same reference in the allegory of the cave. The unfreed cave dwellers were playing the guessing game as they participated in shadowplay⁶. They were endlessly guessing what it was that they were hearing

pursuit of truth and understanding is a never-ending process of thinking about life and finding meaning. To be wise is to be always open to fresh ideas, to be intellectually humble enough to admit that life and existence will never run out of mysteries to uncover and truths to decipher. This will be highlighted further in the next section.

⁶ In comparing classroom activities with Plato’s idea of a shadowplay, it should be pointed out that although lower order thinking skills such as rote memorization, remembering and comprehension help in student achievement and success, they must be complemented by activities that foster higher order thinking such as inquiry, reflection, and analysis, especially if the teacher is concerned with cultivating wisdom in her students. P4C does not entirely reject the idea of learning facts and theories about the world, which is crucial in some content-rich curricula. Instead, P4C advocates for an inquiry-based pedagogy that puts children in a community context where they can unpack and analyze the ideas they learned in class.



and what names they could give the shadows (515b-c). Stretching the analogy further, it may be said that teachers function as the puppeteers in the shadowplay as they determine the objects of learning in the classroom. Education viewed in this way promotes the idea that teachers are know-it-alls and that students solely depend on them for knowledge. In contrast, the Platonic insight advocates that teachers and students share the role and responsibility in the quest for truth and understanding. The teacher is an inquirer too, and she is as eager as the students to participate in the inquiry process.

Additionally, an education for wisdom emphasizes the role of the community in cultivating wisdom. In a community of inquiry, nothing is purely personal. No one is the sole author of any thought. Whatever is gained in the inquiry is gained by the entire community. Thus, wisdom is socially cultivated and gained through discussions with other thinkers. Wisdom should never be kept to oneself. Somebody wise, in the Platonic sense, participates in the dissemination of wisdom. Wisdom is gained, reinforced, and flourishes when one constantly shares it with others. The same goes for both the teacher-facilitator who engages students in inquiring in the pursuit of wisdom and the student who is participating in the inquiry – both develop wisdom. Socrates demonstrated it throughout the dialogue through the elenctic approach of asking questions and guiding his interlocutors towards the truth. As somebody who was remarkably candid about his role as an inquirer of the truth, he engaged his interlocutors in a dialogue in an atmosphere of intellectual openness and humility. He never claimed to know of the “good” himself and was quite vocal in saying that he was as eager to know the truth as his interlocutors were. Teachers and students are co-learners, and teachers also become “wise” as they teach and learn alongside their students.

Keeping wisdom’s social aspect in mind, a P4C teacher, as she guides her students through the inquiry process, should approach things as a participant in the quest for knowledge and understanding. She not only deepens her understanding of concepts that students adopt as she participates in the inquiry process, but she also enhances her grasp of the inquiry process and develops proficiency in facilitating. The P4C teacher should not be seen as a mere guide in

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the quest, as if she were uninterested in both the quest for the truth and truth itself, a sort of disinterested tour guide. As she guides others, the tour guide also benefits as she discovers more about the place. The teacher and the students share discoveries and mutually benefit from the learning process. In the Platonic ideal, education is a form of participation; teachers and learners participate in it together.

The allegorical enlightened prisoner who came back to share what he had learned with his friends did so out of genuine compassion and intellectual sympathy. Since the enlightened prisoner symbolizes a teacher who promotes an education that genuinely transforms, compassion and genuine care for young people and their education should also motivate teaching. Sayson (2023) puts it beautifully and profoundly in his metaphor of the Flame of Wisdom. Some, he says, keep their flames of wisdom to themselves. Having found the land of the blessed, they bask in the light and never intend to revisit their old lives inside the dark dungeon (519c). But some are guided by an inner flame and an unquenchable desire to impart that flame to others, for it is by sharing the flame that they hope to produce enough light in the world. P4C practitioners must never forget the caring aspect of the practice and the greater goal of spreading more light in a world that lingers in darkness . In this sense, it is teachers’ love of wisdom and desire to dispel ignorance that motivates them to seek to spread it through their teaching and facilitation of inquiry.

