Running head: PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN AND DIALOGUE

Philosophy for Children and Its Impact on Student Dialogue, Language, and Thinking Skills

Albane Ardolli

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Master of Education

Wagner College

2012

Wagner College Education Department

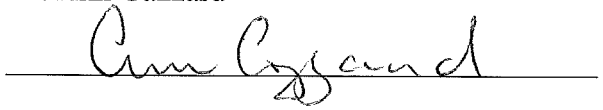
Graduate Studies Master's Thesis

Author:	Albane Ardolli
Title of Thesis:	Philosophy for Children and Its Impact on Student Dialogue, Language, and Thinking Skills
Degree:	Master of Science in Education
Date of Graduation:	May 2012

Thesis Review Committee

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Stephen Preskill

Reader: Dr. Ann Gazzard



Reader: Professor Danielle Arena

Abstract

With high stakes testing and teachers focused on behavioral outcomes, it appears little time is left for effective group dialogue in the classroom (Fisher, 2007). However, Philosophy for Children is a program that can be implemented in the classroom to encourage student dialogue and improve language and thinking skills. This study explores the impact of Philosophy for Children in a preschool setting on dialogue, language, and thinking skills as measured by number of occurrences of student-initiated questions, connections made to personal experiences, support or elaboration provided for answers in the form of reasons or examples, and the length of time of discussion. The participants in this study were six preschool students ranging from age 3 years, 11 months to 4 years, 11 months. Students met with the research twice a week for a total of ten sessions. At each session, the researcher read a children's book and pursued a philosophical discussion with the students. Each session was recorded for assessment purposes. As the sessions progressed, there was no trend in student-initiated questions, an increase in the number of connections students made to personal experiences, and support and elaboration provided remained consistent throughout the sessions. The length of discussion time remained consistent as well. Looking at the variables for each student independently offered more insight into the impact of the program as well as limitations. This study has shown that preschool children can participate in discussion, ask questions to peers, make personal connections, and provide support and elaboration when discussion philosophical topics. Future research should explore the impact of time constraints, gender roles, and organization of discussion material has on student discussion, language, and thinking skills.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Background

Lev Vygotsky's (1962) research on the relationship between thought and language development propelled a sector of contemporary educational researchers to focus on the role of dialogue in the classroom. Vygotsky's "thinking is internalized dialogue" and further findings between language development and social activity in the classroom raised the question: where and how does student discussion play a role in the classroom? According to Jenkins and Lyle (2010), a study in the United Kingdom found that dialogic teaching promotes inclusive classrooms and student confidence to voice thoughts and opinions (Alexander, 2006). However, in addition to heightened interest in the role of discussion in student learning, a movement towards a child-centered classroom has emerged in the past few decades. Constructivism, in which students learn through engaged activity and experience with only guidance from the teacher, is restructuring educational beliefs on effective teaching and learning practices. Both movements are asking educators to create a classroom environment in which students learn by doing as well as engage in discussions to further cognitive and language development.

In the 1970s, a movement emerged with the idea of teaching philosophy to children. Matthew Lipman, a major proponent of the movement, researched the benefits of philosophical discussions in the classroom. He also created a curriculum for children called Philosophy for Children, even though it has been adapted since to suit a range of ages and cultures. Lipman used psychological findings and philosophical issues to create a program that would help students improve their reasoning abilities as well as foster creativity development, personal and interpersonal growth, development of ethical understandings, and the ability to find meaning in experience (which is similar to the modern educational coined phrase of "text-to-self") (Lipman,

Sharp, & Oscanyan, 1980). In this program, the classroom becomes a community of inquiry in which educators guide student discussion and dialogue of a philosophical investigation of student interest. In this way, the Philosophy for Children approach incorporates two important movements: language development through dialogue and child-centered learning.

The aim of philosophical discussion in this approach is to elicit student views and opinions, help students express their thoughts, encourage inference making, improve reasoning, seek consistency, request definitions, and search for assumptions and fallacies in an argument. In addition, this dialogue asks students to use formal logic, listening skills, and develop language and communication skills (Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyan, 1980). These abilities should then foster cognitive and socioemotional growth that will further the child's development and success in school as well as in becoming an independent thinker that makes informed, reasonable decisions.

Problem

With high stakes testing and teachers focused on behavioral outcomes, it appears little time is left for effective group dialogue in the classroom (Fisher, 2007). However, Philosophy for Children has become a program that is adaptable to an existing curriculum making it easier for educators and schools to implement. It can be used to encourage language development and foster dialogue in the classroom, which has been found to improve academic achievement. If implemented in the early grades, it may be possible that students hone abilities that will prepare them for higher level skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of information; all of which are important skills for academic success in the later grades and in the work force. In addition, these dialogues encourage reflection which can increase student metacognition. This in turn can help students think about their learning, evaluate their conceptions, and be aware of adapting or changing previous ideas when new information or knowledge is acquired.

Research Questions

Based on interactions with preschool children and an experience teaching a philosophy lesson to preschoolers, this thesis will explore the relationship between Philosophy for Children and language development. This present study will use Philosophy for Children in a preschool setting to explore how it contributes to increased higher level language, thinking, and dialogue skills. Will engaging students in philosophical discussions increase participation, student initiated questioning, connections made to prior knowledge and experience, and use of reasoning to provide support and/or elaboration for an answer? Will the occurrence of each of these behaviors increase as the sessions progress? Will the length of discussion time increase as the sessions progress?

Key Terms

Constructivism – learning theory that suggests individuals create knowledge and meaning by interacting with their own and other individuals' ideas and experiences

Dialogic teaching – refers to the kinds of verbal interactions that provide cognitive stimulus, expand consciousness, and enlarge the dialogic space for thinking in children's minds (Fisher, 2007)

Philosophy for Children (P4C) – a movement that aims to teach reasoning and logic skills to children as well as foster creativity development, personal and interpersonal growth, development of ethical understandings, and the ability to find meaning in experience (Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyan, 1980)

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Higher Order Language Skills

Language is the unique capacity through which human beings communicate thoughts and ideas to one another. Vygotsky (1962) suggests that thought is inner speech and that it is through language that individuals participate in shared thinking. It is through social interactions that children further their language development as well as engage in the ability to share thoughts, ideas, opinions, view different perspectives, and change or adapt their own personal beliefs or previously acquired knowledge based on new information. Based on these theories, language has an impact on a student's development and has within the past several decades become an important issue in educational research.

According to Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1999), an increase in vocabulary and the in-depth learning of words occurs when children hear and learn as many words and concepts as possible. Social interactions are situations in which students can hear and learn words. Gjems (2010) suggests children use social interactions with peers and teachers to gain knowledge about the cultural environment as well as use that language to make meaning of thoughts and experiences and further develop mental schemas. This suggests that there is an important relationship between language and cognitive development. Moreover, if language affects the learning process, then it is important for educators to develop language skills to further a student's developmental growth.

According to Gjems (2010), use of dialogue through peer and teacher conversations in the classroom can promote children's language as well as their use of extended discourse which includes explanations, narratives, jokes, etc. This is important in expanding a child's vocabulary

and figurative language skills – both of which are important for academic success and effective communication. In addition, the more opportunities children have to use language and receive feedback from teachers and peers, the more likely they will be to attain a richer vocabulary and more complex syntax (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001). In other words, educators must provide students with opportunities to use and play with language in order to expand their knowledge, which impacts not only language development but cognitive development as well.

Promoting language development is crucial for supporting higher level language skills such as questioning, elaborating, providing support, using diverse vocabulary which will support students' ability to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information. Teachers can promote language learning by using and implementing various instructional and learning instruction and strategies in the classroom. Educators should use a variety of vocabulary words that are not otherwise used in daily peer interactions to expand students' vocabularies (Gjems, 2010). In addition to instruction strategies, Gjems (2010) reports that the level of teacher engagement in students' personal experiences and thoughts had a critical relationship with their language learning.

