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Philosophy in Schools as a Literacy Pedagogy

Presented by
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Philosophy in Schools as a Literacy Pedagogy

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So just who are Australians?...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Australians are really English</th>
<th>Phan¹</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You become Australian when you do things the Australian way. For example, being good at putting up tents.</td>
<td>Anna</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Australians can build tents, but people from other countries can do that too, so does that make them Australian? | Ibrahim |
| But Australians would do that better. | Adrian |

I disagree.

| Aborigines were here first, so they are the real Australians. | Dean |

| What if Zawet turned black from white, is she Aboriginal? | Cam-tu |
| If I call myself Aboriginal, then I’m Aboriginal. | Zawet |

| What if someone else disagrees with you? | Cam-tu |
| Where your heritage is from decides. | Zawet |

| We judge people on their appearance. | Cam-tu |
| How do you know if someone is Aboriginal? | Kelly |

| What do racists want others to do? They can’t change their colour. | Joe |
| People are just racist to make others look bad and to feel strong. | Zawet |

| People get really effected by it because it’s about who you are. | Scott |

| What about people who don’t belong to either group? For example, I’m not blue eyed or brown eyed, I’m hazel. | Anna |
| If you are feeling bad yourself, you might want to tease someone else. | Joe |

| It passes on because that person teases the next person. | Imbrahim |
| People tease others to fit into another group. | Imbrahim |
| They tease weaker people because they can’t defend themselves | Scott |

Eavesdropping on this year 7 conversation in a community of inquiry provides an explicit insight into the dilemmas, struggles and learning for students and teachers in this Quality Teaching Project. The students are grappling with their own identity and that of those around them, they are exploring views and opinions, they are engaged in oral literacy development, argument, reasoning and counter argument and they are defining the social competencies and understandings which are highly relevant to their world as well as their futures. The students are engaged: the teacher is silent. She is actively supporting the

¹ The students names have been changed. It is important to however note the flow of the dialogue so names have been used to identify speakers.
democratic inquiry and learning that is the central outcome of a philosophical community of inquiry. She has enabled the development of literacy, social and civic knowledge so that the students are able to reason inductively about this broad social issue, building on and with colleagues for greater depth of understanding. This example from practice reinforces Fishers’ (1990) claim that an emphasis on four key aspects of the child: psychological, biological, philosophical and sociological is required for the nurture and development of the thinking child.

And in year 3/4 students have been wondering if there a difference between being angry and losing your temper?

| You don’t show your anger as much as when you lose your temper. |
| I try to keep my anger to myself. When I lose my temper, I lose control. |
| Losing your temper involves your whole body. |
| When I’m angry, I do something to cool down. |
| Anger is boiling feelings inside my chest. Losing my temper is more boiling coming out. |
| When I lose my temper, I make it all rise to my head. |
| You’ve got lots of rage in your head and have destructive thoughts. |
| I get thoughts like that when I lose my temper, too. |
| When I lost my temper, my body just chucked my Pokemon on the floor, I didn’t have any thoughts about it. |
| After I lose my temper, I think, “Why did I do that?” |

Here the teacher is also silent as students engage in a challenging exploration of personal feelings, behaviours and associated responsibilities. There is strong evidence of articulate language skills which support reasoning and inferential comprehension, interpreting behaviour, critical thought and reflection.

This paper documents the practices and outcomes of a group of teachers who purposefully embarked on a program of professional learning through a philosophical community of inquiry about classroom philosophical community of inquiry. Through immersion in a professional learning community which grappled with issues of changing practices, student engagement and teacher research of practice, this community prepared itself well to create and stimulate learning circles within classrooms which supported improved thinking, social education and literacy learning.

Background to the Project
The Philosophy in Schools as a Literacy Pedagogy project has been funded under the DEST Quality Teaching Project (QTP) and was established to provide professional development opportunities for teachers in the area of philosophy in schools and community of inquiry pedagogy so that literacy learning of school students would be enhanced. The nature of community of inquiry and philosophical dialogue directed the literacy learning goals in a more focussed way around speaking, listening and reasoning skills.

The goals of the QTP were to:
- Update and improve teachers’ skills and understanding in the priority areas;
• Enhance the status of teaching in both government and non-government schools and
• Develop teachers as researchers as a significant professional development priority within the project.

