

RESISTING THE ‘VIEW FROM NOWHERE’: POSITIONALITY IN PHILOSOPHY FOR/WITH CHILDREN RESEARCH

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While Philosophy for/with Children (P4wC) provides a better alternative to the usual ‘banking’ model of education, questions have been raised regarding its applicability in non-western contexts. Despite its adherence to the ideals of democratic dialogue, not all members of a Community of Inquiry (COI) will be disposed to participate in the inquiry, not because they are incapable of doing so, but because they are positioned inferiorly within the group thereby affecting their efforts to speak out on topics that are meaningful to them. In this article, I claim that it is essential to integrate positionality in P4wC research/practice. Aside from its role in helping a practitioner/researcher choose the appropriate method and materials that match the unique contexts of children, it also increases one’s awareness of the subtle forms of epistemic injustice that could leak in the COI, as well as the other subtle ways in which children are marginalized. In this regard, a P4wC researcher/practitioner must have a higher degree of sensitivity towards her positionality as this inevitably gets entangled with the positionality of children. I present some ‘areas’ in which the importance of positionality in the COI manifests, namely, restructuring classroom power relations, navigating a multi-ethnic classroom, facilitating meaning-making, and modeling reflective thinking.

INTRODUCTION

Amy Reed-Sandoval and Alain Sykes (2017, 220) assert that while Philosophy for/with Children (henceforth, P4wC) is an improvement from the banking model of education, it may “underserve, and perhaps even marginalize, children who suffer epistemic

injustice.” Their claim proceeds from the observation that despite P4wC’s adherence to the ideals of a democratic dialogue, in the real world with less than ideal conditions, some members of a Community of Inquiry (henceforth, COI) will not be disposed to participate in the inquiry, not because they are incapable of doing so, but because they are positioned inferiorly in the group thereby affecting their efforts to speak out on topics that are meaningful to them. For instance, children who are deemed ‘different’ due to their socio-economic, cultural, and ethnolinguistic background often experience being ‘othered’ as they feel they are not part of the status quo. Consequently, their sense of safety and belongingness in the COI are affected, often leaving them feeling silenced and disconnected (Murriss 2013). It is for this reason that attention towards positionality, which refers to one’s location within an existing socio-cultural, economic and political network, becomes crucially important (Reed-Sandoval & Sykes 2017). Positionality describes how one is positioned according to their age, gender, class, race, ethnicity, age, which in turn determines how she is “differently positioned in hierarchies of power and privilege” (Qin 2016, 1). Failure to acknowledge the subtle levels of positionality may inadvertently reinforce subtle structures of oppression and marginalization couched in a well-meaning intent to expose children to philosophy. Obviously, in teaching children how to philosophize, good intentions are not enough. Educators who wish to practice an educational theory that originated outside of one’s socio-cultural background are responsible for discerning whether their goals and methodologies address the unique needs and contexts of learners. In this connection, P4wC practitioners should know how the subtle dynamics of power, privilege, and exclusion – endemic in many societies – may be reflected and reproduced inside a P4wC classroom.

I claim in this article that integrating positionality as a methodological complement in P4wC practice/research is important. At the most basic level, sensitivity towards positionality helps a practitioner/researcher choose the appropriate method and materials that match the unique contexts of children. In this regard, a positionality-sensitive COI makes room for a more meaningful dialogue that creates opportunities for inter-subjective encounters among children and P4wC practitioners. This approach also helps increase awareness of the subtle forms of epistemic injustice that could leak in the COI, as well as the other subtle ways in which children are marginalized based on a deflated outlook of their capacity as knowers and sources of knowledge (Fricker 2007). As I show below, my P4wC experiences strengthen the view that a P4wC researcher must have a greater degree of sensitivity towards her positionality as this inevitably gets entangled with the positionality of children.

