cover: picasso, *las meninas* (1957)

childhood & philosophy

núcleo de estudos de filosofias e infâncias [nefi/uerj]
international council of philosophical inquiry with children [icpic]

e-issn: 1984-5987 | p-issn: 2525-5061

dossier racism, colonialism and philosophy for/with children: praxis in non-ideal contexts

desegregating the community of inquiry in philosophy for/with children: a dialogue on racism

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doi: 10.12957/childphilo.2026.96051

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abstract

This dialogical article examines persistent challenges in engaging racism, colonialism, and white supremacy within the theory and practice of Philosophy for/with Children (P4/wC). Framed as a mutual interview between two long-standing colleagues, the dialogue revisits formative encounters in the P4/wC community and situates them within broader intellectual traditions, including American pragmatism, deliberative democracy, and Africana philosophy. Drawing on personal experience, archival material, and critical scholarship, the authors interrogate the metaphilosophical assumptions underpinning the "community of inquiry," particularly its commitments to reasonableness, consensus, and democratic dialogue. Concepts such as the "gated community of inquiry," white ignorance, nonideal theory, and insurrectionist ethics are mobilized to illuminate how norms of reasonableness can function as mechanisms of exclusion. Rather than abandoning dialogue, the authors explore the possibilities for reconstructing the community of inquiry in light of nonideal realities, positioning it as a site not only of deliberation but of critical transformation.

keywords: philosophy for/with children (P4/wC); community of inquiry; racism; white supremacy; nonideal theory.

dessegregando a comunidade de investigação em filosofia para/com crianças - um diálogo sobre racismo

resumo

Esse artigo dialógico examina os persistentes desafios para abordar o racismo, o colonialismo e a supremacia branca na teoria e prática da Filosofia para/com Crianças (Fp/cC). Concebido como uma entrevista mútua entre dois colegas de longa data, o diálogo revisita encontros formativos da comunidade de Fp/cC e os situa dentro de tradições intelectuais mais amplas, incluindo o pragmatismo estadunidense, a democracia deliberativa e a filosofia africana. Baseando-se em suas experiências pessoais, arquivos materiais e estudos críticos, os autores interrogam as hipóteses meta-filosóficas que sustentam a "comunidade de investigação", especialmente seu compromisso com a razoabilidade, o consenso e o diálogo democrático. Conceitos como o de "comunidade de investigação fechada", ignorância branca, teoria não-ideal e ética insurrecional são mobilizados para ilustrar como as normas da razoabilidade podem funcionar como mecanismos de exclusão. Em vez de abandonar o diálogo, os autores exploram as possibilidades de reconstruir a comunidade de investigação sob a luz de realidades não-ideais, posicionando-a não apenas como um lugar de deliberação, mas de transformação crítica.

palavras-chave: filosofia para/com crianças (Fp/cC); comunidade de investigação; racismo; supremacia branca; teoria não-ideal.

desegregando la comunidad de investigación en filosofía para/con niñas y niños - un diálogo sobre el racismo

resumen

Este artículo dialógico examina los desafíos persistentes para abordar el racismo, el colonialismo y la supremacía blanca en la teoría y la práctica de la Filosofía para/con Niñas y Niños (Fp/cN). Enmarcado como una conversación entre dos colegas de larga trayectoria, el diálogo retoma encuentros formativos en la comunidad FpcN y los sitúa dentro de tradiciones intelectuales más amplias, como el pragmatismo estadounidense, la democracia deliberativa y la filosofía africana. Basándose en su experiencia personal, material de archivo y estudios críticos, los autores interrogan los supuestos metafilosóficos que sustentan la "comunidad de investigación", en particular su compromiso con la razonabilidad, el consenso y el diálogo democrático. Conceptos como la "comunidad de investigación cerrada", la ignorancia blanca, la teoría no ideal y la ética insurreccional se movilizan para ilustrar cómo las normas de razonabilidad pueden funcionar como mecanismos de exclusión. En lugar de abandonar el diálogo, los autores exploran las posibilidades de reconstruir la comunidad de investigación a la luz de realidades no ideales, posicionándola no solo como un espacio de deliberación, sino también de transformación crítica.

palabras clave: filosofía para/con niñas y niños (Fp/cN); comunidad de investigación; racismo; supremacia blanca; teoria no-ideal.

desegregating the community of inquiry in philosophy for/with children: a dialogue on racism

introduction

This dialogue is a both a continuation and a summary of a conversation we began several years ago about persistent challenges in making the community of inquiry – as theorized and practiced in Philosophy for/with Children (P4/wC) – engage deeply and structurally with racism, colonialism, and white supremacy. Having discussed these issues together for so long at academic conferences and workshops, over video conferencing platforms, and via email, we initiated this new exchange – a kind of mutual interview – in response to the call for papers for the special issue of *childhood & philosophy* on the topic of "Racism, Colonialism and Philosophy for /with Children: Praxis in Non-ideal Contexts." Our dialogue situates episodes of our personal histories alongside intellectual traditions, examining the legacy of P4/wC founders Matthew Lipman, Ann Margaret Sharp, and Gareth B. Matthews, the metaphilosophical assumptions of pragmatism, and the contested ideals of reasonableness and democratic dialogue that have shaped P4/wC practice.

