

# Pragmatism, constructivism and Socratic objectivity: The pragmatist epistemic aim of Philosophy for Children

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## Abstract

*It will be shown in this paper that the epistemic aim of Philosophy for Children should be understood in pragmatist terms. It argues that Philosophy for Children, as a practice of dialogical inquiry, falls in the middle of a continuum from constructivist through to Socratic objectivist epistemic aims. Philosophy for Children shares the constructivist aim of creation but it also shares the Socratic aim of discovery. The epistemic aim of P4C however, is not to discover the objective truth or to construct subjectively acceptable views, but to discover and create tentative, fallible views that make sense of philosophical problems we currently face. As such, Philosophy for Children is best described as pragmatist. The epistemic aim of Philosophy for Children is to create and discover views that work to resolve philosophical problems.*

This paper explores what type of philosophical knowledge students obtain from Philosophy for Children classes. I call this the epistemic aim of Philosophy for Children.

Philosophy for Children starts with philosophical questions problematic for, and often generated by, students. The epistemic aim is to resolve these problems. I will argue that this aim can be situated in the middle of the continuum from constructivist to objectivist epistemological aims. I base my analysis on the description of constructivism and Socratic inquiry by Boghossian (2006), in a recent paper in *Educational Philosophy and Theory*. Although Boghossian seems to see these as two distinct positions, it is better to see them as the ends of the spectrum from subjective through to objective epistemic aims, from creation through to discovery.

Philosophy for children shares epistemic aims with both constructivism and Socratic inquiry. This is what makes it seem plausible to describe Philosophy for Children as Socratic or constructivist. Nevertheless, because Philosophy for Children emphasises both subjective construction *and* objective discovery, it is firmly in the middle of the spectrum of epistemic aims and thus needs a different label than one which applies to either end of the spectrum. I argue that pragmatism, which emphasises both discovery and creation, is a better label for the epistemic aims of Philosophy for Children.

This paper will present an outline of the conception of philosophy and philosophical inquiry in the Philosophy for Children programme. Then it will critically examine conceptions of constructivist and Socratic objectivist epistemic aims and their similarities to the aims of this programme, concluding that Philosophy for Children is best seen as having a pragmatist epistemic aim.

## Philosophy for Children

Philosophy for Children was created in 1969 by philosopher turned educator Matthew Lipman, working at Columbia University. Lipman was responding to his concerns that children do not reason as well as they could, that they are presented with intellectually “banal and stodgy fare” at school and that their sense of wonder and curiosity does not survive their schooling (Lipman, 1993). Lipman believed that if philosophy were made available to children, it could resolve these concerns.

Philosophy for Children is most often associated with the theoretical work of Lipman<sup>1</sup>, and the series of novels and teacher materials developed by Matthew Lipman and Ann Margaret Sharp at the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC). Unlike standard philosophical texts, the novels do not

name philosophers or philosophical positions, and are instead about children in normal life engaging with and discussing philosophical issues such as friendship, thinking or fairness. Students read the novels, then as a class community of inquiry they raise the philosophical questions and issues that they find problematic. The teacher is trained to help them to engage in philosophical dialogue to resolve their issues and answer their questions. There is further support offered from teacher materials co-written by Matthew Lipman and Ann-Margaret Sharp.<sup>2</sup> Philosophy for Children also includes a number of alternative pedagogical materials. For example, many practitioners stimulate philosophical dialogue in a community of inquiry with picture books, newspaper articles, dilemmas, philosophical activities or movies.<sup>3</sup>

### **Philosophical inquiry**

Philosophy for Children takes a Deweyan inspired approach to philosophy as a form of inquiry. Inquiry starts with an experienced problem and ends with a resolution to this problem (Dewey, 1916, 1933, 1938). The philosophical inquiry in Philosophy for Children is thus best understood as seeking a distinctly 'philosophical' resolution to a distinctly 'philosophical' problem.

Philosophy raises a particular type of problematic concern about "what is most fundamental in human experience" (Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyan, 1980 , p. 125).

Philosophy attempts to clarify and illuminate unsettled, controversial issues that are so generic that no scientific discipline is equipped to deal with them. Examples would be such concepts as truth, justice, beauty, personhood, and goodness (Lipman, 1988, p. 91).