Specifically, the Philosophy in Schools project sought to achieve the following additional goals and outcomes around the 2 key areas of philosophical inquiry in classrooms and literacy.

**Philosophy:**
• Participating teachers become qualified to facilitate Victorian Association for Philosophy in Schools (VAPS) 2 Level 1 Philosophy for Children professional development with other teachers and philosophers;
• Research documentation of improved student literacy growth and development for involved students/ classes;
• Collection and analysis of data associated with philosophy sessions in classrooms;
• Students and teachers will demonstrate improved reasoning/ thinking skills;
• Establishment of an email distribution list and a discussion forum for interested teachers in NMR and WMR;
• Locally delivered professional development in philosophy for schools/ teachers.

**Literacy:**
• Update and improve teachers’ skills and understanding of Literacy;
• Focus of this project has been on understanding and being able to better assess student listening and speaking skills;
• Develop classroom observation checklist;
• Re-designing and adjusting WA First Steps Literacy Continuum has increased our awareness and knowledge of this specific developmental continuum.
• Networking with other schools and teachers at the same and different stages of schooling has shared good classroom practice.

The Project brought together teachers and teacher educators across Northern Metropolitan and Western Metropolitan Region in professional development activities which included professional development for teaching philosophical inquiry in classrooms (conducted in partnership with VAPS) and in participatory action research (conducted in partnership with Victoria University). Additionally, the work was informed by further private study in the area by two colleagues who are undertaking masters research in the area.

**Project Organisation**
The schools in the project are spread across several school networks, however the high level of skill of the teachers provides a resource for the new networks, should they wish to develop network projects. The project has been structured to

2 VAPS is a subject association in Victoria (FAPCA is the national association). The Association conducts professional development programs for teachers and philosophers who wish to develop their knowledge and skills in philosophical communities of inquiry and Philosophy for Children. These programs can be used for credit in most Victoria universities.
support ongoing development of team members whatever organisational structures exist within DE&T.

Brenda Cherednichenko from Victoria University participated as a member of the group, assisted in providing professional development in research methods, supporting the group with advice and practical help, particularly in effective PD approaches and drafted this paper.

The project has constructed its work as a research and learning circle established to meet the project needs. It has met nine times (full days) over the past eighteen months, July 2001 - December 2002 inclusive. There has been participant commitment to keep meeting and working together. Schools participating have already funded their staff participation beyond the project allowance. Teachers have written a case per term re community of inquiry in their classroom, the WA First Steps (oral) literacy continuum has been modified for our classroom use and research and good classroom practice has been shared at our meetings.

The email distribution list and discussion group are well established and used regularly. In fact, two extra email lists have been created to link our group to wider research groups and the Victorian Association for Philosophy in Schools. The analysis of our data collected in teacher journals and case writing was analysed at the remaining research circle meetings this year. Our critical friend/researcher facilitated this work. The planned local delivery of philosophy and community of inquiry professional development took longer to establish than first expected. The project plans have however broadened to include ‘Philosophy Trails’ for major Victorian tourist/education sites, e.g. zoo, museum, aquarium. Once completed, all these venues will be possible venues in which to support philosophy and community of inquiry professional development for interested teachers from Term 2 2003.

An opportunity has also been initiated in the development of Philosophy Cafes as an engaging and novel way to invite teachers in our region to experience philosophical inquiry first hand. Five ‘cafes’ have been conducted from July to November 2002 on a trial basis. This cafe sub-project has stimulated an on-line discussion group which supports dialogue between the monthly sessions.

The paper which is been presented here reflects reports collaborative analysis of a range of data collected throughout the life of the project, but most specifically the analysis of data collected in the last few months of the project. Although the project team was small the work was rigorous. The findings presented were drawn from the data analysis in collaboration which the participants who were active in the project at it conclusion.

Project Research Plan

Focus Question
How can I foster democratic learning and improved literacy learning outcomes for students through introducing philosophy in schools practices?
Project Team
The team included twenty-one teachers in primary, secondary and tertiary settings, regional consultants and university colleagues who each wanted to engage in change as action research so that they may critically improve the way they listen to, talk with and negotiate learning and be democratic with kids from P-10 from Broadmeadows High School to Werribee Primary School. The team comprised a total of 9 secondary teachers, 9 primary teachers and one consultant and 2 university teachers. Team membership fluctuated over the length of the project as teachers work lives changed.

