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**Furthering Philosophy for the Future:  
An Exploration of the Benefits of High School  
Philosophy Education and the Barriers It Faces**

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DePauw University Honor Scholar Program

Class of 2022

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## Introduction

“But, why? Why, exactly? What are your reasons? Okay, but have you considered...? What about...?” When I would speak with high school students about philosophy, my contribution to the conversation would mainly be questions like these. As a student at DePauw university, I worked for the Prindle Institute for Ethics, an organization dedicated to improving K-12 ethics education. What is ethics? Well, that is one of the questions that the folks at the Prindle Institute ask and answer during the workshops we hold in high school classrooms. Ethics is the field of study which concerns right and wrong. It asks “is there such a thing as right and wrong?” but also “what is the right standard for judging right and wrong?” and, most practically, “What should I do?” We focus on that latter question. In a typical workshop, we present a case study, real or imagined, that presents some ethical problem, some situation where it is difficult to determine what someone in that situation should do. Then, we have the students discuss the case in small groups, supplemented by someone from the Prindle Institute helping guide the discussions in each group. It is at that point that I ask questions like I mentioned at the beginning.

Some students, when asked those questions, would stare at me like a deer in the headlights. It is always some combination of uncertainty at what to say, some surprise at being asked to give more than their mere opinion, and some worry that they will be judged for what they will say. Most students, however, quickly open up. As it turns out, teenagers are eager to share their opinions, since they are typically told to listen more than they are told to speak. And, even after just an hour-long workshop, the students would be more confident and you could see they were still thinking, even wondering, when you left them.

When I came to university and took my first philosophy class, I had much the same experience, just as the student rather than the teacher. The class was Ethical Theory. Each day, my professor, Dr. Erik Wielenberg, would come in, write some notes or diagrams on the chalkboard, talk about whatever we had read for a few minutes, and then sit down on the table in front of the class and ask us “Now how does that grab you?” And then, silence. For as long as no one spoke he would just stare at us. The onus was clearly on us to engage with the text, with him, and with philosophy. Eventually someone would say something, and someone else would disagree. And, they would argue. Or, if no one disagreed, the professor would poke holes in the argument or belief the class agreed on. He would ask pointed questions and would just stare at us till we responded, maybe cracking a joke about the silence. Everyone loved that professor, and I was always left thinking about whatever we had talked about until long after class. Many of my own opinions about ethics shifted as a result of that class and the way I had been compelled to grapple with the issues.

I realized that *this* is what I had been missing all my years of school thus far. Why had I only been introduced to philosophy, and this mode of discussion in university? As time went on, I became a philosophy major and began to work at the Prindle Institute for Ethics, where I tried to practice what I had learned about what the classroom could be like in the workshops we held at high schools. There I saw that not only *could* philosophy be taught to younger students, but also that students enjoyed it and seemed to thoroughly benefit from it like I myself did. Based on my experiences, I believe that it is critical that philosophy education be integrated into high school classrooms.

In this paper, I will present a picture of how philosophy education should be integrated into American high schools, I will build a case for the benefits of this integration, and I will respond to some challenges to the process of bringing philosophy into the classroom. I hope to show that expanding philosophy education and encouraging critical thinking is important. American high schools are in need of new methods of instruction in this era of misinformation and fruitless political discourse. I hope to show that philosophy education is one tool in the project of improving education, and thus society in general. In essence, I hope to make a case that philosophy education is a vital part of any successful future for education in America.

### **Roadmap**

First, I will paint a picture of what high school philosophy education would look like according to my ideal. I will then analyze and contextualize this picture, considering how philosophy education of the form I describe is connected to philosophy and philosophy education more broadly. I will expand on the evidence in favor of this form of philosophy education, known as collaborative philosophical inquiry (CPI), from the literature. I will detail the way it measurably improves reasoning, and has the potential to provide serious social and political benefits. With the picture of CPI in mind, along with the empirical evidence for its benefits, we will look at the challenges to my proposal, practical and theoretical. That is, first, we will look at the impediments that stand in the way of any teacher or administrator that would be interested in bringing philosophy education to their school district. Then, we will briefly consider theoretical objections to the proposal. That is, not practical impediments for someone who wants to bring philosophy education to the classroom, but arguments that might persuade us that we shouldn't *want* to bring philosophy education to the classroom in the first place. I do not doubt that my

case can survive these objections, but by considering them, I think we will better see how CPI ought to be implemented. Ultimately, I will find that we should want to support CPI and that my picture of high school philosophy education can survive and even flourish despite the practical impediments to its implementation.

### **What Should High School Philosophy Education Look Like?**

#### *Painting a Picture of High School Philosophy Education*

An English teacher stands, leaning over a table at the front of her classroom, looking once more over the handout she created for the senior literature class she would be teaching to the students soon to be pouring in.<sup>1</sup> Soon, the bell rings and the hallways are flooded with the cacophony of hundreds of students hurrying to their lockers and chatting with their peers along the way. A few minutes later and the classroom is full of students. The bell rings again and the chatter slowly stops. The students sit down, their desks arranged in a circle around the room, the teacher sitting at the front.

“Hello everyone, how did the reading treat you last night?” the teacher asks, brightly. The students had been assigned to read Act III, Scene 1 of *Hamlet*.

The class grumbles a bit, hesitant to say much of anything. One student, the exception in terms of confidence, raises her hand:

“Ms. Honey, I’m just not sure what was going on at all!”

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<sup>1</sup> The construction of the following imagined discussion was significantly aided by research that assessed the relative efficacy of differing modes of teaching philosophy such as in Natascha Kienstra et al., “Doing Philosophy Effectively: Student Learning in Classroom Teaching,” *PLOS ONE* 10, no. 9 (September 17, 2015): pp. 1-23, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0137590>.

“That’s alright!” said the teacher, “Even though it’s famous, it’s pretty hard to get what Hamlet is saying when he gives that ‘To be or not to be’ soliloquy. Does anyone remember what a ‘soliloquy’ is?”

Some students raise their hands and the teacher eventually gets a satisfying answer.

“Now, let’s have someone read Hamlet’s soliloquy aloud and we’ll try to figure out together what it means and what we think of what he’s saying,” Ms. Honey says. The teacher calls on the first hand she sees and the student reads:

To be, or not to be, that is the question: // Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
 // The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, // Or to take arms against a sea of  
 troubles // And by opposing end them. To die—to sleep, // No more; and by a  
 sleep to say we end // The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks // That flesh  
 is heir to: 'tis a consummation // Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep; // To  
 sleep, perchance to dream—ay, there's the rub: // For in that sleep of death what  
 dreams may come, // When we have shuffled off this mortal coil, // Must give us  
 pause—there's the respect // That makes calamity of so long life. // For who  
 would bear // the whips and scorns of time, // Th'oppressor's wrong, the proud  
 man's contumely, // The pangs of dispriz'd love, the law's delay, // The insolence  
 of office, and the spurns // That patient merit of th'unworthy takes, // When he  
 himself might his quietus make // With a bare bodkin? Who would fardels bear, //  
 To grunt and sweat under a weary life, // But that the dread of something after  
 death, // The undiscover'd country, from whose bourn // No traveller returns,  
 puzzles the will, // And makes us rather bear those ills we have // Than fly to

others that we know not of? // Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all, //  
 And thus the native hue of resolution // Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of  
 thought, // And enterprises of great pith and moment // With this regard their  
 currents turn awry // And lose the name of action.

The teacher goes over the archaic vocabulary of the passage and they reread the passage a couple of times till everyone seems to understand the basic sense of the sentences, if not the overall thrust of the passage. The teacher then asks:

“Now, what is Hamlet getting at in this soliloquy?”

The classroom is quiet, most students still unsure. A few students hazard guesses till one gets close to the meaning:

“I’m not sure, but I think Hamlet is, uh, well, he’s deciding whether to um... he’s thinking about ending his life. Like he’s really frustrated with the whole situation he’s in. That’s the whole ‘To be or not to be’ thing. He’s thinking like ‘why don’t I just end it all?’ but... uh... well he’s just not very confident. I’m not really sure about the details or the last half though.”

“Yeah you’re really getting to the heart of it. Does anyone else have any thoughts?”

Some other students raise their hands and add on to the first student’s analysis. They note that Hamlet is uncertain about what comes after death. His dilemma, essentially, is between the known evils and suffering of his present life with the complete unknown of what comes after death. The teacher summarizes and clarifies the analysis of the students for the other students in the classroom. She passes out a handout describing much the same analysis and then the tenor of her voice shifts to become a little graver:

“Now, we’re going to shift gears a bit. Hopefully we all have a better sense of what Hamlet was saying after that discussion. But, I want to broaden our discussion. As we talked about, Hamlet is contemplating suicide in this passage. I want us to discuss the topic of suicide and wherever else that discussion takes us. So, we may be talking about mental health, depression, and a lot of other difficult stuff. Like we talked about at the beginning of this semester, we are a *community of inquiry*. That means we all need to be sensitive to the feelings of everyone here. What that means, first off, is that I want to make sure everyone is comfortable having this discussion. So, everyone put your heads down.” The students did, “and raise your hand if you’re not comfortable with talking about this subject more in-depth.” No student raised their hand.

“Okay, everyone is okay with starting this discussion. So, let’s start. Just remember to be respectful of each other. If you disagree with your classmate, do so respectfully. We all may have different perspectives and that’s okay. We learn and grow by sharing and exploring everyone’s different perspectives. Now then, does anyone want to start us with a philosophical question about what we read? If you don’t have any yourself, there are some on the handout I’ve passed out. If one of those is particularly interesting to you, raise your hand and we can start with it. Once we pick a question to start with, we’ll take a couple of minutes to write down some thoughts or reasons we have for our answers to the question. Then, we will get into a discussion. After we get started with that, it’s all going to be on you guys. I’m going to jump in only if I see us getting too far off topic, or if the way someone is speaking does not match the spirit of *collaborative philosophical inquiry*, or if I have something to add that could help your discussion. There’s no need to raise your hands after we start. Just be careful not to interrupt one

another. Remember: that means you listen, you build off of the ideas of your peers, and you make *arguments*. Don't just state your opinion. Give us your *reasons*. And, if you just have a feeling, but you're not sure why, that's okay. Just say so and we can try to work together to figure out if there are some good reasons behind that feeling. Alright, who wants to start? Who has a philosophical question about what we read?"

The class was quiet for a little while while students composed their thoughts. Eventually, a few students raised their hands. The teacher called on one student who hadn't spoken yet in class:

"Okay, this may be too simple but, uh... what should Hamlet do? Like, I dunno. I just think it's... well he's in a bad place. And, a bad time too. Like obviously people shouldn't hurt themselves. Everyone knows you should talk to a counselor because they can help with depression. But, I mean Hamlet is living in Denmark in the Middle Ages. I'm pretty sure there weren't any counselors back then. I don't think it's good to kill yourself, but in Hamlet's situation I kinda get it. Or, at least.. Well, I wouldn't blame him...."

"Great question to start us off, Sally! Now, before anyone else answers, let's take a little while to think carefully about the question and gather our thoughts," said the teacher, "Get out a piece of paper, or just write in the margins of the handout I gave you—what do you think? Why do you think what you think? Write down some reasons. I'm going to give you all two minutes to gather your thoughts and write them down." The two minutes passed and the teacher spoke again, "Alright, now who wants to share their thoughts first?" One student, Jameela, began:

“Okay, Sally, I get what you’re saying. But, like there’s always a way out. People who have depression—my older sister has it—they always think it’s their only option. But, it never is.”

And, another student added:

“Yeah, like Hamlet is a prince, right? So, he probably has the money to run away from his whole situation if he wanted to. And, after that he could try to figure things out for a while.”

Sally replied:

“I agree with both of you, kinda. Like, yeah, it’s true that he *could do that*. And, I know there’s pretty much always a way out but there’s like two problems: one, I mean, his situation is really, really tough and he’s already on the run and, two, I guess, well, I just think it’s up to him. Like that’s a super hard thing to be dealing with—wanting to kill yourself. I’ve never been depressed so I don’t really like *get* it in the same way someone who has been might. I just don’t think anyone else has the right to tell *him* what’s right: it’s up to him to make that decision for himself.” After the student said this, a bunch of students wanted to speak.

The students went back and forth on this point for a while. Then, the teacher stepped in:

“I think you guys are confusing a few different questions. Let’s focus on just one of them that I think we need to answer before we can answer anything else: do you all think that the morality of suicide is relative to the person thinking about doing it? That is, can any of us say for someone else that they should or should not commit suicide?”

The hand of the original question-asker shot up and the teacher called on her, asking “Alright Sally, what do you think?”

“Like I said, we can’t say for anyone else whether it’s okay for them to commit suicide! That’s such a hard personal choice. Like I just don’t think it’s okay to force people to live in the same way you can’t force someone to die. I mean, you can’t kill people, so you can’t keep them alive against their wishes either. If anyone wants to kill themselves, I think they should be allowed to.”

Jameela quickly replied:

“I just think that’s just deeply cruel. Like, you’re abandoning them! When my sister was thinking about killing herself, her friends telling her that she shouldn’t and reminding her of why she should keep going are what made the difference for her. What if, when she told them she was thinking about killing herself, they just said ‘okay, it’s up to you’? That would be horrible!”

Sally raised her hand quickly after this, but the teacher spoke first:

“Hey guys, let’s be careful here. I appreciate you all discussing this topic, and it’s totally okay to have a lot of feelings about it. It’s a really hard topic. Let’s just all try to be more respectful. Sally, clearly what you said upset Jameela. You clearly have a strong opinion and that’s okay. But, try to focus more on the reasons. If you don’t state your reasons clearly, then someone like Jameela is going to be upset because they may not understand where you’re coming from. On the flip-side, Jameela, recall what we learned about *the principle of charity* at the beginning of the semester. I think we all know that Sally is not a ‘cruel’ person. Even if she wasn’t clear about them, she has reasons for her belief and she holds it sincerely. Try to be charitable, and think of why she might believe what she believes, or, if you’re not sure why she would think that way, ask her. How about we start with that? Sally, would you clarify why you

said what you said? What are your *reasons*? After that, Jameela, you can respond, and then we'll move on to some other hands."<sup>2</sup>

Sally began:

"I'm sorry Jameela, I didn't mean it that way. I agree that we should still talk to people who are depressed, and remind them that we care. It's more like, we can only do so much of that. Like, in Hamlet's case, he could talk to a bunch of people about it, and maybe he should do that and try his best to get through his depression. But, if he decides, ultimately, that he doesn't want to live anymore, I just don't think anyone should be able to *force* him to go against what he decides, especially given the time period. Like, I think it's pretty different today since there are professionals you can talk to and medicines you can take. Basically, I just... I just think that someone like Hamlet, like, in that time and place, after he exhausts all his options, and after everyone tries their best to help him, then he should be able to make the decision for himself and no one should be allowed to stop him. It's up to him because it's wrong to make him go on living when he's suffering a lot and can't find any way to get out of it."