In addition to teacher engagement, Bond and Wasik (2009) argue that linguistically competent adults need to provide feedback to children's ideas as well as help them elaborate on their topic discussions and provide them with high quality dialogue. This is similar to an approach reported by Brown and Palincsar (1989) called reciprocal teaching. Reciprocal teaching involves the use of dialogic strategies by both educators and students to enhance students' critical and elaborated contributions to a discussion. According to Mercer (2008), this approach is a form of cooperative learning that emphasizes the role of teacher scaffolding and practice with important language and thinking skills such as questioning, clarifying, summarizing, and

predicting that emerge in dialogue. Through use of reciprocal teaching, there are reported gains in students' reading comprehension. Rojas-Drummond and Mercer (2004) report that the differences between schools whose students did well in reading and math as compared to similar schools whose students did not were dependent on three important factors in the classroom learning. They found that in the schools in which students scored well in reading and math, the teachers used question-and-answer sequences to guide the development of understanding as well as encourage elaboration, reasoning, and reflection. The teachers taught strategies for solving problems and promoted making sense of experience and learning, and the teachers also treated learning as a social communicative process in which students could share ideas, support one another, and become active voices in the classroom.

According to Bond and Wasik (2009), book reading, play, and Conversation Station are three strategies for language development in preschool students. Book reading creates the opportunity for students and teachers to have discussions on the book and/or the concept being explored. This provides the opportunity for educators to use open-ended questions to foster development of higher language skills. During play, educators can ask students open-ended questions about their activity or to describe what they are doing and will be doing which fosters language use. Conversation Station, on the other hand, is a center in the classroom where a student can have the opportunity to converse with the teacher on a topic related to school or personal experiences. This makes having meaningful conversations a daily routine in the classroom.

Mercer (2008) implemented a school intervention program with colleagues to test the effect of dialogue on children's cognitive development. Comparisons were made between the schools with the intervention programs and the schools without the program. The program

emphasized teacher-led sessions and group activities as well as exploratory talk – students engaged in conversation with each other and thinking aloud. Mercer (2008) reports children in the experimental group engaged in more exploratory talk, those who used this type of talk solved more Raven problems successfully, students made significantly greater gains in math and science scores than those in the control group, and students improved their individual Raven score as well. Mercer (2008) suggests that these findings support that over the course of the intervention, students not only used talk to think collaboratively but also improved their reasoning abilities. This may suggest that students internalized the exploratory talk, continued a silent dialogue with themselves, and enhanced their reasoning from this processes. According to Mercer (2008), this would lend support to the Vygotskian claim that dialogic experience shapes individual ways of thinking.

Higher Order Thinking and Critical Thinking

In addition to developing higher language skills, educators are also being asked to develop students' higher order thinking skills and critical thinking in the classroom. According to Lewis and Smith's (1993) collection of research for defining higher order thinking and critical thinking, clear definitions of each concept are difficult to establish. However, based on this compilation of research, higher order thinking can be defined as a thinking process that challenges the student to interpret, analyze, and/or manipulate information of a given idea or concept. Higher order thinking could also include the ability to make inferences based on given information. Critical thinking, on the other hand, is the thinking that assesses the truth or authenticity of particular claims and/or arguments. It encourages individuals to doubt the methodology and examine the facts to provide a judgment (Daniel & Auriac, 2011). Petress (2004) lists characteristics of students engaging in critical thinking as: questioning, assessment of

statements and arguments, weighing opinions against facts, searching for and providing support, and ability to adjust opinions.

According to Limbach and Waugh (2010), active learning is one way to encourage higher order thinking and critical thinking. These researchers suggest that educators can create a learning environment that fosters higher order thinking and critical thinking by creating learning objectives that encourage higher order and critical thinking, use questioning, and provide students with feedback. Byrne (2011) suggests the use of Socratic Circles to foster the development of critical thinking skills. Socratic Circles is a strategy that educators can use to encourage group student discussions. In these discussions, students are encouraged to ask questions and discuss a particular book. Byrne (2011) reports that Socratic Circles lead to more critical thinking, listening skills, collaboration, vocabulary building, and student directed learning. The fostering of higher order and critical thinking is imperative to a student's cognitive development in understanding the world around them. It is important for educators to include strategies in the classroom, such as questioning and discussions, to engage students in higher order and critical thinking.

Dialogue

Amidst the research of language and cognitive development and the aforementioned studies, dialogue makes a significant appearance in the educational scene. To date, the emergence of dialogue and its role in the classroom is a major forerunning issue in educational research. According to Metcalfe and Game (2008), dialogue exchange is always a learning experience. Moreover, they assert that there is no learning without dialogue that illuminates differences. Because dialogue allows individuals to discuss topics in relation to one another and their personal beliefs and experiences, the persons involved are not restricted to their own

subjectivity. As Metcalfe and Game (2008, p. 346) suggest, "dialogue transforms us, opens new worlds, and expands minds." Furthermore, they suggest that if the importance of dialogue is not recognized in educational theory, then society will lose the ability to see education as a transformative rather than accumulative process. It is because of dialogue that teaching and learning are creative processes (Metcalfe & Game, 2008). In other words, dialogue is what moves individuals from accumulation of facts and concepts to analyzing, judging, and applying facts and concepts learned to real life. Dialogue affords the opportunity for participants to see past their own experiences and view various perspectives and comprehend differences. In essence, it is when a difference is made apparent in which human beings learn something new about themselves and the world around them.

More specifically, Reedy (2006) defines dialogue, or dialogic talk, as conversation with a cognitive challenge that moves the students' thinking onward. Alexander (2005) defines five principles of dialogue: collective, in which teachers and learners work together; reciprocal, in which teachers and children listen to one another and share ideas; cumulative, in which teachers and children build on their ideas; supportive, in which teachers and children can express ideas without fear of embarrassment; and purposeful, in which teachers plan and facilitate dialogue with educational goals in mind. These five principles define dialogue as a social language interaction where active listening, speaking, and learning takes place between students and teacher.

According to Alexander (2005), dialogic teaching engages students, stimulates and extends their thinking, as well as furthers their learning. Wertsch, Del Rio, and Alvarez (1995) assert when students participate in meaningful interactions, the outcomes of the whole are beyond what each student could exhibit individually (Murphy et al., 2009). According to the

study, it is through this social interaction that students share unique values, experience, and knowledge that eventually better enables them to incorporate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions learned or adapted to future situations. Moreover, Anderson et al. (2001) suggests that taking part in discussions with people that hold different perspectives is how students learn to think through in their own mind different points of view. That is to say that through engaging dialogue, students can learn to extend their thinking and incorporate different views into their own frameworks.

Similar to engaging in a stimulating dialogue with colleagues or peers, educators must provide opportunities for students to converse in dialogue to expand their language and cognitive learning. Mercer (2008) suggests that the quality of classroom dialogue has a relationship with the students' communication skills, thinking skills, and school attainment. According to Mercer (2008), characteristics of a good discussion include: all students participating and staying on topic, sharing ideas, keeping an open mind, asking questions, respecting each other, and providing support for their personal views. It is important to illuminate the fact that some researchers use the term discussion and dialogue interchangeably. Parsons, Mokhtari, Yellin, and Orwig (2011), however, provide a distinction between the two terms. According to these researchers, discussion is directed talk towards a specific instructional goal moderated by one person, whereas dialogue involves the participation of all members and respectful listening and understanding of different perspectives. In other words, dialogue involves the active engagement and conscious participation of all members involved.

According to Keefer, Zeitz, and Resnick (2000), there are different types of dialogue. The types they report are: critical discussion, explanatory inquiry, eristic discussion, and consensus dialogue. Critical discussion is defined as a situation in which differences of opinion encourage

participants to consider different viewpoints and persuade others. Explanatory inquiry is a situation in which there is a lack of knowledge and correct knowledge is acquired through cumulative steps and making hypotheses. Eristic discussion is defined as a situation associated with conflict and antagonism in which participants are expected to defend their position. Consensus dialogue involves reaching agreement in opinion amongst participants. Keefer, Zeitz, and Resnick (2000) report that critical discussion yields divergent views that include: nonstrategic concessions due to persuasive arguments, concessions in course of argumentation, and shifts in dialogue for further understanding.