Maughn Rollins Gregory began philosophizing with children as part of his masters studies at the University of Hawai'i in 1991. That experience convinced him to take the PhD in philosophy with a concentration in philosophy for children at the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City. He is a professor of educational foundations at Montclair State University, where he succeeded Matthew Lipman as director of the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children. Darren Chetty has been philosophising with children since 1996. His PhD Dissertation was entitled *The Gated Community of Inquiry: Racism and Philosophy for Children*. Darren is one of the co-editors of the *childhood & philosophy* special issue in which this paper is published. He sometimes describes himself as a Welsh Indian South African Dutch Londoner.

the dialogue

darren: Ok, where to begin our conversation for the special issue? Perhaps at the beginning? Beginning of what though? Our relationship as P4/wC colleagues? The Philosophy for Children programme? The USA? "Western

Philosophy"? Or somewhere else altogether? I often talk about the importance of 'starting from a different place' when we philosophise with children. So I think where and when we start is something to think about!

maughn: Let's start with our relationship as colleagues and then we can move backward and forward in time?

darren: Ok, so I think we first met twenty years ago. You came to a SAPERE[1] one-day conference in Birmingham in June, 2005. A few months earlier, a piece I had written for the SAPERE newsletter had been published. It consisted mainly of questions that I had been wondering about since my first attempts to philosophise with children in the mid-'90s, regarding how I'd observed non-Muslim children interrogating Muslim children in the community of inquiry and how this connected to my reading on anti-racist education. Someone at SAPERE decided to use my questions as the starting point for an inquiry session with SAPERE trainers. I remember your careful facilitation that day. It was a hot, packed room. A couple of people voiced concerns that all of the questions had come from one person. As the discussion continued, I became increasingly frustrated that nobody seemed to be directly addressing the questions. A number of people referred to their own relationship with their Christian upbringings. I became acutely aware of being the only racially minoritised person (or person of colour if you'd prefer) in the room and did eventually speak — I'd held back in the belief at the time that I should, given that these were my questions. You and I spoke briefly afterwards and you described my contribution as akin to 'outing myself' which seemed apt.

That session, along with other incidents, made me think about how dialogue can be limited not only by the failure to ask certain questions but also by a collective avoidance of questions once they are asked. I started to wonder if philosophy for/with children (P4/wC) might be operating as a mechanism of education as an assimilationist system. It set off a long inquiry for me — both informally and formally in the shape of my Masters and Doctoral Theses. Eventually, I'd come to understand that session in the context of the term I coined in my first published paper (2014) — as an example of 'The Gated Community of

[1] Society for Advancing Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education—renamed 'Thoughtful' in 2025.

Inquiry'. It's a term that has had a varied response among P4/wC colleagues, to put it mildly.

maughn: I remember meeting you at that conference. The questions you were raising there happened to overlap with some issues I was covering in my presentation, "Philosophical Inquiry and Religious Faith" (I had read your article in the SAPERE Newsletter!). A couple years before that, I had launched a boycott of a national education conference that was being held at a religious university that excludes LGBTQ students and faculty, during which I was often the only sexually minoritized person (or queer person if you'd prefer) at the table, so being 'out' in many ways was on my mind a lot. I also bring that up here because we know that violent oppression of indigenous traditions of gender and sexuality were and are part of the mission of Western colonialism.

darren: That sounds like an awful experience, Maughn. I remember after our first meeting you sent me some articles you had written (Gregory 2004, 2009), which were very helpful. You also gave me detailed feedback on a paper I wrote for the 2007 conference of the International Community for Philosophical Inquiry with Children (ICPIC).[2] We kept in touch, bumped into each other at conferences and had a number of Zooms while I was working on my PhD thesis — you often made yourself available when I had a query or a half-formed idea that I wanted to explore with you!

maughn: Those were great conversations that helped me develop my own thinking. I remember meeting you again in person at the 2014 Philosophy for Children Seminar at the University of Winchester. Toward the end of that seminar Karin Murris caused a stir by saying she had noticed how women at the seminar had frequently been overlooked and interrupted, and the discussion that ensued was mostly defensive on the part of many of the men there. It struck me that feminism was maybe the first critical theory overtly applied to philosophy for children theory and practice, initiated largely by Ann Margaret Sharp. Two special issues of *Thinking: The Journal of Philosophy for Children* were dedicated to feminism and philosophy for children (see Sharp 1994, 1997), and of course people wrote and continue to write on that in many other places. And yet, we struggle to give women and girls equal voice and respect in our practice. I suppose this also raises

[2] See ww.icpic.org.

the problem of which issues a community confronts depending on which voices raise the issue—in this case the fact that it was Ann who raised the issue of feminism and P4/wC no doubt influenced others to take that issue seriously.

darren: Yes, because of Ann's scholarship and advocacy, it's entirely possible to work on feminism in P4/wC and be seen as continuing the tradition of P4/wC. The same is not true of work on antiracism or decoloniality, for example. Such work is too often seen as alien or antithetical to P4/wC and those who engage in it are seen as intruders (hence the power of the metaphor of 'The Gated Community of Inquiry').

