Interactions within a Philosophical Community of Inquiry: Can they Transform Pedagogy and what do Teachers Learn in the Process?

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Abstract
Inquiry-based learning responds to an improved understanding of dialogical learning processes using thought and language (Freire, 1970; Bohm, 1996; Dewey, 1933; Vygotsky, 1978). Such approaches require active interaction and reflection of both teacher and student. Though these theories of learning for educational reform have been integrated into professional learning for teachers, and included in educational goals (MCEETYA, 1999) there remains a gap in practice. The qualitative methodology of this retrospective interview study allowed teachers to describe thoughts, feelings and experiences resulting from work with students in Philosophical communities of inquiry (Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyan, 1980), and consequences for pedagogy. Results reveal evidence for the efficacy of the Philosophy program, in terms of its impact on pedagogy. Contributions to the literature and the fields of professional and personal development for teachers are conveyed.

Introduction
One way of characterising theories of teaching and learning is along a continuum from student-centred learning to teacher-centred teaching. Most experienced teachers would accept the need for a variety of theories-in-use (Argyris & Schón, 1974), which can be adapted in order to respond appropriately to students and contexts. Current ideas and ideals about student-centred, inquiry-based learning respond to an improved understanding of the learning process, including socio-cultural and dialogical learning processes which rely on thought and language to foster student learning (Bruner, 1961; Burgh, Field & Freakley, 2006; Cam, 1995; Dewey, 1933; Lipman, 2003; Renshaw, 1998; Rogoff, 1990; Splitter & Sharp, 1995; Vygotsky, 1978; Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976). Research on pedagogy (Hayes, Mills, Christie, & Lingard, 2006; Lingard et. al., 2001; Newmann, & Associates, 1996; Newmann, & Wehlage, 1993) reveals that teachers mostly use didactic, content driven approaches to teaching and learning and that student voice is heard mainly in response to teachers, not in instigating learning experiences, investigations or inquiries. The pedagogy of teachers who are making a difference is markedly different from those who view teaching and learning as a predictable, linear, passive transmission of static knowledge. The Adelaide Declaration (MCEETYA, 1999) outlines a number of goals for schooling that would engage teachers and students in interactive, inter-responsive and genuinely inquiring teaching and learning activities which promote critical, creative and caring thinking and the habits of lifelong learning.

An interactive, inter-responsive, inquiring pedagogy is found in dialogue which breaks out of the traditional patterns of student-teacher talk of initiation, response, evaluation (IRE) (Cazden, 1988) to be more inclusive, more complex and more considerate of all members of the classroom community. The argument presented here asserts that the most productive theory-in-use, in terms of both student and teacher outcomes, is interactive, inter-responsive and genuinely inquiring; that is, it considers the student, the teacher and the context in the process of learning and finding out together. This can happen in a Philosophical community of inquiry.

The interview data presented in this paper is the expression of teachers who have become reflective practitioners (Schón, 1983) and are able to attest to the transformational benefits of persistent and regular participation in an interactive, inter-responsive, inquiring dialogue with their students through teaching Philosophy for Children (Cam, 1995; Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyan, 1980). Following is a brief review of the literature regarding Philosophy for Children and the aims and outcomes of this research project selected for this paper: Can interactions within a Philosophical community of inquiry transform pedagogy and what do teachers learn in the process? The possibilities of Philosophical dialogue with students are seen as extensive in terms of student outcomes, professional development and lifelong learning for educators, in a resource efficient, economically beneficial manner.

The process of Philosophical inquiry is known for having a positive effect on children’s thinking and their academic and social outcomes (García-Morinyon & Colom, 2005; IAPC, 1982; IAPC, 1991; Trickey & Topping, 2004; Trickey & Topping, 2007). To achieve these outcomes the teacher, when facilitating the Philosophical community of inquiry, is required to act at a metacognitive level, consciously employing substantive and procedural knowledge and
critical, creative and caring thinking skills, including wondering and questioning skills, to guide the progress of the dialogue (Fynes-Clinton, 2008). As Splitter and Sharp (1995) outline, the teacher’s role is a varied one.

To be sure the teacher, as a model of the inquiry process, has a special responsibility to guide her students to assist them in ways that do not subvert or undermine their own initiatives. But the community runs against the grain of many of the metaphors traditionally employed to describe the teacher’s role. She does not function as a transmitter of knowledge and values, nor as a banker making intellectual deposits in the minds of her students. She teaches by wondering, by thinking and by doing, in reflective and self-corrective fashion, and by helping her students to do likewise (p.120).

