

## NOTES FROM THE FIELD

# *Philosophizing with Mrs. Yoshida's Third Graders: A Transcript from a P4C Session*

What follows is a transcription of a Philosophy for Children (P4C) session which I taped on April 18th, 1997 and an analysis of this transcript. I've found analyzing transcripts of P4C sessions to be quite useful; it not only provides me with evidence with which to support my claims but also helps me to get clearer on what, precisely, P4C does. The analysis which I provide here, it should be noted, is brief. My aim is simply to supplement my other article in this issue ("Philosophy for Children and The Cultivation of Good Judgment") and to provide others with what I hope might be a useful resource.<sup>1</sup>

Imagine, if you will, that it is a beautiful sunny day as you pull up to Ala Wai Elementary School in Honolulu, Hawai'i. You have come to this public elementary school because you have heard that Kathryn Yoshida's class of third graders regularly (twice a week) have P4C inquiry sessions. You have also heard that they are pretty good at it.

This is Mrs. Yoshida's third year doing P4C. The children have been doing P4C with Mrs. Yoshida for about six months. Only a few of the students had done P4C with other teachers during the previous school year.

You round the corner and walk into Mrs. Yoshida's room. In the room you see Mrs. Yoshida, Mr. Toby Yos (a University of Hawai'i philosophy graduate student who comes once a week to help with the P4C session), and about twenty-five children (who are eight to nine years old). The group is very culturally diverse; there are at least a dozen ethnic groups represented in this class. Ala Wai School, you have been told, has a large immigrant population. English is not the first language of nearly two-thirds of the children. Indeed, it is apparent that several of the children in this class have little proficiency with the English language. Nearly three-quarters of the children, you have also been told, are from low income families. Too many are also from homes where violence and substance-abuse are prevalent.

The children and teachers are all sitting together in a circle on the floor. Having already read a philosophical novel, raised questions, and selected a topic for discussion, the

members of the community are already engaged in inquiry. Though there may be occasional outbursts of excited chatter as the children all try to talk at once, for the most part the members of this classroom community of inquiry take turns speaking. The students (not the teachers) toss their class's "community ball" to one another. Whoever holds this ball, which they built together and which symbolizes their community, is the speaker.<sup>2</sup> The other students are listening carefully.

Mrs. Yoshida is "pedagogically strong"; she ensures that the community is an intellectually safe place by justly enforcing the agreed upon rules and procedures. She is also "philosophically self-effacing"; while she enriches the inquiry by helping the children to think deeply, she does not impose her intellectual perspective upon the children. She prefers instead to let the children learn by doing their own thinking.<sup>3</sup>

Let's listen to this class for awhile. Pay close attention not only to what the children say but to cognitive moves and social behaviors that they model.<sup>4</sup>

*Mr. Toby:* You know I kind of want to LMB—move back to what Ahn Thy says 'cause [because] the more I listen the more confused I'm getting about what a relationship is.<sup>5</sup> Is it just any two things that have something in common? I thought I understood, but now when I think about it more I'm not so sure what a relationship is. Brian [Mr. Toby passes the community ball to Brian].

*Brian C.:* They're different things, but they're the

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10 same thing; like ice and steam are made from water, and chocolate and vanilla [ice cream] are [both] made from ice cream. They are different *things*, but they're the same family.

15 *Mr. Toby:* OK, you've got to have two different things and they have got to be in the same family?

*Brian C.:* Yeah, something like the same family. Joseph.

*Joseph:* What did you say Mr. Toby?

20 *Mr. Toby:* I'm trying to figure out what a relationship is. What do we mean by relationship?

*Joseph:* A relationship could be two things that are alike but looking different. Like water it has three different types of forms. It could be a solid, it could be a gas, and then...well I forget the third one. They are both alike  
25 'cause they're both water, but then they're both in different forms. So it would be sort of like something alike and it could be in a different form. Nani.

*Nani:* I agree with Joseph that we can have two or more things and  
30 you see what's the connection—what they're like. They can be like steam and ice; they're both made of water. So that's one reason why they're alike. And like the last time we had  
35 philosophy it was a cottage and a castle. We agreed that people can live in a cottage and a castle. That's how they were alike. So a relationship is two or more things that have something in common, or a connection. They're alike. Jason.

*Jason:* Steam and ice. Steam can just melt the ice and the steam is more hot than the ice. It is made of water. So  
50 the water is more hot so the steam comes out. The steam goes out 'cause the ice is made of water so the steam is made hot and so....Jackie.

*Jackie:* I think what a relationship is is different groups but same things. Like maybe say...a clock. It has a  
55 group of its own. There are different kinds of clocks: Round clocks like that one [points to the clock on the wall], and electric alarm clocks, and the clocks that can stand up. But they are all the same because they are all clocks. But they are all different. Thomas.