Yes, I recall the Winchester Conference. It was the first time I'd presented my "Elephant in the Room" (2014) since it had won the ICPIC Award for Excellence in Interpreting P4/wC. I didn't speak in the discussion following Karin Murris' comment. But I did note that a seminar that began with a talk on racism in P4/wC and invited attendees to consider their relationship to whiteness ended with a conversation about the unfair treatment of white women (the numerical majority) in the seminar. I recall being the only person of colour in the room.

maughn: Fascinating how attention to one form of discrimination, that affects people with certain other kinds of power or privilege, can occlude attention to other forms that affect people with less power. I wonder if that's an example of the issue raised in one of the questions posed in the Call for Papers for this special issue: "How has the failure to engage with racism — in the USA and elsewhere — impacted P4/wC practice?"

darren: Can you say a bit more about that?

maughn: I was thinking about how the long history of collective discomfort in acknowledging and confronting racism makes it difficult for people who are directly harmed by it to get even their own family members, friends, and colleagues to talk about it, let alone act on it. That seems to be true even among groups like P4/wC groups who uphold norms of critical, self-corrective, dialogical inquiry — which is something you've written about so insightfully.

darren: Thank you.

maughn: I've also been thinking about another claim made in the Call: "Despite their direct engagement with issues of race and racism in American education, neither Sharp nor [Matthew] Lipman explicitly engaged in sustained

discussions of racism, colonialism, and P4/wC. As a result, over the last 50 years the literature has either overlooked the topics of race and racism in P4/wC or adopted a color-blind attitude to these issues." There's no doubt something to that, though "as a result" seems both hard to substantiate and also to deflect attention from other problems.

darren: Yes, it assumes causality doesn't it? And it doesn't acknowledge the agency of those scholars who have come since Lipman and Sharp in ignoring the issue. That said, I think it does also hint at how many working in P4w/C have viewed and continue to view themselves as working in the tradition of Lipman and Sharp — and take this to mean that they should read and cite them but not critique them. I don't think this is a phenomenon that is unique to P4wC — I've observed it in other fields too. Perhaps it is even necessary to build a 'movement' in the early stages. And I don't dismiss tradition outright but rather I'm interested in when it becomes an impediment to philosophical thinking.

maughn: Yes, I've tried to be loud about the need for robust P4/wC scholarship, including critiques of the founders; and I can honestly say that's what Mat and Ann wanted and expected. For instance, they published an essay by the American educational philosopher Jane Roland Martin (1978/1994), criticizing philosophy for children for not providing children with historical and contemporary alternatives to democracy and capitalism, in their anthology *Growing Up with Philosophy.* Many of the articles in the *Thinking*[3] journal were similarly critical.

The Call for Papers does a good job summarizing Mat's and Ann's life experiences — especially Mat's — that made them aware of race issues, which I also know from personal conversations with them.[4] I recently found a letter to the editor of *The Montclair Times* Mat wrote in 1966 arguing against a proposal to

[3] Lipman was the founding editor of *Thinking: The Journal of Philosophy for Children*, published by the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children from 1979-2014. All issues are available at https://digitalcommons.montclair.edu/thinking_journal_philosophy_children/.

[4] From the Call for Papers: "Lipman, for example, was particularly familiar with issues of race and racism in his private life. He was married to the first Black woman to be elected to the New Jersey Senate at a time when 'anti-miscegenation' laws were still constitutionally protected in the US. He was a professor at Columbia University during the student protest of 1968 which was directly motivated by issues of racial segregation and gentrification. He additionally strongly dissented against Hannah Arendt's remarks on Little Rock. Similarly, Sharp taught at Spelman College, an HBCU in Atlanta, Georgia, and noted how this experience was profoundly influential on her development of P4C."

institute voluntary open enrollments in Montclair public schools as a means of achieving greater racial integration. He predicted it would result in only token integration, amounting to collective self-deception. He called for actual, complete integration, saying the schools should not reflect the neighborhoods children come from but the society they're preparing to go into. That was also the thinking behind his critical response to Hannah Arendt on the issue of school desegregation.[5]

So it's a fair question: Why didn't they or other early proponents of children's philosophy "explicitly engage in sustained discussions of racism, colonialism, and P4/wC"? That question is closely related to the question you and others have raised about the lack of more explicit representation of race (and gender) diversity in Lipman's novels[6] and the paucity of race and gender issues those novels raise for philosophical inquiry. Of course, the same questions need to be asked of how children's books have been curated for children's philosophy, beginning with Gareth B. Matthews in the 1970s — an issue you raised in your "Elephant in the Room" paper, and that you, Megan and I addressed more recently (2022).

darren: As I think you know, while writing up my PhD dissertation I often wondered what Lipman and Sharp would make of my arguments. I didn't know Mat, but Ann and I shared a number of conversations in person and by email. She was very encouraging of my early attempts to articulate a critique of some P4/wC orthodoxy.

maughn: In doing our research on the philosophy for children founders, Megan and I have discussed the question about the lack of attention to race and other issues in the IAPC curriculum at length. The closest Mat and Ann came to addressing that question is in their introduction to *Social Inquiry* (1980), the instruction manual that accompanies Lipman's high school philosophy novel *Mark* (1980). That curriculum title is less well-known than others but very interesting in a number of ways. It addresses gender, race, minority groups in society,

[5] In 1959 Lipman wrote an essay criticizing Arendt for her article (1959a) criticizing the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* mandating the racial desegregation of public schools. Lipman's essay was not published but Arendt read it and sent him a lengthy reply (1959b).
[6] In Lipman's curricular philosophical novels, the students Fran Wood and Luther Warfield, Luther's older brother Marty and their mother, Mrs. Warfield, and the mathematics teacher Mr. Spence are identified as Black. Context clues indicate that the character Suki and her family are Asian.

stratification, status, class, and caste as social and political issues — but these issues are presented more overtly in the manual than the novel. The introduction to the manual says that teachers should both follow the concerns of their students and use their own judgment about when and how to raise these issues in their classrooms.