"Okay," Jameela responded, "I think I get what you're saying. I'm sorry I lashed out at you. It's just... It's really hard to hear you say what you said before given what I've seen with my sister. I could agree with what you said. Like, for Hamlet, in his place and time. But, I still don't agree with what you said in the end. It's not all about just Hamlet. Or, about the individual. I would totally understand if someone like Hamlet killed themselves after trying their best to

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<sup>2</sup> I am imagining the teacher stepping in here, not as an authoritarian, but as a fellow community member reminding students of ground rules they themselves would have set regarding discussion at the beginning of the semester. For brevity, I have not included a description of that class session, but those rules are necessary. Of course, a teacher could let the students try to resolve the conflict themselves. The proper teacher reaction to conflict in a class discussion like this is highly contextual. For the purposes of this thesis, I have used this intervention to keep the focus on the philosophical discussion and to point the reader to philosophical values, of charity and a focus on reasons. But, a real classroom need not be operated in the same way.

escape depression, but it would still be really sad. And, that's true for pretty much anyone who ends their life. Whenever someone kills themselves, that doesn't just affect them. It affects their family members, their friends—pretty much everyone who knows them—so I just think because of all that, while it's *understandable* when people kill themselves sometimes, it just seems to me like it's almost never the right choice. Maybe Hamlet is an exception. I don't know. I still disagree though that it's *always* and *only* up to the individual. We should weigh their concerns a lot but we have to consider how it impacts other people too.”

Some other students added on to both sides of this argument and offered some further perspectives: that it may be up to the individual, but they have to consider how their suicide might impact other people; that they should be *allowed* to kill themselves, i.e. that neither the government nor their peers should stop them, but that doesn't make it always right; that it's not just the time period, but also which countries people live in, and what resources they have access to that affects what we should think of their decision; etc. After a while of this, the teacher spoke at length again:

“I'm really impressed by the quality of your discussion so far. You guys are making a ton of great arguments. I really feel like we're getting somewhere—that's that *inquiry* we've talked about, yeah?” Some students nodded their heads. “I'm going to summarize one of the issues you all have been talking about and then I'm going to add something to the mix that might give you all a totally different perspective than anything that has been mentioned so far.

“Alright so first, about your discussion so far: I said you guys were confusing two different questions and I pointed you toward answering just one of them, you know, about whether anyone can decide for Hamlet about whether it's right for him to kill himself. In

philosophical terms, this is a question of whether there's an objective 'right answer' about whether or not Hamlet should kill himself. The other question you were trying to answer was, given that there is a right answer, what the right answer is. To use some philosophical terminology, we might wonder, first, whether we ought to accept *moral relativism* about the question of suicide. That is, we might think that the morality of suicide in a particular case is relative to person considering doing it to themselves. And then, second, once we have an answer to that question, there's two ways we can go. If we decide that the morality of suicide is relative to the individual contemplating it, then the discussion stops there, because it's up to Hamlet and we can't say if he's right or wrong unless he tells us, and from the text it's clear he isn't sure. If we decide that the morality of suicide isn't relative, and we can say whether it's right or wrong objectively, then that's a further question. Got it?"

The students nodded and looked agreeable.

"Great! Now, let's add something new to the mix. Flip your handout over. You'll see here that I've put some quotes about suicide from some people with Latin-looking names. These are quotes from the *Stoics*. The Stoics were a school of people in Ancient Greece and Rome who believed that the most important thing in life, the best way to achieve happiness, was through virtue. Now, they weren't a literal school, though they did have some of those. They were just a bunch of people with similar ideas who read some of the same foundational texts. Some of you might know that, in fairly recent history, suicide was a crime. The Catholic Church views it as a sin and many people did too. Many still do. But, the Stoics actually thought that the act of suicide could be part of a virtuous life. How is that? If you look at some of these quotes and historical accounts, you'll see the binding factor: people the Stoics praised for committing

suicide did so for what they took to be noble reasons. For example, in Rome, if you were executed by the government, your property would all be taken by the government, and your family wouldn't inherit any of it. But, if you committed suicide, your family would get to keep the inheritance. In another famous case, the statesman Cato ended his life to avoid participating in what he viewed as the tyranny of Julius Caesar. Living would have meant living viciously, rather than virtuously, and so he did what he and his fellows thought was the right thing, and ended his life. Let's read some of these quotes aloud and then you all can discuss your thoughts about the Stoics' reasoning. I think the Stoic's perspective is quite different from the typical perspective we take on suicide today. While people usually think suicide is cowardly, or tragic today, at least from the perspective of the Stoics, it could be courageous and virtuous. Alright, now who wants to read the first quote?"<sup>3</sup>

The students read the quotes, and discussed them. Discussion flowed smoothly as the students tried to wrap their heads around the perspective of the Stoics. Most students didn't really buy the Stoic perspective, but many were convinced that there were at least some rare cases where the Stoic perspective might be right. The students naturally shifted toward discussing the second of the two questions the teacher had separated: though there were some disagreements, the students were gradually untangling the issue and discovering for themselves when they believed that suicide was morally permissible, obligatory, and supererogatory, terms which the teacher introduced so that the students could more readily and precisely state what they meant when they said that suicide was "okay" or "wrong" or "right" or "understandable,"

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<sup>3</sup> The point of bringing in the Stoics here is to add new perspectives to the mix for students to engage with and assess. However, another teacher might use the Stoics as an opportunity to have students practice textual analysis. They might be encouraged to read the quotes first, without context, and interpret their meaning and its relevance to their discussion. Especially in a longer class period, this may be a good idea. For brevity of description, I have simply had the teacher introduce the ideas of the Stoics instead of having students engage in interpretation.

etc. In other words, the teacher gave them the terminology to discuss concepts that they were already talking about, without having specific words to refer to those concepts. As the discussion went on, and the class had only 10 minutes remaining, the teacher asked the students to spend the remaining time writing out their positions on a class forum online. Their homework would be to finish writing their position, to respond to the argument of at least one other student with whom they disagreed, and to consider how Hamlet would respond to what they were arguing. The teacher told them that their responses would not be assessed based on their position, but on the clarity with which they expressed their position, as well as on how thoroughly they explained their reasons for their position. Their response to their classmates would be assessed by looking at how well they practiced charity toward the target of their response, how well they identified the point of disagreement they had with their classmate, and how thoroughly they explained why they disagreed.<sup>4</sup>

Overall, the 45 minute class was divided into about 10 minutes of analyzing the text, i.e. what it meant. The next 25 minutes were spent on philosophical discussion of the issues in the text. Finally, the last 10 minutes were spent on independent writing. In this particular class, the students had these sorts of philosophical discussions twice a week. In classes with longer periods, philosophical discussion might be held more frequently. This class cordoned off parts of two class periods a week for philosophical discussion so that the class retained plenty of time for

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<sup>4</sup> The goal of this top-down approach is to promote values in argument that are vital for characteristically *philosophical* discourse. For an example of how these values are respected in philosophy even today, one can look to the American Philosophical Association's own statement on what proper teaching of philosophy consists of: "Statement on the Teaching of Philosophy," American Philosophical Association (American Philosophical Association, 1995), <https://www.apaonline.org/page/teaching>. I take it that the benefits of philosophy education rely on philosophical values being inculcated in students. But, as this is an English class, the teacher might encourage students to come up with their own creative responses to their discussion that are less heavy on clear philosophical reasoning, but more engaging for them to do. After all, a class like this cannot be successful without students being invested.

basic textual and more comprehensive literary analysis on the other days of the week. Usually, the days with philosophical discussion would be days where a character in a text they were reading was thinking about a difficult decision, or made some difficult or controversial decision.

*Analyzing the Painted Picture of High School Philosophy Education*

The last few pages are what I take to be an idealistic, though not unrealistic picture of what philosophy education could look like in a high school classroom. Over the course of the next few sections, I will point out different parts of this imagined class session and I will explain why I described them as happening the way they did. First, we will look at the idea of collaborative philosophical inquiry (CPI), a phrase that our imagined teacher mentioned. We will look at how CPI relates to philosophy in general and how it compares to other kinds of philosophy education. Along the way, I will explain what a community of inquiry is, and its central importance to CPI. I will also point to particularly important parts of the imagined class session and I will relate them to the measurable, studied benefits of CPI. Having gotten a firm grasp on what CPI is, and on what this picture I have painted is meant to illustrate, I will then explain how my picture falls short. That is, I will explain why it might be considered overly idealistic. Moreover, I will consider how various practical impediments teachers and classrooms are subject to might prevent the typical attempt at integrating philosophy into high school classrooms from looking like the class session I have imagined. I should note that while this class session is imagined, it is based on the dynamics of philosophical discussions I have moderated among real high schoolers through my work at the Prindle Institute for Ethics. Thus, I believe that by examining it, we can get a good grasp of what CPI is, where it is beneficial, and why it may be difficult to realize in practice.

## **Collaborative Philosophical Inquiry (CPI)**

As the teacher in this imagined narrative mentioned, what the students were doing in that narrative was collaborative philosophical inquiry (CPI). While we saw the spirit of CPI in the classroom already, let's look more closely at how it is defined by its practitioners. We will consider the significance of each of the three components of the phrase "collaborative philosophical inquiry."

First, CPI is collaborative in the sense that it takes place in a "community of inquiry." This means that students are not learning and discussing philosophy as strangers to one another, as might happen in a large lecture course in philosophy at a university. Students participating in CPI get to know one another, learn to care about one another, and so engage in philosophical discussion as a *community*. The community element of CPI is vital: when students form a community, they learn to trust one another, and so can have more productive discussions. When someone says something you disagree with, you are likely to respond to it differently if it is coming from someone you know and trust as compared to coming from a stranger. The students in the narrative were still fairly early on in the process of developing this sense of community. As such, there was some conflict because of which the teacher stepped in, to remind the students of the fact of their collaboration as a community. We can look at university philosophy courses to see the contrast. In an introductory philosophy course, students will hear arguments from their professor and their peers, but the arguments may feel empty, an exercise done merely for class participation points. That is not to say students are not interested in the subject—they often are—but even if they are, they are interested *as* individuals. The philosophical questions that come up in class are questions the answers to which each student seeks for themselves. The

questions will not be regarded as ones the students *as a community* must answer, i.e. because they are relevant to all the students individually, or because they are questions that face the community that students share in. I think this is why teachers often struggle to get students to talk in class about even questions that seem relevant to their students. When students don't feel like they are part of a learning community, there is no reason to speak up: they can respond to the questions in their heads, since they are only relevant to themselves as individuals. The arguments they hear in class are rigorous and may be personally meaningful, but don't seem worth talking about with their classmates. Meanwhile, outside of class, students may argue about ethics or politics, but rarely in a rigorous way. They engage with their friends since they see their friends as part of their community. But, these conversations are rarely rigorous, like those they hear in class. Developing a community of philosophical inquiry combines the benefits of these two modes of conversation without either of their drawbacks. Students who recognize each other as part of a single community will see value in speaking up, since they will see the importance of understanding and persuading their fellow classmates and community members. This is the value of a community of inquiry.

CPI is philosophical just because the topics discussed are philosophical. They have to do with ethics, epistemology, metaphysics, or some other part of philosophy. In the narrative, for example, students discussed the ethics of suicide. But, they could have just as easily, using the same source material, discussed whether there is a soul that lives on after death (metaphysics) or whether Hamlet is right that we cannot know what comes after death (epistemology). Feasibly, you could conduct collaborative inquiry in all sorts of subjects. If collaborative inquiry is

particularly linked to philosophy over any other discipline, it is likely because of its history, i.e. that history of collaborative inquiry going back to Socrates.

Finally, CPI is inquiry in that students do not merely share their opinions with one another. As we saw in the classroom I imagined, students build upon each other's view, critiquing each other, and asking questions so that they progress in their understanding, rather than merely displaying their current level of understanding.<sup>5</sup> Many discussions people have, inside and outside of the classroom are deficient in this regard. They involve simply stating opinions back and forth, with the occasional reason thrown in. Inquiry goes further than this, and it makes all the difference. With inquiry, students are not defending themselves, but their arguments, and must look carefully at their reasons and the reasons of those they are talking with to come to a better understanding of the topic of discussion. Shifting to an inquiry-based model of discussion, rather than mere opinion-sharing, can have unintended consequences. Since students are substantively responding to one another, conflict can develop, as we saw in the narrative. However, since this inquiry is conducted within a *community* of inquiry, students are likely to trust one another more, and so to be more respectful and understanding while practicing inquiry. In this way, we can see how the elements of collaborative philosophical inquiry work together. Inquiry that is not collaborative is impeded, and so is collaborative discussion not dedicated to inquiry.

But, more than all this, proper CPI is practical. Topics of inquiry must be philosophical, but also relevant to students so their inquiry is meaningful.<sup>6</sup> Like I mentioned before, sometimes

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<sup>5</sup> K. J. Topping and S. Trickey, "Collaborative Philosophical Enquiry for School Children: Cognitive Effects at 10-12 Years," *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 77, no. 2 (2007): pp. 271-288, <https://doi.org/10.1348/000709906x105328>, 274-276.

<sup>6</sup> Cristina Cammarano, "On Philosophizing as Education," *Precollege Philosophy and Public Practice* 3 (2021): pp. 5-20, <https://doi.org/10.5840/p420214716>, 10-12.

the questions of philosophers and of young people today overlap. Usually, this occurs with those timeless questions of why the world is the way it is and how it ought to be. But, students are likely to feel like their philosophy education is irrelevant if the philosophy they are learning is not applied to contemporary issues. Although some forms of philosophy<sup>7</sup> may frequently be obscure and detached from the here and now, pursuing, as they often do, eternal truths, philosophy as we understand it here cannot be. When students are learning in a community of collaborative philosophical inquiry, they are working to answer the questions *they* and their fellow community-members have, not the ones that philosophers of history thought were important (though these categories will almost certainly overlap). In this way, CPI is, at its root, practical. There cannot be impractical CPI.<sup>8</sup> This is not to say that students must exclusively talk about ethics and political philosophy. In the right sort of class, you might have a productive CPI discussion about whether mathematics is discovered or invented, about what constitutes knowledge, or whether we have free will, among any other number of epistemological or metaphysical questions. I am only saying that the questions that will most commonly be interesting to students will be ones with some ethical or political character (and many epistemological and metaphysical questions have ethical implications!). But, as long as the topic is relevant or interesting to students, I think it is in a sense practical. Not only could this practicality encourage students to pay attention and participate in class, but it seems likely they will also retain more of what they learn since the skills they learn are practiced on subjects they care about and people generally remember what interests them more than what doesn't (e.g. song lyrics vs. math theorems). As an example of making the discussion of Hamlet and Stoicism even

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<sup>7</sup> Such as disciplinary philosophy, as we shall see later.

<sup>8</sup> That is, if we are optimistic. As we shall see in examining objections to philosophy education, critical theorists are more pessimistic about this.

more contemporary and interesting to students, high school English and psychology teacher Shawn Adler has created a lesson plan for connecting those two topics to Batman.<sup>9</sup> Plus, there are a variety of activities that can be done to deepen the skills developed through CPI, activities which have helpfully been cataloged by Danish researchers.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, for this project, CPI must be understood at the high school level in particular. College students may read the 18th century German philosopher Immanuel Kant and properly understand how to apply him to their own lives, thus practicing CPI. Likewise, primary school students can read or be read story books and think about and discuss basic philosophical questions while being heavily guided by teachers. CPI at the high school level differs from both of these in being intermediate. Students can be more independent, and can engage with more abstract questions than primary school students, but will practice CPI through deep analysis of primary philosophical texts less frequently than undergraduates. Philosophical texts, on this model, will be supplementary to, rather than the focus of, high school students' CPI-based discussions. As we saw in the narrative, philosophical texts can open students' minds to unfamiliar viewpoints. They should be used for that purpose rather than as a way of limiting discussion to a historical philosopher's or group of philosophers' view of a philosophical problem.