Philosophical questions about problematic issues are not empirical. They cannot be given settled answers by gathering the empirical facts, because they arise even when we have all the settled knowledge. Although empirical evidence is relevant, no matter how much information is gathered, this will not be enough to answer a philosophical question such as "What is a friend?" or "How should I live?"

This means that resolving philosophical problems is not by discovering new facts, providing accurate information or filling gaps in our knowledge. We resolve philosophical problems by making sense of issues that otherwise did not seem to make sense even when we have all the information.

Because the facts do not determine answers to philosophical questions and do not require us to prefer one answer over another, these questions always remain contestable and problematic (Splitter & Sharp, 1995, p. 95). There are no final answers that can be given to philosophical questions because they can always be opposed by contrasting views (Lipman et al., 1980, p. 97; Lipman, 1988, p. 33). "In fact philosophy involves precisely this perpetual effort to come to grips with questions that permit no simple solution and that require continual rephrasing and reformulation" (Lipman et al., 1980, p. 28).

### **Reconstruction of philosophy**

There are a variety of ways that the general conception of philosophy held in P4C could be practiced or taught. Lipman argues that academic philosophy should be seen as one version of philosophy and P4C another, in the same way that we have different designs of cars or houses (Lipman & Bosch, 1997, p. 3). However, more specifically, Philosophy for Children 'bends' or 'adapts' philosophical methods for the use of children (Cam, 2006b, p. 40) or to use the words of Dewey and Lipman, P4C is a reconstruction of philosophy (Cam 2000; Dewey, 1920; Lipman 1991, p. 262; Sharp, 1987, p. 43). It is an alternative design with the particular aim of making philosophy available to children.

When I advocated philosophy in the schools, I was not talking about the tradition of academic philosophy taught in graduate schools of the university. What I was talking about was a philosophy redesigned and reconstructed so as to make it available and acceptable and enticing

to children. Moreover the pedagogy by which the subject was to be presented would have to be just as drastically redesigned as the subject itself (Lipman, 1991, p. 262).

This move to reconstruct philosophy situates Philosophy for Children in the tradition of curriculum founded by Bruner (Cam, 2006b, pp. 38-39). Bruner claimed that “the foundations of any subject may be taught to anybody at any age in some form” (Bruner, 1960, p. 12). Consistent with Bruner’s approach, Philosophy for Children rejects the view that philosophy is so difficult and esoteric that only the mature and intelligent can handle it. In particular Bruner’s idea of the spiral curriculum is relevant for understanding the intention of Philosophy for Children. Young children engage with basic ideas from the discipline of philosophy and use foundational philosophical thinking skills and dispositions. They then revisit these over the years in more and more complex forms, until they are able to deal with the mature discipline of philosophy. For example, 5 year olds might think about what it means to be a friend in concrete terms, and then come back to this concept in more and more sophisticated and abstract ways in later years by considering the connections between friendship and trust, integrity, happiness and living a good life. Each time they revisit the same topic, they bring with them a greater mastery of the tools of philosophy, such as giving and evaluating reasons or making distinctions.

To illustrate the difference between academic philosophy and the reconstructed philosophy of Philosophy for Children, I present an example of what might occur in a lecture on academic philosophy and then an example of a Philosophy for Children class. Both examples depict the same philosophical topic, freedom.

The academic philosophical practice, depicted in the example, is only accessible by the sophisticated and capable student. University students are to master the body of philosophical knowledge, that is, the positions and arguments for and against these positions. The content they are presented with has already been organised into a logical structure to make it easier to understand, but it is too scholarly and sophisticated for children.

Jenny’s first subject in philosophy is *Metaphysics*. She thinks she’s getting the hang of it, but still struggles a bit. The lecturer sometimes speaks too fast and sometimes too slowly, but at least the notes give a handy outline to follow. She reads about philosophers like Dennett and Strawson, but is more interested in the summary of the arguments. The notes set out four important assumptions made about freedom:

1. We are free when our actions are caused by ourselves
2. Freedom is incompatible with determinism
3. We are determined
4. We are free

Then they explain how the different traditional positions about freedom result from denying one or other of these assumptions.