Thus the teacher is using and monitoring the use of critical, creative and caring thinking skills in the Philosophical dialogue and bringing her students’ attention to them when appropriate. The employment of such thinking skills in a cognitive, metacognitive and reflective manner is essential to the transformation of pedagogy (Baumfield, 2006). Particular to Philosophical inquiry is the nature of learning which is not simply student-centred or teacher-centred; rather it is community focused learning which is interactive, inter-responsive and inquiry centred. This type of learning includes all individuals within a class community, learning together in an interdependent manner. The learning can be for both teacher and students (see Figure 1) who take particular care to listen to each other, respect each other’s ideas, build on each other’s ideas and understand that there may be no single right answer.

![Figure 1. An interaction centred model of teaching and learning.](image)

Reflection, in and on the Philosophical community of inquiry, individually and as a community, is crucial to the learning of both students and teachers. Recognition of the importance of reflection is distributed across the bodies of literature addressing the learning of children, adults and organisations (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Argyris & Schön, 1978; Butler, 1996; Dewey, 1916; Seashore-Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996; Schön, 1983; Senge, 1990; Splitter & Sharp, 1995). Teacher reflection often takes place external to actual classroom practices and takes time afterwards in meetings, through professional development or in the compilation of portfolios (Berrill & Whalen, 2007); if indeed it happens at all. What is interesting about the reflection that comes from Philosophical communities of inquiry is that its spark is most often fired from the mind and floating on the voices of children, in class time. This process is synergistic, surprising and often as difficult as it is delightful.

The effect of facilitating Philosophical communities of inquiry on pedagogy has been acknowledged by some working in the field of Philosophy for Children (Cherednichenko, Harvey & Roberts, 2003; Golding, 2005; Splitter & Sharp, 1995) and investigated by a small number of researchers. Yeazell (1981), Daniel (1988) and Roche (2000) have explored the effects of implementing Philosophy with small numbers (1 to 13) of teachers. Their findings reveal that implementing Philosophy initiates a broadening of teaching knowledge, improvement in the teacher’s thinking skills, a critical evaluation of their pedagogy and improved confidence and self-esteem of the teacher. These effects are attributed, by the authors, to the teacher’s experience of critical reflection in and on the Philosophical community of inquiry. Such effects are aligned with the adult learning literature (Butler, 1996; Knowles, 1970; Mezirow, 1991; Schön, 1987) which recognises the power of situated, purposeful, and reflective learning as a catalyst in transformative, paradigmatic shifts.

Unfortunately for teachers, professional development available to them is often disconnected and driven by system agendas, which magnetize their energy and time away from the intricacies of scaffolding thinking, dialogue and learning with students. Philosophical inquiry in the classroom allows thought and dialogue with students to precede reflection in and on action, in the classroom. The construction and generation of pedagogical knowledge,
and ultimately a change in pedagogy, a reconstruction for the better, takes place in classrooms in a manner that provokes transformative learning for all members of the Philosophical community of inquiry (Butler, 1996; Daniel, 1988; Dewey, 1957; Roche, 2000, Schön, 1987; Yeazzell, 1981).

The data presented here portrays the thoughts of teachers who had engaged in this process, and could describe the transformation of their pedagogy and selves and its impetus in their interactions with students. This data facilitated the development of a grounded theory-in-use (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Strauss, & Corbin, 1990) of teaching and learning which is interactive, inter-responsive and inquiring; an experiential mode of teaching and learning which considers and responds to the student, the teacher and the context. This can ultimately be seen as a mode of building habitual and lifelong learning processes in classrooms for both students and teachers.

**Research Aims**

The aims of this research were in part to document the stories of staff, who had been involved in implementing the Philosophy program for up to eleven years, and to review and describe the impact of training in and implementation of the Philosophy program on their pedagogy, in order to answer the following questions:

- Does the Philosophy program change pedagogy? In what ways?
- What do teachers subsequently report to be critical junctures in, and features of the change in terms of their pedagogy? i.e. What part do students play in this process? How is the interaction with students different? What part does reflection play in this process?

**Methodology**

The participants were the principal and 13 teachers in one primary school. The teachers themselves had between 18 months and 20 plus years of teaching experience and had been at this school from between 6 months to 17 years. The participants included 12 females and 2 males. Their cultural and ethnic heritage included Australian, southern and northern European, Irish, Indian and one New Zealander. Their experience and knowledge of the Philosophy program ranged from 6 months to 11 years.