### **How Does CPI Fit into the Field of Philosophy?**

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<sup>9</sup> Shawn Adler, "Teachers Assemble: Sample Lesson Plan for Philosophy in High School English," Blog of the APA (The American Philosophical Association, May 11, 2021), <https://blog.apaonline.org/2020/01/15/teachers-assemble-sample-lesson-plan-for-philosophy-in-high-school-english/>.

<sup>10</sup> Natascha Kienstra, Machiel Karskens, and Jeroen Imants, "Three Approaches to Doing Philosophy: A Proposal for Grouping Philosophical Exercises in Classroom Teaching," *Metaphilosophy* 45, no. 2 (April 2014): pp. 288-318, <https://doi.org/10.1111/meta.12085>, 300.

The benefits of collaborative inquiry seem unambiguous. But, what is the unique importance of that inquiry being philosophical too? From my discussions with teachers,<sup>11</sup> high school students, and peers, I have found that people understand philosophy in a variety of ways. These different definitions are not *wrong*. The word “philosophy” has many valid meanings. But, let’s go through some of the most common understandings that do *not* speak to the way in which CPI is philosophical. If you have any doubts about the program of CPI based on understanding philosophy in one of these ways, this section may provide some clarity.

#### *Philosophy as a Guiding Opinion*

The most common understanding of philosophy is probably as it is used colloquially. People say things like, “It’s my philosophy that anyone can make it if they make an effort.” Here, “philosophy” means something like “strong opinion” or “well-thought out opinion,” particularly one that is guiding in some way. I do not believe “philosophy” in this sense can or should be taught: each person must determine their own “philosophy” in this sense. Students of CPI may develop a new personal philosophy like this. But, as we discussed, the philosophical nature of CPI does not mean that it just involves the sharing of deeply held opinions, nor does it mean that teachers will be trying to impose guiding opinions on students.

#### *Philosophy as an Academic Discipline*

Another common understanding of philosophy is of philosophy as the thing philosophers do. Philosophers are distant, rather strange creatures residing up in the ivory tower. They pass papers back and forth on such arcane subjects as “Bayesian epistemology” and “Hegemony in the Superstructure.” Philosophy, in this sense, is academia in its purest form. This is philosophy

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<sup>11</sup> Traci Kyle (public high school English teacher) in discussion with the author, November 2021; Aaron Warner (public high school science teacher) in discussion with the author, February 2022.

as “disciplinary philosophy.”<sup>12</sup> Disciplinary philosophy is characterized by its language, its participants, and its subjects. Its language is full of specialized jargon. Its participants are all academic philosophers. Its subjects are those of interest to said academic philosophers, as guided by a historical path and certain shifts in the culture of academic philosophy. For example, philosophy’s focus on metaphysics (the study of what exists fundamentally) has varied significantly over time. In the late 19th century, metaphysics was an incredibly popular topic for academic philosophers. By the early to mid-twentieth century, people were rejecting the idea of metaphysics completely, regarding metaphysical problems as mere confusions of language that could be *dissolved* rather than *resolved*. Then, metaphysics came back into fashion toward the end of the twentieth century. This kind of philosophy *can* be taught, but certainly only to graduate students who have spent years understanding the jargon and context for the discussion. And, once they learn it, they become themselves philosophers. This kind of philosophy is not suitable for high schoolers and is certainly not the kind of philosophy involved in CPI. High schoolers, and non-experts in general, (a) do not understand the complicated jargon of disciplinary philosophy, (b) are by position in society excluded from being participants in it,<sup>13</sup> and (c) are not privy to the historical and cultural trends in academic philosophy. The philosophical questions of interest to non-experts, such as high schoolers, are either timeless (“why is there anything at all?” “will we live on after death?”) or utterly contemporary (“how do I know what to believe on the internet?” “how should I work to achieve x political goal?”). Philosophy done and taught in high schools must, then, be mostly free of jargon, doable by

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<sup>12</sup> Adam Briggie, “Dialogue and next Generation Philosophy,” *Precollege Philosophy and Public Practice* 1 (2019): pp. 75-88, <https://doi.org/10.5840/p420181256>.

<sup>13</sup> That is, high schoolers don’t work in universities being paid to research and teach and interact with academic philosophers.

non-experts, and free from the chains of history and the particular culture of contemporary academic philosophy. Some of the opposition to teaching philosophy in high schools may come from thinking that philosophy cannot be understood in this way, that it is necessarily opaque and scholastic, but as we will see, it isn't.<sup>14</sup> In fact, my imagined discussion of philosophy in *Hamlet* shows how philosophy can be made approachable.

Now, you might wonder why I am setting up this kind of philosophy in opposition to CPI when, in the narrative I began this paper with, the students engaged with the writing of philosophers, i.e. the Stoics. As philosopher Adam Briggie<sup>15</sup> gets into, philosophy has not always been a distinct discipline, defined by departments in universities wherein philosophers mainly or exclusively talk to one another about philosophy. Philosophy has followed a trend of increased specialization and departmentalization over the last 200 years that began with the division of “natural philosophy” into the fields of physics, chemistry, biology, psychology, zoology, anthropology, etc. which all became sharply defined from one another. Thus, more ancient philosophy sources are frequently more understandable by non-philosophers. Plato's dialogues, for example, are known for being paradigms of literature as well as philosophy. Even modern philosophy can sometimes be suitable for the classroom. However, it can never *define* the practice of CPI, which must be open-ended and interdisciplinary in a way modern disciplinary philosophy is not. The problem is not with using the texts produced through disciplinary philosophy, but with doing philosophy in the classroom the way disciplinary philosophy is done.

### *Philosophy as a College Class*

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<sup>14</sup> As I will get into much later, this sort of thought is part of what drives the Utility Objection, one of the theoretical objections to teaching philosophy in high schools that I consider toward the end of the paper.

<sup>15</sup> Adam Briggie, “Dialogue and Next Generation Philosophy,” 79-81.

Yet another idea of “philosophy” comes from those who have taken a college philosophy course or who know someone who has. In this sense, philosophy is a subject of a college class. Specifically, “philosophy” is the subject when you go listen to a philosopher lecture on past philosophers or on particular philosophical topics. “Philosophy” is the ideas of Plato, Descartes, Kant, etc. It is arguments for and against the existence of God, of free will, of morality, etc. There is a great deal of value to this kind of “philosophy,” and it could be instituted in public high schools to a limited extent. A few schools in the United States give students the option to follow the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum, which includes a “Theory of Knowledge” class that discusses a number of philosophical topics.<sup>16</sup> But, this kind of philosophy still has some difficulties: first, most schools have neither the time nor the resources to develop separate philosophy classes; second, many high school students struggle with literacy, with two-thirds graduating from high school while reading below grade level.<sup>17</sup> It is difficult to ask such students to read and analyze philosophical texts, which are often quite difficult. Like the texts in math and science classes, philosophy texts are full of jargon. And, just like the texts read in English classes, philosophy texts span history, which results in texts being written in unfamiliar styles and with archaic vocabulary. In addition, perhaps unlike many high school English classes, many of the texts are read in translation, increasing even more the distance between author and reader as said authors come from vastly different cultures spread across time and space. Finally, reading philosophy stretches the mind in a way no other subject does because of how often philosophy asks us to think at the edge of our experience, to push at the

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<sup>16</sup> “So You Want to Teach Pre-College Philosophy,” American Philosophical Association (The American Philosophical Association), accessed September 26, 2021, <https://www.apaonline.org/page/precollege>.

<sup>17</sup> Amy Rea, “How Serious Is America's Literacy Problem?,” *Library Journal* (MSI, April 29, 2020), <https://www.libraryjournal.com/story/How-Serious-Is-Americas-Literacy-Problem>.

fundamentals. Questions of ethics will come up in literature and philosophy, but questions like “what is time?” and “how do we know anything?” arise only in the latter. These questions are valuable, of course, but they involve concepts that are very difficult to pin down and discussions of them frequently require extraordinarily precise reasoning and definitions to be valuable. This is all to say that we should not envision CPI as involving difficult philosophical texts, or extremely precise, involved reasoning in the same way that college philosophy courses require. CPI should be down at the level of high schoolers and involve questions that are more relevant to them. After all, a high school class that involves philosophy is meant to be applicable to everyone while college philosophy courses are meant as an introduction to philosophy as a disciplinary subject.

Thus, the content of philosophy as a college class is problematic for our purposes in the same way disciplinary philosophy is. But, the format of college philosophy is unsuitable for CPI too. Statistically, if you have taken a philosophy class, it has probably been at a large public university. If so, most of your class time is spent listening to lectures. As the narrative I gave shows, CPI can be nothing like this. With CPI students are encouraged to engage with texts and ideas, as well as with their peers. In a large lecture class, students need only engage with the texts and professor as much as they need to get the grade they want in that course.

### *Philosophy as a Mode of Conversation*

The sense of “philosophy” which I think is most useful for the present project and most representative of the narrative that started this paper is philosophy in the sense of what Socrates did with his interlocutors. Or, in some more familiar contexts, what philosophy students do among themselves in some seminars, or what students sometimes do when they talk with one

another about politics and hot topics in culture and society. In this sense, philosophy is a kind of conversation, one in which people are careful with what they say and are looking to learn something about important subjects. Philosophy is respectful, practical, and something you do with people you know and whose opinions you value. We can see now how the philosophy of CPI can be beneficial in a way that the other forms of philosophy we have discussed are not.

Philosophy as a mode of conversation is accessible, malleable, and yet nonetheless rigorous. Philosophy as mere statement of opinion (e.g. “my philosophy”) is malleable, but lacks rigor. Philosophy as disciplinary philosophy is rigorous, but inaccessible. And, philosophy as a university class subject is fairly accessible, but painfully rigid. Philosophy as a mode of conversation takes all the strengths of these forms of philosophy without their weaknesses. Anyone can state their opinion on some philosophical question when those questions are the kind that come up naturally in dialogue, and are not artificially imposed by the history of philosophy or the topics of interest in the contemporary discipline of philosophy. Thus, philosophy as a mode of conversation is accessible. Furthermore, unlike philosophy as a university course subject, where lecture is central and the syllabus is written, philosophy as a mode of conversation is highly malleable. Conversation naturally flows according to what is interesting to the participants. In a philosophical conversation, the same is true. Thus, though the conversation may start in one place, any number of subjects can arise and be discussed. Finally, and most critically, philosophy of this sort can be rigorous. In fact, learning how to make one’s ordinary conversations philosophical in large part is learning how to make one’s conversations more rigorous.

It is important that our understanding of philosophy be one that is accessible, malleable, and rigorous because, ultimately, this is a kind of philosophy that should be able to find its home in high schools. That means that it should be accessible to all, just as high school is. It should be malleable so that it can fit into the disparate curricula that exist across school districts in the United States since they are determined at the state or local level. Finally, it must be rigorous because, if it were not, it would have no value at all. Philosophy as a mode of conversation without rigor is just the passing of opinions back and forth. When people think critically about what they are saying and what they are hearing from others, they are truly doing something valuable.

From all this, we can see that the philosophy that is part of CPI is uniquely valuable compared to other kinds of philosophy. But, CPI is not only a particularly fruitful form of philosophy. After all, it is a method of philosophical education. Thus, it is worthwhile to compare CPI to other forms of philosophy education. You may believe that philosophy would be valuable to teach in high schools, but as we will see, there are many ways philosophy can be and *is* taught to students.

### **How Does CPI Compare to Other Forms of Philosophy Education?**

Philosophy education can be understood in about as many ways as philosophy itself. Philosophers Stephan Millett and Alan Tapper categorize all modes of philosophical education as falling under five categories: (1) dogmatic/ideological, (2) historical/patrimonial, (3) problem-solving, (4) democratic/discussionary, and (5) decision-making/ethical.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Stephan Millett and Alan Tapper, "Benefits of Collaborative Philosophical Inquiry in Schools," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 44, no. 5 (July 2012): pp. 546-567, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-5812.2010.00727.x>, 3-4.

The dogmatic/ideological mode of philosophical conversation exists where philosophy is taught as a body of knowledge: for example, in Vietnam, public high school students are required to learn the philosophy of Marxism-Leninism to graduate. Likewise, in Catholic schools, students learn the philosophy that has accreted onto the dogma of the Catholic Church.

The historical/patrimonial mode exists where philosophy is taught as a history of ideas, particularly with people (usually of a particular culture) growing to better understand themselves. For example, philosophy taught as the history of philosophy, beginning with Greek mythology, moving into the pre-Socratics, then to Ancient Athens, through the ancient and medieval periods, to Descartes and then the Enlightenment, the Scientific Revolution, and the modern era. This is often the primary mode of university philosophy courses as we saw in the previous section.

The problem-solving mode exists when students are taught to philosophize, that is, in the sense of thinking carefully about the answers to rigorous philosophical questions and pursuing knowledge. We might think of this paradigm as roughly mapping to the study of disciplinary philosophy. Students who go on to graduate school are taught the history of philosophy and the main topics of discussion in the field, but they are primarily trained in analyzing philosophical problems so they can contribute to the field themselves, beginning with their PhD and continuing for the remainder of their career in academia.

The democratic/discussionary paradigm exists where philosophy is taught as a means to develop an active, thinking citizenry capable of competently participating in democracy. The aim of this paradigm differs from those discussed so far, but its method is perhaps more unique. While the dogmatic and historical paradigms involve learning the truth from others, and the problem-solving paradigm involves determining the truth for yourself, the democratic paradigm

encourages people to seek the truth together. Necessarily, then, it is a more collaborative means of philosophy education.

Finally, there is the decision-making/ethical mode. This mode of philosophy education involves learning philosophy in a practical way. In other words, it is philosophy directed at learning to act ethically. We can distinguish it from the democratic paradigm through this ethical focus. With the democratic paradigm, the focus is more epistemological: the goal is for philosophy students to become better at finding, assessing, and integrating information so they can make good voting decisions. With the decision-making paradigm, students are encouraged to use philosophy as a means of making life-choices, relevant to the democratic process or otherwise.

Some of these categories are similar to the way modes of education in general are categorized.<sup>19</sup> The dogmatic/ideological framework corresponds to the Marxist view of education as a means of reproducing the dominant class's values. Meanwhile the democratic/discussionary paradigm is similar to the liberal educationalist view, that the purpose of education is to "promote individual development whilst also developing respect for others."<sup>20</sup>

Looking back at the categories of philosophy education, we can see that CPI fits into the democratic/discussionary and decision-making/ethical categories of philosophical education with elements of the historical/patrimonial and problem-solving categories. By requiring a community of inquiry, CPI assumes the value of the democratic/discussionary approach. It recognizes that the answers to the most important questions in philosophy cannot be placed in a textbook, since they remain up for debate. Students cannot simply be forced to memorize them, since we don't

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<sup>19</sup> Steve G. Bartlett and Diana Burton, "Introduction," in *Education Studies: Essential Issues* (London: SAGE, 2003), 1-3.