That suggests a kind of subversive strategy. We know that philosophy for children had been removed from some U.S. school districts where parents saw it as some kind of left-wing propaganda, making children into anti-authority free-thinkers. Apart from that, it was — and still is — an uphill battle getting philosophy into American P-12 schools. So we think Mat and Ann deliberately did not include issues of race or religion or sexuality in their philosophy curriculum, in order to have a chance of that curriculum being adopted, but then in the high school political philosophy curriculum they included those and other hot-button issues in the teacher manuals, trusting that the students and teachers would want and need to discuss them.

I'm not saying they made the right decision, but it should be understood in context; I know so many teachers today facing similar dilemmas about using anti-racist and LGBTQ-positive curriculum in red states (right-leaning, run by Republicans) and in blue states (left-leaning, run by Democrats) that rely on federal funding.

darren: It sounds rather like you're saying that the USA is so tied up with white supremacy that even an educational programme that encourages children to ask questions of their society is going to be / has been shut down. You're sounding a bit like a critical race theorist!

maughn: More than a bit, I hope! I believe white supremacy is a system the whole world participates in and in the USA we're losing a lot of the important ground we had made in the past sixty years. Same with misogyny. Same with homophobia. Same with class warfare. Ann Sharp eventually published curriculum dealing directly with immigration (1999), child arranged marriage and child sexual abuse (2005a, 2005b), but they were published in Australia and French Canada. Mat wrote an unpublished story, "Marty and Eddie" about HIV/AIDS and started a philosophy for adults novel, *Ashaka*, set in a women's prison where

the main character was Black. His wife, then Senator Lipman,[7] supervised his writing of U.S. Southern Black English.

darren: I corresponded with Ann about her story 'Are Children's Rights Global?' after she sent me a draft. I had a number of criticisms of it. To my point that the narrator in the story offered an example of the ''white gaze," she suggested I write a sequel. I didn't feel confident enough to do so at the time. I wondered who else working in P4/wC might be.

So — to attempt a brief summary at this point — I think you're pointing out that Lipman and Sharp did a little more work on racism and colonialism than is sometimes acknowledged and that we might understand the limitations of what they did in these areas in the context of an educational system and society that would have punished them had they done more. Further, they may have made the strategic decision to prioritise the growth of philosophy for children over more sustained and overt work to encourage children to philosophically examine racism in their society.

If you're ok with that summary it does raise questions about the particular conception of philosophy that they worked to promote, doesn't it? And this was a point that Leonard Harris[8] made when you, Megan Laverty and I interviewed him (Harris 2022). He questioned what he termed 'the metaphilosophy' of philosophy for children. (I have you to thank for alerting me to his edited book 'Children in Chaos' (1991) a book that has sadly received very little attention from P4/wC scholars.) Might his critique explain why subsequent scholars didn't address the lack of attention to racism in P4C materials?

maughn: I'm convinced that has to be part of the explanation, yes. One way I've come to understand the metaphilosophy of philosophy for children, at least for Lipman, is the idea that if we educate for good thinking—very broadly

[7] In 1971, Wynona Moore Lipman became the first African-American female Senator for the State of New Jersey. At the time of her death in 1999, she was the Senate's longest-serving member.

[8] Leonard Harris is a professor of philosophy at Purdue University and a leader in the field of critical pragmatism. His agenda of "struggle philosophy" moves beyond analytic and instrumentalist reasoning and Socratic dialogue to incorporate an "ethics of insurrection," "advocacy aesthetics," and the concept of racism as "necro-being." Harris has been largely responsible for the renewed, contemporary interest in the life and philosophy of the American philosopher Alain LeRoy Locke. In 1980 Harris attended the IAPC Summer Seminar at Mendham with Matthew Lipman and Ann Margaret Sharp. A few years later he founded and directed a Philosophy for Children Center at Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland and established a Philosophy for Children program in Washington D.C. public schools, which he wrote about in his book, *Children in Chaos: A "Philosophy for Children" Experience* (Kendall Hunt, 1991).

construed to include not just critical thinking but creative expression and experimental inquiry and democratic disputation and peer review, and the understanding that value inquiry (especially ethical and political) is an element of every kind of inquiry we do—if we educate young people well enough in those ways, they will inevitably recognize and ameliorate social problems, without our having to educate directly about them. To put it crudely, if you take care of good thinking, social problems will take care of themselves. It's a kind of Habermasean faith in discourse ethics that the closer you get to the ideal speech community, the more obviously racism, poverty and other problems appear as unreasonable. (Lipman was fond of Habermas; see Gregory and Lipman, 2000)

darren: I suspect that metaphilosophy was informed by scholarship by Lipman, Sharp, Matthews, and others, and the philosophers and educational theorists who influenced them, particularly American pragmatism and analytic philosophy—which then gets perpetuated by people who study the writings of those P4/wC founders.

maughn: Definitely. In fact, that metaphilosophy seems to describe Dewey's position. He's an interesting parallel to Lipman, in that, in his non-academic life, Dewey was an important social critic and reformer, working for Jane Addams' Hull House in Chicago, the American Civil Liberties Union, the American Federation of Teachers, Maxim Gorky, etc., though in his writings on education and on democracy he only mentions race a few times and not as a central problem of either.[9] In fact, as Cornel West said in the afterword to the first book on pragmatism and race, "If a Martian were to come down to America and look at the American pragmatist tradition, they would never know that there was slavery, Jim Crow, lynching, discrimination, segregation in the history of America. This is a major indictment" (2004: 225; see also Harris 2002/2020). He explains that this isn't due to any particular feature of pragmatism, but to American culture in general, and I think the same has to be said of philosophy for children. Philosophy for children is afflicted with white ignorance (Mills 2007) because American society is—as is most of the world. That's not to reduce our culpability or responsibility.