Each participant was interviewed once by the researcher. Both the participants and the researcher had a sound understanding of the Philosophy program as implemented at the school. The interview schedules were designed to gather the broad history and description of pedagogy at the school, followed by particular investigation regarding any changes in terms of Productive Pedagogies (Lingard, et al. 2001). The interviews were semi-structured and reflective (Neuman, 2004) involving three phases:

1. **Descriptive questions**, which explored the setting, participants, history and Philosophy program.
2. **Structural Questions**, which required the participants to organise information into conceptual categories identified by the researcher, and verify such information.
3. **Contrast Questions**, which built on all the previous answers and focused generally on future expectations.

The interviews ranged in length from 35 minutes to 2 hours. Each interview was transcribed by the researcher and reviewed by the particular participant. Interviews were then coded to reveal emergent patterns and themes (Patton, 1990) using nvivo 7 software (QSR, 2006). These interview data and themes were then analysed and synthesised to answer the stated research questions and subsequently develop a grounded theory-in-use (Strauss, & Corbin, 1990) for pedagogical and personal transformation.

**Research Findings**

The results focused on here are specific to the nature of teaching and learning interactions within Philosophical communities of inquiry and the effect they have on pedagogy. The data from these interviews reveal evidence for the efficacy of the Philosophical communities of inquiry in terms of the impact that interactions with children in Philosophical communities of inquiry, have on the pedagogy and self of the teacher, where Philosophical communities of inquiry are implemented as a whole school approach, in a consistent and regular fashion.