<sup>20</sup> Steve G. Bartlett and Diana Burton, "Introduction," 2.

know for sure what they are. As may occur in the dogmatic/ideological approach, they may be forced to memorize *one answer* to these questions, but it is implausible that these are likely to be the right ones. Meanwhile, by focusing on the contemporary, practical concerns and interests of the particular community members who are doing philosophy together, CPI demonstrates the decision-making/ethical approach of philosophical education. The conversations students have while practicing CPI are not aimed solely at eternal truths, but at practical questions of action: how should we live and act right now? What do we need to figure out?

I hope by now to have persuaded you that CPI is the best way of integrating philosophy into American high schools. The kind of philosophy it teaches is the most valuable to high schoolers and the way it is taught is superior to the other forms of philosophy education. But, in this discussion I have assumed that philosophy is valuable in general. In this next section, I will back up the claims I have been making about the value of philosophy education. There, we will look at the evidence that supports CPI as found in meta-analyses and detailed studies of schools that tried out CPI. Then, I will make some arguments for the harder to study potential benefits of CPI—those that have to do with social practices and political discourse.

### **What are the Benefits of Philosophy Education?**

Philosophy education, in the form of CPI, could provide significant benefits for American students. Meta-analyses, surveying the best available evidence, have found that there are moderate positive effects of CPI in aiding student reading ability, reasoning, cognitive ability, self-esteem, and behavior.<sup>21</sup> When students are practicing CPI, they are developing important thinking skills and practicing useful conversational methods. In other words, they are developing

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<sup>21</sup> S. Trickey and K. J. Topping, "Philosophy for Children?: a Systematic Review," *Research Papers in Education* 19, no. 3 (September 2004): pp. 365-380, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267152042000248016>, 371-375.

the skills to have productive discussions about important topics, in particular discussions that may have ethical or political consequences.

### *Cognitive Benefits of Philosophy Education*

After finding a variety of benefits to philosophy education in the meta-analysis just mentioned, researchers Trickey and Topping set up their own study to test the benefits of CPI in a more rigorous way than previous studies had done.<sup>22</sup> They compared several hundred students ages ten to twelve in about ten schools who received 16 months of regular CPI instruction to about the same number of students who were instructed as usual. They conducted tests of cognitive ability before and after the intervention. They found that students in the group who received CPI instruction had significantly improved cognitive ability as compared to the students who continued on with their regular instruction. This finding is highly significant because it shows the very unintuitive result that basic cognitive ability can be altered through education. Cognitive ability is frequently thought of as static, or at least something that changes very gradually, but these researchers found that students' foundational abilities to reason and problem solve changed in less than 2 years because of just a few hours a week of CPI instruction. Male and female students experienced much the same benefits. The students improved in verbal and quantitative reasoning (though less in the latter). Even more astounding, these cognitive gains were retained 2 years after students stopped receiving CPI instruction.<sup>23</sup> The data is solid, but why is CPI so effective?

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<sup>22</sup> K. J. Topping and S. Trickey, "Collaborative Philosophical Enquiry for School Children: Cognitive Effects at 10-12 Years," *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 77, no. 2 (2007): pp. 271-288, <https://doi.org/10.1348/000709906x105328>.

<sup>23</sup> K. J. Topping and S. Trickey, "Collaborative Philosophical Inquiry for Schoolchildren: Cognitive Gains at 2-Year Follow-Up," *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 77, no. 4 (December 2007): pp. 787-796, <https://doi.org/10.1348/000709907x193032>.

The structure of CPI explains its benefits. Look at each of its components. It is collaborative, philosophical inquiry. As we discussed earlier on, this means that when practicing CPI students are discussing and attempting to find solutions to practical problems which are relevant to their community, in a rigorous and respectful way. This means that students who practice CPI will get used to going through the process of making arguments, raising objections, and building up the truth in a variety of contexts. Moreover, what contexts they choose to practice CPI in are never going to be limited to what a textbook author could think of when they wrote it, perhaps years prior. Like we saw in the narrative, students develop the ability to think about the question, “Is suicide ever morally permissible?” in three radically different contexts: a sixteenth-century play (*Hamlet*), ancient Greek philosopher’s writings (the Stoics), and their own experiences (students’ reflections on facts about suicide in the modern era).

Compare CPI to an ordinary high school’s teaching of biology or history. It is possible to teach biology or history in such a way that facts are simply relayed to students who are then expected to memorize them and regurgitate them on a future test. There is little student participation and less discussion. After all, the facts are the facts. Now, some biology and history classes in high school classrooms do more than this. The AP courses for these subjects, for example, emphasize analytical skills over rote memorization, though a great deal of the latter is still required, or at least very helpful. In contrast, CPI requires little to no memorization of facts and focuses exclusively on developing broadly applicable skills. It is impossible to teach a CPI class the way the worst forms of biology and history classes are taught. Discussion, student involvement, and the development of critical thinking and conversational skills are foundational to the subject. And, though a student may become proficient in analyzing a biological or

historical system in the corresponding courses, they will frequently learn to do so *only* in that context. The skills are not transferable in the same way that those developed in a CPI classroom are.

In a rapidly changing world where new contexts for analysis and critical thinking arise every day, having these highly transferable skills is vital. For example, the ongoing crisis of misinformation, the presence of social media, and the gig economy all arose in the last two decades. A citizen who practiced CPI as a student is going to be able to think carefully about these new parts of the world, productively discuss them with their friends and family, and wisely decide how they should react. A student who learned just “the facts” will be utterly unprepared since they know only about the past or what was present when they were in school. A student who learned analytical skills as applied to their history or biology courses will be more prepared, since they might make the leap to apply those skills to these present problems. But, neither of them will be anywhere near as prepared as the student of CPI.

Though in a biology class or history class connections to the contemporary may arise (e.g. in a biology class, how does the debate about evolution compare to the debate about climate change today? Or, in a history class, how does the rise of fascism in the early 20th century compare to the rise of authoritarianism today?) those connections are not the point. Whereas, in a CPI class, they are. And, that is mainly because in those other classes, the primary relationship is the relationship between student as student and teacher as teacher. The lecture format is the paradigm case of this. In a CPI class, in contrast, the relationships of every student to every other student and to the teacher, not only as students and teachers, but as citizens and community members, are central. I am not saying these sorts of relationships do not exist in classrooms

without CPI. Rather, the practice of CPI makes ignoring these relationships difficult if not impossible. In other classrooms, these other relationships can be made secondary. When these relationships are kept central, students are more likely to apply the questions they are discussing to their own experiences and contemporary problems. These and like comparisons explain why the benefits of CPI, particularly the cognitive benefits, are so great and last for years after students stop formally learning CPI.

### *Social/Political Benefits of Philosophy Education*

We should recognize these concrete benefits to CPI. But, the benefits of CPI go beyond these readily measurable improvements to cognitive ability and social skills. One of the most important benefits of philosophy education is also one of the most difficult to assess. Thus, for it we must rely on argument rather than scientific evidence: philosophy education benefits us all because of how it helps fulfill one of the most important purposes of education, the development of good citizens.

As John Dewey<sup>24</sup> and Thomas Jefferson<sup>25</sup> have argued, education is inherent to humankind and is particularly vital to the functioning of a democratic society. In such a society, citizens are also voters. And, to elect representatives and leaders, they must have a wide breadth of knowledge as well as the ability to reason and think critically. Furthermore, citizens must participate in free and open public discourse to aid the progress of society. But, they can only do so if they know how to, essentially, engage in collaborative philosophical inquiry. The most important political questions are generally also *moral* or *epistemological* questions. That is, they

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<sup>24</sup> John Dewey, *Education and Democracy* (Pennsylvania State University, 1916).

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Jefferson, "Thomas Jefferson on Educating the People," ed. Reid Cornwell, The Center for Internet Research, accessed March 21, 2022, <https://tcfir.org/opinion/Thomas%20Jefferson%20on%20Educating%20the%20People.pdf>.

either ask us what we should do (moral), or how we know what's true (epistemological), information which helps us find the facts about the world that help give us context for answering the aforementioned moral questions. In other words, political questions are generally *philosophical*. As a community our discussions with each other help us engage in *inquiry* that allows us to *collaboratively* get closer to the truth and the right decisions for our future. Our lack of philosophical education may be part of the reason we, as citizens in the United States, are struggling to have beneficial and enlightening conversations about politics. I should note that I am not saying that this lack of education is the *only* reason this is the case. For example, there are many wealthy individuals and corporations that have a vested interest in preventing changes to the status quo. They may achieve this goal by fomenting misinformation and aggressive rhetoric that discourages conversation. The institution of CPI in public schools would make the tools of good conversation available to all<sup>26</sup> and would advance our political discourse considerably, but it is, of course, only a partial solution to making political discourse clear and productive.

### **What are the Practical Impediments to Integrating CPI into American High Schools?**

Despite these cognitive, social, and political benefits to CPI, it is extremely rare in American high schools. At the same time, Americans are not clearly opposed to integrating philosophy education into their high schools. This is unlike the situation with “critical race theory,” for example, which is opposed by, at the very least, a loud minority. If CPI is so great, we might wonder why it isn't already everywhere. In this section, I will explain several significant impediments to bringing CPI to American high schools. I have two objectives: first, I hope to show that the reasons CPI is rare are not because it lacks value, but because of other

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<sup>26</sup> As we shall see later on, this is only an ideal: a central objection to CPI is its inapplicability to those in poverty or of lower socio-economic status more broadly.

factors; second, I hope to make clear what needs to happen for CPI to become widespread in high schools and indicate where your attention should be directed to deal with, if not entirely overcome those impediments.

There are three important impediments to integrating CPI into American high schools which I will discuss in this section: poverty, lack of buy-in from students, teachers, administrators, and parents, and ideological opposition at all levels. I am choosing to focus on these difficulties in particular for a reason. These concerns, I think, will be relevant no matter where in the United States people try to implement high school philosophy. At the same time, these are problems that came up in the discussions I had with high school teachers in my local area. Thus, I can examine these problems both in a way that is broadly applicable and theory-based, and in a way that is highly local and detailed. In another way of saying it, these objections represent systemic problems that impede the implementation of philosophy education in high schools and I will discuss these objections both in terms of them *as* systemic problems, *and as* examples of those systemic problems as they pop up in my local area. In doing so, I hope to create a strong case by showing how these problems originate and can be dealt with systemically as well as how they can be dealt with locally, even while it seems difficult or impossible to remove the systemic problems themselves.

Some problems that I am not going to be addressing in this paper, but that are still problems for the *universal* implementation of philosophy education in the United States are as follows: the difficulty of doing CPI in a homeschooling setting, the difficulty of doing CPI in largely segregated school systems, the difficulty of doing CPI in unsafe schooling environments, the difficulty of doing CPI remotely, and much, much more.

### *The Problem of Poverty*

The first practical objection to philosophy education has to do with poverty, and systemic inequality in general.<sup>27</sup> Because of poverty, many students often have poor parental support, both during early childhood and later on. This leads students to frequently move around between schools, preventing them from developing the relationships necessary for a community of inquiry.<sup>28</sup> Impoverished students are rarely placed in advanced or honors academic tracks,<sup>29</sup> and so they are treated as less capable of high level thinking, like that necessary in philosophical inquiry. Thus, they never learn to practice these skills. It is easy to see how this problem could be compounded year after year as they fall further behind the students in higher tracks. Finally, impoverished students, and other students of lower socio-economic status, such as students of color, are more frequently disciplined in school, with 3.8 times as many Black students receiving out-of-school suspensions as white students in K-12 schools despite there being around 5 times as many white students as Black students.<sup>30</sup> Clearly, when suspended these students are unable to participate and engage as part of the learning community. Plus, they may simply grow to resent the school system and so be unwilling to really engage with it. Since many students are impoverished, it would be impossible to practice CPI with all students. And, if it were only

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<sup>27</sup> Credit for this objection goes to one of my high school English teachers, who I interviewed for this project: Traci Kyle (public high school English teacher) in discussion with the author, November 2021.

<sup>28</sup> I first heard about this problem from Traci Kyle (public high school English teacher) in discussion with the author, November 2021. And, the data backs up her anecdotal report: Center on Rural Education and Communities, "Poverty, Housing Insecurity and Student Transiency in Rural Areas," PSU College of Education (Penn State College of Education), accessed April 4, 2022, <https://ed.psu.edu/academics/departments/department-education-policy-studies/eps-centers-councils-and-journals/center-rural-education-communities/poverty-housing-insecurity-and-student-transiency-rural-areas>.

<sup>29</sup> Rashea Hamilton et al., "Disentangling the Roles of Institutional and Individual Poverty in the Identification of Gifted Students," *Gifted Child Quarterly* 62, no. 1 (2017): pp. 6-24, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0016986217738053>, 21-22.

<sup>30</sup> U.S. Department of Education, "2013-14 Civil Rights Data Collection: A First Look - Ed," U.S. Department of Education (U.S. Department of Education, 2016), <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/2013-14-first-look.pdf>, 3.

practiced with wealthier students, doing so would exacerbate existing inequities. Wealthier students would get smarter, and achieve more, while poorer students would remain the same. In short, poverty is a huge obstacle for the success of CPI. And, when you look further at the ways class intersects with race, gender, sexuality, and other identities to make things worse for students who belong to multiple power minorities, the problem seems intractable.

Poverty is probably the largest obstacle to bringing CPI to American high school classrooms. This impediment is so significant because it inhibits CPI in two distinct ways. First, poverty limits the effectiveness of CPI. And, second, poverty and systemic inequality may turn the benefits of CPI into drawbacks. Or, at the very least, there may be unintended consequences of promoting CPI. The limited effectiveness is the more minor problem of the two. Effectiveness must always be compared to cost. If CPI were extraordinarily difficult to implement and had a high cost, *and* had limited effectiveness, that would be a serious problem for it. But, the impediment due to poverty is still important if there are sizable unintended consequences that outweigh whatever benefits are accrued from doing CPI. Those unintended consequences would be, as stated before, the exacerbation of existing inequities. Poorer students would gain very little, while wealthier students, already ahead, would gain even more. Given the benefits of CPI, including improved cognition and communication abilities, it is easy to see how an inequity in receiving those benefits could turn into further inequities of college acceptance, of lifetime earnings, and thus of socio-economic status. I doubt an opponent of CPI would claim that the differences that would arise from trying to teach CPI would be enormous on their own. Rather, the central idea of the objection is that, in a world with such sizable inequities already, why make things worse? It seems even worse to add on some new inequity when there's already so much

than when there is only a little. It shows disregard for the seriousness of the already existing inequity.

Of course, it may not be obvious why inequity is, in itself, bad. From how I have described it, it seems like making CPI universal in American high schools would help some students, while doing little to help others. The effect is a net positive: more students were helped than would have been helped had CPI not been employed at all. One might think it unfortunate that the impoverished students were not helped, but that's no injustice done to them. What makes this problem of increasing inequality so serious is that employing CPI vs. doing nothing are not the only choices. Whatever cost there is to employ CPI could be put toward doing something else. There is an opportunity cost to CPI in addition to its cost in dollars and cents. That opportunity cost, should it be true that the practicing CPI in systemically unequal schools will have significant drawbacks, is being unable to help those most in need, i.e. the impoverished students. It is intuitive that the wealthiest students would gain the least marginal benefit from CPI successfully employed: they are already better at reading, communicating, and analysis. And, their lack of the benefits of CPI would be no great impairment. But, for an impoverished student, getting something like an intervention to improve their basic literacy (instead of getting CPI) could mean the difference between being literate enough to get a decent job and being unemployed or in a dead-end job. For a wealthier student, that dichotomy is not present. The fruit of CPI for them would likely be a marginally better job, a marginally better salary, and marginally better quality of life. Helping students like these when impoverished students could be helped much more for the same cost—that is injustice.