This article is a product of my experiences in conducting qualitative P4wC research in Mindanao, Philippines. It is part of my doctoral dissertation, which consisted of thirty P4wC classes with grades 5 and 6 students in a public elementary school in Marilog District, Davao City (Philippines) between June 2018 and April 2019. Drawing from my experiences in facilitating philosophical dialogues with a multi-ethnic class, I reflect on how I positioned myself and negotiated my identity during my visits to their community.

This article consists of three (3) parts. First, I discuss some implications in adopting Positionality as a methodological complement in qualitative research, particularly its presuppositions concerning the situatedness and partiality of knowledge. Second, I describe how I situated myself in the research field by considering the context and method, as well as and my assumptions and limitations. Third, I present some ‘areas’ where the importance of Positionality in P4wC and COI manifests, namely, in restructuring classroom power relations, in navigating a multi-ethnic classroom, in facilitating meaning-making, and in modeling reflective thinking. A conclusion follows this.

RESISTING THE ‘VIEW FROM NOWHERE’

The positionality of a researcher plays a significant role in the research process (Mosselson 2010; Bourke 2014). Her positionality is entangled in the web of social relations already at play in the chosen research environment. This requires reflexivity towards her assumptions, biases, and actions, and how these affect the research process from the beginning up to the end. As Sultana argues, “reflexivity in research involves reflection on self, process, and representation, and critically examining power relations and politics in the research process” (Sultana 2007, 376). The researcher, in this approach, refuses to think from a detached standpoint, which is no less than a “view from nowhere” (Code 1993, 16). In this regard, one’s perspective about research has to change from researching *about* (implies distance) to researching *with* (implies active participation), thereby affirming the inherent relationality between the researcher and the researched.

Integrating positionality in research entails awareness of some presuppositions about what knowledge is and how it is produced. One presupposition is the idea that knowledge is *situated* as it always carries the fingerprints of a socially, culturally, and historically situated person or group. On this note, Rose asserts that “the sort of knowledge made depends on who its makers are” (Rose 1997, 306-307). This highlights the claim that researchers are shaped by their intellectual background and lived experiences, thus informing their assumptions about the world and the knowledge they produce. In this connection, Brown, Collins, and Duguid (1989) underline the crucial point that knowledge cannot be understood outside the physical and social contexts where it is created, discovered, and used. It implies that the process of knowing is inseparable from the activities and situations where they emerge. Knowledge, therefore, is fundamentally linked not only with the identities, values, interests of the individuals involved in its production but also with the context and circumstances of its acquisition and use.

Moreover, objectivity in research does not necessarily mean neutrality and disinterestedness. In the positivist-empiricist research method, what counts typically as objective knowledge is presupposed by the impartiality of the researcher and independence from the concrete specificities of the research process. This Baconian research paradigm focuses on *what* the object of study is and gives less account on *who* conducts the study. In contrast, positionality conceptualizes objectivity in terms of “limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of

subject and object” (Haraway 1988, 583). Objectivity, in this sense, is possible only through the complex connections and the overlaps between equally legitimate partial perspectives. In short, one cannot speak of a singular form of knowledge, but partial and situated forms of knowledge.

SITUATING MYSELF IN THE RESEARCH FIELD

As a P4wC researcher, I am embodied and situated within concrete contexts that affect how I choose my research agenda, environment, research participants, methodologies, and conceptual framework. It is somewhat naïve of me to think that I made these choices impartially. My decision to take on a particular area among all the other possible fields of study already manifests my partiality. Such decision has something to do with the conditions shaping my positionality, including my preconceptions about the nature and purpose of Philosophy, my experiences, past, and present, and all the other ideas and activities to which I have been exposed. Likewise, my interpretation of data and analyses, including the dilemmas and conflicts that arise in the field, are informed and influenced by my positionality (Alcalde 2007). Indeed, my socio-political and geo-political locations impact the research process (Harding 1986).