[9] See Bernstein 2010, Glaude 2007.

Not incidentally, in the same piece, West argues that pragmatism, coupled with analysis of social structures and institutions, is the ideal philosophical orientation to deal with racism, because of how it "wrestles with concrete realities" with an "historical, contextual [...] experimental improvisational nondogmatic orientation" (2004, p. 226, 229). I hope the same can some day be said of philosophy for children understood as an educational program.

darren: So philosophers have written about this discrepancy between how pragmatism claims to be operating and how it has actually operated. And I think that's what I've been doing with my scholarship on philosophy for/with children and what I've termed the 'gated community of inquiry' (see Chetty 2018). The philosophical tradition that philosophy for/with children draws from does not have a good track record on attending to white supremacy, racism and how it has coexisted with claims of democracy in the USA. And I think the focus on the USA in the first instance is justified, as it is where the philosophy for/with children program and then movement has its origins. So first of all, are we asking the right questions? Lipman's fictional model of a community of inquiry is one where children rarely if ever ask questions about racial injustice. This is in keeping with the pragmatist tradition but at odds with many actual classrooms.

maughn: I think that's right, and it helps explain the deficiency of the subversive strategy, intending that real children would ask those questions when invited to philosophize, as Lipman (1991) explains in his chapter in Harris's book. And as Harris elsewhere points out, the concept of democracy itself needs to come under suspicion and interrogation, since "Every major democracy in human history, whether Greek, Roman, Arabic, Chinese, or African, has also practiced slavery, colonial domination, and ethnocide of minorities" (2003/2020, p. 131). But, of course, Harris and Charles Mills make the same critique of Western philosophy in general, like when Harris writes that "The *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* should be renamed the *Encyclopedia of Eurocentric Nationalism*" (1997/2020, p. 260).

Harris (2018b/2020) advocates the kind of "critical" or "radical" pragmatism that began with Alain Locke and continues today with people like Eddie Glaude (2007, 2017, 2021), Cornel West (2015, 2017), himself, and many others. This new, or reconstructed tradition is mediating another of pragmatism's blind sides, historically, which is that its emphasis on optimism and ameliorism

can ignore the antagonism that comes with personal and social value pluralism. There is always loss and often harm with even the best choices we make. Dewey understood that we always sacrifice some values in choosing others, but I don't see his theory of democracy as dealing directly with the social consequences of that idea. It's another article of faith that in a community that is sufficiently democratic, everyone's important interests or values can be accommodated, without violence to any of them. For some, this seems possible because, again, if we're all sufficiently reasonable and reasonably committed to a common good, we'll come to see how all reasonable values are compatible and be willing to give up those that aren't.

darren: Where in the history of the USA do we see a reasonable commitment to a common good? Derrick Bell (1992) argued that racism is a permanent feature in the USA. Even if one doesn't go along with that, and wishes to argue for a narrative of racial progress it is hard to build a case that this has been achieved simply by appeals to a common good being recognised.

maughn: It most certainly has not; only when those appeals are backed up by active disruption, including civil and uncivil protest, disobedience, and, if necessary, revolt. (Revolt is something my country takes pride in when it comes to white settlers going to war against their European landlords but not when it comes to Indigenous and slave populations resorting to violence to protect their lives, their freedoms, their lands.) Scholars of discourse ethics and deliberative democracy—and the community of philosophical inquiry—uphold democratic dialogue as a way of solving conflict through persuasion rather than force, and I still hold to that, but I recognize some major problems with it. One is that the politics, the power dynamics of actual episodes of discourse never realize those ideals of power sharing and careful thought—as you described at the beginning of this dialogue. We need to apply Mills' (2005) notion of nonideal theory to the community of inquiry in philosophy for children, where he points out that if we want to make an actual practice conform to our ideal of what it should be, we have to pay attention to the actual features that prevent it from doing that.[10] We have to

[10] On this point, Jacques Derrida wrote that "in the most reassuring and disarming discussion and persuasion, force and violence are present. None the less, I think that there is, in the opening of a context of argumentation and discussion, a reference—unknown, indeterminate, but none the less thinkable—to disarmament" (1996: 83). Similarly, Harris wrote that "Discourse ethics fails when the kinds of gestures considered odious by one community is considered sacrosanct by another and

pay more attention to which voices are dis/advantaged by the context, the protocols, the language, the norms of argumentation in the community of inquiry.

darren: So I think what you're saying has implications for the texts/stimuli/starting points that are used in the community and how they are selected (Chetty, 2014; Chetty, Gregory, & Laverty, 2022). This is what sparked my interest in children's literature initially. On the one hand, W.E.B. Du Bois (1920-1921), a contemporary of John Dewey, was writing about racism philosophically *and* editing a magazine of children's literature centring Black children back in 1920. (I am always struck by how little Du Bois is mentioned in P4/wC literature coming out of the US). On the other hand, the mainstreaming of children's literature authored by and/or written about what in the US you would describe as BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, and People of Color] people is a largely 21st century phenomenon (see Chetty, Gregory & Laverty, 2022). And new issues can emerge when we organise educational practice around commercially produced children's literature – not least the way that the market shapes what is possible to be asked in the community of inquiry.