To encourage dialogic talk, Reedy (2006) suggests that educators must ask genuine questions, expect extended responses from students, offer time for students to formulate ideas, provide models of the patterns of language, and encourage students to respond to peers by building on each other's ideas, and debating conflicting ideas. For a successful interaction, teachers must also establish ground rules for discussion and provide group activities that foster dialogic talk in pursuit of students' personal learning (Mercer, 2008). By using dialogue to engage participants, educators offer students an opportunity to make connections between personal experiences, texts, and the world (Gritter, 2011). Myhill (2006) asserts that teachers must be sensitive to what children say because missed learning opportunities occur due to a teacher's questioning that leads discussion to a predetermined answer. Instead, teachers need to be able to allow new connections to be made in dialogue and trust that knowledge will form and reform as the dialogue ensues (Metcalfe & Game, 2008). As Metcalfe and Game (2008) suggest, it is the whole of the experience that matters more than its specific parts. Moreover, dialogue can have an important connection with lifelong learning in which students learn to appreciate wholeness and wonder as well as have reflexive dialogue with oneself (Metcalfe & Game, 2008).

Thus, dialogue is important issue for educators to be knowledgeable of in that it helps motivate students to care about what they are learning and to encourage them to make connections between what is learned in school and their real world experiences.

The Importance of Meaning Making, Philosophy, and Philosophy for Children

"If the educational process had relevance, interest, and meaning for children, there would be no need to *make* them learn" (Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyan, 1980, p. 5). If we are to accept the theories of Dewey and Vygotsky and major movements such as pragmatism, constructivism, and inclusive education, then educators must provide students with learning opportunities in which they are actively engaged in discovering and constructing meaning for themselves and the world through independent and social thinking. Meaning cannot be given or transferred from teacher to student – instead, it must be discovered by the learner through involvement in dialogue and inquiry (Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyan, 1980). Even in the simplest terms, one cannot completely understand the meaning of a beautiful garden without ever having seen or experienced it through one's own senses. In the same way, a child cannot truly appreciate the meaning of a concept without having thought, discussed, or played with the topic in one's classroom, world, social interactions, and own mind.

With the present stress on reading achievement, educators look for ways to increase interest in reading. According to Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan (1980), if the goal is to increase sustained interest in reading and writing activities, then these tasks must hold meaning and relevancy for the child and his or her world. Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan (1980) suggest that only by understanding the meaning for, of, and behind a concept can students begin to make inferences, an important factor in reading comprehension.

Thinking – while a natural ability – is a capacity that can be perfected (Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyan, 1980). Thus, the aim of a thinking skills program is to help students become more thoughtful, reflective, considerate, and reasonable individuals. It is suggested that dialogue and thinking have an important relationship such that when engaged in dialogue, participants are forced to reflect on different views in light of their own (Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyan, 1980). In this way, individuals respond in their own minds to the thoughts heard in dialogue. In short, a philosophical thinking program encourages dialogic exchange as well as the use of logical and creative thinking (Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyan, 1980).

Before discussing the philosophical program, Philosophy for Children, a brief exploration of philosophy is important. The birth of philosophy occurred in the sixth century B.C. when people began thinking about thinking (Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyan, 1980). It became of interest to think about the "why" of concepts taken for granted or taken as true without questioning. It makes sense then that philosophy begins with wonder and puzzlement – the wondering of how and why something came to exist. Children naturally question the world around them and they cope with these mysteries through three avenues: scientific explanation, the symbolic level of fairy tales and stories, and philosophically in the form of metaphysical, logical, or ethical questions (Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyan, 1980). Sometimes providing a child with a scientific explanation appeases their interest, but other times they want to know why something came to be in which a philosophical discussion can be more helpful for their understanding.

Philosophy for Children "enables one to work out one's own beliefs and discover good reasons for their justification; to figure out what follows from one's own assumptions; to hammer out in one's mind one's own perspectives of the world; and to be clear about one's own values, one's own distinctive ways of interpreting one's experience" (Lipman, Sharp, &

Oscanyan, 1980, p. 42). The program has been practiced and implemented for over 30 years in over 50 countries (Lyle, 2008) and translated into 20 different languages (Daniel & Auriac, 2011). With roots in Socratic questioning and pragmatism, philosophy aims at the construction of truths through dialogue (Daniel & Auriac, 2011). With Philosophy for Children, educators can help students construct truths through dialogue with peers.

According to Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan (1980), this program flourishes in a heterogeneous classroom that appreciates different viewpoints and thinking and learning styles. It is also suggested that children use ordinary language in order to feel comfortable communicating their thoughts and ideas. In addition, educators must transform their classrooms into a community of inquiry (Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyan, 1980). This entails a commitment to procedures of inquiry and responsible search techniques. According to Kennedy and Kennedy (2011), a community of philosophical inquiry is a group of people who meet regularly to participate in dialogue about philosophical concepts such as truth, justice, and friendship. This type of discussion functions around specific rules of talking. There is usually a facilitator to help ensure a constant flow of ideas. In addition, there is "the argument" in which members use strategies and skills in categorizing, classifying, hypothesizing, suggesting definitions, requesting and offering counterexamples, questioning assumptions, offering examples, and such to explore the philosophical concept at hand. Knowledge is never fully complete or finite, therefore a community of inquiry allows individuals to engage in ongoing construction and reconstruction of ideas through arguing, deliberating, and deciding together. "We arrive at knowledge through thinking for ourselves and with others." (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2011, p. 270). When internalized, these thinking skills become reflective habits of mind (Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyan, 1980). It is important that students learn to use logic, look for supportive data, and question information they

receive from various sources. In an ever-increasing technology driven world, students need to be able to critically analyze information they read from various Internet sources.

For the community of inquiry to be a success, educators need to create an open environment in which children feel comfortable to express ideas, encourage a readiness to reason, create a spirit of mutual respect, and avoid indoctrination (Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyan, 1980). In addition to helping children learn to think for themselves, Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan (1980) state that Philosophy for Children uses the community of inquiry to help students draw better inferences, better identification of evidence, and better recognition of faulty inferences. This program encourages the development of logical and creative thinking as well as encourages development of sensitivity and sound social judgment. It stresses the method of ethical inquiry and deriving meaning through discovering connections, alternatives, impartialities, consistency, feasibility with giving reasons for beliefs, comprehensiveness, and part-whole relationships (Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyan, 1980). Not only is Philosophy for Children concerned with critical reasoning, but also with harnessing emotional development and creativity (Lyle, 2008). The program seeks to help children understand what it means to be human and to learn to be an ethical human (Lyle, 2008). These skills go beyond the classroom and encourage development and growth that will aid in the individuals success in the global community.

To teach philosophical thinking, educators must lead through integrity, having and acting on principles, and consistency (Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyan, 1980). The teacher is the model and students are aware of what the teacher says and if it is consistent with his or her actions. There must also be avoidance of indoctrination by allowing children to explore, develop, and articulate their own way of looking at a concept (Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyan, 1980). According to

Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan (1980), teachers must respect children's opinions and help them explore their beliefs deeply. They must also establish trust which is the foundation for a healthy, open student-teacher relationships.

According to Vansieleghem (2006), philosophical stories trigger critical thinking which in turn leads to dialogue. Dialogue is for exploration, self-knowledge, and mutual understanding but it does not have to seek a consensus in light of Lipman's model of Philosophy for Children (Lyle, 2008). In the end, there may or may not be an answer, there may or may not be agreement. What matters is the process and students learning more about themselves and the world through listening and dialoguing on a philosophical topic. Golding (2011) states that using philosophical discussion and inquiry enables students to participate in reflective thinking in which they can come to better understand and make sense of themselves and the world.

The procedure in the Philosophy for Children program follows a general outline: a novel with ambiguities and paradoxes is read, then questions are collected from students, and lastly a dialogue in a community of inquiry is held (Daniel & Auriac, 2011). Children create the questions so that it is they who are actively exploring the concept (Lyle, 2008). This makes the child the active learner which creates a child-centered learning environment. According to Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan (2008), for a successful dialogue, the educator should be doing the following: eliciting views or opinions, helping students express themselves through clarification and restatement, explicating student views, seeking consistency, requesting definitions, indicating fallacies, and eliciting and examining alternatives. Success depends on the quality of teacher questioning to promote critical thinking, reasoning, and reflective thinking (Lyle, 2008). It is imperative for educators to listen to comments, be flexible, and open to exploring various concepts in depth.