Context

The context where I conducted my research can be characterized by three (3) conditions: destitution, diversity, and discrimination. The school is situated in an economically deprived area located just over 65 kilometers from the center of Davao city. Unlike the city proper, its location is somewhat rural, where most settlers get their source of income from farming vegetables, cacao, and corn or raising various livestock. Their products are usually bought at a lower price by ‘middle-men’ who, in turn, sell the goods to the local markets in the city. In terms of ethnolinguistic composition, the communities surrounding the area are diverse. Most are *Bisaya* (i.e., Cebuano-speaking), while a significant number belong to indigenous groups, particularly, the *Manobo* tribe. It may be well to note that there are various indigenous communities scattered all over the island of Mindanao. Among the estimated 15-20 million indigenous peoples (henceforth, IP) who belong to 110 ethnolinguistic groups in the entire Philippine archipelago, 61% of such population are located in Mindanao.¹ Based on the data generated in 2018 by the Department of Education (DepEd), the total number of IP learners in the entire Philippine public basic education system is around 11.8% (i.e., 2,593,555 learners). More than 50% (or 1,373,954) of these learners are situated in the six regions of Mindanao.² These data indicate that a good number of public schools in Mindanao, particularly those that are located in rural areas, have IP learners. In particular, the school where I conducted my research has about 15% indigenous learners.

Why did I choose this particular context? Before I commenced the study, I had other options for elementary schools located in the city proper that are more convenient to visit, and have far better conditions compared to the school in Marilog. One of the reasons for deciding to choose such a school is my past experiences with indigenous children and youth. As a former seminarian, I had been immersed in various indigenous

communities in some areas of Visayas and Mindanao, and had witnessed their struggle to get a decent education in public schools. By situating my fieldwork in a school where there are IP learners, I was hoping to ‘bridge’ my previous apostolate experiences with my current work as a scholar.

Children coming from indigenous groups face various difficulties in getting an education from the public basic education system. Aside from financial constraints, many of them suffer from discrimination based on their physical features, distinct language, and social status. Many of these IP students have experienced discrimination within the school setting either from teachers who treat them with prejudice or from classmates who hold discriminatory views against them. Also, their experiences of discrimination are sometimes caused by their inability to comply with the school requirements, such as wearing uniforms and shoes (ECIP, 2008). Since most of them could not afford these, having no shoes and uniforms has become a part of the stereotypes attached to being indigenous. Moreover, they are discriminated against as ‘slow learners’ because their mode of knowing and learning (usually passed on orally) does not match the basic competencies (usually associated with literacy) prescribed in the curriculum (ECIP, 2008). In other words, the standard curriculum does not take cognizance of their culture and identity.

Method

I used the Community of Inquiry as the primary method in facilitating philosophical dialogues with my students. I designed a ‘customized’ P4wC program that makes use of local stories, locally-produced picture books, and familiar collaborative games. I also utilized some philosophical problems that were translated into the local dialect. Despite the modifications I made in terms of materials, language, and approach, I kept the basic flow of the dialogue in the COI. However, acknowledging that the usual Lipman-Sharp model may not always be applicable in my context, I explored what I call “indigenized COI,” which emphasizes connectedness, relationality, and situatedness (Elicor 2019). What is unique in this indigenized approach is the lesser emphasis placed on the act of questioning and the setting up of a learning agenda. Instead, it highlights the activity of finding commonalities in their experiences and weaving their unique stories together. Also, journaling is an integral part of the class. After each dialogue, they would spend several minutes writing (or drawing) their thoughts and questions in their journals. This is where they would articulate what they are not comfortable sharing with the group.

Assumptions and Limitations

Before conducting the study, my knowledge and experience of P4wC were limited to my participation in a P4wC international conference, two intensive P4wC workshops, one short course, and a few observations of P4C classes.³ Lacking an actual P4wC hands-on experience, my primary motivation in conducting a ‘fieldwork’ is to experience the practical challenges and possibilities of doing P4wC in my locality.