The Project as Collaborative Research
The approach for this research based project was be founded on Collaborative Practitioner Research methods, including collaborative data collection, analysis and generation of findings. This methodology is based on the research methodology of the ARC/ANSN Longitudinal Study of School Restructuring (Kruger et al 2001). As such, the approach involved the systematic collection of data using case and commentary writing (Shulman 1984; Naumes and Naumes 1999; Cherednichenko et al 1998). It utilised the application of case and commentary writing to extend professional dialogue about teaching and learning, as developed through a range of qualitative projects which are committed to collaborative research (Cherednichenko, Davies, O’Rourke and Kruger, 2001). The research process included collaborative conversations with the Researching Community of Inquiry, including teachers, regional colleagues and university colleagues, as the basis of initiating case writing and documenting the practices of teaching and learning within the school.

It is significant to note that the research and similarly this paper reflects the notion of critical dialogue for developing understanding and informed thinking. Data collection techniques involved colleagues in talking, writing, thinking and responding, not always in real time but as a developing professional dialogue which developed discursive consciousness about teaching, learning, philosophy and literacy. This paper therefore presents as a dialogue between data and understanding.

Data Collection Tools
Teachers utilised a range of data collection tools in the process of this project. These included:

- Observer/ Teacher notes;
- Teacher’s journal;
- Case writing;
- Work samples;
- Audio-visual records of teaching and learning;
- Student case studies against the First Steps Framework’
- Records of student generated questions in classes;
- Student journals;
- School Data - DART, Attitudes and Attendance, CSF, Discipline;
- Student self-assessment;
- Interview and focus groups with students;
- Portfolio of student learning and reflective comment;
- List postings and discussions;
- Teacher professional conversation.

Stage 1: Reconnaissance - The Researching Community of Inquiry identifies the Social Practices of Teaching and Learning, 2001

All data documents literacy learning practice over 10-12 months with one cohort of students during 2001 – 2002 with as many as possible continuing with the teacher from 2001 – 2002.

Community of Inquiry
Meetings with the whole project group initiated and stimulated thinking and writing in response to the question: “What is it like to be a learner in my classroom?” Establishing a community of inquiry which supports investigation of the social practices of teaching and learning and the literacy learning of students was a critical goal and outcome of the project.

Case Writing
An introduction to case writing was also conducted. Small group and whole group discussions offered both reflection and exemplars of the practices of teaching and learning from the teachers' perspective. Case and commentary writing documented these conversations and illustrated the social practices of teaching and learning in literacy. Sharing case writing (eg Teachers Write) and other materials were also discussed as preparation for collegial sharing of practice and inquiry about practice.

On-Line Discussion
A Project web-site and discussion list was established so that colleagues could share their ideas and developments in nurturing philosophical inquiry, philosophy for children and democratic learning. The discussion list supported development of the professional community of inquiry. The website is a public journal, to stimulate ideas exchange, and case writing as well as, where appropriate, student work samples, video and audio tapes of class sessions.

Professional Development
All participants completed a Philosophy of Children Level 2 workshop for developing skills in providing professional development for colleague teachers - October 2001 or January 2002.

Stage 2: Developing a broader data base of teaching and learning practices - the Researching Community of Inquiry gathers extensive data about school wide practices, 2001 - 2002
Cycles of Cases and Commentaries
Reviewing the initial case writing provided the basis for further professional conversations which verify, challenge and illuminate the initial cases. Writers were encouraged to identify the sketches and threads of practice represented in their case writing. The discussion of these identified threads and sketches supported a new focussed dialogue and provides the basis for a shared discourse about practice.

These conversations also generated new exemplars of teaching and learning practice which are again recorded as cases. Where possible case writing was supported by examples of student work which reflected the teaching and learning practices described. Writers were invited to share their case writing with other groups, in the first instance perhaps with the staff at a staff meeting to generate oral commentary on the cases shared.

The professional dialogue of the community of inquiry reflected a discursive environment and provided the opportunity to investigate and document the social practices of teaching and learning beyond the small groups. Existing cases were read (with permission) by the whole group and practitioners asked to identify the sketches and threads of practice represented in the case. The dialogue explored these threads and issues and teachers responded by reflecting on connections to their own practice. Oral commentaries offered an initial opportunity to validate and extend the threads identified by individuals.

