

## Corrupting Youth

**Volume 1: History and Principles of Philosophical Enquiry (PhiE)**

**Volume 2: How to Facilitate Philosophical Enquiry (PhiE)**

by Peter Worley (2021) Rowman & Littlefield, London. ISBN: 978-1475859195 (Vol 1) & 978-1475848168 (Vol 2)

In his latest offering on the teaching of philosophy, a two-volume book titled *Corrupting Youth*, community of inquiry (CoI) practitioner, educational researcher, award winning author and co-founder of the *Philosophy Foundation* (<https://www.philosophy-foundation.org>) Peter Worley, provides us with a comprehensive overview of his dialectical method of *Philosophical Enquiry* (or PhiE).

PhiE is a deliberately ‘informal’ (Vol. 1, p. xxvii) but highly effective method of philosophising aimed at children of all ages. It is one whose underlying principles and techniques, Worley points out, can be traced to the ancient Greeks, from pre-Socratic philosophers Heraclitus and Parmenides, to Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. As the originator and leading exponent of contemporary PhiE, much of what Worley details here, though on the surface familiar and commonsensical, is the product of years of experience and careful consideration. The result, coupled with Worley’s knack for masterful storytelling, is a highly engaging and accessible introduction to a dialectic-based pedagogy that has gained increasing traction in recent years.

Volume 1 sees Worley detail what he considers to be the ‘true’ theoretical background of his dialectical approach, and that sees him distance himself, somewhat surprisingly, from the theoretical roots of pragmatist philosophers Charles S Peirce and John Dewey, while subtly distinguishing his practice from the more Lipman-inspired P4/wC (philosophy for/with children) programs. Here he also uses the opportunity to cast off aspersions that PhiE, and CoI more broadly, with their ‘fixation’ on reasoning and rationality, are essentially Western-centric constructs that again serve to perpetuate the marginalisation of non-dominant voices and narratives in classrooms.

Worley leans heavily on Edith Hall’s book *The Ancient Greeks: Ten Ways They Shaped the Modern World* (2016) to generate PhiE’s core values and that include both *techné* (skills) and *hexis* (dispositions) that best embody the philosophical ‘way of being’ that is being sought. These core values include:

- Exploration
- Dissent

- Autonomy
- Enquiry
- An open, questioning mindset
- Friendship
- Excellence, and
- Oracy

Worley also provides us with a spirited defense of the role of *competition* in the pursuit of excellence. PhiE is embracive of the *evaluative* and *eliminative* (Vol. 1, pp. 41-44) aspects of doing dialectical philosophy. If philosophical enquiry is indeed evaluative and eliminative, as Worley maintains, then that also bodes well for those wanting to assess discussants. The inclusion of an additional chapter on assessment, one suspects, would in this instance have been especially welcomed by teachers and curriculum developers.

In Volume 2, the focus shifts? towards PhiE facilitation and practices. Here Worley goes on to detail the three *basic conditions* that participants in any philosophy session are expected to maintain? for dialect to occur, and that is 'to think, to speak and to listen' (Vol. 2, p. 3). Represented as a dialectical triangle (or 'Talk Triangle'), one that Worley often employs prior to commencing a philosophy session, the basic idea ultimately rests on the introduction of a question that is posed to the group. The use of classroom questioning to generate provocations (*aporia* in Greek), and, in turn, lines of inquiry that serve to unsettle participants' existing *schemata*, is of course nothing new. As Lipman would argue, questioning 'puts doubt in our minds and doubt is the beginning of inquiry' (Lipman 2003, p. 99). Doubt and the subsequent generation of cognitive dissonance, as most teachers would agree, is essential for learning to occur.