- If we deny assumption 2 we get compatibilism
- If we deny assumption 3 we get libertarianism
- If we deny assumption 4 we get hard determinism.

She’s not quite sure what compatibilism or libertarianism are, but Jenny figures she will be able to understand them if she has some time tonight to re-read the notes and go over it in her head.

On the other hand, the philosophical practice of Philosophy for Children is inclusive, dialogical and collaborative. It occurs within the structure of a community of inquiry: a group “dedicated to the use of like procedures in pursuit of identical goals” (Lipman, 2003, p. 20), where the doing of philosophy is emphasised rather than learning about philosophy. The learning starts with the experience of the students rather than the philosophical tradition. The teacher’s job is to help the students uncover philosophical problems in their own experience and then to follow the inquiry where it leads, not to discover particular pre-decided positions, arguments or conceptions.

James looks puzzled. He thinks he can follow what his classmates are saying but he's not sure. His year 4 class are doing Philosophy for Children, or P4C as Mrs. Adams calls it. They had read a story about a boy who was so sick he couldn't go outside. Now they were sitting in a circle discussing the ideas from the story to see what questions would arise. James had said that it was a sad story because the boy wasn't free to play outside, but Alisha had disagreed and said the boy didn't want to go outside anyway, so he *was* free. Ying agreed. "You're only unfree if you can't do what you want," she argued.

James had a question but he was struggling to form it in his mind. "What if he wanted to go outside though?" he finally asked. "Yeah", said his friend Sam. "He's not really free because he might want to go outside sometimes."

Mrs. Adams stopped the class than and asked: "Who agrees with Alisha?" and 6 or 7 children put their hands up. "Who agrees with James" and 3 children put their hands up. "Who needs more time to make up their minds?" and the rest of the 20 or so students put their hands up. "OK, talk to the people beside you: is the boy in the story free or unfree?"

The class broke into small groups of students eagerly discussing their view of freedom and trying to resolve the problem that arose from Alisha's challenge of James' idea.

### **Constructivist epistemological aims**

The common core of constructivist theory is that we don't find knowledge, we construct it (Boghossian, 2006, p. 714). "From this point of view, then, the task of the educator is not to dispense knowledge but to provide students with opportunities and incentives to build it up" (von Glaserfeld, 2005, p. 3). Consistent with this, Philosophy for Children takes the position that philosophy is best learned by constructing philosophical knowledge.

Both Philosophy for Children and constructivism reject a mimetic view of teaching, or what Freire calls the banking concept of education (Freire, 1993, pp. 52-53), where knowledge is transmitted ready-made to students. Knowledge is not fixed and waiting to be discovered. Applied to philosophy, this means that students must be involved in creating their own philosophical knowledge and cannot be given it, or find it, ready made.

For example, "I think implies I exist" does not create knowledge if it is merely told to a student, nor if someone discovers this phrase. At most it might become a piece of information they can parrot back if they happen to remember the words. New philosophical ideas cannot be transferred to someone and piled on top of their store of knowledge. They only become meaningful or known to them in a strong sense when the ideas are put into their own words, and when they are connected with their experiences and built into their world views. Knowing requires the active transformation of old views and the construction of new concepts and representations.

Philosophy for Children is constructivist. It is partly based on Peirce's views on the social construction of knowledge (Burgh, Field, & Freakley, 2006, p. 33), and the literature explicitly states that children construct meaning and knowledge (Splitter & Sharp, 1995, p. 65 & 74; Lipman, 1988, p. 142). It is very similar to the constructivist position described by Fosnot (2005, p.ix).<sup>4</sup>

Although Philosophy for Children does aim for construction of philosophical knowledge, it is on the objective end of the continuum of constructivist theories.