Following the dialogue, all participants were then invited to offer a written commentary which drew on their own relationship to the practices described in the case.

Student Work Samples, Journals, Case Studies
Teachers and students were invited to select student work which reflects the social practices of teaching and learning of literacy. These work samples were then interrogated by the teachers who inquired about the nature of learning the achievement of learning and the teaching practices which support that learning. The ANSN Protocols for Looking at Student Work (Cushman 1996) formed the basis for this dialogue.

Stage 3: Collaborative Analysis, Generation and Validation of Findings by the Researching Community of Inquiry

The data gathered was triangulated by the range of perspectives presented – teacher case writing, student work samples, and quantitative data, as well as and records of conversations both face to face and on-line. These data were collaboratively reviewed and key issues, themes and practices were identified. Additionally, trends and changes in quantitative data were monitored for changes or indicators of teaching practices. The Researching Community then explored the nature of student learning and through facilitated dialogue identified the strengths of existing practices and areas for development based on the evidence presented, establishing democratic validity. Anderson and Heer (1999) propose
the potential for practical insights to be translated into valid findings through the application of successive practical tests confirmed in a dialogic engagement between practitioners. These conversations were ‘translated’ by the research colleague as a report of the project and returned to the Researching Community for further validation.

Project Outcomes

Teacher Learning
The project was designed to stimulate teacher learning for changing pedagogy and student learning outcomes. Teachers in the research identified a range of learning which impacted their professional development and classroom practice.

- **Learning about Teaching**
  My class are new to me and I to them. I do have 4 students from last year but that was in the context of a P-2 setting. This is 3-4 and I am going to try something different when I introduce Philosophical Inquiry to this class. After participating in the “Philosophy for Children Level 2” summer school this January, I decided this change at least needed to be tried out.

- **Formal Professional Development and Accreditation**
  Teachers were involved directly in 9 full days of collaborative inquiry, reflection, curriculum building and practice in philosophical inquiry. Whilst there were a few visitors to the group and not all teachers were able to attend every day due to changing work environments, a professional community of inquiry developed.

  All participants in this project have completed Level One Philosophy for Children and most have now completed the professional development program in philosophy for leaders (Level 2) program conducted over 5 full consecutive days and some follow-up sessions by the Victorian Association of Philosophy in Schools. This means that they have contributed at least another 6 unfunded days of their own time to the project over the school holidays.

- **Professional Leadership**
  By the end of term 3 in 2002, these teachers were so skilled in thinking about philosophical inquiry and the way it engaged students and their desire and achievement in literacy, that they embarked on perhaps the most ambitious aspect of the project. They spent 2 days doing and writing philosophy curriculum for themselves, but importantly also for other teachers. There was a significant shift in practice from teachers as learners to teachers as teacher educators. Time at the Melbourne Museum and the Melbourne Zoo was an exploration of possibility - the practical but also the philosophical. Meeting special education service personnel and following their own inquiry about the exhibits, practices, ethical considerations and role and value of knowledge stimulated the posing of many dilemmas for thinking moral citizens. The time spent is this personal
learning enabled the team to intensively practice with peers the skills of community of inquiry: questioning, listening; challenging assumptions; identifying distinctions and making connections (Splitter and Sharp 1994).

- Professional Extension
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Student Learning
From the first day of the project teachers went back to their classrooms ready to engage students more systematically in philosophical dialogue. Not all students, or their teachers, it would be safe to say, entered into the exploration of ideas with great confidence. What was evident though was that with the commitment of teachers came the confidence that students could think for themselves, make this thinking explicit and learn well through the experience.

The analysis of the data gathered about student learning indicated a wide range of positive engagement with literacy and their own thinking as a stimulus for generating a sense of personal agency in the classroom and with the curriculum. Some comments from students are listed below.

i) Doing philosophy is ... fun, boring, hard, helps me understand things, helps me understand other people.
ii) Philosophy is ... a challenge for me.
iii) What is it about philosophy that helps me learn? ... to make me think
iv) If you were the principal would you have a) more philosophy, b) less philosophy or c) about the same amount? B - less philosophy because it interrupts my class work.
v) My feelings about doing philosophy are... the same as there were in term 1 and have not changed.
vi) I have found philosophy ... to help me (sic) thinking a little bit more.

