

BLE07002

## **Reconstructing Gender in the Philosophy for Children Program**

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### *Abstract*

This paper will examine how Philosophy for Children (P4C) can respond to current gender equity issues in education. I will examine claims that traditional pedagogies facilitate 'masculine' ideals of thinking, while excluding and denigrating the 'feminine'. It will argue that unlike traditional pedagogies, P4C facilitates valuable 'feminine' ways of thinking as interconnected with traditionally masculine methods. Consequently, P4C reconstructs traditional gender stereotypes and challenges the traditional gendering of school subjects. It will also be shown that P4C may be particularly valuable for overcoming the current concerns about the educational performance of boys, especially in relation to literacy and behavioural problems.

### *Introduction*

Philosophy for Children is a pedagogy which integrates the methods and content of philosophy and the pragmatist ideal of the community of inquiry (CI) in order to facilitate reflective thinking skills, as well as the social skills and attitudes necessary for democratic citizenship. A typical P4C class involves the shared reading of a narrative, containing philosophically puzzling ideas, followed by a classroom inquiry initiated by student questions and concerns. However, P4C need not be restricted to the philosophy class or to particular texts. All subjects have epistemological, metaphysical, aesthetic, ethical, political, and logical aspects. Through asking questions, articulating problems, searching for solutions and explanations, expressing opinions, constructing arguments, constructing criteria, searching for counter examples, and evaluating arguments, students work through philosophical problems and acquire greater understanding about their world and their experiences.

In this paper I will argue that P4C reconstructs traditional gender stereotypes, which link caring, imaginative, concrete, communal, and connected thinking with femininity, while abstract, rational, and individualistic thinking are conceived as masculine. Traditional pedagogies emphasize masculine ideals of thinking. As such, traditional schooling can exclude and disadvantages females because it is constructed in opposition to dominant notions of femininity. Boys are also disadvantaged because they are denied access to 'feminine' methods of knowing, which, I will argue, are essential for good thinking and autonomy. In contrast, the P4C classroom, which involves students inquiring into philosophical issues in a caring, communal inquiry, facilitates valuable 'feminine' ways of thinking in conjunction with traditionally masculine methods. Consequently, girls and boys develop aspect of both these thinking types as interconnected and interdependent. By deconstructing these gender stereotypes, P4C also challenges the traditional gendering of school subjects, which involves the arts and humanities being labelled feminine, while apparently more rational subjects like math and science are considered masculine. Thus I believe P4C can help respond to current concerns about the behaviour of boys and their literacy ability. Before I assess how P4C can respond to these problems, I will outline various

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ways in which mainstream schools reinforce dominant gender stereotypes and how this affects the educational experiences of both males and females.

### *1) The participation & performance of females in maths & science*

Some feminist philosophers have argued that dominant, western epistemology reflects masculine experiences and is defined in opposition to the feminine. According to this dominant epistemology, only Reason, devoid of emotion, experience, and the imagination can transcend the particularities and situatedness of concrete, corporeal experience and deliver us abstract, objective, universal, and absolute knowledge. While Reason is associated with masculinity, all that is opposed to reason (e.g. emotion, the body, imagination, experience) is associated with the feminine. Thus, knowledge and reason are defined via an exclusion of the feminine (Lloyd 1984, p. xvii). While the faculties and attributes associated with femininity are considered useful for the reproductive and caring activities of the private, domestic sphere, they have been opposed to the public, productive, and political realm.

This has consequences for education. As Martin argues, the fundamental goal of education is to prepare individuals for participation in the public realm. Thus, traditional education privileges masculine notions of thinking and is opposed to women and the family, which are considered 'a-educational' as well as 'apolitical' (1994, p. 108). This can make mainstream schooling a difficult experience for many women. As Martin states, success at school may require girls and women to reject traditional femininity and conform to dominant ideals of masculinity. Girls who reject traditional femininity may be marginalized and hegemonic masculinity is just as problematic and undesirable as dominant ideals of femininity (Martin 1994, p. 116).