But it also identifies barriers such as curriculum content - especially, but not exclusively, History. A study of history will help us to establish when revolt has been memorialised and celebrated and when it has not. Charles Mills views this as part of "the management of memory" (2007,p. 28). It will also help us to see how social change has been achieved. This is often messy, contested territory. But our philosophical inclinations towards conceptual clarity should not be so strong as to make us retreat from the mess of the nonideal life – what Cornel West describes as 'the funk' in the film *The Examined Life* (2008). Mills, to whom I am indebted for his use of residential metaphors, described 'the white flight' of ideal theory. We often hear the claim that 'philosophy begins in wonder' – attributed to Socrates and Aristotle. But I'm taken by Simon Critchley's idea that philosophy begins in "disappointment – in a great unmet need" (2007: 1).

maughn: That's certainly true for me: philosophy begins in existential angst. And I think that's also true for many children—as it was for me as a child. It's why

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compromise means a result that subjugates all parties.[...] The powerful are always advantaged in any arrangement intended to create a consensus. The rules may maximize the possibility of minority interest and contribution, but 'maximizing' is not the same as having the greatest impact." (2018a/2020: 151, 155).

when I stumbled onto philosophy as a university subject, I recognized disturbing childhood questions. In reviewing Megan's and my book on Garreth Matthews (2022), David Bakhurst (2023) worried that Matthews and philosophy for children in general don't give due attention/concern to the dark side of philosophy and the dark side of childhood. I think he's right.

darren: As Langston Hughes famously asks of us in his poem "Harlem," 'What happens to a dream deferred?' (1951, p. 268). Mills points out that people of colour have been dealing with existential questions in groups, communities, with a great sense of urgency. He contrasts this with Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* (1970), written in the late 1960s in the US, 607 pages long, with barely a mention of racism. So P4/wC practitioners have a role to play in philosophically examining the curriculum themselves, before they engage in that process with students. I also think we need more research on how the community of inquiry is shaped by the broader curriculum. But they also have a role to play in philosophically examining the tradition of philosophy from which they intentionally or otherwise draw.

maughn: Yes—as they/we have the same responsibility in politically and ethically examining the curriculum they/we bring into the classroom in every school subject. That's something I discuss with my teacher education students. And it puts the onus on schools of education to prepare teachers to do that.

darren: When we pay attention to context in the US this would also include housing policy, redlining and de jure and de facto racial segregation. The question of which children get to be in a particular classroom to form the community of inquiry is already deeply political. Who those students are will have a significant impact on a student's experience of the community of inquiry, of this microcosm of deliberative democracy.

maughn: Definitely; it's something I often think about in the context of doing community of inquiry in my college classes.

Another problem I see with democratic dialogue aimed at rational consensus—as it is commonly construed in P4/wC—is that even if some episodes of dialogue approach the ideals we have for it, those ideals themselves are not culturally neutral. They describe a culturally-specific language game that's good for certain purposes. They make certain kinds of collective understanding, decision-making, and action possible at the same time that they make other kinds

difficult or impossible. This is part of what Nicholas Burbules (2000) talks about in that chapter you and I admire. When we teach and insist on the model of reasonableness and social ethics that informs the community of inquiry (and its sibling protocols in Western democratic communities) we tend to see alternatives to it, such as norms of thinking, discourse, and decision-making practiced in other cultures, as unreasonable. It becomes a kind of colonialism. Looking out for that and the potential violence of that is a more difficult task, since those of us brought up, educated in that Western democratic, quasi-scientific model have to rely on voices from outside of it to show us where the conflicts are.[11] That's one reason in my own teaching I use other dialogue traditions like the story circle and contemplative dialogue, along with the community of inquiry, but that's not a wholly satisfying solution.

darren: I'm interested in how an ahistorical sense of reasonableness can limit the kind of ideas that can even be expressed in the classroom community of inquiry, among academics, and in the public sphere. Steve Williams has been a long-time friend of mine in the UK P4/wC community of practitioners. He recently shared this quote from Stanley Fish and I think it neatly captures what I've often observed residentials, seminars and conferences in the UK and internationally. If we substitute 'rational' with 'reasonable' I'd say it's almost perfect:

> A difference of opinion you respect is an opinion held by someone who argues from the same premises and with the same tools as you do; an opinion you merely tolerate—although we won't imprison you for holding it; neither will we take any account of it in the process of formulating policy—is an opinion held by someone who argues from premises and with tools you and your friends find provincial at best and dangerous (because fanatical) at worst. It is at this point that you dismiss those premises as ones no rational person could subscribe to, whereas in fact what you have done is to define "rational" so as to make it congruent with the ways of thinking you and those who agree with you customarily deploy. "Mutual respect" should be renamed "mutual self-congratulation" since it will not be extended beyond the circle of those who already feel comfortable with one another. (2001, p. 200)