*The Problem of Buy-In*

The second practical impediment to bringing CPI to American high school classrooms has to do with a consequence of popular opinions of philosophy.<sup>31</sup> As we discussed, people's usual understandings of philosophy are generally ambivalent and confused. When hearing that students are learning philosophy, their minds will not leap to the idea of CPI. This leads to problems on several levels. First, students themselves will be conditioned to think the subject is boring. Teachers will be unfamiliar with the subject and so will require training to teach it. Plus, as the teachers I interviewed reported, administrators are loath to pay for the professional development of teachers unless they understand it well and see its benefits because of the cost of doing so. And, of course, most administrators, like most people, do not know much about philosophy and may have a superficially negative view of it.

Moreover, teachers of certain subjects, like in the sciences, will likely not see how philosophy could fit into their classes. This was the case with one science teacher from my high school to whom I spoke for this project. He liked the idea of CPI in general, but he was doubtful that it could be well-practiced in many science classes outside of a few exceptions, such as in an environmental science course. In such a course, he said, there is ample room for discussion about the ethics of various environmental policies, provided there is sufficient class time of course.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, even if it were possible to show science teachers how they could include philosophy in their classes, they might still doubt its usefulness. After all, science gives students an understanding of the world they can be confident in. Philosophy doesn't have the same track record. Oftentimes, philosophy teaches you more questions to ask than answers to have. We can

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<sup>31</sup> Traci Kyle (public high school English teacher) in discussion with the author, November 2021.

<sup>32</sup> Aaron Warner (public high school science teacher) in discussion with the author, February 2022.

call these related problems the problem of lack of buy-in, since they have to do with difficulties in getting buy-in at all levels—student, parent, teacher, and administrator.

The problem of buy-in, then, is getting people to understand the value of CPI given the backdrop of people's negative attitudes toward philosophy. But, beyond that, it is also the problem of practically persuading administrators, teachers, and students to participate in any new educational intervention when they have competing concerns. For administrators, they are concerned about the cost of professional development for any such intervention. For teachers, they are worried about the time it would take to reformulate their curricula. And, for students, they may not want to engage with something like CPI that requires their thorough participation when they are used to just sitting through class listening to a lecture, or they may just not be used to participating in that way even if they want to.

### *The Problem of Ideology*

The final practical difficulty with promoting CPI that we will consider has to do with ideological opposition to it: some people, primarily administrators and parents, may be ideologically opposed to philosophy education because of how it encourages people to be critical of conventional narratives and of dogma, political, religious, or otherwise. These people would serve as barriers to the widespread institution of philosophy education.

This problem is not unique to the implementation of philosophy education. Biology has had its share of ideological objections, such as when parents rally against the teaching of evolution, or of comprehensive sexual education. Physics has had to deal with this problem when it discusses the Big Bang. History deals with it when it lingers on the injustice of slavery too long. In all cases, there is one contingent of people who oppose new subjects of education on

ideological grounds: Evangelical Protestants.<sup>33</sup> And, in all these cases there is one reason that they stand in opposition to the new subjects of education: those topics challenge their religious dogma or traditions. The ideological opposition some people might have to philosophy could be even stronger as it does not simply dispute religious dogma, but actively encourages students to question any beliefs they or others might hold without sufficient argument. Philosophy in the form of CPI is inherently critical.

### **Can the Problems with Philosophy Education be Dealt With?**

For it to be possible for classrooms across America to have discussions like I portrayed in that narrative at the beginning of this paper, these practical difficulties must be overcome. However, I am not so idealistic to think that barriers like widespread poverty and inequality, student, parent, teacher, and administrator disinterest, and ideological opposition from Evangelical Protestants can be solved quickly. I also do not claim that solving these problems is merely instrumental to getting CPI into schools. In this section, all I hope to do is to show how these barriers may be circumvented, or otherwise dealt with so that, even without large-scale structural change to the society of the United States and its economic, political, and educational institutions, CPI can still be brought to schools, and that it would be valuable to do so.

#### *Responding to the Problem of Poverty*

As I discussed earlier, the problem of poverty for CPI is two-fold: first, poverty may prevent CPI from being successful in its aims, but also the fact of poverty may make CPI do more harm than good due to increasing existing inequalities. We must confront the question, why

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<sup>33</sup> On this and related political habits of evangelical conservatives, see Michael Gerson, “The Last Temptation,” *The Atlantic* (Atlantic Media Company, March 11, 2018), <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/04/the-last-temptation/554066/>.

do CPI at all instead of any other educational initiative that is more effective at lifting people out of poverty?

The first response we must have is humility. We must admit that every dollar going to fund CPI initiatives would be better spent improving educational outcomes for the students who struggle the most. Rather than focusing on CPI, these students should be helped with graduating high school, with becoming functionally literate, and with learning basic mathematics. These skills will allow the students who have the hardest time, who are frequently impoverished, who are people of color, or who have intellectual or learning disabilities, to have a better chance at flourishing in their lives. Education isn't always, as the old saying from nineteenth century education reformer Horace Mann goes, "the great equalizer." Clearly, schools reproduce the inequities of the societies they exist in. However, education unquestionably can improve social mobility.

All this is true, but this either-or is artificial. The move toward integrating CPI into classrooms does not have to be part of a zero-sum calculus where every dollar spent on CPI is taken away from struggling students who need it. There are two reasons for this: first, there are situations where spending dollars on improving the outcomes for struggling, impoverished students is not an option; second, schools are not the only, and may not be the best, place through which poverty can be reduced. I will explain each of these reasons in turn.

What are these situations where we don't have a chance to make what I have said is the "better" choice, i.e. to help the worst off students gain basic skills like literacy? The most obvious case is in wealthy school districts. If I could snap my fingers and cut these school districts' budgets in half, sending the other half to impoverished school districts, I would. But,

the unfortunate reality is that this is rarely possible. When considering integrating CPI into schools, we have to look at the choice as it can be made by individual school districts. As citizens, we should advocate for increased educational spending in the school districts struggling the most and reduced funding in those that struggle least. But, for an educator, or a school district administrator, this is not a choice that is on the table, so-to-speak. Even so, school districts should choose to work in this direction as best they can: the worst off districts should preference basic skill development with their limited budgets; middling districts should do the same, preferencing the needs of worse-off students; but, the best-off school districts will likely be able to dedicate plenty of resources to their struggling students with a great deal of money to spare. In these districts, the impediment of poverty is minimal, and so integrating CPI into these classrooms is a no-brainer. This will exacerbate inter-district inequality, but what is the alternative? Simply fail to give a boon to their wealthy students just because it might exacerbate inequality nationwide? I imagine it would be enormously difficult to make this argument to parents, even progressive ones. And, those parents would be reasonable. We *must* resolve inter-district inequality in education. It is a disgrace that students receive differing educations according to which district they are born in, especially when school districts are largely segregated by race.<sup>34</sup> But, that is not the responsibility of district administrators and teachers *qua* administrator and teacher. Rather, that is their duty *qua* being citizens. As teachers and administrators, they must help *their* students the best they can.

Even low- and middle-income districts, however, will not always come across a difficult choice between funding CPI integration and funding basic literacy initiatives. Certainly, we can

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<sup>34</sup>Will McGrew, "U.S. School Segregation in the 21st Century," Washington Center for Equitable Growth (Washington Center for Equitable Growth, March 7, 2022), <https://equitablegrowth.org/research-paper/u-s-school-segregation-in-the-21st-century/?longform=true>.

imagine some such cases: suppose a low-income district has an extra \$10,000 allocated for professional development and they are deciding between spending it on training teachers in CPI or on training teachers how to better help the most struggling students stay in school and achieve the best educational outcomes. In this case, the choice is obvious. But, in other cases, it may not be. After all, as we have seen, the data suggests that CPI is valuable in a very broad way. It improves students' basic reasoning abilities, which are useful in a variety of domains. Thus, CPI may be a worthwhile part of a larger initiative to improve educational outcomes for struggling students. It has been shown that some of the best ways to improve students' basic educational outcomes (graduation, literacy, etc.) don't come from directly focusing on developing those skills. Funding the arts and humanities in schools, or even sports, can keep kids in schools and, as a consequence, they will develop those basic skills better. Getting the chance to do philosophy in the classroom may have a similar effect. CPI is more engaging than ordinary lecture-based discussion.

The other reason we may doubt that spending money on CPI takes away from spending money on helping impoverished students succeed is that, at least in some cases, those students will not be able to be helped by the school system. Now, I am *not* saying that there are students who are not worth helping in schools. Every student deserves everything a school can do to help. But, the effectiveness of educational interventions undoubtedly varies. You can put as many dollars as you want toward improving what happens to students *inside* the school building. But, it won't necessarily make much difference because what happens *inside* often isn't the problem. For some students, their problems in the classroom come from without, e.g. abusive parents, difficulty getting enough to eat, cold nights without power, responsibilities to work to help their

families, or to care for their siblings, dealing with parents' addictions, etc. If CPI benefits the most well-off students, but does actually provide a significant benefit to them, then it is worth doing over an intervention that benefits all students equally little. In other words, an intervention that is significant to a decent number of students, like CPI, is preferable to an intervention that would be virtually negligible to all students. I am *not* saying that CPI for well-off students should be preferenced over interventions for other students as a rule. Rather, I am saying that we ought to do the most good for the most students with the limited resources of a school district, prioritizing the students most in need.<sup>35</sup> In a low-income school district, there may still be some well-off students. They might be on the borderline of college-readiness. CPI could pay dividends for these sorts of students, even if more impoverished students fail to benefit much, if at all, from it. And, if the needs of impoverished students have been met as well as a low-income school district can meet them, it is reasonable to promote CPI for the benefit of students like these. Now, it may be that most low-income school districts lack the resources to do the best they can for the students there who are struggling the most with basic skills. In those cases, the cost of CPI might be an unaffordable luxury. Nonetheless, it is conceivable that, at least in *some* school districts, spending on helping struggling students has reached the point of diminishing marginal returns. In such cases, schools should implement initiatives like CPI training for teachers that would help other students.

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<sup>35</sup> To clarify my background moral theory, I believe that a form of utilitarianism defines what is right and wrong. However, I also think basic utilitarianism is insufficient. I think that resolving pain and suffering is ultimately more important than promoting pleasure and satisfaction. The former is more bad than the latter is good, generally. And, this is more true the greater the suffering is. We, as humans, have a much greater capacity for suffering than for pleasure. Thus, on my view, we ought, generally, to focus on prioritizing relieving the suffering and difficulties of the worst off first, followed by less bad instances of suffering, and finally on making students positively happy.

Overall, then, we can respond to the difficulty poverty poses for integrating CPI into American classrooms as follows: first, we must recognize that CPI is a luxury that should only be integrated into schools when doing so does not enact further harm on the worst-off students; second, we must note where there are schools for which spending on CPI would not increase intra-district inequity (recognizing that it may increase inter-district inequity in an unavoidable way), i.e. in wealthy districts; third, we consider how CPI could actually be beneficial even to the worst-off students in low- and middle-income districts, namely, in the same way that arts and humanities education can also be thought of as a luxury, but is still extremely helpful for helping the worst-off students' educational outcomes; fourth, and finally, we see how in-school spending on the worst-off students can become inefficient when the causes of those students' problems lie mainly outside of the classroom, and so we can justify instituting CPI even if it takes away marginally from helping the worst-off students, since it benefits better-off students significantly.

Where does this response get us? Well, it means that we can now see a variety of contexts where CPI could be useful, even in situations where poverty is a factor. The main problems poverty posed for the integration of CPI into American schools were that poverty would make it ineffective at helping students and that, given poverty, CPI could exacerbate systemic inequity. From our discussion, we can now see that CPI could be perfectly effective for some students despite it being ineffective for some impoverished students. We can also see that bringing CPI to classrooms *could* exacerbate inter-district inequity, but doing so is unavoidable given the structure of education in the United States. It would fail to help impoverished students in low- and middle-income districts, but it would not actively *harm* them. It could also exacerbate intra-district inequity, but, again, this would not be because the worst-off students went unhelped

when they could be helped. Rather, since their difficulties cannot be efficiently solved by schools, it is morally acceptable to further help better-off students. Doing so increases inequality, but not in an unjust way, or in a way that harms the worst-off students. Crucially, however, this must be done only under great duress, when administrators and teachers have a very clear view of the situation and have extremely good reason to think that some particular worse-off students cannot be efficiently helped any more than they already can. I am imagining a district that already does a great deal—far more than average—to help its worst off students and has resources leftover. In these cases, administrators and teachers could decide to preference the better-off students, but it would wholly be up to them.

#### *Responding to the Problem of Buy-In*

The problem of buy-in is basically the difficulty in convincing administrators to fund the training of teachers in CPI, the difficulty of persuading teachers that they should learn to teach CPI, and the difficulty of getting students to participate in CPI when teachers teach it. I will explain how we can respond to each of these difficulties. But, there is one response necessary for all three groups which we must consider first.

While there are numerous practical difficulties associated with trying any new educational intervention, philosophy has an additional problem: people have negative attitudes toward it. They think of it as some ivory-tower pursuit and are not familiar with the way philosophy can be done in the form of CPI. Administrators, teachers, and students will need to be informed about the differences between the different senses of philosophy, as I discussed toward the beginning of this paper. Most importantly, they must learn about the difference between disciplinary philosophy and CPI. To that end, advocates of CPI seeking to develop buy-in on this

foundational level ought to learn these distinctions well themselves and share them with the administrators, teachers, and students they hope will practice CPI. Only after recognizing that philosophy education is worthwhile in this basic way can the process of dealing with the practical difficulties of implementing a new educational intervention begin. Now, let us look at that practical process in more depth, beginning with how it ought to be conducted with administrators, then teachers, and finally students.

Convincing administrators to fund the training of teachers in CPI could be a trivial task, or the most difficult of the three we have before us. Any parent or teacher interested in getting CPI integrated into high schools in their district would likely have to start with convincing administrators and local factors would predominate the discussion. How large of a budget does this district have for professional development? Is there a shortage of teachers that would make it difficult to convince administrators to let teachers spend time on professional development? Is the administration ideologically opposed to CPI (as we will discuss in the next section)? Despite these highly contingent considerations, I believe there are two general strategies that proponents of CPI could use to develop administrator buy-in: promotion of CPI from within, and promotion of CPI from without.