60 *Thomas:* Can we LMO [move on to another question]? I think...

*Mrs. Yoshida:* Let's move on? And then what were you going to say? "I think" what?

65 *Thomas:* I think that steam and ice have a relationship. And I agree with Leigh because they are both water and

when water evaporates it becomes steam. And ice is like steam 'cause they're both water.

*Mrs. Yoshida:* Oh, JAMP [someone is holding up a JAMP card which means "Just A Minute Please"].

*Thomas:* Nani. 70

*Nani:* I want to know if Mr. Toby knows what "relationship" means before we move on to the next question.

*Mrs. Yoshida:* Very considerate of you.

*Mr. Toby:* I think I understand it. Maybe new examples will come up and I'll realize that I don't understand it, but for now I'm happy. OK, how many people want to NQP [move on] to the next question? [the class counts votes] What's the JAMP? 75

*Brian S.:* I want to refer to his question when he said  
80 you can do any old thing to find a relationship. I don't think so because if you do a shoe and a creature, its like there is not even a relationship. So I think you have to pick something [else] first—like a shoe and a boot.

*Mrs. Yoshida:* 85  
I think right now we called for NQP. The majority voted so you can pass [the ball] to Joseph. Maybe now that we've talked about some things and their relationship maybe you're ready for some more scratching [beneath the sur- 90  
95  
100



face of the topic]. Let's see how we do with these questions.

*Joseph:* [reading the question which Mrs. Yoshida has written on an index card] "How are relationships like things?" 105

*Class:* Huh...I don't get it...what?

*Mrs. Yoshida:* How are relationships like things and the contrary question, "How are relationships different from things?" Can you separate the two? Are they alike? 110

*Joseph:* I think relationships and things are alike because you can use a relationship on two things or more. Like Nani said. You could have a clock that could hang. And then both clocks used to do the same thing. Or a relationship and a clock. In fact, I think relationship will go with any two things that are like...Kacey. 115

*Kacey:* But [if we accept what you say] then I think relationship is a thing, you know, like a clock. So how can it be a relationship? I think its just a word. But it means something. 120

*Mr. Toby:* So Kacey, you're saying that a thing and a

relationship are not the same. They're different. Is that what you said?

*Kacey:* Well mostly. Kind of.

125 *Mrs. Yoshida:* You said that a relationship is just a word?

*Kacey:* Yeah.

*Mrs. Yoshida:* She said relationship is a word and a thing is like a thing, like a creature, or like an item or an object.

130 *Mr. Toby:* So here's a thing [holds out a pen]. Right? And a relationship...

*Kacey:* ...is a word.

*Mrs. Yoshida:* Can you see a relationship then? If its a word you can't see it. Where does it exist? Where is it?

*Kacey:* I don't know, but I have one more question.

*Mrs. Yoshida:* Where do we get the relationship? I'm sorry, go ahead. What was your question?

*Kacey:* You just took my question.

140 *Mr. Toby:* Say the question Kacey.

*Kacey:* Where does the relationship...

145 *Mrs. Yoshida:* Where does the relationship come from?

*Jackie:* Maybe the thing is inside the relationship.

150 *Ahn Thy:* IDUS, IDUS, I don't understand.

*Mr. Toby:*

155 OK...[draws a diagram; the relationship is represented by a circle and the thing is represented by a point within this circle]. Like that [shows diagram]? So the thing is inside the relationship? Is that the way you'd draw the picture?

*Jackie:* [nods "yes"] All the different kinds of things...they relate so they're inside of the relationship.

*Nani:* I agree with Jackie 'cause if you like to see what a ship and a submarine are like. The relationship would be around both of them because you're trying to see what's the relationship around them, the connection, or what they're like. So there would be a big circle or relationship and then there's the things that you're comparing—I mean, that you're trying to see what's the connection. They would be inside the relationship. And so every time you're trying to see what other things are like [the] relationship would be around it. 'Cause that's what you connected.

175 *Mrs. Yoshida:* Would you be drawing a line between those things? Would the lines be the connection? Or would they just exist inside that circle?

*Nani:* They would just be inside the circle.

*Jackie:* But then it doesn't really have to be a relationship and a thing. It can be different things, like maybe say an ocean and the...and many things live in the ocean so they relate to each other. 180

*Mr. Toby:* Did everyone get that? OMT, one more time.

*Jackie:* OK, this is a big classroom and we fit inside it and we're relating to it 'cause we're inside. So I think a relationship is a big thing...like say...a pool can fit people inside it so they relate to each other. 185

*Mr. Toby:* I think maybe you've just found a kind of relationship—a part to wholes. Like the whole is the ocean and then the parts...or maybe that's not right. A big thing and a little...Or an outside...I don't know what to call it. 190

*Jackie:* It's like a mother and a baby inside. So they relate to each other 'cause they're connected. They are a part of each other. Brian C. 195

*Brian C.:* I think the relationship and...they're both noun. 'Cause most people is talking about things and person that belong to the noun. So I wonder if a noun could be a relationship. Ahn Thy. 200  
205  
*Ahn Thy:* OK, I think I can explain what that mean. I think what it means is without a thing there will be no



relationships.