A Philosophy for Children curriculum for grades K-12 was published by the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyan, 1980). It includes novels and teachers' manuals that include discussion questions and activities for educators to use in their classroom. Matthews suggests the use of children's literature to promote philosophical discussions in his *Thinking in Stories* section in *Thinking*, the Journal of Philosophy for Children. Wartenberg (2009) follows suit by publishing a text, *Big Ideas for Little Kids*, that promotes the use of literature as a springboard for philosophical discussions in the class. The present study will be using this latter method for Philosophy for Children for two reasons. The first is a practical reason in that the Philosophy for Children curriculum was created for grades K-12, whereas this study is interested in implementing the program with preschool age students. Secondly, every seemingly ordinary day has something of wonder to offer if looked through fresh, adventurous eyes. Therefore, philosophical themes can be found in the activities of the day, as well as the books in the classroom library. What better way to encourage students to think about philosophical concepts in literature than to find them in the novels of their very own classroom library? A list of the literature used in this study is supplied in the Appendix.

Do Children Have the Ability to Think Philosophically?

Philosophy for Children, while being welcomed by some, has also been criticized on several counts. Many ask, "Do children have the capacity to engage in philosophical discussions?" Some would argue that children are incapable of having philosophical discussion because they do not possess higher order thinking (Murris, 2000). Some would suggest that children are not capable of thinking critically and reflexively (Daniel & Auriac, 2011). In addition, critics argue that the program does not actually teach philosophy or about important philosophers (Murris, 2000).

It is true that Philosophy for Children by promoting the notion that young children can think abstractly challenges Piaget's claim that abstract thinking is not apparent in children prior to the formal operational stage which children reach at approximately 12 years of age (Lyle, 2008). However, Matthews (1980) suggests that children are natural philosophers – so much so that he suggests "it is something that Piaget has missed" (Matthews, 1980, p. 55). Matthews (1980) proposes that children sometimes stumble into philosophy from innocence because they have yet to learn that some questions like "How many skies are there?" is considered to be strange. But as Matthews (1980) argues, it is not altogether too strange of a question. Children learn that there is one sky that begins from the horizon and continues upward, but then why do we use phrases such as "morning sky" and "evening sky?" According to Vansieleghem (2006), children offer a creative component to a philosophical discussion because they are still in touch with themselves and in natural wonderment of the world. Adults, on the other hand, have lost this way of thinking. Matthews (1980) suggests that adults rid themselves of defensiveness and embarrassment from not knowing the answer to a question such as "What is time?" and instead use this as a moment to have a philosophical discussion in which the adult's control of language and the child's frankness and spontaneity work together to come to some form of an understanding. As mentioned earlier, knowledge is not about having the answers – it is not finite. Instead, it is the process of coming to know what is important and meaningful in the quest for knowledge.

In reference to the argument that Philosophy for Children does not teach "actual philosophy," its definition of philosophy focuses on the study of concepts and the relationships between concepts in order to better understand oneself and the world, leading to the cultivation of an ultimate explanation (Daniel & Auriac, 2011). Because philosophy uses the methodology

of questioning and analyzing universal themes, knowledge is not transferred from teacher to student but is discovered by the learner (Daniel & Auriac, 2011). Socrates taught to philosophize (Daniel & Auriac, 2011) – which is what Philosophy for Children aims to do (Murris, 2000), thereby suggesting that Philosophy for Children is applied philosophy (Daniel & Auriac, 2011). Daniel & Auriac (2011) argue that the common trait that the discipline of philosophy and Philosophy for Children share is critical thinking that aims for the development of independent thinkers who can engage in constructive skepticism. Therefore, while Philosophy for Children may not include lengthy discussions of specific philosophers and their contributions, Philosophy for Children uses the method of philosophy to encourage students to philosophize – think philosophically, to use logic, to question, to provide reasons.

Research Findings on Philosophy for Children

In addition, research provides support for the ability for children to engage in philosophical discussions. Research findings suggest several benefits from implementing Philosophy for Children in the classroom. A meta-analysis revealed that children can engage in philosophical discussions and that the program fosters higher order thinking skills (Garcia-Moriyon, Rebello, & Colom, 2004). According to Vansieleghem (2006), Matthew Lipman's Philosophy for Children program provides children freedom of expression and promotes critical thinking and dialogue in order to enhance a student's autonomy.

Daniel, et al. (2005) conducted a study in which Philosophy for Children was used one hour per week in conjunction with a math program with students aged 10 to 12 years. They report that dialogical critical thinking occurs when egocentricity of perspective and relativism of beliefs are transcended. In other words, dialogical critical thinking arises when students are able to see past their own views and acknowledge and reflect on peers' ideas. Moreover, Daniel and

Auriac (2011) report students searched for meaning of the words, concepts, and ideas as to provide significance to themselves and the world in community of inquiry. Students also learned to think autonomously when the teacher took the role as guide allowing students to question one another and ask for supporting information. They also learned to respect different points of view, justify their opinions, become critical of peers' statements with the encouragement of reflection, interaction, and questioning from the teacher.

Fisher (2007) suggests that the Philosophy for Children approach provides ways for dialogic teaching to support and further cognitive development. According to Fisher (2007), the research shows that Philosophy for Children programs have a positive effect on students' achievement on academic tests, self-esteem and self-concept as thinkers and learners, fluency and quality of their questioning, quality of creative thinking and verbal reasoning, and their ability to listen to others and engage effectively in discussion.

An overall list of positive outcomes found in the studies of Philosophy for Children classrooms include: gains in logical reasoning skills, gains in reading scores, improvement in critical thinking and interpersonal relationships, mathematics, formal reasoning, listening, supportive group interaction, gains in self-esteem, thinking, language skills, self-confidence, engagement, and providing more reasons when expressing opinions (Trickey & Topping, 2004). Similarly, Jenkins and Lyle (2010) report discussions showed evidence of becoming more structured and logical. Students spent more time giving an opinion and providing support for it, elaboration became more complex, engagement and metacognition increased in classrooms incorporating Philosophy for Children.

According to Othman and Hashim (2006), the implementation of Philosophy for Children showed an increase in critical thinking. The authors suggest that critical thinking is directly

related to cognitive development and enhances reasoning skills and logical skills that can be found in reading and mathematics. From the aforementioned studies, there seems to be a significant relationship between Philosophy for Children, dialogue, language, thinking analytically, and critical thinking.

Present Study

One of the aims of philosophical discussion in the Philosophy for Children program is to elicit student views and opinions, help students express their thoughts, encourage inference making, provide reasoning, seek consistency, request definitions, and search for assumptions and fallacies in an argument. If implemented in the early grades, it may be possible that students hone abilities that will prepare them for higher level thinking and language skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of information as well as enhance critical thinking skills. All are important skills for academic success in the later grades and in life outside the classroom. In addition, these dialogues encourage reflection which can increase student metacognition. The purpose of this study is to implement Philosophy for Children in a preschool setting to determine how it contributes to increased higher level language and thinking skills as well as dialogue. Will engaging students in philosophical discussions increase student initiated questions? Will there be an increase in the number of connections made to personal experiences? Will there be an increase in the number of times students provide support or elaboration for answers? Will the length of discussion time increase with the progression of the sessions?

CHAPTER 3

Method and Results

Participants

The participants in this study were six preschool students currently enrolled in the Early Childhood Center at Wagner College, a liberal arts college located in New York City. The participants ranged in age from 3 years, 11 months to 4 years, 11 months. Of the six participants, four were boys and two were girls. The students were not particularly diverse; five students were Caucasian and one student was Egyptian. One of the five Caucasian students also identified as part Hispanic. Five students were excluded from the selection process because they already participated in an enrichment program. In addition, this exclusion would keep these students from being pulled out of their regular school day too frequently. Of the students whose parents consented to their child's participation in the study, all were selected to participate because of the small sample size.

In this study, the cooperating teacher was given a permission form to sign allowing the researcher to conduct the study with her students. Consent forms, stating the purpose of the study and the option to discontinue participation in the study at any point in time, were sent home to parents and returned to the researcher with signatures indicating consent to allow their child to participate in the study. The participants were given an assent form to sign, stating the purpose of the study and the option to discontinue participating in the experiment at any point in time. They signed the consent form before the study began. The researcher explained the study to the participants. During each session, the researcher read a children's book which was followed by a philosophical discussion on a topic explored in the literary work. Through modeling, the researcher guided discussion encouraging students to ask questions, share ideas and previous

experiences, and support their assertions. The researcher recorded and scripted these sessions to track the occurrence of higher level language, thinking, and dialogue skills over the progression of the study.

The independent variable in this study is the instructional program, Philosophy for Children. The dependent variables in this study are dialogue, language, and thinking skills as measured by number of questions initiated by students, length of discussion, number of times students provide reason or elaboration for an idea, and number of times students relate the discussion concept to prior knowledge or experience.