For Worley, however, 'the simplest way to get things going in a philosophical enquiry [and distinguishing it from? some other CoI approaches is for the facilitator] to put a question to the group and take responses' (Vol. 2, p. 3) rather than relying on student-generated questions. More specifically, Worley's method is comprised of two steps: '1) the formulation or articulation of a response to a question, and 2) the identification and articulation of a supporting reason to the response or explanatory reason for the response' (Vol. 2, p. 4). One may be forgiven for thinking here that the PhiE is, therefore, a highly prescriptive approach. However, one would be wrong. Teacher-generated questions are favoured over student-generated ones for purely pedagogical reasons. This is because they are *optimally conducive* to eliciting the kind of dialectical movement for philosophy to occur. So, while the role of the facilitator, Worley argues, is to assist the group 'to get as reflective or as exploratory (etc.) as they are able ...

[d]uring a PhiE, the facilitator should not ... provide idea-content' (Vol. 2, p. 2). Nor should the facilitator 'participate' in the ensuing discussion, beyond the use of procedural interventions. This characteristic feature of the PhiE, Worley continues, even requires facilitators, in most cases, to resist *paraphrasing* (distilling or summarising) philosophical exchanges, lest one risks disrupting the *parity* one is wanting to maintain between the child and the adult *philosopher* facilitator.

Worley's meticulous understanding of question-types and the pedagogical purposes for which they are best employed is perhaps unequaled in the field and elevates the PhiE method above other community of inquiry approaches. After all, it is questioning that triggers what (following Mary McCabe 2015), Worley calls 'the dialectical effect' (Vol. 1, p. 15), that is, the 'back-and-forth movement and ensuing argumentation' (Vol. 1, p. 13) that makes meaning-making or truth-seeking a genuinely open-access domain. And the question-type that is best placed for generating this dialectical effect is Worley's well-known *grammatically closed yet conceptually open* question (see Worley, 2015); by 'best-placed', I mean 'most inclusive'. These are questions that typically elicit one-word responses but that invite tensions, conflicts or controversies: 'Can you step in the same river twice?' (Vol. 1, p. 14), 'Is the mind the same as the body?' (Vol. 2, p. 14) and 'Is a ship that has had all its parts gradually replaced over time the same ship?' (Vol. 2, p. 13).

Volume 2 builds on this and other question-types and is separated into four parts: focusing on basic PhiE facilitation on *Getting PhiE Going*, expert facilitation on *Managing Dialectic* and advanced facilitation on *Taking Things Further*. In Part 4 Worley has included some new philosophy sessions and activities for lesson planning, followed by an equally useful appendix describing the names and details of some of Worley's key facilitator moves.

Drawing on his extensive experience as a teacher-facilitator of philosophical inquiry across a range of educational settings (both conventional and non-conventional), Worley's volumes offer much in terms of theoretical and practical insights for anyone interested in CoI, its history and facilitation. As an unashamed proponent of his work, few CoI practitioners or theorists, I would argue, rival Worley's understanding of the importance of interrogatives in teaching and learning and the dialectical vision Worley brings with him for the teaching of philosophy. The end-product is a pedagogical guide to philosophical thinking that has much to offer teachers and students of philosophy and to novice and advanced facilitators of CoI. Further still, there is much here to offer those simply interested in the development of children's

critical thinking skills or for those merely wanting to encourage greater student voice in one's practice; irrespective of the discipline or achievement level one happens to teach.

Teacher-directed instruction and knowledge dissemination, while vitally important, still dominates, it must be said, most classrooms; virtual or otherwise. But it is not everything. The pedagogical advantages to be had in incorporating increasing opportunities for children to exercise their thinking skills are many and varied. Worley's dialectical philosophical enquiry approach offers educators perhaps the best available pedagogical tools to change existing practices, minimising the temptation for passive learning or the perpetuation of hegemonic narratives that remain closed to critical analysis and the skeptical young mind. PhiE may, it is true, be the most minimally prescriptive community of inquiry approach, but it is one that holds the most promise in genuinely eliciting from its participants the kind of clarity, depth, and precision that sound reasoning demands.

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