*Mrs. Yoshida:* You're getting us to one of our next questions. 215

*Ahn Thy:* It's the one that Jackie said. It's just like earth. It is like there are people inside, and without them there would be no earth.

*Mrs. Yoshida:* So you're saying if you don't have things you can't have relationships? 220

*Ahn Thy:* Yeah, 'Cause things make a relationship. It's just like a mechanical pencil. They make lead, right? Without a mechanical pencil why should there be lead?

*Mrs. Yoshida:* You know we're getting tight for time and...conversely Jackie you said: "A thing is inside a relationship." Well, what if we throw this question out? Joseph. 225

*Joseph:* [reading] "Can a thing have relationships within it? Can you give an example?"

*Mrs. Yoshida:* Jackie, I believe you said a thing is inside a relationship and Nani you agreed. But can you have the opposite? Can you have a relationship within a thing? Joseph do you want to comment about that before 230

we go on? Or you can recognize someone.

235 *Joseph:* Maybe a thing inside of something can have a relationship. Like maybe your arm and your blood—inside, the fluid. Its inside your arm or your skin or something, and they're both a body part or something. Actually, we're off the subject. Kacey.

240 *Kacey:* Are you saying that we are made of relationships?

*Joseph:* Sort of.

*Kacey:* The circle right now and then all the things around us in the classroom. I mean like if we're the whole relationship, right? And then the classroom is a thing 'cause all around us is things in this room. So is that what the question is?

*Mrs. Yoshida:* What do you people think? Oh, I see some new hands. Maybe recognize some of our new participants.

*Kacey:* Max.

*Max:* Probably like us and this ball—the community ball. Like our care is in the philosophy ball. Something like that?

*Mrs. Yoshida:* Oh, so the philosophy ball is a thing and the relationships are in it.

260 That's a good example. What do you people think?

265 Let's get some other viewpoints. Some new people here. Quickly, so we can give you a chance to participate.

*Max:* Vanessa.

*Vanessa:* I agree with Max because its like our relationships are inside the ball. Its like that picture [points to the diagram which was made earlier]. Its like the ball is a thing and a relationship is the hair [care?] of the ball.

275 *Mrs. Yoshida:* OK, so you agree with what Max said. Anybody have something new, something different to add? Just want to share, disagree or agree?

In this case the members of the community did not arrive at conclusive answers to their questions. But this does not mean that they did not make progress in their inquiry. They came to better appreciate the complexity of the issue. They also began to make connections with their experiences and to perceive new connections. These, Thomas Jackson argues, are forms of philosophical progress.<sup>6</sup>

That the children made progress in this particular inquiry is, of course, a matter of some interest. Of far greater interest, however, is the sophistication of the dialogue through which the inquiry proceeded. The children have,

during the course of the year, learned to consistently practice certain cognitive and social moves. They demonstrate that they have both the ability and, at least within the confines of the community of inquiry, the disposition to think well and to interact cooperatively.

The children repeatedly make the sorts of cognitive moves through which good thinking proceeds. They make the move of *supporting their positions with reasons* (for instance on lines 35, 65, 193). They *use examples* to illustrate and to support their contentions (10, 54, 180, 193). So too, they *search for counter-examples* in order to test the legitimacy of claims (82). When they are unsure of what is being said, they *seek clarification* (152, 240) and when they are unsure of the accuracy of what is being said they *question the truth* of statements (80, 119). They also *employ analogies* (222) and are able to *draw out the implications* of what has been said (117).

Another cognitive move which the children make and which is essential to good thinking (and, so too, to good

judging) is the move of leaning back upon (and then subsequently proceeding forth from) their understanding. The children do this when they make the move of *reflecting back* upon their prior understandings. They reflect back upon their understanding of what has transpired thus far in the inquiry and build upon each other's ideas (28,

65, 80, 111, 163, 271). They also reflect back upon their understandings of prior discussions (35) and, so too, of their world (54-58, 178-187, 221-224, 235-237).

Reflecting back upon their understanding, the children make the subsequent move of *correcting their thought*. They do this when, appealing to their prior experience, they respectfully disagree with one another (81, 118) and endeavor to correct the course of their inquiry (178).

These cognitive moves are important means through which good thinking proceeds, good judgments are made, and understanding is gained. That the children are practicing these moves and, during the course of their practice, continuing to improve their performance of these moves is, then, highly significant. For, the children are, through their practice, being empowered to think better, to judge better, and to understand better.