The materials included: children's books, tape recorder, Discussion Behavior Checklist, teacher consent form, the parent consent form, the assent form, and thank you letters.

Procedure

Permission was acquired from the classroom teacher to carry out this study. Consent forms were sent home to the parents and returned to the researcher with parent signatures. The researcher worked with six students for approximately 20-30 minutes in a resource room for 10 sessions during school hours for a period of eight weeks.

At the first session, the researcher explained to the students that she will be pulling them out twice a week during rest time to read and discuss a story during the regular school day. She explained that by talking about the story as a group and its philosophical concept it may lead to more student initiated questioning, support and elaboration for assertions, connections to prior knowledge and experience, and longer discussions. The researcher read the assent form to the children and each child signed the form indicating their willingness to participate. The researcher previewed the procedure of how the sessions were to be conducted. She also used the first session to establish the ground rules for discussion (wait for turn to speak, listen to peers, etc).

Each session was recorded and used for assessment (to record number of questions asked, connections made, length of discussion, etc).

During each session, the researcher read a children's book that explored a philosophical topic. During the reading, the researcher asked questions to ensure comprehension. After the reading, the researcher asked students for questions they had about the reading. The researcher used these questions to guide discussion to a focus on a philosophical topic (ex: what is beauty, what is sharing, what is honesty?). The researcher used the recording of each session to document the number of questions initiated by the student, connections made to personal experiences, support or elaboration provided for answers, and length of discussion, which represent behaviors characteristic of higher level language and thinking skills. At the end of the study, the researcher assessed the data to discern a relationship between Philosophy for Children and higher level language and thinking skills as well as dialogue.

Results

The purpose of this study was to implement Philosophy for Children in a preschool setting to determine how it contributes to increased higher level language and thinking skills as well as dialogue. On a Discussion Behavior Checklist, the number of occurrences per session of the following variables were measured: student initiated questions, connections made to personal experiences, students provided support or elaboration for answers, and length of discussion time for each session. To test the hypothesis of this study, observations of the variables were conducted to identify if there was a trend as the sessions progressed.

As depicted in Table 1, student initiated questions were only observed in sessions 1, 7, and 10. This shows no trend as the sessions progressed. Connections made to personal experiences increased as sessions progressed with the exception of sessions 7 and 8. Support or

elaboration provided in the form of reasoning or examples remained consistent with the progression of sessions with the exception of session 2. The length of discussion also was roughly consistent across sessions with the exception of session 2.

Table 1. Number of Occurrences of Discussion Behaviors Exhibited Across Sessions.

	Number of Occurrences (per session)									
Discussion Behavior	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5	Session 6	Session 7	Session 8	Session 9	Session 10
Questions Initiated by Student	2	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	1
Connections Made to Personal Experience	3	-	7	8	12	6	2	3	13	11
Support or Elaboration Provided in the Form of Reasoning/ Examples	20	5	13	17	15	14	18	14	15	14
Length of Discussion (in minutes)	**21:30**	**8:15**	**18:10**	**19:21**	**21:35**	**19:07**	**20:26**	**19:30**	**20:17**	**21:51**

As depicted in Tables 2-7, each child was assessed independently for impact of the program on discussion behaviors. Student 1 initiated two questions, consistently made connections to personal experiences, and less consistently provided support or elaboration in the form of reasoning or examples. Student 2 did not initiate any questions, made more connections to personal experiences as sessions progressed, and inconsistently provided support or elaboration in the form of reasoning or examples. Student 2 was also absent for four of the ten sessions.

Student 3 did not initiate any questions, made more connections to personal experiences as sessions progressed, and provided more support or elaboration in the form of reasoning or examples as sessions progressed showing an increase in discussion behaviors. Student 4 did not initiate any questions, made inconsistent connections to personal experiences across sessions, and moderately consistently provided support or elaboration in the form of reasoning or examples except for session 6. In session 6, student 4 provided more support or elaboration possibly due to student attendance. There were only two students present for discussion that day. Student 5 initiated one question, inconsistently made connections to personal experiences, and inconsistently provided support or elaboration in the form of reasoning or examples. Student 5 provided more support or elaboration is sessions one and seven possibly due to interest level. Student 6 initiated two questions and remained consistent in making connections to personal experiences and providing support or elaboration in the form of reasoning or examples.

Table 2. Number of Occurrences of Discussion Behaviors Exhibited by Student 1.

	Number of Occurrences (per session)									
Discussion Behavior	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5	Session 6	Session 7	Session 8	Session 9	Session 10
Questions Initiated by Student	1	-	-	-	-	A	1	-	-	-
Connections Made to Personal Experience	2	-	2	3	3	A	0	1	2	3
Support or Elaboration Provided in the Form of Reasoning/ Examples	10	3	4	7	6	A	8	6	4	7

Table 3. Number of Occurrences of Discussion Behaviors Exhibited by Student 2.

	Number of Occurrences (per session)									
Discussion Behavior	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5	Session 6	Session 7	Session 8	Session 9	Session 10
Questions Initiated by Student	-	-	A	-	-	A	A	A	-	-
Connections Made to Personal Experience	0	-	A	2	1	A	A	A	2	3
Support or Elaboration Provided in the Form of Reasoning/ Examples	2	0	A	3	0	A	A	A	2	2

Table 4. Number of Occurrences of Discussion Behaviors Exhibited by Student 3.

	Number of Occurrences (per session)									
Discussion Behavior	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5	Session 6	Session 7	Session 8	Session 9	Session 10
Questions Initiated by Student	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Connections Made to Personal Experience	-	-	2	1	1	2	1	2	2	3
Support or Elaboration Provided in the Form of Reasoning/ Examples	1	1	3	2	3	4	4	4	2	3

Table 5. Number of Occurrences of Discussion Behaviors Exhibited by Student 4.

	Number of Occurrences (per session)									
Discussion Behavior	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5	Session 6	Session 7	Session 8	Session 9	Session 10
Questions Initiated by Student	A	A	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Connections Made to Personal Experience	A	A	1	1	2	4	0	0	3	2
Support or Elaboration Provided in the Form of Reasoning/ Examples	A	A	2	3	4	10	1	2	5	3

Table 6. Number of Occurrences of Discussion Behaviors Exhibited by Student 5.

	Number of Occurrences (per session)									
Discussion Behavior	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5	Session 6	Session 7	Session 8	Session 9	Session 10
Questions Initiated by Student	1	-	-	-	-	A		-	-	
Connections Made to Personal Experience	1	-	1	-	3	A	-	-	2	-
Support or Elaboration Provided in the Form of Reasoning/ Examples	4	1	2	1	2	A	4	2	1	-

Table 7. Number of Occurrences of Discussion Behaviors Exhibited by Student 6.

	Number of Occurrences (per session)									
Discussion Behavior	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5	Session 6	Session 7	Session 8	Session 9	Session 10
Questions Initiated by Student	-	-	-	-	-	A	1	A	-	1
Connections Made to Personal Experience	-	-	1	1	2	A	1	A	2	-
Support or Elaboration Provided in the Form of Reasoning/ Examples	3	1	2	1	-	A	1	A	1	-

CHAPTER 4

Discussion and Conclusions

Limitations

This study assessed the impact of Philosophy for Children on student discussion, language skills, and thinking skills. However, there were several limitations that held the study back. Limited time for the study was one factor inhibiting the gathering of more data thereby negatively impacting the study's comprehensiveness. This study was conducted over an eight-week period, two of which were lost to the preschool's spring recess. Only ten sessions were conducted, most of which were twice a week. Two sessions per week for six weeks was not enough time to show the sort of progression hoped for with respect to changes in discussion behavior. This is especially key because as a teacher assistant at the preschool with these students, I have observed that they do not regularly participate in philosophical discussions about the books read. In the classroom, booking readings are more devoted to literacy skills including comprehension and concepts of print. In addition, twice a week was not enough to expose students to the program because they then experienced a four-day gap without instruction. This lessened the consistency and could have impacted the students' potentials for growth in language and thinking skills. Moreover, one session was not enough to discuss a particular concept in depth, therefore each concept was discussed over two sessions, except for weeks in which there was only one session due to school holiday observances.