Wisdom is not meant to be developed in one sitting; one cannot be wise in every sense of the word even after finishing schooling and formal education. But as the *Republic’s* protreptic aspect shows, an education for wisdom is only an education towards it. Going back to the original thrust of the P4C program, it is intended to arm children with philosophical thinking skills and inculcate their reasoning capacities in order to start the cultivation of wisdom. Inquiry sessions must be designed to prompt children to pursue wisdom inside and outside the inquiry sessions, thereby transcending the boundaries of the classroom. That is what Socratic wisdom is. A wise person in every sense of the word will remain thirsty for wisdom and further learning. A wise man is a lover of learning and a

lover of wisdom. He is uncompromisingly in love with the truth and pursues the pleasures of the mind (582a-b).

Wisdom, that is, the love for truth and the desire to know and understand, is modeled. Socrates modeled it in ways that stirred his interlocutors' curiosity and penchant to seek answers. He stimulated their thoughts by employing literary devices that made the natures of wisdom and justice comprehensible and attractive, while leaving some spaces for their imaginative thinking capacities to be used as well. One can teach philosophical skills to the young as a form of a love for and propensity toward wisdom and understanding. This is built on the idea that teachers may not claim to be wise themselves, but it is their love for wisdom and their desire to be for the truth that drives them and qualifies them to be propagators of wisdom. What P4C does and must continuously do is to make the teaching the love of wisdom as attractive to children as possible. The simple activity of guiding children to ask meaningful questions propels them to move toward wisdom. All the other skill-building exercises in the COI session must be aligned to direct children along the path of wisdom.

Finally, an education towards wisdom must include an education of pleasures and emotions. Getting children to take pleasure in certain things (goods of the mind) rather than others (goods of the body) must also be involved in the inquiry process. A teacher intending to teach wisdom to her students should create a classroom atmosphere where students get to be engaged in an actual inquiry and taste of its goodness, which is, as Plato explained it, a pure experience of something that has more being or value – something that has more goodness and truth to it. The enlightened cave dweller, in some sense, desired to return to the dungeon and acted on the desire. Interestingly, enlightening those who remain inside the cave cannot be accomplished simply by narrating one's experience of getting out; the other prisoners are urged to experience it by literally getting out of the cave. Education must provide children with real experiences of being reasoned with and inquiring with others. The pleasures gained through participating in these skill-building activities have “more being” and are genuinely pleasurable in the truest sense of the word because reason appreciates and values them more, as

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Plato argued. These intellectual activities give students the feeling of “being filled with things appropriate to our nature” (585d-e). Teachers must engage students in intellectual activities, such as formulating questions and empowering them to answer the questions that interest them as a community.

conclusion

The *Republic* is a treatise on how to educate souls, i.e., the formation of souls (Sayson, 2023). This formation of the soul is not exclusively experienced by students of older age; it is, in fact, an experience that fits younger learners best. Some P4C thinkers mistakenly have quoted Plato as saying that children must not be taught philosophy, concluding that “Plato was wrong!” (Shapiro, 2012). Contrary to this erroneous notion, Philosophy for Children, an educational program that brings philosophy closer to young learners, perfectly fits what Plato might have advocated as a pedagogy for educating children. To address this misconception, one should interpret Plato’s *Republic* within its cultural and historical context. Of course, engaging children in hairsplitting conversations may not have been typical during the time of Plato, given that formal schooling was still an undeveloped concept. Plato has been largely misunderstood. Plato is not averse to teaching virtues such as courage and wisdom to children at a young age. What Plato cautions his readers against is the tendency to reduce philosophy to the love of winning arguments and passing that tendency along when teaching children how to reason. The form of philosophy he envisions for education systems invites dialogue among thinkers, which helps free the soul from errors and false opinions that obstruct the truth. In fact, in 429a-b, Plato recognizes the importance of guiding young children in a certain way; while they are still receptive (in reference to the metaphor of dyeing wool), one should take the opportunity. While the individual is still a good absorber of knowledge, which is the state of the mind of young children (429d-430b), we should take the initiative in guiding them in the right way. This was also reiterated in the allegory of the cave in 519a-b:

If this soul, the soul belonging to a nature of this sort, had been hammered into shape from the earliest of childhood, it might have struck from it the leaden weights of birth and becoming... If it had

rid itself of these weights, and turned towards the truth, then the same soul, in the same people, would be able to see things which are true with the same clarity as it sees the things it is directed towards at the moment.