Also, my research maintains the idea that P4wC and its pedagogical method intersect with the principles of democratic education. The philosophical dialogue within

the framework of the COI is a concrete exercise of some democratic values, which prepare students for the procedures of rational deliberation essential in a democratic society. Following Lipman, I think that fostering and strengthening critical, caring, and creative thinking in the basic education level is important so that later on, they would not fall prey to “authoritarian and conformitarian propaganda” (Lipman 2003, 209). The values of critical listening, openness to reason with others, tolerance of other’s views, and a collaborative attitude are dispositions essential in citizenship. In other words, the principles that students learn in P4wC equip them with the skills necessary to actively participate in building a democratic society (Lee 2009). Moreover, P4wC empowers individuals (i.e., children) whose voices are often less heard, if not at all. Following Kohan, I maintain that P4wC possesses a revolutionary potential as it provides a dialogical space in which the oppressive practices in a society, and even those that are reproduced inside the classrooms, are examined and challenged (Kohan 1995).

POSITIONALITY IN P4WC

It must be noted that the embedded principles and the very structure of the dialogue in the COI presuppose the importance, albeit implicitly, the positionality of its members. For instance, Sharp (1991, 31) asserts that among the cognitive behaviors that are observable in a COI, one of which is “sensitivity to context.” For her (1991, 31), the “success of the community is compatible with and is dependent on, unique expressions of individuality.” The participants in the dialogue co-create knowledge by building on each other’s ideas, thus taking consideration of their unique identities and contexts (i.e., positionality) where ideas stem from. Likewise, taking off from what the children decide to inquire as a community is a crucial P4wC practice that underlines their background conditions in the formation and development of their theoretical positions, as well as the direction of the dialogue. A philosophical inquiry that is stirred by the questions, experiences, musings, and personal interests of children, instead of a teacher’s pre-fabricated learning agenda, highlights the important implication of positionality in P4wC.

However, the necessity of positionality becomes apparent when the notion of *impartiality* as a criterion of philosophical discussion is considered. Lipman and Sharp (1995, 359) emphasize that a teacher must assume responsibility in introducing and maintaining the fundamental criteria of a philosophical dialogue, viz., impartiality, comprehensiveness, and consistency. While comprehensiveness and consistency are obviously necessary in ensuring the integrity of a dialogue, impartiality, on the other hand, has been problematized and contested. Haenel (2017), for instance, argues that there are modes of thinking⁴ embedded in the traditional conceptual analysis within Analytic Philosophy, which is predicated on ‘aperspectivity’ as a criterion of philosophizing. This criterion, by implication, discredits the social position of the knower in the construction of concepts. In this sense, the philosophical practice is taken to be independent of the epistemic standpoint of the knower. Her positionality is understood as ‘epistemically neutral’ in relation to her ideas.

This understanding of what it means to philosophize can potentially marginalize

students who belong to underrepresented groups, especially when the entitlements (in terms of gender, age, race, language) implicit in the usual setup of academic philosophy, are seriously considered. Neglecting the obvious implications of one's social position in the process of arriving at or constructing knowledge inevitably rejects specific legitimate claims coming from contextualized 'voices' of differently positioned individuals. In the context of P4wC, this bias could consequently disregard children coming from the minority, such as those belonging to different cultures with distinct epistemologies. While the importance of being aware of positionality is already implicitly embedded in P4wC, making this awareness explicit is essential especially when the children in the COI come from starkly different backgrounds and conditions.

In the following sections, I discuss some 'areas' where the importance of Positionality in P4wC and COI manifests, namely, in restructuring classroom power relations, in navigating a multi-ethnic classroom, in facilitating meaning-making, and in modeling reflective thinking.

Restructuring Classroom Power Relations

The basic framework of the COI disrupts traditional classroom power dynamics from its physical configuration (sitting in a circle) to its dialogical and collaborative procedures (Reynolds 2019). Forming a circle and being able to see each other's faces were unusual yet exciting for my students as they had been used to sitting in rows and columns according to grade levels.⁵ Some fundamental P4wC commitments were surprising to them, such as the idea that they can openly ask any question that means to them and that their views are important and should be listened to. It took them a while to get the rhythm of sharing their personal questions since they were 'programmed' to just absorb information, e.g., copying what is written on the board or memorizing textbook answers.