Traditional education's opposition to the 'feminine' is most noticeable in the hierarchical structure of the curriculum. Maths and science are typically considered to be 'masculine' subjects in virtue of their greater emphasis on abstractness, theory, and rationality (Keller 1985, p. 77; Davies 1996, p. 214).<sup>1</sup> These 'masculine' subjects are also considered to be the most prestigious, intellectually demanding, and vocationally valuable. They are prerequisites for many high status university courses and careers, and their content and assessment methods enable them to more reliably discriminate between students.<sup>2</sup> Thus, a good performance in these subjects is considered a good indication of a student's ability more so than a good performance in other subjects (Teese, et al 1995, p. 10). The lower end of the curriculum hierarchy is dominated by the arts and humanities which are considered 'feminine' because their content and methods are more concrete, imaginative, and emotional (Gilbert 1998, p. 122).

One consequence of the gendered nature of the curriculum is that females have been less likely to participate in maths, science, and technology subjects and when they have participated they have been less successful than their male counterparts. Consequently, the participation and performance of females in math and science was a focus of early Australian gender equity strategies introduced in the 1980s. These strategies appear to have had some success. For example, in South Australia in 1987 there were 15% more boys enrolled in year 12 chemistry.<sup>3</sup> By 1991 the difference had

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<sup>1</sup> An exception to the 'masculine' nature of the sciences is biology, which is considered less abstract, theoretical, and prestigious and has always been dominated by females (Teese, et al., 1995, p. 62; Scott, 1980, p. 101).

<sup>2</sup> For example, the content of these subjects is suited to assessments that use short answer and multiple choice questions. It is presumed that these assessment methods can be marked more objectively and consistently than essays or projects, which are more common in the arts and humanities.

<sup>3</sup> In Australia year 12 is the final year of schooling.

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decreased to 9%. At the start of the same period their were 23% more boys enrolled in Physics. By 1991 this gender gap had also decreased to 17% (Teese, et al., 1995, p. 21). The performance of females in these subjects has also improved. In the Australian state of New South Wales (NSW) in 2000, the average mark for female students was 1.4% higher than their males peers in year 12 chemistry and 2.6% higher in Physics (Board of Studies 2001, pp. 22, 23). In the same year the average marks for female students were higher in three of the four year 12 maths subjects offered. In the one subject where boys had a higher average mark the difference was very small (Board of Studies 2001, p.23).

However, there are still some concerns about the accessibility of these subjects for females. Firstly, students still predominantly select subjects in accordance with traditional gender stereotypes. For example, in the 2006 NSW Higher School Certificate (HSC) there were only 2303 females enrolled in Physics compared to 6951 males (NSW Board of Studies 2006).<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, while girls may get higher average marks in many math and science subjects, the girls that enrol in them are a more select group than their male counterparts. As Teese, et al. explain, it is more predominantly high achieving, middle class girls that enrol in these subjects, while the group of boys who enrol in them is larger and more diversified in terms of background and ability (1995, p. 84). This also reveals that it is not all girls that have achieved greater access to these subjects (Teese, et al. 1995, pp. 82-91). Another concern is that statistics suggest that many females enrol in math courses that are less demanding than what they are capable of. In contrast, males tend to enrol in math classes beyond their abilities (1995, p. 56). While females enrol in humanities and arts subjects in greater numbers and perform significantly better in them, this doesn't act as a substitute for their poorer participation and performance in maths and science. As we have seen, the arts and humanities don't have the vocational, academic and social status and benefits that math and science do.

There are various ways in which subjects like maths, physics and chemistry can reflect masculine values and experiences. They often place an 'emphasis on technical knowledge, on solutions to problems which are justified in abstract rather than personal terms, on an individual, competitive approach to problems rather than a collaborative one' and on deductive reasoning over induction (Gilbert 1998, p. 121). The assessment methods relied upon in these subjects also appear to favour 'masculine' thinking styles. Research suggests that boys do better on multiple choice and short answer tests, as well as on high risk public exams, which are the most commonly used assessment methods in maths and science. In contrast, females generally do better with open ended essay questions, assessments requiring greater language ability, and class based projects. These are the dominant forms of assessment used in English, the arts, and humanities but they are still seldom used in math (Teese, et al. 1995, p. 98). Thus, while females have a competitive edge on the types of assessments used in the arts and humanities, again these subjects are not as lucrative as math and science. Furthermore, public examinations, which tend to favour boys, are still fundamental for calculating university entrance scores in the final years of schooling for all subjects. This is why Teese et al. argues that 'English does not 'work' for girls in the way that math and science so demonstrably serve to maximize some boys chances of high achievement in their final exams' (1995, p. 105).