Constructivism, taken to the extreme end of the continuum, implies that knowledge is non-objective and the result of a process consisting *solely* of construction by students. According to Boghossian, this implies "... that there are multiple perspectives, interpretations and truths, and that each perspective has its own validity. No one perspective is 'more valid' than any other perspective" (Boghossian, 2006, p. 715). If knowledge is pure construction, Boghossian argues that students can construct any conceptual framework or knowledge that they like. Constructivism, according to this perspective, seems to imply complete

subjectivism with no objective constraints or criteria by which to judge knowledge and learning. “For the constructivist, each person’s subjective experience is just as valid as anyone else’s and no one has an epistemically privileged viewpoint. Therefore there are no objective criteria for what constitutes knowledge” (Boghossian, 2006, p. 714).

Philosophy for Children does not take the extreme position identified with Boghossian’s interpretation of pure constructivism, and does not accept relativism, subjectivism or the impossibility of any objective standards. Although philosophical issues are complex and problematic,

This is not to say that anything goes, or that it is all just a matter of opinion. Our answers can be more or less intelligent, well thought out, insightful, compassionate and life enhancing, or they can be more or less obtuse, stymieing or pernicious (Cam, 2006a, p. 25).

The epistemic aim of Philosophy for Children is not for students to construct any view they like. Some philosophical ideas are better than others and the aim is to develop better views than previously. We can judge one view as better than another by employing objective standards for distinguishing, for example, better reasoning from worse (Lipman et al., 1980, p. 18). Lipman suggests we use standards such as impartiality, comprehensiveness and consistency (Lipman et al., 1980, p. 174), or precision, relevance, acceptability and sufficiency (2003, pp. 233-234). Using objective standards such as these are necessary for doing philosophy. If no criteria-based judgments are made about some ideas being better than others, we might be swapping opinions, but we aren’t doing philosophy.

### **Objectivist epistemological aim**

The opposite end of the continuum of epistemic aims is what I call an objectivist epistemic aim and what Boghossian calls Socratic. This end of the continuum holds that truth exists independently of inquirers and is discovered and known through inquiry. “The presupposition of the Socratic method is that there is a truth of the matter and that that truth can be known through discourse... those engaged in a dialogue discover true propositions through a sustained inquiry” (Boghossian, 2006, p. 716).

Philosophy for Children seems to be as consistent with objectivism as it is with constructivism. Philosophy for Children emphasises that we cannot be given or find philosophical knowledge ready-made. The constructivist interpretation is that this knowledge must be constructed. The Socratic interpretation is that, “...there is a truth, we just need cooperation and dialogue to find it” (Boghossian, 2006, p. 720). It might be impossible to find ready made knowledge of philosophical truths because the students have to be active participants in finding and discovering knowledge, not constructing it.

There is much in the Philosophy for Children literature that shows that it holds objectivist epistemic aims. Children are said to: “find meaning in experience” (Lipman et al., 1980 pp. 67-68), philosophy is said to be seeking or guided by the search for truth, (Burgh, et al., 2006, p. 51; Lipman, 1988, p. 148) and philosophy makes progress toward the truth (Gardner, 1995, p. 38).

However, just as Philosophy for Children is not at the purely constructivist end of the spectrum of epistemic aims, nor is it at the purely objectivist end. For Philosophy for Children, knowledge is not simply out there to be discovered and truth is not out there to be known as a pure objectivist position would hold. Instead Philosophy for Children emphasises the epistemic aim of generating meaning.

Construction is essential for generating meaning. We must do something with the experiences and ideas we encounter in order to construct meaning:

- Connect new observations and insights into our mental frameworks (Splitter & Sharp, 1995, p. 72)
- Organise beliefs, values and thoughts (Lipman et al., 1980, p. 74)
- Interweave the threads of our opinions, ideas and experiences (Splitter & Sharp, 1995, p. 131)
- Make judgements and inferences (Lipman et al., 1980, p. 17; Splitter & Sharp, 1995, p. 76)
- Integrate, balance and harmonise different perspectives.

Without this active, creative processing, we can't generate meaning. We have to put things together in a way that makes sense of them (Johnson, 1993, p. 250; Splitter & Sharp, 1995, p. 74).

### **Pragmatist epistemological aim**

I have argued that neither the pure subjectivism of constructivism where whatever we construct is knowledge, nor the pure objectivism of a Socratic epistemology where we seek to grasp the independently existing truth is suitable for describing Philosophy for Children. Philosophy for Children falls somewhere in the middle of the continuum with both constructivist *and* objectivist epistemic aims.