In addition to limited time allotment, inconsistent attendance was another limitation of the study. Student 2 was absent for four of the ten sessions making it difficult to assess whether the program had an impact on her discussion, language, and thinking skills. Only one student had

attended all the sessions. The other four students were absent at least once. For a short study, attendance is a major factor for assessing successful implementation of a program.

Another limitation of the study is that it had a small sample. While able to gain insightful information that will be discussed further, it inhibited the ability to generalize across populations. Moreover, there was limited diversity of participants, which also limits generalizability. In addition, the discussion behavior measures should be measured by another researcher to reduce chance of bias.

Additionally, because of the implementation of the program mid-school year, the students were distracted in the first few session with the enrichment room. Comments about the room would be made mid-discussion until I had to stop the session to satisfy their curiosity about the room. Number of participants also had an effect on some participants. For example, Student 4 consistently displayed off-task behavior such as playing with his necklace, moving chairs, distracting other students, except for session 6 when only he was present with one other peer. Because he was able to receive more frequent attention and questioning, he exhibited more occurrences of support or elaboration using reasoning or examples. The number of participants became a variable for this student.

There were also several unexpected difficulties encountered with the study. One challenge was the timing of the study. It was initially decided that the program would be implemented in the afternoon before the end of the day. The first four sessions were done in the afternoon until it became apparent that it was affecting the study. Students were too concerned about snack time and going to the bathroom. For the last six sessions, the study was conducted in the morning and the number of bathroom requests decreased. The second challenge directly affects one of the measures used to assess the program, student initiated questions. Even through

modeling, participants continued to have difficulty forming questions, instead they provided statements when asked for questions. This was important for the format of the study because after reading the text, the researcher asks students if they have any questions and uses these questions to guide discussion. Because students were providing statements, the researcher had to ask questions that had the students move towards a topic of discussion. Lastly, there was also the issue of copying peers' answers. Because the researcher was looking to expand discussion and thinking, she refrained from making biased comments to limit the probability of inhibiting a variety of answers. In the beginning, this made students second-guess their answer. A student would present an answer and after his/her peer presented another answer, the participant would state that he/she had changed his/her mind and repeat the peer's answer as his/her own. Students had to be reminded that it was "okay" to have different answers.

Discussion and Conclusions

Even though the results of the study are limited, there were several unanticipated findings. It was apparent that the researcher needed to ask more literal questions than initially anticipated to build students' knowledge and ability to answer more complex questions. Familiarity with the concepts played a major role in how easily participants could think of personal experiences or express reasoning in their answers. For example, participants had a more difficult time with the concepts of beauty and bravery than they did with growing up, fairness, and sharing. This was apparent in the answers they gave and the researcher's questioning. With beauty and bravery, discussions focused on developing a definition for both concepts and barely reached the higher level discussions of internal beauty and bravery even if not facing a dangerous event. However, with sharing and fairness, the discussion flowed more easily with less researcher-directed questions because the participants were able to more readily relate to the

concepts. In fact, Student 4 was able to adapt his concept of sharing to one that accepted that sometimes not sharing does not mean one is not being fair.

Not only did the use of relatable concepts affect discussion, but so did interest for some participants. Student 5 expressed interest in session 1's discussion of what is real versus what is not-real and session 7's bravery concepts. As compared to the other sessions, Student 5 had the most number of occurrences for support or elaboration using reasoning and examples in these two sessions. As with classroom lessons and activities, interest of a topic impacts a child's engagement in discussion of that topic. Disinterest lead to distractibility and inactive listening to peers.

New learning that came from these sessions is that students began to use the phrase, "I agree with…" or "I disagree with…" after only limited introduction to the concept. "I agree with…" was used much more frequently, but it showed that students were actively listening to their peers. With more instruction on the usage of these phrases, the participants may have used it even more. It was not initially expected that students would use these phrases, but surprising that they picked it up quickly. From the researcher's modeling of questioning and interest, five of the six participants took the initiative to ask a peer for clarification using questions. This was informative because it showed how students did know how to formulate simple questions, but not think of questions pertaining to the book or concept discussed. This information could indicate a developmental impact in regards to questioning.

There were also several revealing instances during the study. Participants had difficulty providing counterexamples. Many concepts were perceived as black or white, without any shades of grey. When provided with a counterexample one of four scenarios occurred: 1) the participant changed initial view without consideration to the first; 2) the participant became

confused between the conflicting examples; 3) participant ceased talking; and 4) participant adjusted view to include both examples (happened rarely). This reveals that preschool aged children do exhibit the beginnings of complex thinking. One could argue that it may be possible to increase this type of thinking with preschool children and explore how much they can really explore adapting their views based on conflicting examples through reasoning.

Student 3 was interesting in that on occasion she would take an example stated from either a peer or the researcher and change them slightly so to make it her own. In other words, she would take the structure of the example provided and change the parts to make it her own. Therefore, making it was sometimes unclear if she was providing an example of a real experience.

Even though the data may not seem convincing, there were several instances when participants exhibited higher order thinking, language, and reasoning skills. Sessions 1 and 2 were focused on the concept of growing up and it incidentally lead to the discussion of real versus not real because of two students. The books used were Eric Carle's *A Very Hungry Caterpillar* and Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*. Student 6 was describing how kids grow and "get bigger and bigger and bigger and they giants!" Student 1 interjects and says, "No, we grow up and we die. Giants do not exist." This seemingly simple statement led to disagreement between students, especially Student 1 and Student 5. Student 1 argued giants did not exist. Student 5 disputed that giants did exist and that they lived in the clouds. Students 2, 3, and 6 provided support for Student 5's view by referencing a beanstalk. Student 1 claimed that he/she never saw one so giants could not be real. Student 5 argued that they existed far away in the clouds. This came to the logical question, "How could we find out if giants were real?" To which, Student 1 quickly supplied the answer to go on an airplane and look. During session 2, we

imagined riding an airplane and looking out the window. The researcher said, "I'm looking out the window, I see clouds, but I do not see any giants. Do giants exist?" Student 1 concluded that giants did not exist and Student 5 claimed giants did exist but were far away in the clouds. To test Student 5's belief, the researcher asked students to drive the airplane higher and look out the window again. Again, there were no giants. Are giants real now? Student 5 still believed that they were real at which point the discussion was ceased due to peers' bathroom concerns. Without realizing it, students were participating in an age-old philosophical topic about real versus non-real things. Reminiscent of Descartes, Student 1 attempts to argue that if he could not see a giant then it must not be real. In other words, if it could not be perceived by the senses, it could not be real. This is revealing in that preschool-aged children, when talking about a familiar topic of giants, can go to the next level and discuss whether or not they really exist. It is not that Philosophy for Children or this study is looking for students to talk about real versus non-real in scholarly philosophical terms, but that students can talk about these concepts at their developmental level indicating that complex thinking can be encouraged at a young age.

Session 3 and 4 were focused on the concept of beauty and what makes something beautiful. Sharon Dennis Wyeth's *Something Beautiful* was used as the reading to accompany the discussion. This concept proved to be difficult for participants to move past physical features. As a group, the definition of beautiful became something that is cool, awesome, looks beautiful (wears make-up), and that you like and love. When discussing if snakes are beautiful, Students 5 and 6 argued that snakes were not beautiful because they could eat you and that they are bad. Student 3 claimed that snakes are beautiful because they have nice colors. When asked what would make a snake ugly. Student 1 suggested that if the snake was black it would be ugly because he once had a black jelly bean and it tasted like garbage. It is apparent that Student 1

keyed in on Student 3's definition of beauty based on colors and used that to make a connection with the topic and a personal experience. Moreover, this indicates that students have the potential to exhibit deeper thinking skills. Furthermore, when Student 3 said she thought her garden was beautiful. Student 5 asked, "Do you like it or not like it?" This shows that preschool students can attend to each other's ideas and participate actively with one another in dialogue. Student 4, on the other hand, presented the group with a distinction between beautiful and handsome. He claimed that girls are beautiful and boys are handsome. When asked why there was a difference, Student 1 interjected that beautiful and handsome do not have the same letters. This was a fair conclusion. When asked to define the two terms, Student 1 suggested that handsome means "you look awesome and cool," whereas beautiful means "you look pretty." By the end of Session 4, the deeper topic of being beautiful independent of physical looks was touched by Student 1. When asked if someone with ugly hair can still be beautiful, Student 1 suggested, "Yes, because she's fabulous." This shows that with further discussion and concrete examples, students thinking about what makes something beautiful could have perhaps gone deeper.