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<sup>4</sup> The HSC is a certificate awarded to students who complete the final year of schooling (year 12) in New South Wales.

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## 2) *The disadvantage of females across the curriculum*

It isn't just the pedagogical methods, epistemological assumptions, and content of maths and science which appear to devalue and exclude the 'feminine'. Kenway and Willis argue that since girls participate and perform well in the arts and humanities, it is often believed that these are gender neutral or feminine subjects. However, as they point out, these subjects can also reflect 'masculine' experiences and values (1997, p. 74-75). For example, several social studies teachers and students in Kenway and Willis' study believed that history was more focused on male exploits and activities (1997, pp. 75-76). As one female student states, 'We wouldn't normally do anything about women in Social Studies because mostly in Social Studies we learn about history. It would be pretty good if we did I guess but I don't really know if we could because I don't really about any women that was anything in history. (1997, p. 77)

It's not just the content of these subjects that may reflect 'masculine' experiences and ideals, but also the pedagogical methods used. For example, essay writing and classroom discussions may emphasize objective, abstract, depersonalised, and aggressive forms of argumentation, which are associated with dominant 'masculine' ways of knowing (Belenky, et al. 1986, p. 200). The problem is that schooling, regardless of the subject area, has traditionally been focused on the cultivation of ideals of thinking and knowing that are incompatible with dominant notions of femininity. Consequently, many female students lack confidence in themselves as learners; underestimate their abilities; enrol in subjects less demanding than what they appear capable of; display greater dependency on teachers; are often more cautious and conservative in their responses on tests; are less likely, or less able, to contribute to classroom discussions; and appear reluctant to challenge, critique, or disagree with teachers or other students (Teese, et al. 1995, p. 97; Belenky, et al. 1986, Ch. 2; Gilbert and Taylor 1991; Slade 1994, p. 30).

## 3) *The participation & performance of males in literacy, English, art and the humanities*

Just as girls have shown some reluctance to participate in 'masculine' subjects, boys participate less in English, the arts and humanities and also tend to be less successful in these subjects when they do participate. In Australia's 2004 National Literacy and Numeracy Benchmark tests, 3.1% more year three girls achieved the national reading benchmark than boys of the same year level.<sup>5</sup> For year 7 students, the gender gap had increased to 3.9% in favour of girls (MCEETYA, 2006).<sup>6</sup> Male students also have lower participation rates and levels of achievement in traditionally 'feminine' subjects during the later years of schooling. While English is now compulsory in the NSW's HSC, 2006 enrolments show that girls are still more likely to enrol in the more advanced English subjects. While male students accounted for 53% of the enrolments in Standard English, they only made up about 40% of the enrolments in Advanced English (NSW Board of Studies 2006). Males also have much lower participation rates in most year 12 arts and humanities subjects. For example, in 2006 only 17% of the 3798 students enrolled in the subject Society and Culture were males. Of the 8833

<sup>5</sup> There are similar results for the writing benchmark, with 4.1% more year three girls showing the minimum standard of writing ability. In year 7, 4.6% more girls meet this benchmark (MCEETYA, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> These tests have been conducted across all Australian states and territories every year since 1999 on students in years 3, 5 and 7.

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students enrolled in Visual Arts only 30% were male (NSW Board of Studies 2006).<sup>7</sup> Female students also perform significantly better in these subjects. In the 1995 NSW's HSC, the state mean for English was 25% higher for females than it was for males and two out of every three students in the top 30% of all English candidates were female (McGaw 1996, p. 109).