Literacy Learning
Without doubt, teachers were able to track literacy development in their students. The oracy work in community of inquiry prepared students well for writing and stimulated them to write.
Year 10 July 2002

...The dialogues, the oral language part of our work together so far has been ‘fun’ - interesting, thoughtful and enough class laughs and respectful challenges to each other. No put downs or rejections of the ideas from others. Then I asked to write for the first time. We'd talked around the topic as a class twice and then in small group work to give everyone a chance to talk/contribute before I asked them to record the ideas that they felt were the most important or interesting to them. It was like squeezing blood out of a stone! Why such drastic difference in their ability to present ideas orally compared with their written output? Is this a fear of being ‘wrong’ or a lack of ability?

And in October 2002

...As the dialogue the day before has seemed flat, I decided to try individual written conversations for the next lesson. Each student had a choice between two quotes I selected from the movie. They were asked to respond, in writing, to a question at the end of each quote. They had twenty minutes to complete this task. After reading their work, I responded to them with a comment and/or questions that I hoped would push their thinking. They had a chance to respond again. I was pleased to see a wide difference in their responses to the same questions and, in a few cases, quite a lot more writing/thinking that I had previously seen in their journals or in the class discussion they day before.

Evidence of Literacy Learning

In their collaborative analysis of data gathered about literacy learning, teachers identified a number of significant issues for consideration and as outcomes of the project:

- Student interest changes over time and their capacity to express ideas is part of the challenge for their literacy growth.
- The emphasis on literacy through philosophy brings out depth in thinking.
- Enabling primary age students to be explicit about their own learning was evident in the work the students presented.
  - All students displayed thinking skills and metacognition skills.
- Strengthening the students’ ability to
  - form questions regarding complex concepts and ideas;
  - transfer their oral thinking through to the writing process;
  - follow a line of thought and allow contributions from others to help the thought process;
  - use words appropriate and related to the subject in the correct context;
  - use imagination, thoughts, ideas without limit or apprehension.
- Students are participating in first hand exploration of thoughts and ideas rather than through a typical literacy understanding which is from a text or a teacher reading or interpreting a text.
- Students in primary school are thinking capably and abstractly.
### Learning Practices and Outcomes

**Student Learning**

In analysing the data, the significant outcomes identified by teachers in student work, teacher writing and collaborative conversations were organised as themes and practices which offered evidence of these outcomes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key words</th>
<th>Practices</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>appropriateness</td>
<td>when to start - is year 10 too late?</td>
<td>have skills, shared expectations, info</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>prepare the students - dialogue practice/skill development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>success</td>
<td>philosophical talk connects to students’ lives past and present</td>
<td>higher engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>engagement</td>
<td>value all students’ contributions</td>
<td>students are attentive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>student's comment or question leads to the new teaching direction</td>
<td>value student participation democratic classrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher’s behaviour</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>45mins</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ownership</td>
<td>Students are excited and follow the conversation when it is their question or issue</td>
<td>Student engagement, attention to ideas, are prepared to change or modify views, Have things they care about to write about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assessment</td>
<td>display good thinking</td>
<td>oral development=&gt; literacy and thinking skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reflection</td>
<td>important to be writing journals, cases teacher recording questions, reflections, writing back to students</td>
<td>sort out our own thinking by talking, reading, writing, listening</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Our need to understand emotional, social and intellectual state of students</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Understanding our own practice questioning and reflection to over interpretation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>we trust students’ words and the way they explain things</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>more respect among the group</td>
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Teacher’s learning experience change teaching experience
unthinkingly | forum discussion | challenged students’ thinking and ideas
---|---|---
group size | Fishbowl | more time to talk
| 1/2 class | builds trust more readily
teacher role | trust the group to work it out | teacher gains new insight
| step out of the facilitator’s role | into student thinking about
| be quiet, silent | the world
taboos | setting boundaries | What are they? For what levels? Conversation changes when the boundaries change thinking for themselves, forced to do their own
| Students write individual conversations to the teacher | varied points of view emerge, access their individual thinking

Teacher Learning
The most significant learning practice was the learning of teachers for pedagogical change. The teachers in this project engaged in sustained professional learning and engagement in a new professional learning pedagogy. This provided a continuous and rigorous basis for professional inquiry, development and change. This learning both stimulated and mirrored the learning of their students. When teachers were invigorated by the possibilities of democratic learning environments they were doing more that learning that philosophy provides that opportunity for students. Teachers experienced the democracy of the philosophical community of inquiry and were therefore committed to its development with students. Their own experience seemed to enable their successful learning better than any text, lecture or professional development expert. The shift from teacher as learner, to teacher as teacher educator was evidence of this development.