Session 5 and 6 focused on the topics of fairness and sharing. The books used for these sessions were Amy Krouse's *It's Not Fair* and Claire Llewellyn's *Why Should I Share?* During Session 5, participants were asked to evaluate the fairness of a situation throughout discussion. Students 1, 3, and 6 all asked clarifying questions for understanding and to evaluate the fairness of the situation. For example, Student 3 told the story of her mom not sharing her brush. Student 6 asked Student 3 why her mom was not sharing at which Student 3 provided an answer. Student 1 asked if the person in another example was lying to evaluate the fairness of the situation. At the end of the session, the researcher asked students to look at their papers. Student 1 identified that some students had white while others had green colored paper and quickly asserted that it was

not fair. He suggested that they should all be green. While asking the other students for their responses, Student 1 looked at each paper and said, "Fair, because it's still the same words." He noticed that even though the papers were different colors, they all had the same information on them. This is an important skill for students to observe and adjust their views based on additional information. Session 6 was interesting in that four of the six students were absent, giving Student 3 and 4 more attention and opportunity to share their thoughts. Student 3 asked Student 4 if his mom was being fair in the situation he described and Student 4 provided an answer. When presented with a counterexample, Student 4 was able to adjust his view and suggest that "Sometimes we share and sometimes we don't and it's still fair." The participants were able to discuss that sometimes sharing gel markers is good, but it is still fair not to share it with a baby sibling because it could be dangerous. Student 4 demonstrated using logic to come to a conclusion when presented with a counterexample.

Sessions 7 and 8 focused on the concept of bravery using Arnold Lobel's *Frog and Toad: Dragons and Giants*. These sessions proved to be very difficult for the participants to have a discussion about bravery. The discussions focused on defining bravery and what it looks like. Even though both Frog and Toad were scared and ran away from danger, participants thought Frog was brave, but Toad was not because he shivered. Through discussion, participants made it clear that bravery means not shivering and not running away and were able to identify brave individuals such as firemen, soldiers, and police officers. However, when asked if someone is brave if they are scared of one thing but not the other, such as scared of fire but not sharks, the participants became confused. Bravery was a very difficult concept for the students to discuss. It may be that discussions on fear is a prerequisite for discussions of bravery or it may be that participants did not have enough experiences with bravery to fully participate in the discussion.

Sessions 9 and 10 were focused on negative emotions felt when in a bad mood using Judith Viorst's *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*. Participants were able to make connections about their own personal experiences with a bad day and bad mood. They were able to explain why something put them in a bad mood and provide suggestions for alleviating Alexander's bad mood based on their own knowledge. Participants made connections to one another more frequently probably because the topic was familiar and relatable. The disadvantage of these sessions was that the book was too long and a lot of time was spent on ensuring comprehension.

Generally speaking, students did have differences in age as well as language development prior to the study. Throughout the study, those differences were still apparent. The younger students focused more on personal connections whereas the older students were more likely to agree or disagree with one another. Student 4, in particular, could elaborate, but would start tangents and get off-topic. Student 6, on the other hand, could make connections, but was too focused on sequence of events and personal experiences. It would be interesting to see if language development could be used as a deciding factor for participant selection to more readily be able to describe progress of the group as a whole. Age could also be a factor with the ability for participants to notice the degrees of a concept. The older students were more likely to consider various views and adapt their statements.

Most of the sessions included a drawing or a physical activity to provide a concrete example dealing with the topic to be discussed. For students this age, the concrete example helped them tune in to the topic and make a connection. Activities included drawing something beautiful and a day they were in a bad mood. Activities included green and white paper for

fairness and dividing goldfish snack for sharing. These activities helped engage students in the lesson.

It is important to expose children to more complex thinking and language skills. Based on observations in the classroom, participants began using "I agree because…." and elaborated on statements. It shows the importance of modeling and that children can learn higher level thinking and language skills and use them in other environments.

Implications for Future Practice

Based on the research presented and this study, implementing Philosophy for Children in preschool settings may impact thinking, language, and dialogue skills. Educators can easily incorporate this program in the day by either setting time aside during the day or by including it in the classroom as a learning center.

By incorporating Philosophy for Children, an educator can help children develop higher language skills by asking them to elaborate and provide examples as well as become more comfortable and confident in speaking in class. An educator can also help children develop higher thinking skills by asking them to reason, provide support for assertions, and think more deeply about situations especially when a counterexample is given.

Not only can teachers use this program for encouraging critical thinking and valuing of different perspectives, but it also gives students the opportunity to enhance listening and speaking skills. Students learn to take turns speaking, listen attentively to others, and think about their own thoughts with respect to peers' different thoughts.

Suggestions for implementing the program differently in the classroom include: length, duration, topics, and activities. First and foremost, teachers should implement the program at the start of the school year. The program should occur at least three times a week creating a sense of

comfort in discussing ideas. Moreover, the teacher should plan to use the first few weeks or months of implementation to teach questioning, how to agree or disagree with others, how to elaborate, how to listen to peers, and how to support assertions, among other discussion, speaking, and listening skills. In addition, it may be more beneficial to spend more than one week on a particular topic. Moreover, a children's book should not be the only source of information for the philosophical discussion. For example, teachers may need to think of different ways to expose children to the topic before discussion so that they have enough experiences to base their ideas on.

Another suggestion would be for teachers to begin with philosophical concepts that students can easily relate to and then gradually move towards the end of the year to more complex topics. This may better ensure consistency and success with the program.

This study should show teachers that they can incorporate higher level skills in the classroom at this young age. While it is still important to teach print concepts and comprehension, teachers can use this to build information and then bring students to the next level of high order thinking. Moreover, it is important that educators realize the importance of valuing the connections students make and allowing them to express the connections they make to each other in discussion.

Educators should look to their students as individuals with valuable opinions and insights on the world around them. It is this very nature that makes children interesting to observe and makes one laugh or startle when they say something that is actually profound. It is this natural curiosity that Matthews (1980) discusses that makes them question the natural order of the world when they ask questions about how many skies there are or why blue is a boy color. It is the

responsibility of educators to encourage curiosity, deep thinking, and understanding and strategies for understanding the world.

Implications for Future Research

Implications for future research include adapting the program and extending the program to further develop findings. First and foremost, other researchers should extend the duration of the implementation of the program to a full school year. Lessons and discussions should be held at least three times a week, if not more.

As previously mentioned, the first few weeks or months should focus on how to have a philosophical discussion, types of questions that can be asked, valuing of different perspectives, how to agree or disagree with others, providing elaboration or support for assertions, as well as listening and speaking skills.

The rest of the sessions should be organized by theme to present children with related information. In addition, concepts should be organized from most familiar to least and taught in that sequence. Using familiar concepts first will allow students to successfully build discussion, language, and thinking skills to better tackle more complex or abstract concepts.

In addition, researchers should not just rely on children's literature solely to activate prior knowledge. They should provide various activities for students to better understand a concept and then use that knowledge to build on deeper thinking and discussion of that topic.

A larger sample size and more diverse population would be beneficial to better generalize results across populations. If several preschool teachers in various schools can be observed while implementing the program, there may be more beneficial information to be gained. Moreover, consideration of participant selection should be addressed. It may be beneficial to study groups

of children in a similar age group. At this age, months can mean the difference between making successful connections to personal experiences and providing examples for support.

Although there were several limitations and suggestions for improvement, this study offered a valuable perspective on using Philosophy for Children with preschool students. It is one of the few to observe the effect of Philosophy for Children with children ranging in ages 3 years, 11 months and 4 years, 11 months. In addition, it offered students the opportunity to participate in the program without interrupting their normal preschool activities. For future research, the suggestions discussed previously need to be addressed. Moreover, replications of the study need to be made with same and different populations to increase reliability and generalization factors. For future research, it would be interesting to see how duration of the program and a better-organized curriculum for the school year would impact discussion, thinking, and language skills. This study has shown that children of this age range can participate in discussion, ask questions to peers, make connections to personal experiences, and provide support or elaboration in the form of reasons or examples when discussing philosophical topics.

References

Alexander, R. (2005). *Towards Dialogic Teaching: Rethinking Classroom Talk.* Cambridge: Dialogos.