At least part of the problem seems to be that subjects like English, art and the humanities appear to conflict with dominant notions of masculinity (Gilbert 1998, p. 200). For example, it is often argued that reading is a passive, and thus feminine, activity and school literature frequently deals with 'feminine' themes such as personal relationships and emotions. Furthermore, writing in English often emphasizes imaginativeness, introspection, personal responses to texts, and empathizing with characters (Gilbert 1998, p. 211). As Gilbert explains, such literary practices conflict with dominant notions of masculinity which stress the suppression of emotions, activeness, and a focus on things 'outside the self, rather than in the self' (1998, p. 214). Many male students seem very aware of this inherent conflict between English and hegemonic forms of masculinity:

English is more suited to girls because it's not the way guys think...this subject is the biggest load of bullshit I have ever done. Therefore, I don't particularly like this subject. I hope you aren't offended by this but most guys who like English are faggots. (Male Secondary School Student interviewed by Martino, 1995, p. 354)

Boys may also be reluctant to engage in such subjects because these subjects are thought to have lower academic, social and vocational value. Boys seem to have a more instrumental approach to schooling, with their subject choices revealing an emphasis on gaining paid work, particularly in the most high status jobs and positions. In contrast, girls, who tend to select from a boarder group of subjects, appear to have broader educational goals and are more likely select subjects based on their current interests and abilities (Gilbert 1998, pp. 121, 135-138; Glaser 1994, p. 15). Since maths, science and technology are most associated with the male public sphere of production and politics, boys' lack of participation and performance in the arts and humanities may not necessarily disadvantage them in terms of career prospects, university entrance, and social status (Teese, Kenway & Willis 1997, p. 73; Lingard & Douglas 1999, p. 161; Gilbert 1998, p. 201, 216).

#### *4) Male students and anti-social behavior*

Another area of concern is boys greater tendency for antisocial and disruptive behaviour. Some research suggests that Australian boys are two or three times more likely to be reported as the perpetrators of disruptive classroom behaviour (Collins, et al. 1996, p.62). This research also shows that boys are more frequently the perpetrators of school bullying and harassment of both girls and other boys (Collins, et al. 1996, p. 29). Other research suggests that in Australia about 80 percent of the students suspended or excluded from school are boys (Commonwealth of Australia 2002 p.16). Boy's behavioural problems also extend beyond the school. Australian juvenile crime rates show that boys and young men are far more likely to be arrested.

<sup>7</sup> The exceptions to this are Geography and Economics, which enrol significantly more boys (NSW Board of Studies, 2006). However, unlike other humanities subjects, these subjects could be seen as more 'masculine' because they emphasize quantification and measurement and may appear to be more vocationally orientated (Teese, et al. p. 31).

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For example, in 1993/4, about 80% of the juvenile arrests for serious assaults were males (Buckingham 2000, p. 5).

One contributing factor to boys' behavioural problems is thought to be the fact that schooling expects and rewards behaviour that is feminine. For example, students are expected to be docile, obedient, quiet, still, orderly, neat, work cooperatively, display care for their work and for others, and passively receive information. This conflicts with the notion that boys are robust, energetic, assertive, emotionally neutral, risk-taking, and independent (Gilbert 1998, p. 174). Boys who cooperative and studious are frequently perceived as feminine, are socially alienated and are the victims of bullying, especially from other boys (Gilbert 1998, pp. 132-139). As Kenway and Willis explain:

...hegemonic forms of masculinity involve derogating the feminine (the soft, the emotional) and purging it from amongst boys' groups and within the self... This is addressed by some through strong group identification and boundary maintenance and expressed through hostility to difference of any sort - mainly to subordinate males and 'insubordinate' females. (1997, p. 135)

While, I agree that the behaviour expected of students is 'feminine', I don't believe that this behaviour is valued because it is feminine. Rather, like women, children are considered to lack rationality and are expected to submit to the authority of more rational, autonomous individuals. Thus, the problem is not so much that schools value the feminine and see masculinity as subversive. The problem is that schools accept a dominant notion of childhood that bares striking similarities to dominant notions of femininity and conflicts with dominant notions of masculinity. Thus, it is not really a feminisation of schooling that contributes to boy's behavioural problems but rather, as Gilbert states, a conflict 'between being treated as a child and treated as a boy' (1998, p. 208).