The first strategy for developing administrator buy-in for CPI would be to have one or more teachers be interested in CPI themselves. That teacher or those teachers would learn about CPI on their own time at their own expense, and then institute it in their classrooms. As I discussed with teachers from my district,<sup>36</sup> individual teachers have a great deal of leeway in how they teach their classes. Then, they would talk with other teachers, teaching them about CPI and

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<sup>36</sup> Traci Kyle (public high school English teacher) in discussion with the author, November 2021; Aaron Warner (public high school science teacher) in discussion with the author, February 2022.

educating them as to its benefits. From there, the group of teachers could work together to advocate for CPI to their school's administrators. They could point to benefits like I have explained at length in this paper, but they could also point to their own experiences in the local school. Local evidence of an intervention's effect is far more compelling to the locals themselves than studies conducted far away or abstract arguments about the intervention's possible effectiveness. From there, the movement could make its way up the administrative chain and hopefully the weight of the evidence and the support by lower level teachers and administrators would encourage the buy-in of those at the top. Funding approved by them could then allow for more and more teachers in the district to learn about CPI and get training until CPI would become a common practice.

The other strategy would come from without. With this strategy, parents or other citizens of a district would try to educate other parents and citizens about CPI to gain more supporters. Then, they would attempt to convince district administrators from without. With enough support, the administrator or school board could be persuaded to allocate funding for CPI training. Teachers would receive it, and CPI would become common in the district. I worry that this strategy would be less effective since it comes from outside the school system, but it does have the advantage of not relying on overworked teachers to take even more of their time to develop CPI curricula for their classrooms without institutional support. Ultimately, the particular strategy used would depend on highly localized factors. There is no universal method for enacting change.

Given the discussion of administrator buy-in, there are also two ways of approaching teacher buy-in: either administrators are already convinced and the difficulty is persuading

teachers to attend professional development trainings in CPI and to implement CPI in their classes, or administrators are yet to offer support and teachers need to be persuaded to implement CPI on their own. The latter approach raises a question: in this case, who is trying to get teachers to buy-in to CPI? It cannot be administrators because that would mean administrators have already bought-in to CPI, which is the former case. Thus, it must be parents or students. But, teachers have extremely good reasons not to radically change their curricula without institutional support. Their jobs give them little time and less money for doing such things. Thus, I think they would not be persuaded by parents or students to do so on a lark. Otherwise, I think papers like the present one are the main way of achieving this kind of buy-in. Some teachers will read about the benefits of CPI and be persuaded to make the significant effort of including it in their curricula. The English and psychology teacher Shawn Adler is one example of a teacher like this who now advocates for CPI himself.<sup>37</sup> But, I don't think this kind of buy-in can be relied upon. Thus, it would be best to work to persuade administrators alongside a few teachers who might be the most amenable to testing out CPI in their classrooms.

It is still worth talking about getting teacher buy-in after convincing administrators of the value of CPI. After all, teachers cannot (and should not!) be mandated to adjust their curricula to include CPI. Even if there is institutional support, teachers won't necessarily use it. There are three reasons for this that we have to consider: first, as a teacher I interviewed suggested, some teachers are likely to already have a great deal of confidence in their teaching methods<sup>38</sup> and so would be unwilling to make *any* significant changes to their curricula; second, teachers may have

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<sup>37</sup> Shawn Adler, "Teachers Assemble: The Case for High School Philosophy across Disciplines," Blog of the APA (The American Philosophical Association, January 15, 2020), <https://blog.apaonline.org/2020/01/08/teachers-assemble-the-case-for-high-school-philosophy-across-disciplines/>.

<sup>38</sup> This point was raised by my biology teacher, Mr. Warner: Aaron Warner (public high school science teacher) in discussion with the author, February 2022.

good reason to choose other kinds of professional development over CPI; third, even with institutional support, teachers may be unable to, or feel unable to, take the time to attend professional development. Let's look at each of these reasons teachers may have against getting into CPI.

We can respond to the fact that some teachers have confidence in their teaching method due to years of experience in three ways. First, teachers are usually intelligent, curious people who care about doing the best for their students and by default they are likely to be interested in adjusting their curricula to better serve those students. Only a fraction of teachers with confidence in their teaching methods (as many teachers should!) will be so *overconfident* to decline any further training. No teacher is perfect, though many are very good. Second, we can recognize that these teachers constitute a minority of the overall pool of teachers. Even if we assume no teacher like this could be reached, a district could still become a "CPI-focused district" just by working with teachers who are not as far along in their careers, and so have less confidence in their teaching methods and curricula. Third, and finally, a district could seek to persuade these teachers after persuading most of the others. After all, though more experienced teachers may be more conservative in their attitudes toward changing their curricula and teaching styles, if many other teachers change and students in those courses are performing better and are more engaged, they may be persuaded by that sort of local evidence. Think: if you were an experienced teacher with a tried and true way of teaching, why would you significantly change that approach just based on studies on abstract arguments from someone like me? You would want to *see* the impact of CPI on the same sorts of students as you yourself would be teaching. Less experienced teachers or those who are more open to change in general could try out CPI

and allow more experienced, or more resistant teachers in general, to adopt CPI gradually as it becomes commonplace in the district. There will always be teachers unwilling to adapt to a new educational paradigm. But, we can recognize that that is not a problem unique to CPI. That was once a problem for convincing teachers to give assignments and to grade them instead of simply lecturing to students. It was once a problem for getting teachers to let students speak and even discuss in class. CPI, in a way, is just the next step and will face all the same hurdles as these previous advancements.

The second reason teachers might have for declining CPI professional development is that CPI has to compete with other new ways of teaching that teachers may rightfully be interested in. For example, consider a teacher who teaches some AP classes. Suppose they are choosing between using their allotted professional development time to learn more about how the AP exams are graded so they can teach their students to perform better on those exams, and learning about CPI to improve their students' reasoning in general. Teachers want to help their students. And, in this case, it seems like their students would be more concretely helped if they took the former training over the latter. Better AP exam performance means students can get credit from universities, which means they can save thousands of dollars. For this reason, AP exams are critical for many students. It seems hard to justify learning about CPI over AP grading. Plus, there are far more options than CPI vs. AP. Teachers might take professional development time to learn how to create a more inclusive learning environment for minority students. They might want to learn about improving students' oral engagement in class, or how to foster their writing skills, or how to deal with students with below grade-level reading ability, or any number of other important things for a teacher to know.

This is a serious difficulty for CPI, though, like with the problem of change-resistant teachers, it isn't unique to CPI. I think there are three ways of responding to this problem. The first involves recognizing that oftentimes these teachers will just be *right*. CPI is a great thing, but in a particular situation may not be the intervention that helps students the most. The second concerns marketing and the third involves finding an ideal starting target audience. As was noted by one teacher I spoke to,<sup>39</sup> if you want teachers to get interested in some novel educational approach, you need to meet them where they are and make the process as low-friction as possible. The ideal would be something like paying teachers to attend CPI professional development exclusively, and providing them with the materials to quickly and easily implement CPI into their curricula. But, that would be a rare circumstance indeed. As the teachers I spoke to about this noted, many teachers are lucky to be provided time or funding to do any professional development at all. So, let's assume that a district has a small amount of time and money set aside for teachers to attend professional development of whatever kind they are interested in. This is already somewhat idealistic, but is certainly an easier "ask" from administrators than the ideal we described would be.

In such a case, advocates for CPI would have to market CPI in some way. In the case we are considering, administrators would need to persuade teachers to preference CPI. Outside of obvious economic incentives (e.g. only paying for CPI professional development or giving them bonuses, etc.) what can we do? One suggestion I got from a teacher I spoke to was to, in emails marketing CPI, provide materials that teachers could readily integrate into their classrooms as a sort of sample of what further CPI professional development has to offer. For example, as this

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<sup>39</sup> Aaron Warner (public high school science teacher) in discussion with the author, February 2022.

teacher suggested, the folks advocating for CPI training might send along sets of discussion questions that fit the philosophical *ethos* of CPI that teachers who already have time set aside for discussion in class could use. If students respond well to these sorts of questions as compared to what the teacher would have used otherwise, that might make them more interested in CPI.

Another strategy is to develop, or merely distribute, existing lesson plans for CPI. Many such lesson plans already exist, Shawn Adler providing just a few examples.<sup>40</sup> If teachers are merely introduced to the principles of CPI, and are asked to take time to come up with new lesson plans based on those principles, they will have some difficulty since CPI is new to them. Being able to use pre-made lesson plans would allow teachers to test out CPI in their classrooms before taking the time to get a deeper understanding of CPI through professional development. There is stiff competition for teachers' attention given how many responsibilities already occupy it, but initiatives like these could give CPI an edge over other opportunities teachers may have for professional development and so help to achieve buy-in from those teachers.

The final impediment to teacher buy-in is that, even with institutional support, teachers may not feel like they have the time to pursue professional development given their other responsibilities. Teachers have to teach, of course, but they also have to develop lesson plans, grade assignments, and communicate with students, parents, and administrators. Many of them mentor new teachers. Many help run extracurricular activities for students, such as by coaching sports teams or sponsoring clubs. Oftentimes, teachers even act as counselors for struggling students. Plus, they have their own families to take care of, often their own kids to raise, and they have their own interests to pursue. Why take the time to do professional development when they

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<sup>40</sup> Shawn Adler, "Teachers Assemble: Sample Lesson Plan for Philosophy in High School English," Blog of the APA (The American Philosophical Association, May 11, 2021), <https://blog.apaonline.org/2020/01/15/teachers-assemble-sample-lesson-plan-for-philosophy-in-high-school-english/>.

have all this to do already and are being paid so poorly to do it? Unfortunately, the fact of the matter is that many teachers may simply conclude it isn't worth it to them to do the professional development necessary to really get CPI integrated into their classrooms. We ought to conclude from this fact that institutional support for teachers is critical to getting CPI to be commonplace. Administrators have to make the professional development worth it to teachers when they have so much else going on. But, we need not give up because of this unhappy fact. Teachers *already* do many noble, altruistic things that they are not paid to do. Of the responsibilities of teachers I listed, only a few are required of them, only a few of them are responsibilities for which teachers are paid. Even without strong institutional support, it is very possible that CPI can grow in a district. Like water, some institutional support is required to make the flower of CPI bloom, but it will still grow without perfect care, albeit more slowly and it may bloom less beautifully. Note, I am *not* saying that overworked teachers who already volunteer tons of their hours when they are not required to should take on *even more*. Teachers are workers, and some of the most exploited workers at that. Instead, what I mean to say is that, given lots of teachers are already willing to volunteer *some* of their time to help students, *some* of those teachers will likely choose CPI as "their thing," that is, the way they go above and beyond. Others may coach, or help with extracurriculars. Some teachers will learn about CPI and work to market it to other teachers.

Finally, we have to deal with the problem of student buy-in. We might persuade the administrators to offer teachers time and money to learn how to teach CPI. We might persuade those teachers to attend that professional development training. But, even then, we might struggle to get students to care or participate in the discussions that are critical in CPI. After all, CPI is fundamentally *collaborative*. Fortunately, or unfortunately, this problem is not unique to

CPI. Teachers often struggle to get students to actively participate in class at all, and it is even more difficult to get *all* the students in a class to participate in a sophisticated discussion like I imagined at the beginning of this paper. What happens if the teacher asks her students whether suicide is ever morally permissible and, rather than engaging in impassioned discussion as I described, they sit by apathetically and silently? The teacher could describe all the possible arguments on all sides of the issue, but that would not be CPI and it would have little value comparatively. This is the problem faced by all teachers, and the problem is more stark the more lively and sophisticated the teacher expects student participation to be.

I don't intend to show how a teacher can guarantee student participation—there is no way to do that—but I will explain how I think the method of CPI will lessen the very common difficulty of low student participation and then I will recall some of my personal experience with doing something quite like CPI. Consider again the question that was raised in my imagined classroom: is suicide ever morally permissible? Compare this question to those you might ordinarily find in an English class when students are studying Hamlet. We might have questions of comprehension (and in my scenario, the teacher did ask what the students thought Hamlet meant in his soliloquy). The teacher might also ask students to identify literary devices. Or, they might ask students to explain why Hamlet says what he does, i.e. questions of contextualization. All these questions require students to (a) have read the passage that was assigned, (b) to have understood the passage, and (c) care about answering the question. In an ordinary class, a majority will fulfill (a), but then only a fraction will fulfill (b) and only a fraction of *those* will fulfill (c). It becomes obvious why student participation is low in answering these questions.

The question my imagined teacher raised requires (c), but not (a) or (b) from the students. And, the kind of question she raised is far more likely to be the sort of question that students care about than would the other kinds of typical questions I mentioned. After all, mental health is a huge problem for high schoolers and suicide, in the popular imagination, is closely linked to mental health. Plus, students *know* about suicide while the setting and events of Hamlet are extremely disconnected from their experience, comparatively. The kinds of questions that CPI encourages are like the one I raised: they are questions of perennial philosophical importance that everyone has thought about implicitly or explicitly before, and so they have some sense of how to answer them, if only naively at first. The types of questions typically asked in an English classroom, of comprehension, identification, contextualization, etc. are important and teach vital analytical skills. But, they are not terribly interesting. CPI helps students develop analytical skills too, but the sort of questions it asks are quite different and so aid discussion in a way that is rarely possible in most classrooms. The closest analog to CPI-style questions in my high school experience was in my government class. There, we debated political questions about topics like gun control and abortion rights. I could have done the reading for that class day or not and I would still have an opinion on the issue, or, at the very least, I could respond to my peers' claims. CPI is like this, but far more often than is typical in most classes. Thus, student buy-in will be difficult to accomplish, but, I hope, less difficult than in most classes as they are taught today.

And, this is backed up by my own experience. While working for the Prindle Institute for Ethics, I have led or helped with dozens of what we call “moral reasoning workshops.” In these workshops, staff from the Prindle Institute come to high school classrooms at the request of

teachers in those high schools. We present a case study of some situation that involves some moral controversy. We hold small and large group discussions where students give *reasons* for and against various positions on the moral controversy. Plus, we introduce some of the historically developed moral frameworks for thinking about moral problems (e.g. consequentialism, deontology, virtue ethics, care ethics, and social contract theory). These workshops are significantly different from CPI as it ought to be done: there is no established community of inquiry and discussion is more structured, with questions determined by Prindle Institute staff rather than students. But, despite that additional direction and structure, students are enthralled. I have helped with some workshops as early as 7:30 in the morning and the high schoolers still enthusiastically discussed the issues. I have helped with or led workshops with students in low-, middle-, and high-income schools, from rural and urban areas and they all responded similarly. In fact, the students in the worst-off school districts were often particularly enthusiastic after it became clear that we, as discussion helpers actually wanted to hear their opinions. I must imagine that when students are more bound together in a community of inquiry and when they have more power in directing the conversation, they will be even more invested and interested in participating.

We have now investigated the ways we can deal with problems of buy-in on the level of administrators, teachers, and then students. These are not solutions. They provide no assurance that administrators, teachers, or students will be convinced of the merits of CPI. But, there are no such assurances with any new educational initiative. All I hope to have shown is that the problem of buy-in is not intractable and, *compared to the situation with other initiatives*, getting buy-in for CPI at all levels will be easier. With this done, we can now move on to the last of the

practical impediments to CPI that I will be considering: the problem of ideological objections to CPI instruction.

*Responding to the Problem of Ideology*

The problem of ideological objections is not the most pressing or significant. In most places, the problems of poverty and buy-in will be far more important. However, it seems possible to deal with these problems wherever they are. The same is not true for the problem of ideological objections. Where administrators or teachers are *ideologically opposed* to philosophy education, there is little that can be done. Fortunately, I do not think such areas predominate. But, where they do exist, this problem may be the most intractable.