Philosophy: A Pedagogy for Literacy

In my class I have noticed that kids are writing more as a result of more talking. They are much more inclined to be risk takers and they want to write and want to produce their own books. Writing is not something that is usually desired by these young students in the KODE (Koori Open Door Education) setting. The enthusiasm is there and things are changing. I notice there is a causal connection between the confidence they are developing from philosophy speaking and listening and they are wanting to write about the things we discuss. They are using the language of their speaking and listening to carry over to their writing. The modelling of this by me as their teacher has been really important too.
Clearly, the project supported the premise that philosophical communities of inquiry encourage oral language which in turn supports and stimulates writing and reading with students. This one case of practice from a primary classroom illustrates the depth of inquiry in which teachers in the project engaged and their professional thinking about the impact of the project.

It is easy to see advancements and developments in the higher order thinking skills and metacognition in students who have higher literacy abilities (though not always the case\(^3\)). The skills of these students usually reflect current research practice and theories that one reads about, as well as in shared discussion with other teachers.

The strong conclusion we are able to draw from our work is that:

philosophical communities of inquiry enable students to constructing own meaning based on sound reasoning and provide the basis for informed expression of ideas and action.

Students reported their experience of literacy and philosophy. Their comments below reflect the skill the development evident in work samples and teachers' records of practice. Philosophy, as a pedagogy for literacy (and social engagement and action) is developed within a community of inquiry which:

- engages kids when developing the teaching of thinking teaching thinking through speaking and listening enhances the teaching of literacy and the desire and need to read and write;
- values a discordance of views which support literacy, thinking, engagement;
- helps students learn, negotiate, be tolerant and understand diversity;
- is based on clear supportive norms which assist the above practices and outcomes;
- develops an inquiry focus which is owned by students, their questions are often more important than answers;
- sanctions discussion of issues where the answer to a question or dilemma is often truly unknown;
- in which questioning and discussion is open ended, but follows a purposeful line of inquiry;
- models the teacher as a co-learner and co-inquirer;
- scaffolds an emotional safety net to explore unknown;
- stimulates rigour and depth through inquiry is real;
- fosters critique and justification;
- supports the possibility for students and teachers to change their mind as they are able to ‘think again’;

\(^3\) This statement is made with particular reference to a traditional deconstructivist approach to student learning. Most often during our philosophy sessions, students who “tested out” low literacy (because they were only tested on standardized knowledge reproduction in reading and writing, rather than processes of understanding across the English CSF strands) were shown to be as creative and open minded and analytical etc. as those students who were deemed by the system as “high literacy.”
• provides opportunity to think write things through;
• is the opposite of an opinionated classroom;
• challenges personal knowledge and values and the way truth is identified and understood;
• works towards the practice of getting truth, self and social action aligned;
• activates the teacher as learner.

Challenges for Strengthening Philosophy as a Pedagogy for Literacy
Teachers were quick to acknowledge that this was still early in their own learning about how to successfully engage students in student centred constructivist learning which support literacy outcomes. Key challenges were identified as:
• There was little evidence of students' own questions in their writing
• What about the kids who are not engaged?
• Time to explore the wide range of issues proposed was needed
• Peeling back the layers of thinking and beliefs was difficult with large groups for short periods of time. This was especially difficult in secondary schools.
• Being explicit about meta knowledge and engaging students in explicit understanding of their own literacy, social education and meta learning
• Developing appropriate ways of assessing/reporting/recording oracy development which reflect the level of thinking as well as the language used
• Understanding and respecting learning styles: how to engage the thinking of all students and what are appropriate teaching and learning practices to implement.
• Supporting Democratic Learning in Classrooms: how do we develop philosophy with kids?
• How do we support various cultural backgrounds and school difference?
• What resources are available to support the project to maturity? Sustaining teacher learning so that it becomes embedded practice. Much has been written about the need for continuous and sustained development of professional learning communities if they are to deliver reform of pedagogy and curriculum. This project offered a strong starting point for teacher agency in effective change.

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