##### *5) Philosophy for children's reconstruction of gendered epistemologies*

There is some concern that P4C's emphasis on logic and philosophical inquiry may promote notions of Reason and argumentation that are adversarial and defined in opposition to the 'feminine' emotions, imagination, corporeality, connectedness, and subjectivity (Field 1997; MaColl 1997; Haynes 1994; Valentino 1998, p. 29; Birkhahn 1997, p. 39). This concern is expressed by MaColl:

I have to confess that I have often felt, as a feminist philosopher, some disquiet in advocating philosophy in schools, for the following reason: would you wish on young women or small girls a practice of philosophy, which you yourself have come to see as deeply imbued with disguised, gendered ideals and associations, which are, if not wrong, at the very least, not appropriate for everyone? (1997, p. 6)

However, drawing on Dewey's anti-dualistic philosophy, P4C assumes that optimal ideals of thinking actually involve an integration of the 'feminine' and 'masculine'. For example, P4C's notion of reasonableness is not opposed to the emotions and imagination. P4C assumes that reason, emotion and imagination are intertwined and functionally co-dependent. Isolated from one and other they are incomplete and ineffective for constructing meaning (Bleazby, 2007). P4C's classroom community of

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inquiry also emphasizes the relational, communal nature of thinking and the self. Thus, P4C rejects the dominant, 'masculine' ideals of rationality and autonomy as opposed to 'feminine' dependency and connectedness (Bleazby, 2006). P4C's pragmatist notions of truth and knowledge also overcome the reason/experience, object/subject and abstract/concrete dualisms. In the P4C classroom, all thinking is a way of meaningfully reconstructing concrete experiences and thus all thinking is embodied, situated and subjective. However, the reconstruction of experience also involves abstract and objective knowledge and concepts, including formal logic. In the P4C classroom the principals of formal logical are understood to be abstractions and generalizations of methods of thinking that have been proven successful in prior, concrete inquiries. Thus, in the CI, it is assumed that logical principals, like all knowledge, are social-cultural and thus fallible. As such, P4C rejects the idea that 'masculine' objectivity and abstractness are completely severed from 'feminine' subjectivity, corporeality and concreteness. Thus, as Glaser states, 'the community of inquiry provides an environment in which a number of traditional gender dualisms break down' and where undesirable philosophical ideals and methods are reconstructed (1994, p. 16; See also Field 1997; Collins 2001; Redshaw 1994; Haynes 1994; Sharp 1993; Splitter & Sharp 1995).

Furthermore, far from disadvantaging girls and women, I believe P4C's focus on logic and philosophical inquiry may benefit female students in particular (Collins, 2004, p. 21). As explained, research suggest that many female students lack confidence in themselves as reasoners. The explicit and implicit exclusion of females from certain activities and disciplines, such as math, science, and logic has undoubtedly contributed to this. P4C can particularly benefit those who have less developed thinking skills and/or who lack confidence in themselves as reasoners because it specifically focuses on facilitating good thinking and especially because it facilitates an ideal of thinking which is not completely opposed to the 'feminine'. As Haynes argues, facilitating the development of reasoning skills promotes feminist goals because the capacity to think for oneself frees both females and males from complete dependence on, and control by, others (Haynes 1994, p. 23).

Most importantly, P4C's anti-dualistic epistemology also challenges the traditional gendered and hierarchical structure of the curriculum. Since P4C assumes that all subjects involve an ideal of thinking, which reconstructs and integrates both 'female' and 'male' forms of knowing, it rejects the gendering and ranking of subjects. If *all* students were required to engage in philosophical communities of inquiry in all classes they would come to see traditional gender dualisms as fallacious and problematic. Thus, the integration of P4C across the curriculum could help balance out the gender differences in participation rates and levels of achievement in different subjects. Of course, these gender stereotypes and dominant notions of knowledge are reinforced by many dominate social values, institutions and practices beyond the school. This is why schooling must also enable students to openly inquire into gender issues, including gendered ideals of thinking and learning.