The solution to this difficulty will be primarily rhetorical and pragmatic: on the one hand, teachers and administrators must emphasize the practical benefits of CPI, such as how improved cognitive benefits could improve graduation rates, standardized test score performance, future income, etc. On the other hand, parents cannot ultimately stop a school district from teaching students as it does without removing their students from the district. That is, ultimately the only means of preventing students from being taught in accordance with a teacher's or a school district's curriculum or standards is to physically remove them. They may move them to another school or home-school them. But, in practice this is difficult for most parents to accomplish. Usually, the most they can do is put pressure on administrators to stop what teachers are doing. Conceivably, parents could also shift their community's political opinions enough to replace the school board with anti-CPI members, but that would be a far more difficult—and so rare—endeavor. So long as teachers are being balanced, and allowing free and open discussion, regardless of the philosophical topic, administrators will be loath to clamp down on their

teaching, even if parents complain. Even with an anti-CPI school board, it would be hard to clamp down on something like CPI, which can be conducted in such a wide variety of ways.

After all, teachers have a great deal of pedagogical freedom. While they must cover certain subjects, or teach certain skills, they can teach those subjects and skills in almost as many ways as there are teachers to teach them. This is the situation as the teachers I spoke to relayed it to me.<sup>41</sup> Teachers are sometimes observed by administrators to ensure they are performing adequately, and they may give the teachers feedback. But, given the shortage of teachers, at least in Indiana, even poor quality teachers are never threatened with being fired for their teaching. All this is to say that the conditions are not favorable for administrators to coerce teachers into teaching a certain way on ideological grounds. And, given how CPI is not straightforwardly ideologically one-sided, it is even less likely to be questioned.

Unfortunately, there may be some cases where ideology prevails. As discussed above, the risk of this is greatest where Evangelical Protestants control school districts. I will briefly explain what I think anyone in one of these school districts who wishes to bring CPI to their district's high school classrooms should do to succeed despite ideological objections. First, the teacher or individual administrator promoting CPI ought to create as much buy-in as they can with fellow administrators and teachers as discussed previously. Given the ideological conflict between the dogmatism of Evangelical Protestantism and the critical approach of CPI, those interested may have to go about this in a slightly different way. Ultimately, if it is not possible to bring CPI into the classrooms in its fullest form, critical and skeptical of all dogma, the proponent of CPI has to make a decision: is it preferable to do CPI in a limited way, taking certain dogmas as

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<sup>41</sup> Traci Kyle (public high school English teacher) in discussion with the author, November 2021; Aaron Warner (public high school science teacher) in discussion with the author, February 2022.

unquestionable, while practicing CPI in areas still open to debate? Or, is it preferable to not do CPI at all? You might prefer the latter answer if you worry that by teaching CPI as a way of critically investigating the world *and* simultaneously refusing to apply it to certain dogmas, the teacher of CPI may reinforce those dogmas. But, you might as well prefer the former answer if you worry that without the critical skills taught by CPI, even in a limited way, your students will be much less capable of questioning the dogmas they are raised with at all. Moreover, you might worry your students will be missing out on the notable benefits to cognitive ability that CPI provides, benefits that will help them no matter what they want to do.

Personally, I think that teaching CPI in a limited way is preferable to not teaching it at all. After all, CPI helps students question their assumptions and become better citizens, but that is not its only benefit. CPI has clear cognitive benefits. Students who study CPI are just *smarter* than they would be otherwise. Note that the areas dominated by Evangelical Protestantism<sup>42</sup> are already some of the worst-performing on standardized tests<sup>43</sup> and are, economically, the worst-off.<sup>44</sup> If helpful educational interventions are needed anywhere, it is in these areas, primarily in the American South.

Plus, there can be plenty of room to teach CPI without questioning any deeply held dogmas. Although not CPI exactly, I did something similar when helping to teach elementary schoolers in Kisoro, Uganda. On one of the last days I was there, I decided to give the students, about 11 years old, a philosophy lesson. I taught them about the major areas of philosophy, and

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<sup>42</sup> Niraj Chokshi, "The Religious States of America, in 22 Maps (3. White Evangelical Protestant)," The Washington Post (WP Company, December 6, 2021),

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/govbeat/wp/2015/02/26/the-religious-states-of-america-in-22-maps/>.

<sup>43</sup> Sean Reardon et al., "Map - Mean Test Scores, in Grade Equivalents," Stanford Center for Education Policy Analysis (Stanford University, 2016), <https://cepa.stanford.edu/seda/map1>.

<sup>44</sup> Margarita Noriega, "What US States Look like Based on Their Economic Size, Mapped," Vox (Vox, June 15, 2015), <https://www.vox.com/2015/6/15/8780669/US-state-GDP-growth>.

engaged with them in a philosophical discussion. The students, like the rest of the people in the area, were devout Christians. As such, they were most interested in the philosophy of religion. If ideology were insurmountable, this would be exactly the wrong move. But, it isn't, and this wasn't. For example, students were happy to discuss whether actions are right just because God commands them, or if God commands them because they are right. I did not take a side in the discussion and simply cast doubt on whatever answers students came up with, so they would have to refine their thinking. More than that, I reiterated throughout my lesson that they should interpret nothing I was saying as questioning or denying anything they learned in their religion classes (which are required in Uganda) or were taught by their parents. I spoke as if I were a fellow Christian, accepting all the same dogmas, and I presented the questions I asked as difficult ones to answer even as a devout believer. I explained how engaging with questions about God can serve to strengthen one's faith and religious understanding. The students and the teacher who I was helping all took the lesson well. The point of this anecdote is that presentation matters. If you, as the teacher, are teaching students to be critical and skeptical in the way they engage with philosophical questions, you likely won't have a problem even in the most fundamentalist districts. But, if you are teaching students to *critique* and *doubt* the dogmas of the community in which they live, you are likely to bring about controversy.

Ultimately, this impediment is the least significant, I think, of the three I have considered. For 90 percent of districts, this impediment will be a non-concern. I brought it up because, in those 10 percent of districts where there are strong community dogmas, the impediment of ideological objections can be very serious. As I mentioned when I first mentioned this problem for CPI, we need only to look at how "critical race theory" has been received in many

conservative school districts.<sup>45</sup> As a practical impediment to CPI, then, we have dealt with the problem of ideological objections. But, there is something underlying *some* ideological objections to CPI (though not the Evangelical Protestant ideological objection). In the next section, I will briefly engage with some of these ideological or, more broadly, theoretical objections to CPI.

### **Theoretical Objections to Philosophy Education and Responses**

In this last section of this paper, I want us to take a step back and take a high-level look at this whole project we have been talking about. I think there are some reasonable critiques of CPI to be made. I am not seriously supposing, in this section, that these objections may actually damn the project of integrating CPI into schools. But, I do think a consideration of these objections will help inform the approach we should take with our project. That is, without responding to these objections, this project would still be valuable. But, by responding to them, we can develop a superior understanding of how to practice CPI that would make CPI even more valuable for those who choose to pursue it.

#### *Utility Objection*

There are three main theoretical objections to CPI. First, some people think that school isn't "for" philosophy.<sup>46</sup> These objectors take a narrow view of education. They would reject that the development of citizens is a proper purpose of education. They argue instead that students

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<sup>45</sup> Conservatives in their school districts and their states have been pursuing legislation or curriculum changes that exclude "critical race theory," a legal theory that is not actually taught in almost any K-12 school. What they take to be "critical race theory," is more like anything regarded to discrimination, anti-racism, or being critical of the United States or its people when it comes to race issues. That is why I have put it in scare quotes. For further reading, see Sarah Schwartz, "Map: Where Critical Race Theory Is under Attack," Education Week (Education Week, March 16, 2022), <https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/map-where-critical-race-theory-is-under-attack/2021/06>.

<sup>46</sup> Shawn Adler, "Teachers Assemble: The Case for High School Philosophy across Disciplines," Blog of the APA (The American Philosophical Association, January 15, 2020), <https://blog.apaonline.org/2020/01/08/teachers-assemble-the-case-for-high-school-philosophy-across-disciplines/>.

(and their parents) are like consumers and deserve a service (a degree, good grades, high standardized test scores, etc.) in exchange for their tax dollars. After all, say these folks, education ought to be *useful* and philosophy isn't useful. We will call this the Utility Objection.

Given what I have related about the measurable benefits of philosophy education, the reader may find this objection to be of little substance. But, I think it is worth building up before we break it down. Here are the critical facts: wages have been stagnant for decades, good jobs are harder and harder to find, inflation has outpaced wage growth, and in that time education has changed.<sup>47</sup> People are desperate and they want their children to be better off than they were. They want to minimize risk and give their kids a solid foundation for the future. Thus, there has been a lot of rhetoric about jobs training programs, vocational training, and career preparation in high school. We are told that what we should learn should always be preparing us for a job. Even wealthier parents worry when sending their kids to college about "ROI," that is, "return on investment" or the amount of money a student at a particular university can expect to make in a lifetime, over the average, minus the cost of attendance. This is not out of vitriol toward learning for learning's sake. It is just that you cannot eat paintings, historical trivia, or knowledge of philosophy. We can look at Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs<sup>48</sup> to understand the thought process. People generally seek the essentials before pursuing abstract ideals like "good citizenship."

Relatedly, the benefits of learning philosophy, particularly in the form of CPI, are largely intangible. There is no certificate in philosophical knowledge. If you ask a student who has

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<sup>47</sup> Elise Gould, "State of Working America Wages 2019," Economic Policy Institute (Economic Policy Institute, February 20, 2020), <https://www.epi.org/publication/swa-wages-2019/>.

<sup>48</sup> Abraham Maslow was an American psychologist who created the so-called "Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs," a helpful theory explaining the order in which people tend to pursue different goals. As originally stated, people tend to pursue physical needs (food, water, shelter) before safety (means of securing physical needs long-term without risk), personal relationships, and self-esteem, to name just a few in order. It isn't that people *never* go out of order with these, just that people *tend* to go in this order.

studied programming to show the fruits of their labor, they can write programs that do things someone might want. A student trained in CPI is trained in the broadest possible domain: they will be better at everything, insofar as it requires reasoning and communication, but they will have no special skill set. Likewise, good citizenship is hard to see all at once: it is the sum of all one's actions as a citizen. It is easy to write a math test, but much harder to write a real citizenship test.

If we take all this, plus the fact that the US spends an incredible amount on education<sup>49</sup> while still falling behind,<sup>50</sup> it is easy to see how the Utility Objection resonates with so many people. If we are already failing to teach students to read, and to do basic math, and to have basic scientific and historical literacy, why try something new instead of trying to get the basics down? Particularly, they might say, this is true when we can easily see how math skills transfer into an engineering job or computer skills into an office job, but it is extremely opaque how philosophy training improves people's chances of obtaining good jobs.

#### *Responding to the Utility Objection*

The Utility Objection relies on two false presumptions. First, it assumes that philosophy education would not materially benefit students (improved jobs, college application success, income, etc.). Second, it assumes that material benefits are the only possible benefits of something. Philosophy education provides other benefits, such as improved reasoning skills and the ability to question one's beliefs and develop arguments to hone one's beliefs. The proponent

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<sup>49</sup> Erika Chen, "K-12 School Spending up 4.7% in 2019 from Previous Year," Census.gov (United States Census Bureau, May 18, 2021), <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/05/united-states-spending-on-public-schools-in-2019-highest-since-2008.html>.

<sup>50</sup> Marc Tucker, "Why Other Countries Keep Outperforming Us in Education (and How to Catch up) (Opinion)," Education Week (Education Week, May 13, 2021), <https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/opinion-why-other-countries-keep-outperforming-us-in-education-and-how-to-catch-up/2021/05>.

of the Utility Objection is just straightforwardly wrong that philosophy education would not materially benefit students. The reasoning skills students develop from practicing CPI are generalizable and will help them succeed in all education domains. But, there is something more to their central objection, that given the material insecurity of so many people, schools should first and foremost focus on helping people improve their economic status. What should we make of this? When discussing the problem of poverty, we concluded that CPI should be funded only after students have been helped to master the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic at the very least. At the same time, we recognized that CPI, like sports and the arts, can help keep students in school so that they master those basic skills in a way they would not have without these more interesting class subjects and practices.

But, this objection shows what people may think at the logical extreme of this approach: schools exist only to produce human capital, i.e. people with sufficient education to perform labor that will provide them with subsistence wages in exchange for helping enrich corporations and capital owners. Someone beaten down enough by the systems which keep many families in poverty across generations may simply accept that the system's goals must be their own. They can escape the worst of poverty if they master skills useful for capital, so that is what they ought to do, and that is what schools ought to help them do. The problem is that this attitude prevents us from changing these systems. Teaching CPI is essentially revolutionary because it encourages people to critique and question the foundational assumptions of the societies in which they live. It encourages moral and political agency in students, compelling them to take stands on issues and justify their beliefs. This benefit of CPI is one of its most vital.

So, this objection tells us something about how we ought to teach and advocate for CPI: we must balance people's practical concerns, of surviving in a capitalist society, with idealistic aims, of changing that society. CPI, like the humanities in general, is an important tool of social change. That means that, at least in some situations, practice of CPI may be preferred over mastery of basic skills because *both* are important in order for a person to live, and thrive, rather than merely *surviving*. The proponent of the Utility Objection is right that schools should advance students' material interests, but wrong about how: exclusive focus on the mastery of basic skills helps students' short-term material interests of survival, but harms their long-term material interests by preventing them from gaining the tools that they need to substantially change the societies in which they live for the better.

### *Critical Objection*

Second, on the exact opposite side of things from the proponent of the Utility Objection, some people think that teaching philosophy will harm society, by *preventing* progress via reproducing problematic social attitudes. Some of the most widely-read philosophers are also those liberal, Enlightenment philosophers whose arguments for individualism and private property, as well as racism and sexism, have justified oppression in our society. For example, many Enlightenment philosophers justified democracy only for white, property-owning men. Although American society has gradually become more inclusive and democratic, these deep-seated values linger and slow social progress. And, philosophy in general is the domain of the white and the male. The vast majority of people qualified to teach philosophy are white men, and usually fairly well-off ones at that. Their identities fundamentally bias their interpretation of readings and they will unwittingly preference ideas in student discussion that conform to their

own interests. We will call this the Critical Objection, as it comes from the tradition of critical theorists like Michael Apple whose writing on education inspires this objection.<sup>51</sup>

On one hand, this objection is obviously false: there are well-off, white, male, philosophy professors who are extremely critical of systemic oppression in all its forms. And, even if there weren't, these imaginary philosophy professors wouldn't be the ones teaching CPI. The existing teachers would be. And, they would be able to criticize any dominant group philosophers whose writings they choose to draw upon in the classroom. But, there is a more subtle form of the objection that I think rings more true. I am sure there are plenty of would-be philosophy teachers who might bring harmful biases into the classroom. But, even excepting those, there remains a problem: with CPI, the inquiry is only as good as the community. In the ideal case, a classroom learning CPI would be filled with a representative sample of the people of the world. After all, there is no reason to think any one community has privileged access to philosophical truth. Maximizing perspectives would make the discussions had very fruitful. But, of course, this is completely unrealistic. A real CPI class will have, at best, a representative sample of the students in a local community. But, even that is unlikely. Students, living in segregated communities, are further segregated in schools. That is, high schools in the United States remain highly segregated by race and by income.<sup>52</sup> And, in such a situation, where the community in the classroom does not reflect the community outside the classroom, CPI, which is meant to help students develop skills for thinking critically, may do quite the opposite.