Incorporating positionality in P4wC research requires acute awareness concerning how power relations manifest in the COI. This entails challenging the epistemic authority embedded in the teacher's role as a conveyor of knowledge. In this sense, renegotiating the limits of one's authority and privilege becomes a crucial task. It is pertinent to note, however, that challenging the dominant assumptions and practices derived from the teacher's traditional authority is not an easy feat. Most educational environments accord teachers a privileged position that consists of epistemic and disciplinary power over students. In this regard, P4wC's aim to enable children to think for themselves could be jeopardized by the unequal power relations arising from the authority attached to the teacher's role. In my experience, for instance, children would most likely follow anyone without question whom they deem (or are introduced to them as) an authority figure in the class.

During my first week in the school, I felt uncomfortable every time the well-meaning principal would highlight my background (e.g., educational attainment and the institution where I am affiliated) whenever he introduced me to students, parents, and teachers. I was worried about how this would impact their perception of me, knowing that one's social status could cause intimidation and distance. As such, my professional and

socio-economic background served as “identity markers” that, in the first stages of my research, highlighted my being an outsider (Douglas & Nganga 2013, 66). I was born and raised in the city, educated in relatively well-known institutions, and is presently working in a university. Consequently, my presence in an underprivileged public elementary school accorded me with a ‘veil’ of authority that affects the students’ perception of me, and likewise, my understanding of them. In effect, my positionality and theirs automatically got entangled in an asymmetrical relation, inevitably shaping and constructing our classroom interactions.

Cognizance of one’s positionality and how this plays out in a P4wC classroom manifests in disabling the standard teacher-student hierarchy. Challenging traditional teacher stereotypes, such as the usual expectations regarding decorum and language, helped me close the gap between teacher-student asymmetrical relationship. For instance, since most of the students used slippers in going to school, I wore sandals instead of formal shoes; and since most of them spoke only the local dialect, I used the same instead of the mandatory English or Tagalog. Moreover, challenging their usual expectations of a ‘teacher’s persona’ also abetted in restructuring power relations in the COI. Without feigning ignorance, I would directly tell them if I had no idea about a particular topic. I would openly admit if I committed a mistake, and I would let them know if I got lost in the dialogue or confused about something. Similarly, I showed vulnerability by sharing some very personal anecdotes that are relevant to the topic. These efforts somehow challenged the ‘standard’ teacher character and roles, thus helped unsettle the typical teacher-student hierarchy in the classroom.

Navigating an Ethnically Diverse Classroom

In facilitating philosophical dialogues in a multi-ethnic classroom, there are questions that I deemed necessary to consider: Am I bringing something that *adds* to what they already know? Am I bringing something that *duplicates* what they already know? Or am I bringing something that can potentially *destroy* their identity? With these questions serving as guideposts, I have learned to be discerning of the possible ways in which the aims and presuppositions of P4wC might underserve my students. Considering P4wC’s western epistemological assumptions, will it become another educational tool that would cause further epistemic marginalization commonly experienced by IP children? Reed-Sandoval observes that students who have been subjected to various forms of discrimination become empowered to bring into the philosophical dialogue their own experiences of marginalization, especially when their unique contexts are acknowledged and respected (Reed-Sandoval 2014, 9). Likewise, despite its western epistemological biases, I think P4wC can be an empowering learning experience for marginalized IP children, especially when practitioners are conscious of children’s unique positionality (and of their own) and how it influences their perception of themselves and their experiences.

Despite P4wC’s non-traditional approach to classroom teaching and management, I observed that indigenous children were sometimes constrained to participate in the

dialogue actively. Most of them have experienced being bullied and discriminated (e.g., labeled as ignorant and slow). These unjust stereotypes hinder them from freely speaking their minds as well as from collaborating with the students who belong to the dominant group. Thus, to avoid occasions of discrimination, they would tend to remain silent and detached. There were instances when they showed resistance (which is usually perceived as ‘shyness’) by silently doing something else while a dialogue was going on, or by leaving the circle and choosing to read a book at the back.