#### *6) Discussing gender in the philosophical community of inquiry*

The P4C classroom is an ideal environment for discussing gender issues because it facilitates the necessary critical, creative, caring and collaborative thinking skills, while also providing relevant philosophical subject matter (Collins 2001, p. 29; Turgeon 1997, p. 3). The many sub-disciplines of Philosophy include problems and information relevant to gender issues. Firstly, feminist philosophy provides various critiques of how epistemologies, social practices, public institutions, political systems,

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and values, can be patriarchal, as well as racist and classist. Feminist philosophy also suggest feminist alternatives, which may be assessed and implemented by students. Aesthetics and media ethics enable students to analyse how gender and sexuality is constructed and represented in different art forms and popular culture and the ethical implications for those working in the media. The study of epistemology and logic enables students to critique how different ideals of knowledge and thinking may be gendered. Importantly, this will also provoke and enable students to question the traditional gendering of the curriculum. Political philosophy can facilitate student inquiry into human rights, citizenship, autonomy, freedom, justice, equality, harassment and discrimination laws, democracy and multiculturalism, all of which are relevant to gender issues. The problems and theories of ethics can provide students with knowledge and skills for analysing the moral dimension of sexual harassment, sexual discrimination, bullying, violence, and personal relationships. Ethical inquiry will also enable students to construct guidelines and standards for acceptable behaviour inside and outside the classroom. Logic also enables students to construct standards for good thinking, which can facilitate a meaningful and reasonable inquiry into these controversial and contentious issues.

#### *7) Gender, literacy and communication skills in philosophy for children*

P4C may also help improve the participation and performance of boys in literacy and English. P4C rejects the view that reading is a passive and thus 'feminine' activity of merely receiving information from a text. While traditional school texts are primarily designed to transmit information to students, texts used for P4C must be more open and problematic so as to provoke communal inquiry, where students are considered active participants in creating meaning (Othman & Hashim 2006; Seon-He 2001-2002). In the CI it is assumed that each student has a unique situatedness that will affect their interpretation of the text (Seon-He 2001-2002, pp. 44-45). Thus, there will normally be a multitude of textual interpretations given in a CI. Attention is drawn to this multitude of interpretations because the whole class jointly read the same text and this shared reading is immediately followed by a communal inquiry, initiated by student questions. While the text will limit the number of possible of interpretations, if there was only one unambiguous understanding of the text, inquiry would be unnecessary. This diversity of interpretations provokes inquiry as a means to critically comparing and drawing connections between them (Othman & Hashim 2006, p. 27). Thus, P4C students learn that reading a text involves more than just correctly recognizing words. It is an active and creative process of meaning making. As Lipman explains, reading involves a 'collaboration between author and reader that results in a common product that goes beyond what the author has stated or implied' (2003, p. 175). This notion of reading may be particularly beneficial for boys because it is clearly an active, autonomous activity that involves critical and creative inquiry. Furthermore, since P4C accepts that textual meaning is constructed and contextual, it facilitates critical literacy, which encourages children to look for sexism, classicism, racism, and other types of bias when reading texts.

P4C may also help improve literacy skills in general. Since reading is a process of constructing meaning and P4C focuses on facilitating the thinking skills needed for constructing meaning, it is not surprisingly that there is research showing a correlation between P4C and improvement in reading ability (e.g. Othman & Hashim 2006). As Seon-He states, constructing meaning involves making various connections, including connections between different words, between words and things, between premises and conclusions, between things that are similar and things

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that are dissimilar, between the general and the particular, between parts and wholes, between causes and effects, etc (2001-2002, p. 45). The study of logic also helps students understand why some inferences and connections are legitimate and meaningful and why others are not (Lipman 2003, p. 176; Palermo and D'Erasmus 1991, p. 11). As Lipman states, facilitating such reasoning skills is more likely to improve literacy skills than focusing on 'syntactical lapses, vocabulary weaknesses', and 'spelling deficiencies' because 'reasoning skills contribute directly to the reader's acquisition of meaning, and it is access to meaning that most effectively motivates the reader to continue pursuing the reading process' (2003, p. 176).