Anderson, R. C., Nguyen-Jahiel, K., McNurlen, B., Archodidou, A., Kim, S., & Reznitskaya, A. (2001). The snowball phenomenon: Spread of ways of talking and ways of thinking across groups of children. *Cognition and Instruction, 19,* 1-46.

Bond, M. A., & Wasik, B. A. (2009). Conversation Stations: Promoting language development in young children. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 36,* 467-473.

Byrne, G. (2011). Using Socratic Circles to develop critical thinking skills. *Practically Primary, 16,* 13-15.

Daniel, M. F., & Auriac, E. (2011). Philosophy, critical thinking and Philosophy for Children. *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 43,* 415-435.

Daniel, M. F., Lafortune, L., Pallascio, R., Splitter, L., Slade, C., & de la Garza, T. (2005). Modeling the development process of dialogical critical thinking in pupils aged 10 to 12 years. *Communication Education, 54,* 334-354.

Dickinson, D. K., & Tabors, P. O. (2001). *Beginning literacy with language: Young children learning at home and school.* Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing.

Fisher, R. (2007). Dialogic teaching: Developing thinking and metacognition through philosophical discussion. *Early Child Development and Care, 177,* 615-631.

Garcia-Moriyon, F., Rebello, I., & Colom, R. (2004). Philosophy for Children: A meta-analysis. *Thinking, 17,* 14-22.

Gjems, L. (2010). Teachers talking to young children: Invitations to negotiate meaning in everyday conservations. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 18,* 139-148.

Golding, C. (2011). Educating philosophically: The educational theory of Philosophy for Children. *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 43,* 413-414.

Gritter, K. (2011). Promoting lively literature discussion. *The Reading Teacher, 64,* 445-449.

Jenkins, P., & Lyle, S. (2010). Enacting dialogue: The impact of promoting Philosophy for Children on the literate thinking of identified poor readers, aged 10. *Language and Education, 24,* 459-472.

Keefer, M. W., Zeitz, C. M., & Resnick, L. B. (2000). Judging the quality of peer-led student dialogues. *Cognition and Instruction, 18,* 53-81.

Kennedy, N., & Kennedy, D. (2011). Community of philosophical inquiry as a discursive structure, and its role in school curriculum design. *Journal of Philosophy of Education, 45,* 265-283.

Lewis, A., & Smith, D. (1993). Defining higher order thinking. *Theory Into Practice, 32,* 131-137.

Limbach, B., & Waugh, W. (2010). Developing higher level thinking. *Journal of Instructional Pedagogies, 3,* 1-9.

Lipman, M., Sharp, A., & Oscanyan, F. S. (1980). *Philosophy in the Classroom*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Lyle, S. (2008). Dialogic teaching: Discussing theoretical contexts and reviewing evidence from classroom practice. *Language and Education, 22,* 222-240.

Matthews, G. B. (1980). *Philosophy & the Young Child.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Mercer, N. (2008). Classroom dialogue and the teacher's professional role. *Education Review, 21,* 60-65.

Mercer, N. (2008). Talk and the development of reasoning and understanding. *Human Development, 51,* 90-100.

Metcalfe, A., & Game, A. (2008). Significance and dialogue in learning and teaching. *Educational Theory, 58,* 343-356.

Murphy, P. K., Wilkinson, I. A. G., Soter, A. O., Hennessey, M. N., & Alexander, J. F. (2008). Examining the effects of classroom discussion on students' comprehension of text: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 101,* 740-764.

Murris, K. (2000). Can children do philosophy? *Journal of Philosophy of Education, 34,* 261-279.

Myhill, D. (2006). Talk, talk, talk: Teaching and learning in whole class discourse. *Research Papers in Education, 21,* 19-41.

Othman, M., & Hashim, R. (2006). Critical thinking & reading skills: A comparative study of the Reader Response & the Philosophy for Children approaches. *Thinking, 18,* 26-34.

Petress, K. (2004). Critical thinking: An extended definition. *Education, 124,* 461-466.

Reedy, D. (2006). Effective talk in reading lessons: Having proper conversations with children. *English 4-11, 28,* 21-23.

Rojas-Drummond, S., & Mercer, N. (2004). Scaffolding the development of effective collaboration and learning. *International Journal of Educational Research, 50,* 315-342.

Snow, C. E., Burns, M. S., & Griffin, P. (1999). Language and literacy environment in pre-schools. *Eric Digest*: 1-7. http://www.ericdigests.org/1999-3/preschools.htm.

Trickey, S., & Topping, K. J. (2004). Philosophy for children: A systematic review. *Research Papers in Education, 19,* 365-380.

Vansieleghem, N. (2006). Listening to dialogue. *Studies in Philosophy and Education, 25,* 175-190.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1962). *Thought and Language*. Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press.

Wartenberg, T. E. (2009). *Big Ideas for Little Kids: Teaching Philosophy Through Children's Literature.* Lanham, ML: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Appendix A

Discussion Behavior Checklist

Session # _____

Discussion Behavior	Number of Occurrences
Questions Initiated by Students	
Connections Made to Personal Experiences	
Support or Elaboration Provided for Answers in the Form of Reasons or Examples	

Length of Discussion (in minutes): _____

Observations:

Appendix B

List of Literature Used for Philosophical Discussions

Book Title	Author	Publication Year	Philosophical Topic
The Very Hungry Caterpillar	Eric Carle	1969	Growing up or change
Where the Wild Things Are	Maurice Sendak	1963	Real versus unreal
Something Beautiful	Sharon Dennis Wyeth	1998	Beauty
It's Not Fair	Amy Krouse	2008	Fairness
Why Should I Share?	Claire Llewellyn	2001	Sharing
Frog and Toad: Dragons and Giants	Arnold Lobel	1971	Bravery
Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day	Judith Viorst	1972	Negative Emotions

Appendix C

Sample of Lesson Format for Philosophical Discussion on the Meaning of Beautiful

Title of Book: Something Beautiful

Author: Sharon Dennis Wyeth

Vocabulary: courtyard, cardboard carton, alley, launderette, stoop

Aim: Students will discuss what makes a person, place, or thing beautiful.

Objectives:

- Participants will be able to construct a definition for the word, "beautiful."
- Participants will be able to draw and explain their drawing of their something beautiful to peers.
- Participants will be able to make predictions based on the cover and picture walk of the book.
- Participants will be able to use listening skills to listen to one another.
- Participants will be able to make connections to personal experiences about beauty.
- Participants will be able to clearly state and idea and provide reasoning or examples to support the claim.
- Participants will be able to evaluate others' claims by agreeing or disagreeing and explaining why.

Methods:

Before Reading

- Give out drawing materials and ask participants to draw something beautiful in their lives.
- Ask each participant to identify their something beautiful and explain why it is beautiful.

- Ask participants for a definition of the word "beautiful." Responses will be recorded on chart paper.
- Ask participants to make predictions about the book based on the cover and picture walk.
- Ask participants how the character may feel about aspects of her life depicted in the illustrations.

During Reading

- Create a chart with the participants reviewing each character's something beautiful.
- Ask participants to think of what makes each character think that their object or person is beautiful.

After Reading

- *Questions for Discussion*
    - The girl never tells us what her something beautiful is. What do you think it is? Why?
    - What do you think the girl learns about what beautiful is?
    - Is beautiful the opposite of ugly? Can something ugly be considered beautiful to someone else?
    - Can you give an example of something ugly that you think is beautiful?
    - How does beautiful look?
    - How does beautiful make you fell? Give an example.
    - How do we decide if something is beautiful?
    - If something is beautiful, does it mean you love it? Give an example.
- *Culminating Activity*

- Ask participants to add to or change the original definition of beautiful to current definition.
- Ask students to identify an example of a beautiful person or thing and explain what makes it beautiful.

Wagner College

Graduate Thesis Copyright Release Form

Document Identification

Student Name: Albane Ardolli

Thesis Title: Philosophy for Children and Its Impact on Student Dialogue, Language, and Thinking Skills

Department: Education

Author Agreement

I hereby grant to the Board of Trustees of Wagner College and its agents the non-exclusive license to copy, publicly display, archive, lend, and make accessible, my thesis in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter known.

I understand that Wagner College will make my work available to all patrons of its library, including interlibrary sharing.

I agree to the unrestricted display of the bibliographic information and the abstract of the above title.

I retain all other ownership rights to the copyright of the work.

Signed Albane Ardolli Date 06/14/12