Another intellectual disposition which is connected to judging and understanding well is the tendency *to wonder*; wonder is the spark which propels the often-times difficult pursuit of a better understanding. The children in this community display this tendency as well. They ask one another



questions (117-120, 136-143, 240) and simply wonder about their world (197-204).

Also of note are the social behaviors which the children perform. One cluster of these social behaviors are those which are connected with the governance of the procedures of inquiry. The children are, to a large extent, *self-governing*. They call on one another without the direction of a teacher (16, 27, 47). They make note of when the discussion is getting off subject (239). They ask for questions to be repeated (18). They themselves determine when to move on to another question (60) or when to slow down the pace of the discussion (68, 79). Discovering that they can govern themselves and that they need not always look to the teacher for direction, the children gain both the confidence and the ability to make their own judgments and, so too, to participate in a democratic society.

Another cluster of notable social behaviors performed by the children are those oral and aural behaviors which are prerequisites to good inquiry. These children are *listening* to one another. This is demonstrated by the frequency with which they connect their thoughts to those of their peers; they listen to and then build upon each other's contributions (28, 65, 80, 111, 163, 271). The children are also able to *voice their ideas clearly and confidently* (28-47, 53-59). Having learned how to engage in these behaviors, the children are able to pursue understanding during the course of this particular inquiry. More importantly, they have, to the extent to which they have become disposed to engage in these behaviors, gained the power to inquire cooperatively with others.

A final important cluster of social behaviors are those which demonstrate the ethical appreciation which the community members have for one another. Through their behavior the children show that they respect one another and that care about each other as persons. This is demonstrated, first and foremost, by the children's good listening. Listening with care, the children show that they have regard for their classmates and take them seriously. This care is also demonstrated in other ways. Nani shows that she cares about others when she asks another community member if his concerns have been met (71) and when she purposefully asks a child who seldom speaks to share his thoughts (47). Brian and Kacey similarly show respect when they disagree with what has been said; they disagree not with combativeness or animosity but rather with civility and kindness (81, 117).

The children in Mrs. Yoshida's class did not, to such an extent, behave in these ways at the beginning of the year. I

observed, as I visited this class each week, a steady maturation of this community. As the year progressed the children more frequently performed the cognitive moves and social behaviors which I have here emphasized. This is, to my mind, significant. For it supports the contention that the community of inquiry approach can be an effective means through which to cultivate good thinking, good behavior, and, ultimately, good judgment and understanding.

### Endnotes

1. For a more thorough analysis see Yos, Thomas Butler (2002), *Educating for Good Judgment*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Dissertation Services/ProQuest Information and Learning Company, 2003.

2. See Jackson, Thomas and Oho, Linda E. (1993). *Getting Started in Philosophy: A Start-Up Kit for K-1*. Unpublished Manuscript. (p. 12)

3. See Splitter, Laurance J. and Sharp, Ann M. (1995) *Teaching For Better Thinking: The Classroom Community of Inquiry*. Melbourne, Australia: The Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd., 1995. (p. 149)

4. I have edited this transcript slightly in order to make it more

readable. The only time I have deleted entire contributions is in the case when a teacher spoke with the sole intention of repeating what a child said. Changes made within an individual contribution are limited to the elimination of repetitious or unnecessary words. For example, "Like...I think that... maybe...like...families are relationships" would be edited down to "I think that families are relationships."

5. See Jackson, Thomas.

(1998) *Philosophy in the Schools Project: A Guide for Teachers*.

Unpublished Manuscript. (p. 25) Jackson suggests helping children to govern the procedural dimension of their inquiries by teaching them a number of acronyms or "magic words." Because these words are simple, non-threatening, and fun to use, children readily embrace them and, as a consequence, quickly take responsibility for the governance of their inquiry. Among the words which Jackson, teachers, and students have developed are the following: **SPLAT** (A little louder, please; one says this when one wants the speaker to speak louder.), **IDUS** (I Don't Understand; one says this when one wants the speaker to clarify what he or she means.), **POPAAT** (Please One Person At A Time; this is said when too many people are talking at once. It is a request for those who have not been recognized as the speaker to stop talking.), **OMT** (One More Time; one says this when one wants the speaker to repeat what he or she has just said.), **NQP** (Next Question Please; one says this when one wants the community to discuss a new question.), **LMO** (Let's Move On; one says this when one wants the community to move on to another point or question.), **LMB** (Let's Move Back; one says this when one wants the community to return to a previously discussed point.), **POC** (Point Of Clarification; one says this either when one wants to oneself raise a point of clarification or when one wants the speaker to clarify some point.), **GOS** (Getting Off Subject; one says this when one feels that the discussion is losing focus and straying from the question which is currently under consideration).

6. Jackson (1998), (p. 18).

