

Philosophy of Children

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Research Question

Does engaging children in philosophy increase college students' sense of philosophical wonder?

Project Context: This research project was conducted in conjunction with PHIL 250-Philosophy of Children. The central **learning goal** for UW-Superior students is to cultivate their wonder/curiosity regarding both philosophical concerns and children's philosophical potential. The course includes studying two central and interconnected components: philosophers' understandings of children and childhood, and the manner in which children think about philosophical questions.

Methods: Students conducted an Academic Service-Learning project consisting of two sessions of engaging young children in philosophical discussions via children's literature. Students read philosophical texts on children as well as literature on doing philosophy with children. Student writings, surveys, and discussions were used to assess the outcomes.

Central Findings

Increase in college students' curiosity in children's perspectives

- "I am 100% more curious about the thoughts and perspectives of children. Children are so philosophical in ways I never knew."
- "I think I was a person who thought children were naïve. However, now I think that I am more open to topics about children."
- "My curiosity has been cultivated and has thus increased. Rather than think about my childhood and experiences of children currently around me in a distant and unrealistic/fanciful way. I think of those experiences in a current and wondrous light and moreso how I could learn more by being even more open."
- "I learned to think of children as equals vs. assuming that they do not understand what they are discussing."

Increase in college students' interest in philosophical questions and thoughts

- "My interest in language and ethics has increased. I like both of them because they are aspects of our lives that are often taken for granted, but throughout my life I had questioned them often."
- "I believe this course made it easier for me to mentally switch/change perspectives as I posed questions."
- "The reflective writing assignments were good in that they peaked my interest and encouraged me to think more deeply. My favorite philosophical idea we discussed was of beauty and art...[Engaging children philosophically] forced me to take an active role and fully immerse myself in the philosophical ideas. It was helpful to literally go through philosophical dialogue feeling confused and ambiguous..."

Course Bibliography

The Philosophical Child, Jana Mohr Lone
Dialogues with Children, Gareth B. Matthews
The Child in the World, Eva Simms
Big Ideas for Little Kids, Thomas Wartenberg