I argue that it is better to go back to the Deweyan roots of Philosophy for Children and take a pragmatist epistemology. This position takes the middle ground between pure objectivism and subjectivism where meaning and knowledge are gained through a process involving both discovery and creation. The epistemic aim of Philosophy for Children is to discover *and* create meaning.

Boghossian sets up a false dichotomy when he asks whether we should “consider knowledge to be about some ‘real’ world independent of us, or whether we should consider knowledge to be of our own making?” (Boghossian, 2006, p. 718). For Philosophy for Children, we should consider that it is both. “Knowledge is... something to be discovered and created” (Lipman et al., 1980, p. 95, my italics). Ann Sharp, one of the co-writers of much of the original Philosophy for Children materials, puts it well in the following quote.

If our worlds are as much made as found (and I think they are) it follows then that coming to know for the child is as much a process of remaking as reporting what is there. What this implies is that there is a world ‘out there’ to be discovered, but that persons bring to the discovery a host of assumptions, categories, ideas, perspectives, which themselves colour what they discover. In a sense they invent and discover at the same time (Sharp, 1987, p. 41).

Philosophy for Children has features of constructivism and objectivism without taking the extreme of either position. Meaning cannot be given to students, as it involves students constructing their own conceptual frameworks. Yet, although meaning is constructed, it is within the constraints of reality. For example, there are objective errors and mistakes that can make a constructed view useless, badly formed or irrational. We have to discover these objective constraints that limit our construction of meaning. Likewise, we have knowledge of, or make sense of the world, which implies some kind of discovery about the nature of this world. Yet, knowledge and meaning are not objectively out there fully formed waiting to be discovered. Students must put together their knowledge of the world or what it means to them.

The pure objectivist sees knowledge as a representation of an independent reality. The pure constructivist, that there is no independent reality, only our constructions of it. The pure objective view seems to imply a correspondence view of truth while the pure constructivist implies a subjectivist view. Philosophy for Children shares neither and is rather like the pragmatist that sees knowledge or meaning as the vehicle of adapting to an independent reality. Meaning is what works to solve the problems we face, given the constraints of the external reality.

### **Illustrations of these views**

To illustrate the three different epistemic aims proposed for Philosophy for Children, I will go back to my previous examples. In these examples, given all three employ philosophical dialogue, the methods used are similar and may overlap. This might be thought to be enough to prove that they share epistemic aims, but it does not, as aims are only loosely related to method. Difference in method is often caused by difference in epistemic aim (for example, visual art has a different epistemic aim to philosophy and so employs different methods), yet the same methods can be used for different epistemic aims. The same philosophical methods

can be used for the aim of winning an argument or to honestly seek the truth. Thus, in the following examples, although the methods are similar, it is the aims that we are considering.

#### Constructivist epistemological aims

In the middle of their discussion about freedom, Mrs. Kohl, James' principal, came into the room to talk to the class. James liked Mrs. Kohl because she always listened to what he had to say. James didn't know (or care) that she was a constructivist about learning philosophy.

Mrs. Kohl asked each child what they thought freedom was. Amy said it was being like a bird; Alisha repeated her earlier idea that it was doing what ever you wanted; and so on through the class. Mrs. Kohl listened thoughtfully to each comment and always followed up with "good idea" or "excellent thinking". She left feeling very pleased because she wanted every child to construct a meaning of freedom for themselves, and every child had done so.

#### Objectivist epistemological aims

Jenny was now going to her tutorial about freedom. Todd, her young philosophy tutor, fancied himself to be a bit of a Socrates. He told the students that together they would explore, analyse and test various views to try to get to the true nature of freedom. He knew the positions which the students needed to understand for this subject and he was confident that he could lead them to discover for themselves the important truths about compatibilism, hard determinism and libertarianism.

"OK", he began, "What do you think freedom is?" Jenny was excited. She reckoned that freedom was doing whatever you wanted to, and said so.

"Good," Todd replied. "Now, how did you come to want the things you want?"

Jenny hadn't thought this far, and she paused, frowning. But another student had a ready answer. "Well, you were born with certain desires, or you pick them up from the environment."