He was providing a stern warning on cultivating children's reasoning skills without simultaneously turning their souls around, from darkness to light, thereby leading them to engage in useless sophistry. That is why an inquiry must have one eye toward cultivating children's reasoning capacities and another toward leading them along the path of truth and understanding. The inquiry process must not merely equip them for bickering and altercations. Instead, it must lead them to the noble pursuit of the True, the Good, and the Beautiful, which is what it means to participate in the Good – an experience only available to those who had a taste of the realm of the truth and understood completely. This can be seen in the example of Socrates, who went to the agora and town squares to engage the youth of his time. Indeed, the example of the *Republic* as a protreptic dialogue demonstrates Plato's eagerness to make philosophy accessible to any reader and the love for truth, wisdom, and justice attractive to anyone. As Sayson (2023) mentioned, Plato, through the *Republic*, "attempted to spread the understanding of the true natures of wisdom and justice by demystifying the notion of wisdom and making it accessible to as many human learners as possible".

Wisdom is a shared virtue. A person who exemplifies wisdom has the intellectual capacities required to engage in a quest for knowledge and the motivation to learn for the sake of truth. A wise person also possesses other intellectual virtues, such as intellectual humility and openness. She is open to being corrected if truth requires and continuously advances in her quest for knowledge. In treating wisdom as an educational goal and ideal, as Plato suggested, the inquiry must motivate both the teacher-facilitator and the learners to share in the pursuit of it together. The teacher assists students in knowing the self and learns about herself in the process. Wisdom being an ideal in the teaching process specifically means that the teacher is not afraid to project herself in the classroom as somebody who, in the name of intellectual curiosity, is just as interested in discovering the truth as her students are. She is not afraid to admit her cluelessness and naïveté in some matters, and her delight in learning from her

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students also flows from intellectual humility. Wisdom becoming an ideal in the learning process means students are encouraged to apply their learning to their personal lives and reflect on their lives in general. Students are also not afraid to share their thoughts because teachers invite them to do so and exhibit the same openness. Learning done this way imbues both the students’ education and the teachers’ participation with more meaning.

P4C practitioners who wish to improve how COI sessions are facilitated must not forget the importance of educating children towards wisdom. This must not just be a complementary goal but rather an essential aspect of the program. Children must not only be engaged in asking big questions but also questions of practical and social relevance. They must not only be prepared to use critical thinking and logical reasoning in the classrooms and inquiry sessions with their classmates. Instead, they must be prepared to take on questions and resolve problems that impact things bigger than themselves and their concerns. Facilitators should prepare students for the bigger world beyond and arm them with values and dispositions that will allow them to strive to be for the truth and the good.

Starting children young in an education for wisdom, as discussed in the previous sections, calls for a partnership among educational institutions and the child’s family and community. Children’s learning and development are not the sole responsibility of educational institutions. Family members and other people are also called to be actively involved in the virtue education of the child. Cultivating virtues such as wisdom and the love for truth should begin in the homes and be reinforced in the schools and the bigger community. Philosophy for Children enthusiasts must involve more people – parents, community leaders, and many others – in order to better institutionalize the curriculum.

Borrowing from the Greek etymology of the terms “education” and “pedagogy”, *paideia*, it should be noted that raising children is a holistic social process. Education, interpreted through the term *paideia*, calls for the collaborative involvement of everyone in society in raising virtuous people. In the Republic, Plato warns us of the effects of not spreading wisdom in society and



exhorts us to take part in educating the youth in wisdom, which is a prerequisite for maintaining justice. Reflecting on the insights gleaned from the *Republic* and incorporating them into the P4C practice allows one to understand that, like Plato, we cannot reach our goal of establishing justice and order in society if we do not develop ways of educating the youth in virtues and improving solutions to the challenges we face in educating effectively. To this end, Philosophy for Children, as a program, must be constantly reevaluated to remain an effective solution to the ever-evolving challenges in the educational landscape.

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