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<sup>51</sup> Michael Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum*, 4th ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019).

<sup>52</sup> Will McGrew, "U.S. School Segregation in the 21st Century," Washington Center for Equitable Growth (Washington Center for Equitable Growth, March 7, 2022), <https://equitablegrowth.org/research-paper/u-s-school-segregation-in-the-21st-century/?longform=true>.

Students in such a classroom, e.g. a predominantly white, upper middle-class one, are likely to reinforce each other's biases. More than that, they will feel especially confident in their biased views having put them up to what they have been told is a rigorous process of investigating the truth. CPI gives students the chance to turn low-level, poorly thought-out biases, perhaps developed from their parents and from media, into hardened, argument-backed, well-rationalized biases. In the liberal ideal, free communication gets us to the truth. But, for communication to be truly free, it cannot be segregated the way American schools are today. Thus, CPI is not capable of singularly creating good citizens, and could make worse ones. CPI cannot overcome the hurdle of the social conditions most students live in. The objective benefits, e.g. in learning to reason and communicate effectively may remain, but they may be in service of problematic goals: that is, a student may become good at rationalizing their biases and convincing others to accept their rationalizations.

Racism, sexism, classism, etc. have often been more harmful when their practitioners have taken a "rigorous" approach, not simply reacting with disgust and ire at the targets of their discrimination, but creating arguments and narratives as to why the existing hierarchies of oppression are necessary, or even the ideal. We need only look to the history of scientific racism and misogyny in Europe and the United States to see how this occurs. Physical characteristics, such as skull shape and size, were used as justifications for the superiority of men over women and whites over other races of people. If you have an intuitive dislike for someone or some group of people, you might, personally not help them, or you might even take advantage of them. But, if you think your dislike or judgment of their inferiority results from some universal or necessary

truth, you might promote government policies harming or restricting the group of people you dislike.

Thus, on the Critical Objection, the problems CPI seeks to fix are better dealt with, or can only be dealt with, by remedying the material conditions of students. Then, and only then, could CPI really be helpful. Until then, it will be useful only in very specific areas, and potentially harmful in the rest. How this harm could crop up is not necessarily obvious, particularly with topics like suicide, which we saw discussed in my imagined classroom at the beginning of this paper. The situation is most clear when students are discussing something like the ethics of employer-employee relationships or the ethics around issues of discrimination, prejudice, racism, sexism, and the like. In these cases, we can see how students could come to rationalize their bigoted beliefs. But, is this avoidable by simply avoiding such topics? Well, if it avoids them entirely, it will fail to serve one of its purposes—helping people to develop the skills to have productive conversations about these issues—and so we might wonder why we should do it at all. But, we cannot cordon off the problem.

Even with some topic like suicide, there are beliefs that inhibit progress that could be given further rationalization by CPI. For example, one reason someone might have given against suicide is that it is selfish and could injure the people who depend on you for material support, e.g. your children or your spouse. But, this idea is predicated on the idea that the atomic individual is at fault for the material deprivation of his family when he kills himself, that society is properly structured when people depend for survival on some bread-winning wage-earner rather than on a strong social safety net. This is a hegemonic idea that could be solidified in

students' minds by CPI. The problem the proponents of the Critical Objection are responding to is thus pernicious. Nonetheless, I think it is soluble.

*Responding to the Critical Objection*

In response to the Critical Objection, I would argue that philosophy, though it can reproduce problematic values and judgments, is also the most potent tool for overturning those judgments. Philosophy has always been critical of the established authority. Its questioning of tradition is inherently opposed to the mere reproduction of societal values. After all, the liberal individualism of many Enlightenment philosophers was, in their time, a form of progressivism and they were attacked by the conservatives and religious fundamentalists of their time just as progressives are attacked today. Individual rights, property rights for all—these are certainly examples of progress over the feudal system of complete deference by the vast majority to the aristocracy and Church. To be completely successful, the Critical Objection requires that CPI be like Sunday School, when it is completely the opposite. But, there still seems to be something to the more subtle form of the objection—that the bias of a teacher or community will problematically inform the range of CPI as it takes place in a classroom, and so lead students to a false confidence in previously held dogmas.

This more subtle form of the objection is, I think, mostly correct. As proponents of CPI, we must recognize that bringing CPI to the classroom will not radically shift students' fundamental views in the vast majority of cases. After all, for a class to openly discuss a question, they must take that question seriously. And, if a class has a widely shared view about the answer to a question—for example, on whether suicide is moral or immoral as the case study I imagined considered—that class is unlikely to have as productive a discussion as I imagined. A

classroom of religious fundamentalists led by a religious fundamentalist teacher will have difficulty discussing suicide beyond “it’s tragic, and it’s wrong.”

This objection, then, gives us two conclusions about how we should understand proper CPI: first, the teachers of CPI must do their absolute best to make no discussion out of bounds, no dogma unquestionable (outside of the practical concern of creating too many ideological objections from administrators and parents that we discussed before). This is a challenge, but one that can be lessened by strong training in CPI for teachers. Second, advocates of CPI should recognize that CPI will rarely have a magical effect on students to shift their thinking. Rather, CPI may in many circumstances merely serve to keep students’ minds open to alternative viewpoints. Simply not *solidifying* old dogmas helps to change people’s mind about them.

I agree with the proponent of the Critical Objection that CPI *can* have all the negative effects that I described in presenting the objection. But, it need not have them if teachers are trained properly. I agree with them also that remedying the material conditions of students would help them enormously in becoming better reasoners and citizens. But, as we saw in discussing the problem of poverty, that is easier said than done. CPI, taught properly, can give students the tools to promote social change and remedy their own material conditions in the short-term and the long-term. It is also worth noting that this response, that the Critical Objection can be met through proper training of teachers, is in tension with the problem of buy-in we examined earlier. Ultimately, any implementation of CPI will have to be a balancing act—it may be in some cases that insofar as we respond to the buy-in problem, we fail to respond to the Critical Objection and vice versa.

*Focus Objection*

Third, almost blending the theoretical and practical, some might think that philosophy education, at least in the form of CPI, would be detrimental to students as compared to traditional instruction. CPI requires lengthy student discussion. It requires taking time to build community among the students. And, the topics students would independently seek to talk about may not be those that they need to understand the subject. As a result, CPI, these folks might say, ends up teaching students certain skills, but fails to get them the knowledge of the subject that they need. CPI is inefficient at getting knowledge into students' heads. This objection is based on the objections science educators make of the movement toward more discussion and problem-solving oriented learning in their own field.<sup>53</sup> Objectors like these would say that knowledge of philosophy is more important than the skills of philosophy. They might argue that philosophy should be taught as its own class, not as a mere set of skills touched upon in other classes. This is clearly a philosopher's objection, not one that might come from teachers, parents, or your average person. It presupposes the value of philosophy education in a way that the other two objections do not. We will refer to this objection as the Focus Objection.

There is some merit to the Focus Objection. After all, a discussion tightly controlled by a teacher is boring and disconnected from the needs of students, but a completely unmoderated discussion certainly could not be called CPI: unmoderated discussions are just like ordinary conversations, perhaps collaborative, but rarely philosophical or true inquiry. A teacher of a subject will always have more knowledge of a subject than her students, if she ought to be called a teacher at all. By providing focus and direction, her students are much more likely to learn something important than if they have an unmoderated discussion.

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<sup>53</sup> M. Mitchell Waldrop, "The Science of Teaching Science," *Nature* 523, no. Special Issue (July 16, 2015): pp. 272-274.

But, the Focus Objection can go further than this. Why bother with CPI at all? If the teacher is more of an expert than the students, why not simply present the information to her students, asking them questions only to check their understanding? The extreme position here, that students are simply vessels into which knowledge from the teacher can be poured, is archaic. But, a moderate position might have something to it. No humble philosopher would claim that philosophy is a set of true beliefs that can simply be taught to students. Learning the skills of philosophy has some importance. But, philosophy is also about opening people's minds to the possibilities.

The strongest version of the Focus Objection is the claim that there is greater value in exposing students to the history of ideas, i.e. the history of philosophy, than in teaching students philosophical skills through CPI. Doing so helps students see the origin of their foundational, cultural beliefs. Why, after all, do we all think as a background, cultural belief, that liberal democracy is the only effective, legitimate form of government, and the endpoint of human development? By teaching the history of philosophy, we can see a path from people justifying monarchy in medieval times, to finding flaws in its effectiveness and legitimacy, to outright criticism from some Enlightenment and then modern philosophers, followed by Hegel saying that liberal democracy is the end of history. Learning the histories of beliefs like these reveals something important: sometimes, beliefs we have that we never even thought to question, almost like "the sky is blue" are not based on argument, but tradition, or cultural inertia. Of course, there are reasons for believing things like the legitimacy of democracy, or other background cultural beliefs we have, but those reasons are often not the reasons we actually believe them. Rather, we were just taught them either directly, or indirectly, e.g. by media exposure. Seeing that vacuum of

argument and justification is powerful, and can spur people to question much of what they thought they knew, to the effect that they may sizably change their beliefs, and thus their actions.

Broadly speaking, then, teaching the history of ideas gives students philosophical choices they might never have thought they had. If CPI is, as we discussed earlier on, a mode of philosophy aimed primarily at making ethical choices in the course of one's life, then it is vital to know what all the choices are. For example, students may be naive moral relativists: they might think what is right is right according to a particular culture and context. They might think, as many do, the only grounding for an objective, universal system of right and wrong lies in religion. But, upon exposure to Immanuel Kant or to John Stuart Mill, they may judge (as those philosophers did, though in very different ways) that it is possible to judge right and wrong objectively and universally without reference to God. On the other hand, students may be devoutly religious and think that atheists just hate God. Seeing real arguments to the nonexistence of God could drastically change how they see the world and what they think they ought to do. CPI may be aimed at helping people make ethical decisions, but, from the argument here, it seems like teaching the history of ideas might achieve that aim more readily.

#### *Responding to the Focus Objection*

In response to the Focus Objection, I would argue that the preferred aim of those who pose this objection, i.e. knowledge of the subject, is the improper goal for *philosophy* education. Unlike science, whence this objection comes, philosophy does not possess a body of knowledge that simply needs to be dispersed. Certainly, there are some places where philosophy has given us sure enough conclusions that it can be taught like a science: logic is the most obvious example. But, usually once a domain of philosophy has become certain enough to be called a

science, it ceases to be taught as philosophy. Philosophy, understood as what is left beyond the bounds of high certainty, provides more questions than answers. Thus, students best learn philosophy when they learn how to ask questions and practice CPI. Learning the ideas of past philosophers is valuable, but not the most important focus of philosophy education. As I demonstrated with my imagined classroom discussion at the beginning of this paper, these ideas can and should be brought in. An exploration of the ideas of the Stoics can shake up students' views on suicide, views they may have taken for granted as universal and common-sense. But, the point of CPI is to help students develop certain skills, like critical thinking and reasoning. As we have seen, there is empirical evidence backing up the idea that CPI improves students' reasoning abilities. But, this just doesn't exist for the teaching of the history of philosophy. The proponent of the Focus Objection would need to explain why the knowledge of the history of ideas is more important than the development of these skills, a conclusion which is not obviously justified.

The proponent of the Focus Objection justifies a historical approach to philosophy education over CPI by arguing that students' views are often historically contingent, and so ought to learn the history of the ideas that they hold as fundamental. I would argue that the larger fact that all ideas are historically contingent means that there is no reason we ought to privilege the philosophical views that have been expressed historically. Even less should we privilege the historical philosophical views that were *popular*. A historical approach can be enlightening, but also limiting. In fact, a historical approach would be outright *impossible* given the way we have been talking about CPI. We have been talking about CPI as a new way of having discussions in classes that are not otherwise centered on philosophy. Even if learning the history of philosophy

were important (and it very well may be!), it could not be a direct alternative to CPI because it would not fit into English, history, and science classes, among others, in the way that CPI can.

This objection and our response to it helps to clarify how CPI ought to be taught. Though I have argued that a historical approach to philosophy education can be limiting, it is possible that an ahistorical approach could be even more limiting: without referring to historical thinkers, people may not go far beyond their culturally inculcated presumptions. Bringing in a historical thinker is like bringing in a foreign exchange student: both are likely to have quite a different way of thinking about things, and so both offer unique perspectives that enrich discussions. If philosophy could be taught with great certainty, the proponents of the Focus Objection might be wholly right. Unfortunately, philosophy is not like science. Proponents of CPI should keep this fact in the back of their minds.

### **Conclusion**

Bringing philosophy into American high schools will be hard. In some cases, it will scarcely be possible. In some cases, we will have compelling objections to the whole enterprise. Nonetheless, I hope that this paper has been persuasive in its central thesis: philosophy education in the form of CPI is a vital part of the future of American education, if it is to progress. Like each individual student, as they progress from the basics of their education, to mastery of complex skills, I think American education is on a path of progress. In its early days, the point of education was just to get students basic literacy. Nowadays, we teach students a lot more, though some still struggle with the basics because of material deprivation. And, I think we can go even further so that every student has the opportunity to practice philosophy, a discipline once reserved for only the most astute, most educated of all.

I think this paper has made a case that this is possible. I have given a detailed picture of collaborative philosophical inquiry and its clear benefits, cognitive, social, and political. Through illustration of CPI in day-to-day practice, and through response to practical and theoretical problems for CPI, I have shown how CPI *can* be done and why it *should* be done in the way I have explained. Any proponent of CPI will have to take seriously how difficult it will be to make CPI common in American schools given the reality of poverty, the difficulty of getting buy-in from administrators, teachers, and students, and the ideological opposition they may face in some districts. Any proponent of CPI will have to recognize and understand how to respond to the serious objections that can be levied against the whole enterprise of CPI, objections to the utility of CPI, to its ability to effectively criticize unjust social structures, and to its ahistorical focus. With this paper, I hope to have given anyone interested in promoting CPI in their school district the basic tools to do so.

Nonetheless, this paper is not the final word. It cannot be. No paper trying to advocate an educational policy nationwide can be. For any school district, there are myriad unique factors contingent to just that district that will have to be carefully considered in pursuing CPI in that district. Much of what I have said in this paper may ring especially true or completely fall short when applied to these highly localized endeavors. Even so, I hope to have provided enough tools, enough consideration of the variety of social contexts where CPI may be pursued that any advocate for CPI knows what basic direction their advocacy for local change should take. This paper says “Go North” but you should never go in the direction of true north. North-west, or north-north-east or west-north-west, etc. might be the right direction to take. And, as long as I have done enough to instill in you that American schools desperately *need* philosophy, I have

faith that you can figure out for yourself what needs to be done to make that happen in your community. To you, I can only say thank you for reading and good luck!<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> For much, *much* more reading, you may read some of the articles I have cited in my own bibliography or you may consult the very thorough bibliography of articles on philosophy for children collected here: Maughn Gregory, "Etats-Unis D'Amérique : Thirty Years of Philosophical and Empirical Research in Philosophy for Children: an Overview," Diotime, July 2007, <https://diotime.lafabriquephilosophique.be/numeros/034/017/>.

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