"Ah-Ha!" Todd exclaimed, "So if you don't choose what you want, how can you be free when you do what you want? Aren't we controlled by our desires?"

Jenny had discovered something new. Her first view about freedom was obviously wrong. Maybe she was one of those hard determinists the lecturer was talking about?

Todd continued. "Can you see that by rejecting the imperfect definition, we discover more about freedom and move closer to the truth of the matter?"

#### Pragmatist epistemological aims

Mrs. Adams took up the discussion about freedom with James' class the next day. She was not satisfied with the different views that students had constructed for Mrs. Kohl. She was a pragmatist. She did not think there was some final truth of the matter, but she wanted to make sure the notions of freedom that the students had constructed were meaningfully elaborated and tested so they would resolve the problem the class had stated with. Mrs. Adams also did not see her job as leading students to discover predetermined positions or ideas. Her job was to help the students to follow the inquiry where it leads.

Mrs. Adams thought she would start with a suggestion from one of the quieter students. "Amy, yesterday you said that freedom was like being a bird, can you say more about what that means?"

"Well, you know, you can fly above everything."

"And nothing holds you back", James added as the metaphor began to inspire his thinking.

"But a bird has to land somewhere", Ying countered. "Maybe birds aren't free."

There was a pause as the class pondered this challenge.

"Maybe that's what freedom is," Amy wondered. "You can do some things but not others. Freedom isn't doing whatever you want, because you always have to have somewhere to land."

Sam had been quietly constructing his own idea. "I think freedom is like a rocket being fired into space. It doesn't have to land. Freedom is when nothing stops you."

"We seem to have a useful way of making sense of freedom as a bird or rocket flying. Let's test it. How would this help us understand whether the boy in the story who was too sick to go outside is free or not?"

Amy had already thought of this. "He's not free, because he can't fly away like a bird or a rocket."

"James you thought he wasn't free yesterday, do you agree with the reason Amy gave?"

James was surprised that he had changed his mind. "I think he might be free in a way, like what Alisha said yesterday." Alisha grinned. "He's like a bird in a small cage. He still can fly, just not very much, so he still has some freedom."

### **Conclusion: Pragmatism is the best label for the epistemic aim of Philosophy for Children**

Philosophy for Children is both constructivist and objectivist, and it falls in the middle of the continuum between the two. Yet, for this reason, it is different from the extreme conceptions of constructivism and objectivism. Philosophy for Children is not like a subjective construction where internal consistency is the only restriction on the creative responses that are produced. Nor is it like the intellectual sparring of Socratic inquiry where the aim is to attack and defend positions in search of the truth (Ross, 1996, p. 3). The epistemic aim of Philosophy for children is to build on the ideas of others as much as it is to challenge and test them. This means the label constructivism or Socratic objectivism is inappropriate for Philosophy for Children. We are better to distance the aims of Philosophy for Children from possible misinterpretations by avoiding these labels.

The label of constructivism is inappropriate for Philosophy for Children because its epistemic aims are as much discovery as they are construction. Of course some versions of constructivism acknowledge that there is an external reality that constrains which theories and perspectives will work. But by taking the label constructivism, we emphasise the constructed nature of knowledge and ignore the objective constraints.

Philosophy for Children acknowledges that what we construct must work in reality, not just in our heads and not just because our social group accepts it. We must test our suggestions against the views of others as well as against logic and observation before we can say that we are warranted to assert these views as knowledge or meaning. We have to 'negotiate' meaning with our social communities as well as with the brute nature of reality and logic. We could call this constructivism as it does involve some construction, but as discovery is equally important, construction seems an inappropriate label.

The label Socratic objectivism is also inappropriate for Philosophy for Children because it does not leave space for knowledge to consist of our theories, perspectives and world views that we have put together ourselves rather than discovered fully formed. Socratic objectivism suggests that we can have direct knowledge of the truth or have an accurate representation of reality. The aim is to find the correct description of that truth or reality. In Philosophy for Children students look to the world to test their ideas and see if they resolve the problems they are inquiring into, rather than to check if they have a true description of reality.