Some teachers had informed me that these IP children are ‘normally’ silent and less active compared to the non-indigenous due to their lack of self-esteem. This observation, I think, is misleading. Shyness is not necessarily a ‘normal’ trait of indigenous children. Instead, it is their response based on how they perceive themselves positioned in the class. Likewise, their participation (or lack thereof) in the COI is influenced by their perception of my identity and the position I project to them. In other words, shyness (or silence) is not necessarily an inherent characteristic commonly attributed to IP learners, but rather a response to their perception of an outsider’s position in relation to their own perceived position within the class. In this regard, awareness of how positionalities intersect in the COI is crucial. If a P4wC researcher fails to acknowledge the children’s unique contexts and how their positionalities inform their perspectives, chances are, their participation in the dialogue will likewise get affected.

Moreover, the dynamics of privilege and power is usually invisible in the classroom (Barnett 2013). Those who belong to the status quo are often unaware of the authority they unconsciously exert on others. In my class, the children who belong to the majority were understandably naïve of the fact that their dominant positionality affects the IP children. Certainly, it is not their fault to be socially included in the dominant group. Thus, it is incumbent on me to show all of them how their background conditions affect their participation and interactions in the COI. To gradually make privilege visible, I would make it a point to lead their attention to the conditions surrounding their daily experiences that are usually taken for granted. For example, when discussing a particular topic, I would prod them to see it in connection with their experiences at home, neighborhood, and school. I would encourage them to ask themselves: “why do I think the way I think?” “what would others think if they were in my position?” and “what would I think if I were in their position?” There is no better way of making privilege and exclusion visible than to see how things look from a different standpoint. In this regard, being able to help them ‘see’ and recognize how their positionality affects their points of view increases not only critical thinking but also caring thinking.

Facilitating Meaning-Making

Knowledge is always mediated by the specific position of the knower, which “is constructed by the interaction between the questioner and the world” (Takacs 2003, 31). In a classroom, each learner has a standpoint that manifests in her views about the world and the personal meanings she makes out of them. In my P4wC research, I had to be cognizant of the fact that all children in my class are uniquely positioned not only in

their respective environments but also within the COI itself. Their perception of how they are situated in the group and how they are perceived by their classmates (and myself as a researcher) profoundly influence their views, participation, confidence, and the manner they relate with other learners (Avci 2016).

The significance of the COI is that it provides an avenue where children can together discover and negotiate meanings collaboratively, which can only happen within a framework of dialogical inquiry. Lipman and his colleagues (Lipman, Sharp & Oscanyan 1980, 6-8) note that “information may be transmitted, doctrines may be indoctrinated, feelings may be shared – but meanings must be discovered.” The idea that meanings are discovered in cooperation with other thinkers highlights the assumption that meanings are always situated within a shared context, and thus, their discovery involves inter-subjective agreements (or disagreements) among inquiring participants in the COI. It may be noted here that a transmission-based educational model, with its presumption of transferability of knowledge, reduces meanings into self-contained information detached from the context of its usage. On the other hand, understanding the process of knowing, with the view of positionality, always affirms the inextricability of meanings from the social context where they are discovered.