[11] Chantal Mouffe argues that "grasping the nature of democratic politics requires a coming to terms with the dimension of antagonism that is present in social relations.[...] A democratic approach which, thanks to the insights of deconstruction, is able to acknowledge the real nature of its frontiers and recognizes the forms of exclusion that they embody, instead of trying to disguise them under the veil of rationality or morality, can help us to fight against the dangers of complacency.[...] [T]he specificity of modern pluralist democracy resides not in the absence of oppression and violence but in the presence of the institutions that permit these aspects to be limited and contested. And therefore it will be more likely to ask how those institutions could be multiplied and enhanced." (Mouffe 1996: 9, 10, emphasis in original)

I think this is where reference to the 'nonideal' encourages us to attend to what actually happens when a group of people sit down in a community of philosophical inquiry or in any other situation where diversity beyond the comfort levels of members of a dominant group is present. Take the UN World Conference on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance held in Durban in 2001. Here's a real-world example of people sitting down and engaging in dialogue with the aim of building consensus and tackling racism. It's high-level diplomats, educated people in attendance -- the very type of example of dialogic deliberation that we might share with our students. But, how did it play out? Well, the attendees couldn't agree even on the agenda for discussion. Topics such as caste, Zionism, and reparations would not be entertained by all. The United States and Israel withdrew. The political reality was that the US withdrawing meant that little could be achieved and the conference was widely considered a failure. Now, of course it is possible to construct an argument that says that the unreasonableness of the other nations was the reason for the US and Israel to withdraw. I think it's worth going along with that actually – because it reveals something about how reasonableness operates in the real world. The reasonable / unreasonable binary is invoked alongside the civilized / barbarian binary (see John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* (1859/1985)). Its historical antecedents in world politics include the white / black binary and the Christian / heathen binary.

maughn: That's a good example of what I was getting at. Those distinctions are not value-neutral. As a pragmatist, my view is that there *are* no value- or culturally-neutral constructs of reasonableness or wellbeing—or science, or education, or spirituality or anything else—so the question always has to be, not which ones are in/correct or not/worthwhile, but: what do particular constructs make possible and make difficult or impossible? And how can we practice communal inquiry with other traditions in a way that actually helps us see the limits and harms of our own? J.S. Mill's construct of liberty still does a lot of good work, in my opinion, for instance, on the separation of church and state (another political tradition those in power in my country are currently trying to undermine). But what possibilities for human flourishing do Western constructs of reasonableness obscure and denigrate?

darren: Well, to go back to my example of the UN Conference in 2001, we find that the ability to label some people (in fact the majority of the world) as unreasonable allows the powers that be to justify, at least to themselves, their unresponsiveness.

maughn: Yes, and that brings me to the third problem I see with democratic deliberation. I'm convinced by Harris's call for an ethics of insurrection: the recognition that when mechanisms of democratic decision-making fail to protect the fundamental rights and dignity of a population, the Christian "virtues of benevolence, piety, temperance, restraint, serenity, and compassion" upheld by abolition suasionists have to be supplemented with the "virtues of tenacity, irreverence, passion, and enmity" employed by abolition insurrectionists (1999/2020, p. 162-163). This is where the question of direct political action comes up. When are such insurrectionist virtues needed in the community of inquiry? When does it need to become a site of insurrection? That's akin to the question raised by José Medina (2023) about when uncivil protest becomes a moral requirement. His answer, which I like, is that uncivil protest, including violence, is only warranted as a means of making real, better dialogue possible again as a way of resolving conflict. I want to be clear that this doesn't justify the horrendous kinds of political violence, including physical maiming and murder, that are on the rise again in my country.

darren: I wonder if it's possible to develop a community of inquiry in a school that encourages students to become more skilled at dialogue without implicitly communicating that dialogue alone is how all questions of injustice have been, should be, and will be addressed in the real world. One that encourages philosophical thinking as a worthwhile pursuit while also engaging with the ways that philosophy and philosophers have been part of the intellectual work aimed at justifying racism and injustice. What do you think? Do you know of cases where people are doing that? If not, could there be such a practice?

maughn: As for teaching dialogue without teaching that it's the only way to confront injustice, I'm inspired by YPAR programs – Youth Participatory Action Research – where teachers support young people in identifying social and political issues in their local contexts, researching those problems, and designing action projects to address them. Some P4/wC dialogues have resulted in that kind of

action, like when a group of New Jersey students philosophizing about nature with one of Lipman's novels began to question their school's landscaping and launched a research-action-fund-raising project to replace it with eco-friendly, native plants that would support native species (see Macht, 2016). More recently, Amy Reed-Sandoval has initiated the 'Philosophy for Children without Borders' program on both sides of the US-Mexico border, to engage communities there with issues of borders (political, cultural, linguistic), citizenship, and identity.[12]

A good example of an educational engagement with the ways that philosophy has justified racism and injustice is the high school course Lawrence Blum (2012) created to help students acquire "racial literacy" – an understanding of race as a social and historical phenomenon with moral implications. They studied historical documents including, I believe, some philosophical texts that explain the origins and evolution of race as a category in the US. I can imagine a community of philosophical inquiry of teens or young adults comparing JS Mill and Rawls with Charles Mills and Harris. I've also been reviewing children's books that deal with racism, colonialism, and other areas of injustice in ways that are philosophically engaging (Gregory, 2024, 2026).