The epistemic aim of objectivism is not suitable for Philosophy for Children because its goal is to discover the absolute truth of the matter. Philosophy for Children sees philosophy as leading to fallible and tentative answers that are always controversial and open for revision. The meaning we create is personal and contextual. It is what makes sense for me in this situation or what resolves the problem that I experience about this issue. Meaning is not a universal truth for all times and places.

Versions of Socratic objectivism could look very much like Philosophy for children as could versions of constructivism. In this sense Philosophy for Children is constructivist or Socratic objectivist in its epistemic aims. However, labelling it as such gives the wrong impression. Philosophy for children is not aiming to discover an independent truth, so Socratic objectivism is inappropriate. Philosophy for children does not

involve construction alone, so constructivism is an inappropriate label. Philosophy for Children is at the objective end of constructivism and the constructed end of objectivism.

A better label for the epistemic aim of Philosophy for Children is pragmatism. It acknowledges both the construction of our knowledge and the objective constraints on this constructed knowledge, both of which are essential for understanding the philosophical practice of Philosophy for Children. We build, make, organise and interweave philosophical perspectives to make sense of the external world and to solve our problems. We also discover, find or notice resolutions as well as restrictions on what resolutions will work. My argument is that this is because the philosophical inquiry of Philosophy for Children involves constructing and uncovering, as well as critical and creative thinking. It falls in the middle of the continuum between creation and discovery. We could call it constructed objectivism, or objective constructivism, but pragmatism seems simpler.

## Notes

1. The foundational set of theoretical works and teacher texts by Matthew Lipman are, *Philosophy Goes to School*, (1988), *Thinking in Education* (2003) and the original, *Philosophy in the Classroom* by Lipman, Sharp and Oscanyan (1980).
2. The following are some of the official IAPC novels and teachers' manuals for primary and middle years students: *Lisa* (Lipman, 1983; Lipman & Sharp, 1995), *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery* (Lipman, 1982a; Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyan, 1984), *Pixie* (Lipman, 1981; Lipman & Sharp, 1982), *Elfie* (Lipman, 2004a, 2004b) and *Kio and Gus* (Lipman, 1982b; Lipman & Sharp, 1986).
3. For example, the following three series of Australian books advocate using picture books as the stimulus for philosophical inquiry: Tim Sprod's *Books into Ideas* (Sprod, 1993), Phil Cam's *Thinking Stories* series (Cam, 1993a, 1993b) and the *Philosophy with Kids* series by de Haan, MacColl and McCutcheon (1995). There is also a range of supplementary pedagogical materials from Australasia to support different aspects of philosophical inquiry such as Phil Cam's *Twenty Thinking Tools* (2006) and Clinton Golding's *Connecting Concepts* (Golding, 2002).
4. It is worth repeating this general statement of constructivism in full to appreciate how similar it is to Philosophy for Children:  
... the theory describes knowledge not as truths to be transmitted or discovered, but as emergent, developmental, non-objective, viable constructed explanations by humans engaged in meaning-making in cultural and social communities of discourse. Learning from this perspective is viewed as a self-regulatory process of struggling with the conflict between existing personal models of the world and discrepant new insights, constructing new representations and models of reality as a human meaning-making venture with culturally developed tools and symbols, and further negotiating such meaning through cooperative social activity, discourse, and debate in communities of practice.  
... teachers who base their practice on constructivism reject the notions that meaning can be passed on to learners via symbols and transmission, that learners can incorporate exact copies of teachers' understanding for their own use, that whole concepts can be broken into discrete subskills, and that concepts can be taught out of context. In contrast, a constructivist view of learning suggest an approach to teaching that gives learners the opportunity for concrete, contextually meaningful experience through which they can search for patterns; raise questions; and model, interpret, and defend their strategies and ideas. The classroom in this model is seen as a mini-society, a community of learners engaged in activity, discourse, interpretation, justification and reflection. The traditional hierarchy of teacher as the autocratic knower, and learner as the unknowing, controlled subject studying and practicing what the teacher knows, begins to dissipate as teacher assume more of a facilitator's role and learners take on more ownership of the ideas. Indeed, autonomy, mutual reciprocity of social relations, and empowerment become the goals (Fosnot, 2005, p.ix).

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