In one of the philosophical dialogues with my students, we came across the concept of “enemy” and tackled it by describing how one becomes an enemy to someone. One child pointed out that “one becomes an enemy by the way she/he speaks.” I asked him to elaborate. He replied, “if someone talks to me like this, *tatatatatat...* (mimicking the sound of a machine gun), he could be very annoying, thus, becomes my enemy”. The majority of the class expressed their agreement with his answer. Probing further, I asked them: “what will you do if one of your classmates talks to you like a machine gun?” Another child who is known to be a bully in the class immediately blurted out: “I will punch him in his face!” His answer created mixed reactions. Some students showed signs of agreement; some hesitated, while others reacted in opposition. Struck by his response, I took the chance to inquire deeper. I asked him, “why would you punch him?” After a few seconds, he replied: “because he talks annoyingly.” Conscious not to single him out, I then turned my attention to the class and asked: “does one’s way of talking justify the act of punching?” This time, he no longer responded, but the discussion continued as other students raised their answers. Part of my mind, however, was stuck to his response. Reading their journal entries after the class, I was surprised by the question he wrote: “Why am I always punished at home?” My gut feeling tells me that there is a connection between his remark earlier in the class and his personal question. Prompted by this, we spent the next dialogue inquiring about their experiences at home and how these influence their behavior in school.

In this example, that child revealed the conditions underlying his perceived position in the class and his own home. This dialogue shows that a child’s ideas (or behavior) are somehow conditioned by the concrete circumstances in which he is immersed. Some of these circumstances are easily noticeable, while others are not. In this connection, positionality offers a way of looking at how one’s location within social structures and relations affects meaning-making and knowledge construction. In

the dialogue, the questions ‘what is an enemy’ and ‘how one ought to treat an enemy’ have varying layers of meaning for each child. To my mind, it would not be helpful to dismiss that child’s thoughts by moralizing the act of punching. As a P4wC practitioner, I ought to view his answer as a tip of a serious issue (i.e., violence at home) and initiate a dialogical inquiry about it.

Modeling Reflective Thinking

In advocating for the inclusion of Philosophy in pre-college settings, one of the things Lipman had in mind was the perceived need to cultivate in the students a kind of thinking that is critical but at the same time, caring, creative and *reflective*. Reflective thinking for Lipman (2003, 26) “takes into account its own methodology, its own procedures, its own perspective and point of view.” Such thinking, a metacognitive move, prompts a knower to acknowledge both her explicit and implicit personal biases and other forms of prejudices that could derail the COI from a reasoned dialogical inquiry. Reflective thinking, therefore, helps one to take notice not only of the idea (subject matter), the manner (procedure) in which an idea emerges, but also the conditions (positionality) surrounding the context from which it is discovered and used. In this connection, being grounded on the conditions underpinning one’s epistemic position helps foster a reflective disposition towards one’s way of thinking. In other words, if one has a good grasp of the conditions influencing her ideas, it would be less strenuous for her to evaluate her thinking, and if need be, to self-correct.

In facilitating philosophical dialogues with children, reflective thinking is taught to children not by telling, but by demonstrating (modeling) to them how it is done. It is, therefore, expected that the researcher has acquired a certain degree of mastery of such skill; after all, one cannot give what one does not have. During my dialogues with the children, I had to be always conscious as to how my thinking plays out in the COI, and how it could either provide support to the students’ deliberation or hijack the dialogue. Specifically, being aware of my positionality prepares me to keep myself mindful of my epistemic position (and by extension, epistemic authority) that affects my facilitation of the COI. This does not mean, however, that my personal biases can (or should) be suspended since this is not entirely possible, not least because there is no such thing as unbiased facilitation. What is important here is that “bias should stimulate inquiry without interfering in the investigation” (Wolcott 1995, 165). In the context of P4wC, a researcher’s bias should not interfere in the dialogical inquiry.

One bias that I held very dear during my first few classes is the assumption that ‘P4wC will work no matter what’. Regardless of the differences in culture, language, and ways of thinking, I held on to the thought that if I would faithfully follow the standard P4wC process, a philosophical dialogue will eventually ensue. I would ‘keep an eye’ for any striking dialogical exchange that would support this assumption. However, it did not take long for me to realize that such was not always the case. Far from my romanticized notions of P4wC, there were moments when our dialogues became messy, bland, and even noisy. There were times that I felt frustrated listening to seemingly contradictory and irrelevant ideas. In these instances, I would usually catch myself ‘controlling’ the

dialogue instead of patiently following where the conversation leads.