Most of the teachers agreed that Philosophy had been instrumental in the transformation of their pedagogy. Generally the teachers spoke of changes in terms of their pedagogy, moving from a ‘banking’ (Freire, 1970) model of teaching and learning to a more collaborative and interactive, inter-responsive, inquiry-based approach that found its impetus in student questions (Scholl, 2005), that is in student (not teacher) voice. The themes revealed through the teacher’s comments are interconnected. They confirm links between pedagogy and aspects of interactions with students, including listening, locus of control, student voice and reflection. When student voice and patterns of interaction cause the teacher to become reflective practitioners the transformational power of Philosophical communities of inquiry becomes most evident. Evidence supporting these research findings is categorically summarised in Table 1.
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<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Teacher Comment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pedagogical Transformation</td>
<td>Models of pedagogy teachers reflect on and use</td>
<td>Definitely changed my pedagogy … I guess from the models of teachers I’d seen before I always thought you needed more control than I worry about having now … the teachers that … I’d seen … at other primary schools, that I’d been, were much more … teacher centred … and I guess you know I built my practice on what I’d seen, and I developed my own practice, and modelled my own practice on what I’d seen … I didn’t really see a teaching model like this until I came to the school and … I always liked the idea of the inquiry approach because … that’s the way I would like to learn myself … I was never given that opportunity at school … there was no such thing as an inquiry approach – I was always in trouble for inquiring (laughter). Maxine</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>I think its just opened it up really and made it … made my practice more … or my approach more holistic, that’s a very flouncy word but, its helped me to not adhere to so rigidly to you know, in the beginning key learning areas and that type of thing that learning is more open ended … for learning to have maximum benefit to the learner then it should be open ended, it should be inquiry based … you don’t need to stick so rigidly to you know sort of syllabus documents and guidelines, I think that’s important but its more important for the student to have to work to. Frederick</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional and personal self concept of the teacher</td>
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<td>When I look at this one about my self … and Philosophy has made me reflect a lot more about me as a person, about how I learn, about how I, even how I teach. I think it’s changed how I perceive myself and then also how I interact with other people. Margaret</td>
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<td>Uncovering or reinvigoration of these teachers' faith and belief in the abilities of children.</td>
<td></td>
<td>I’ve also got a fairly strong belief and a fairly strong faith that kids can uncover a great deal conceptually for themselves. Frederick You’d be surprised how much the kids know … and how they make connections themselves. Anne [Teachers] need to really genuinely believe that children have a lot to offer, they need to really believe that it is worth stopping and listening and giving them the opportunity. Sophie</td>
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<td>The role students play in pedagogical transformation</td>
<td>Causing the teacher to reflect and reconstruct their thinking</td>
<td>I think it just changes the way you teach right. … I think that it’s made me realize - get the kids more involved in their own learning -does that make sense? So before we do anything now the kids will work together and they’ll come up with ideas or, we do a lot more reflecting on things, we do a lot more discussion on things, so that the kids are much more involved, it’s not just me up there telling them what they have to do … I just think its my role in my classroom has changed and my approach to doing things … and the fact that you know I’ll push the kids a lot harder like, you know my grade three kids come out with things that I know some grade five kids wouldn’t come out with. Jane I’ve sat there sometimes and I thought I’ve never thought about it that way, and I’ve just been blown away with the way they’ve thought about things. Maxine Through the learning that I’ve had on my own [and] as a professional but also with the students, the things that students discuss and I think I haven’t actually even thought about that in my life before, I’ve certainly never thought about something in that way before its been very, very … liberating to me. Frederick Yes but they [the children] influenced the change as well … right from the word go. Just being amazed at the novel way they look at things and thinking, I would never have thought of thinking of it that way. Simone You know I’ve learnt so much from my kids. It’s not just what they’ve learnt from me in Philosophy. I’ve actually learnt to think better through what they’ve thought. Maxine</td>
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| Providing a model of open ended thinking for the teacher. |                                                                          | The greatest one was now … I was doing the Philosophy on what is ordinary? And they were really struggling with what is, what is ordinary … and then a little girl in the end said, “I can tell you what is not ordinary”, and I said “OK. Alright tell us what is not ordinary” and she says, “A pig diving into water”. And I said “Oooh! That’s true. That’s not ordinary.” And anyway I’ve never forgotten it! Simone We were talking about how much is a lot and one child said “It’s a bit more than a bit but not as much as a heap” and another went on to say “You can have a lot of cells in your body but just one has cancer in it and that’s a lot…” That certainly stuck with me. Sarah
### Table 1 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Teacher's Comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The patterns and quality of the interaction between teacher and students</td>
<td>The teachers listening to the students and the students listening to each other</td>
<td>You need to be able to… not talk as much, and listen to the kids more. Margaret</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Listening and respect are one of the first things I start to develop as a community. Maxine</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>It's a case of listening really well to what other people are doing, because [of] some of the tools they use and some of the ways they attack things. Nel</td>
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<tr>
<td>A shift in the locus of control for learning</td>
<td></td>
<td>I always use a very much community based pronouns when facilitating sessions with kids, because I'm not important … No - not more important than you in this…Frederick</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>You know and if you are a bit of a control freak, give yourself a pattern and let it go child, child, child then you, like you've got to get that pattern going and have it. Margaret</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>I've really felt like if it hadn't been for working at this school I probably wouldn't be teaching now, and I would put that down to… working in classrooms that operate through a framework of Philosophy has really helped me see that kids, in order to learn well, really should be in control of what they're doing. Frederick</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The children and … the types of things they were discussing and the way that they were discussing them and the whole … disagreeing with each other part was, you know and there was no one batted an eyelid at it you know …… It was quite ok to disagree, and I think that was a bit of shock to start with. Linda</td>
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<td>A more respectful, democratic and supportive learning environment</td>
<td></td>
<td>Just the respect of allowing other people to have a say and really listening to what they're saying, and taking in what they're saying and building on those ideas and if they're challenging those ideas …in a …responsible way that the person … they're challenging doesn't feel … threatened by it. Maxine</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I think [Philosophy] teaches these children to question, it teaches them to think and think well, it teaches them to, to explore their disagreements properly. Paula</td>
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<td>Inclusion and presence of student voice.</td>
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<td>It's helped me to understand that kid's views are important …… And I guess it's all the … teaching with a more student-centred approach just rather than the old chalk and talk thing ……..It's I say it might have helped me develop a more inquiry-based teaching approach I think … you know getting kids to ask questions. Matthew</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Another important thing about Philosophy is that it's the children's questions; it's the things that they're dearly interested in. Simone</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>But they [the students] love it. They just love it! I think it's such an empowering thing for them that they just, oh WOW, someone will listen to me. Nel</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Another important thing is that the children have a voice, and that is very special to them and means a lot. Simone</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>Reflection which fuels the progress of the Philosophical inquiry</td>
<td>It isn't just becoming good at your own practice or developing your own professional practice, it was more than that … It's that you can actually reflect on … your own personal views and beliefs and your own personal … knowledge. You know more and that strengthens your own practice as a teacher. Maxine</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I always use a very much community based pronouns when facilitating sessions with kids, because I'm not important … No - not more important than you in this, and I pointed that out, you know during one of these team coaching session things, but really looking at facilitation at that micro level was very helpful to me. Frederick</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>So we explored Philosophy through Philosophy I guess in a Philosophical way and once I did that with one class and that really worked and their understanding was a whole lot better … … I began to take that on as practice as well…. I think … a learning community has to be reflective. That means everybody has to be reflective not just about themselves and their own learning but also about the learning of the group. Maxine</td>
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Discussion and Contributions to the Field