Of course, another good example is the "Dwelling Together in Diverse Spaces" project that you facilitated with Abigail Bentley at University College London (UCL) (Chetty, Bentley & Ferner, 2020). I was really moved by the film of those discussion circles with UCL students and London residents on the interplay of multiculturalism, race, identity, self-esteem, and the education system (Gupta 2017). It's a live example of an un-gated community of inquiry!

darren: Our dialogue has taken us to big P political topics, and I think rightly so. Can we perhaps return to where we started—to our relationship as P4/wC colleagues? You've seen me described as unreasonable, uncollaborative and a dangerous threat to the movement by P4/wC colleagues. As Lipman's successor at the IAPC you have a perceived and perhaps actual role in upholding the tradition of P4/wC. I've been heartened in this dialogue to see you share extracts from a book I mentioned to you back in 2007, *Pragmatism and the Problem of Race*. I wonder if your view of my arguments has shifted over time? Or perhaps it's that I've become better at articulating my critique of P4/wC in relation to

[12] See https://filosofiainfantil.weebly.com/.

racism in particular? One of the painful ironies I've encountered in my years of talking about racism in the community of inquiry is that when people aren't persuaded, they attribute that to me (my tone, the literature from which I draw, at one time my 'lack of experience', at another my immersion in 'theory') and when they have been persuaded they attribute that to the success of the community of inquiry model. I wonder what you make of that?!

maughn: Well, first, I think you've been very consistent over time, even as you've strengthened and expanded your arguments in the course of your continued research. I was gratified at the recent conference of the North American Association for Community of Inquiry at Montreal where you presented an overview of your arguments, that although there were a few who expressed confusion and/or resistance to some of them, the overwhelming majority of the audience appreciated what you were saying. Speaking personally, I would not say that my view of your arguments has shifted over time in terms of their correctness. I will admit that my personal stake in the issues you have raised has increased, meaning that I feel more and more responsible to make them central in my own teaching and writing, in part as a response to the kinds of negative responses you have unfortunately received. And yes, that sense of responsibility is compounded by my role as IAPC director. As approaches to P4/wC have proliferated, along with its theoretical underpinnings (see Gregory, 2021), the traditional Lipman/Sharp IAPC approach has become more and more distinctive, and I very much feel responsible to perpetuate that tradition into the future as one approach among other worthy approaches (not that I consider all approaches worthy, by the way). At the same time, the IAPC approach has evolved significantly since the early 1970s, both in how we practice the community of inquiry and in the materials we use with children. It's important to me that critical consciousness of our materials and methods be central to that tradition. And you are one of the people we have to thank for that, Darren.

darren: I appreciate your words here, Maughn, I really do. And of course, I'm also interested in actions – not only yours but those of others engaged in P4/wC practice and theory – people who frequently use terms like 'engaging with the Other', 'dialogue across differences', 'democratic pedagogy' and the like. When do you think we will see a serious engagement with philosophical work

that complicates and potentially enhances the project of P4/wC with regard to the types of exclusion we have talked about here? When will there be conferences and courses that engage with what Africana Philosophy (to name a field that developed in the same country as P4/wC) offers to our collective understandings of developing communities of philosophical inquiry? When will the gate-keeping (conscious and unconscious) of philosophical work that speaks directly to the aims of P4/wC but provokes discomfort in those already in the community of scholar-practitioners end? When will the P4/wC community become desegregated – intellectually and socially?

maughn: You are rightly pointing out that the needed change is structural as well as personal. It's important to recognize the seeds of that kind of change in recent P4/wC scholarship, with new focuses on African, Latin American, and Indigenous philosophical traditions (see, e.g., Bleazby et al., 2023; Fraser-Burgess, 2023; Noguera & Marcos, 2018). It seems to me that white ignorance has been the main obstacle to the desegregation of the P4/wC community we envision. And with regard to that, given my conversations with young scholars, I'm optimistic that much of the change we're discussing could happen within a generation — depending on how we confront another obstacle, just as formidable, that has recently resurfaced: the dramatic lurch to the right of political parties and factions in many parts of the world. Predictably, that brings with it the demonization of academia and the authoritarian control of education — typified in the US by the Trump administration's "Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education" and laws in many US states against teaching openly about race, gender, and sexuality in public schools. I honestly fear for the future of academic freedom for P4/wC scholars and the future of pedagogical freedom for P4/wC practitioners.

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how to quote this article:

APA: Gregory, M. R. & Chetty, D. (2026). Desegregating the community of inquiry in philosophy for / with children - a dialogue on racism. *Childhood & philosophy*,22,1–27.doi:10.12957/childphilo.2026.96051

ABNT: Gregory, Maughn Rollins; Chetty, Darren. Desegregating the community of inquiry in philosophy for / with children - a dialogue on racism. *Childhood & philosophy*, 22,1–25, 2026. Disponível em:_____. Acesso em:_____. doi:10.12957/childphilo.2026.96051

credits

- **Acknowledgements:** Not applicable.
- **Financing:** Not applicable.
- **Conflicts of interest:** The authors certify that they have no commercial or associative interest that represents a conflict of interest in relation to the manuscript.
- **Ethical approval:** Not applicable.
- **Availability of data and material:** Not applicable.
- **Authors' contribution:** Conceptualisation; Writing, revising and editing the text; Formal analysis; Research; Resources: GREGORY, M.; CHETTY, D.
- **Image:** Not applicable.
- **Preprint:** Not published in preprint repository.

article submitted to the similarity system :::plagium™

submitted: 09.01.2026 *approved:* 12.02.2026 *published:* 28.02.2026

reviewer 1: *anonymous* **reviewer 2:** *anonymous*