Conversely, there were moments when there were long periods of silence indicative either of confusion, difficulty, or perhaps indifference towards the topic at hand. These moments were crucial insofar as modeling reflective thinking is concerned. When the dialogue seems to be not moving forward, my tendency as a teacher is to take the helm, so to speak, and revert to transmitting information, thereby disrupting the process of dialogical inquiry. Consequently, instead of providing a model for reflective thinking, I model an 'authoritative thinking' that cancels out the epistemic equality presupposed in the COI. From these lapses, I learned that while personal biases are inescapable, these should not hijack the dialogue.

When confronted by a 'lull' in the dialogue, either caused by a puzzlement, confusion, or unresponsiveness, it is essential to encourage children to go back to their own experiences. For instance, on dispelling puzzlement, Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan (1980, 32) note that, "we must somehow find the surrounding circumstances that might explain it, the conditions accountable for it. Or we must find a context or frame of reference to which the puzzling thing belongs, for we can understand it if it is a meaningful part of a larger whole." One's positionality is an appropriate source of such a frame of reference. As explained above, one's understanding of an idea and appreciation of its meaning always proceed from the situation where it is used. In other words, part of modeling reflective thinking is leading children's attention to their positionality from which meanings may arise.

CONCLUSION

I have asserted that it is essential to have an awareness of positionality in P4wC research. Following Harding, what positionality can necessarily offer to P4wC is the fact that it provides a "starting thought from marginalized lives" (Harding 1992, 463). Children are among the marginalized groups in a society that are often prejudiced based on their age, thus discrediting their capacity as knowers and sources of knowledge. That children, particularly those who belong to underrepresented groups, should be listened to without prejudice is intimately linked to the assumption that their lives and the unjust structures surrounding them manifest the very kind of society in which they live. In other words, their experience of epistemic marginalization is not merely caused by a biased perception of their cognitive abilities, but a result of an unjust social positioning inherently prejudicial to them. Through positionality, one can problematize the unchallenged assumptions about the epistemic capacities of children.

A P4wC research/practice that takes positionality seriously makes room for learning experiences where children who are inferiorly positioned in the COI become engaged in the dialogue. Such dialogue results in a more meaningful - not just a critical - exchange of ideas, questions, and experiences that could touch the lives of learners. In a community that gives importance to the role of positionality, members are being addressed and being spoken to, not in a 'neutral' manner, but in a more nuanced, situated, and personal encounter. Thus, the philosophical dialogue does not remain a verbal exchange of ideas

that seemingly occurs in a vacuum but instead creates real possibilities for inter-subjective encounters.

Finally, the relationship between positionality and the COI (both in theory and practice) is an area that invites a focused investigation as this affirms the idea that no learning experience occurs in a vacuum. Both teachers and learners are situated within a social, cultural, political, and economic nexus that goes beyond the borders of the classroom or the school. Thus, the whole complex relationship between one's thinking and the concrete realities surrounding it is indispensable in the process of inquiry and the construction of knowledge. It is for this reason that P4wC practitioners ought to recognize how their positionality impacts the COI inasmuch as it impacts the positionality of children.⁶

NOTES

1. see www.ph.undp.org

2. These data were gathered through an email correspondence with the Education Management Information System Division of the Department of Education last June 2019. I thank Ms. MaLourie Victor of IPed for her invaluable insights and support.

3. Before I started this research, my P4wC background were: a conference participation in the 2017 International Council of Philosophy Inquiry with Children (ICPIC), P4C Level 1 Course with Society for Advancing Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education (SAPERRE), Intensive P4C workshop with Philosophy with Children and Youth Network for Asia and the Pacific (PCYNAP), P4C Summer Course in Madrid, and a few classroom observations in Manila and in Taiwan.

4. These modes are semantic internalism and intentional definition.

5. Due to a lack of classroom, grade 5 and 6 students were joined in one small classroom. Their seats were arranged according to the attendance sheet, and their grade level. Grade 5 students were grouped on right side, while the grade 6 students were on the left side.

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