Participation in P4C's classroom CI should also help improve language, literacy and communication skills, simply because participation in the CI requires students to choose and structure their words thoughtfully and carefully, give examples, provide reasons and make connections between one's own ideas and the ideas of others and the text. These skills don't just characterize good speaking and listening but also good writing and reading. The CI scaffolds students while they are developing these skills because the teacher and students offer each other assistance and model these skills for each other. It is sometimes argued that such an emphasis on classroom discussion privileges girls because they have superior social, communication and language skills (e.g. Buckingham 2004, p. 17). However, while the CI emphasizes inter-dependency, social relationships and verbal ability, as we have seen, it is also *dialogical*, in that it is guided by logic and makes use of abstract concepts and principals. Since P4C facilitates these 'masculine' and 'feminine' types of thinking as interconnected, a strength in a particular area of inquiry could help a student develop other interrelated inquiry skills. Students who are lacking in a particular area, such as language or logical ability, will also benefit by being exposed to other students who may be stronger in these areas and who can model them.

#### 8) *Gender and student behaviour in the philosophy for children classroom*

P4C's facilitation of communication skills and its reconstruction of gender stereotypes could also help reduce bullying. A significant amount of school bullying and harassment is sex based, with gender stereotypes being used as weapons for denigrating and dominating others. Reconstructing traditional gender stereotypes will require students to question the assumption that the 'masculine' is opposed to, and superior to, the 'feminine'. Consequently, boys may feel less pressured to dominate and control girls and non 'masculine' boys through harassment, ridicule, violence and social alienation. In fact, P4C's reconstruction of the dualistic construction of gender should help students realize that these gender stereotypes are unachievable because they require a separation of things that are intertwined and interdependent (e.g. reason/emotion, individual/community). Consequently, those students who don't conform to dominant stereotypes are less likely to be seen as subversive, weird, and threatening. As such, they are less likely to be subject to harassment and exclusion.

By reconstructing dominant gender stereotypes, P4C may also reduce the disruptive classroom behaviour of boys. Male students who participate in a classroom CI are less likely to believe that care, attentive listening, collaboration and learning are opposed to masculinity. In the CI these are valued attributes that all good inquirers and autonomous individuals possess, regardless of their gender. Most importantly P4C also rejects the traditional view that well behaved children and good students are *submissive, passive, silent, and subordinate*. This notion of childhood is undoubtedly the cause of much student misbehaviour and disruption, especially from boys, who, as

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we have seen, are likely to dismiss such traits as ‘feminine’. It is understandable that students, both male and female, resist this ideal of the good student because it denies them any sense of autonomy and individuality. In contrast to traditional pedagogies, P4C is a student-centred pedagogy. P4C rejects the child-adult dualism, which posits adults (at least white, male, middle class adults) as fully autonomous and developed, while children are seen as completely dependent. In the P4C classroom children have degrees of autonomy and rights, especially the right to inquire in a community, which is necessary for personal and social growth (Bleazby, 2006). The classroom inquiry is initiated by student questions and all students are encouraged to actively participate, give their own opinions, share their experiences and question others, including the teacher.<sup>8</sup> In the CI, participation and effort is rewarded with meaningfulness and a greater capacity for independent thinking and this helps keep students motivated and engaged. In such an environment students are less likely to be disruptive and resistant because they are less likely to feel oppressed, pacified, manipulated and bored.

### Conclusion

Thus, it has been argued that P4C may be able to overcome many of the gender inequalities that characterize traditional pedagogies. P4C reconstructs traditional gender stereotypes, which posit the imagination, emotions, corporeality, and experience as feminine, and reason, objectivity and abstract thought as masculine. I have examined the various ways in which traditional education can be seen to perpetuate and reinforce these gender stereotypes. These stereotypes contribute to the underperformance and lower participation rates of boys in the arts and humanities and of girls in math and science. They also contribute to boy’s behavioural problems. By facilitating an ideal of thinking that explicitly integrates both ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ ways of knowing, P4C reconstructs these gender stereotypes and challenges the hierarchical structure of the curriculum. Consequently, P4C may offer a solution to these current gender and education problems.

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<sup>8</sup> However, the CI is still rule governed and structured, and the teacher’s more developed inquiry and communication skills gives her some degree of authority (Bleazby, 2006).

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