The evidence offered here indicates that teachers can be involved in developing their own thinking and learning about themselves and their pedagogy with their students. This learning can take place in situ, in classrooms. Such learning requires a supportive and democratic learning environment, a renewed belief in children, and a shift in the locus of control for learning to the learner (be they the teacher or student). Open minded teachers can include student ideas through the empowerment of student voices. Each can then be listened to and heard as patterns of dialogue begin to emerge. The classroom can become interactive, inter-responsive and genuinely inquiring with each person in the classroom situated as a teacher-student (Freire, 1970). Engagement in reflection during and post dialogue is a catalyst for progress. Both student and teacher thoughts can cause the pedagogy to evolve, to be reconstructed and/or transformed. Schools and systems can capitalise on this process of pedagogical reconstruction and transformation by using the most common resource teachers have – their students – to create an intellectually engaged, skilled, enthusiastic, creative and supple workforce, who can respond and interact well with their students and each other. Such outcomes would also require support and commitment of systems, school leaders, teachers, students and parents. Hargreaves (2003) agrees:

“We [should] promote a high investment, high capacity educational system in which highly skilled teachers are able to generate creativity and ingenuity among their pupils, by experiencing creativity and flexibility themselves in how they are treated and developed as knowledge society professionals. In this … scenario, teaching and teachers will reach far beyond the technical tasks of producing acceptable test results, to pursuing teaching as a life-shaping, world-changing social mission again”.

This research has revealed that change from a traditional pedagogy is not to be worked in authoritarian ways; not decided on by systems and dutifully implemented by teachers in mechanistic ways (Fullan, 1996). These teachers have been involved in changing their pedagogy through participating in Philosophical communities of inquiry, which placed the teacher in the role of the active listener and learner. Students were able to have a voice in the processes and content of classroom activities. This consequently provided teachers with surprises and evidence that lead them to thinking new thoughts and reflecting on old ones. This experience is essential. Teachers became aware of an emerging belief that their students’ were able to think and solve problems and provide answers that they as the teacher had not previously conceived.

The findings of this study indicate that the change process is synergistic; necessitating the interaction of students and teachers working together in responsive, supportive, democratic environments. In order to effect pedagogical transformation, future preservice courses, professional development and research needs to consider ways in which to incorporate Philosophical communities of inquiry, so that teachers can be immersed in this experience. They will then be able to engage fully in their ‘life-shaping, world-changing social mission again’. Systems, schools and individual teachers need to embrace a positive belief in students’ abilities to think, learn, communicate and achieve. They would also need to develop flatter structures which allow for positive professional cultures (Seashore-Louis, Marks and Kruse, 1996) to develop. Such positive professional cultures can then be reinforced by a more interactive, inter-responsive and inquiring pedagogy, within democratic structures which may have positive benefits for school cultures (Roland & Galloway, 2004).

This change in pedagogy, towards a more interactive, inter-responsive, inquiry-based model, is an artefact of the learning experience of the teacher. Such adult learning can be characterised by mental models (Senge, 1990) which show the learning experience to be challenging or daunting, requiring targeted support and a positive and courageous approach to self-management, throughout the learning process (Butler, 1996; Palmer, 1998). The courage must come from all levels but mostly the teacher and the support must come from school leaders and systems in the form of professional development, time, resources and encouragement. These efforts however, will be rewarded by the students.

I’ve taken a lot of community of inquiries now with adults and with children and I really see the very best thinking coming out of the children. Maxine

Philosophical communities of inquiry have been shown to have wonderful benefits for student thinking. This research has shown that it can in turn have a very positive effect on pedagogy and teacher thinking, in a time and resource efficient manner. In classrooms where teachers philosophise with students, these interactions cause teachers to reap the benefits themselves of critical, creative and caring thinking, within the community of inquiry, and more broadly in their lives. They become the thoughtful people and reflective practitioners.

So [Philosophy has] made me a much more reflective person … it certainly … for my own personal self has made me a much better thinker. Simone
References


*My thanks to the participants in this research: This is their stories, their lives and work and their achievements.*