P4C and Playfulness: Are Games and Playfulness Important for Communities of Philosophical Inquiry?[1]

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"The very essence of playfulness is an openness to anything that may happen"

- John Cleese

In the summer of 2011—the third year in which *Eurekamp*[2] provided programming—I sat in the shade of one of the rare maple trees on the University of Alberta campus, casually eating my lunch while 2 of the 40 or so children played in the dirt beside me. It was a Wednesday of our third week that year—at the time Eurekamp offered four weeks of camps for children in the grades 1 through 9; we welcomed nearly 150 children that year—and so the children had already had a few days to acclimate to one-another socially, to be encouraged to ask questions about a range of activities, and to really listen to what other children were saying. The two—one boy, one girl—were both 6 years old (our youngest participants) and were pensively pushing sticks into the dirt. Then, as if it were obvious, the little boy said aloud[3]:

Noah: I wonder how people counted before there were numbers.
Abby: What do you mean "Before there were numbers"? Numbers are real! There have always been numbers.
Noah: No, God made them.
Abby: No, God didn't make numbers. They go 1-2-3-4. He can't make them go 1-2-3-5, so he didn't make them.
Noah: Why not? God made Godzilla, so he can make numbers go "1, 2, 3, 5".
Abby: But Godzilla is cooler than God. I mean, like, he wrecks cities and stuff…

We do not have to look very hard to see interesting themes and genuine philosophical questions arising entirely naturally (for 6 year olds!) in areas philosophers would identify as metaphysics and

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[2] Eurekamp was founded in 2009 by John Simpson, Rob Wilson and the author; its last summer of operation was 2017. It aimed to merge the pedagogical approach to P4C developed and defended by the IAPC with play and games. The result was a large collection of distinct week-long programs directed at youth as young as 6 years (grade 1) to as old as 14 years (grade 9); each five-day camp program had distinct themes which engaged youth, inviting them to take up various interrelated philosophical ideas. The highest enrollment Eurekamp saw was 350 youth (in 2016).
[3] These and all other names are pseudonyms to protect the privacy of the children involved.

philosophy of religion: Noah is clearly curious about whether numbers are necessary entities—he thinks they are not: they are created (by God); and Abby clearly thinks that such a position is not possible. To support her objection, Abby relies on an argument with unstated assumptions, drawing into question the extent of God's omnipotence: because created things could have been created differently (one assumption), and because it is impossible for numbers to be ordered differently (another assumption), it follows that numbers were not created by God.

Though this interaction arises from Noah's independent thought during a lunch hour (which are informal and unplanned), its nature is typical of the kind of dialogue that arises from the planned activities and games featured at Eurekamp. During later parts of the same discussion—which were not actively tracked—there was a playful contention about the greatness of Godzilla as eclipsing the greatness of God with various appeals to features of God(zilla) that appeared to tip the scales one way or the other. In other words, they collaborated to present and evaluate various properties of each as candidates for establishing their implicit claims. The unfolding of this part of the discussion actually sparked our interest in responding to the assumption that playfulness and the use of games are unsuited for philosophical inquiry; we hope here to suggest that view is mistaken.

It is by reflecting on experiences at Eurekamp that we aim in this discussion to establish two related claims: first, that the features of games provide fertile grounds on which long term philosophical engagement can be fostered; and second, that the attitude of playfulness is a happy bedfellow for the attitude and dispositions that dialogical inquiry is designed to foster in both participants and facilitators. In other words, we hope to show how the incorporation of play—*qua* games and *qua* the disposition of playfulness—into various activities, approaches, and iterations of P4C promises to enrich the CPI experience. To the extent that this demonstration is plausible, it can be understood as an argument that games, play, and playfulness *should* be incorporated.

To establish the article's arguments, we will look at some of the literature on games (specifically that literature discussing the importance of rules) and playfulness (specifically that literature that presents playfulness as "responsive openness") in an attempt to extract some features of those concepts which will help to theorize more carefully about the (admittedly anecdotal) insights drawn from Eurekamp experiences. We shall try to draw both from the literature on the philosophy of sport, as well as the literature from the philosophy of education—including John Dewey's claims surrounding experiential learning and the "forked road of doubt," as well as Tim Sprod's more recent concerns about seeing the results of CPI dialogues applied to everyday life.

Games, the Importance of Rules, and Philosophical Engagement

In this section we shall examine some literature on games to try to establish the claim that the features of games provide fertile grounds on which long-term philosophical engagement can be fostered. We shall start by canvassing seminal work by Bernard Suits who captures one central understanding of games. Suits establishes that a game is defined by its rules in at least two ways: first, the aim of the activity, the purpose of the game, are set out by the game's rules which establish the winning conditions; second, rules define the very activity in which participants are involved. In his words, "to play a game is to engage in an activity directed towards bringing about a specific state of

affairs, using only means permitted by the rules, where the rules prohibit more efficient in favour of less efficient means, and where such rules are accepted just because they make possible such activities" (Suits, 1978, pp. 34). Thus, for example, winning a soccer game requires scoring more goals than our opponent, and what it means to "score a goal" is defined by the rules.[4] Moreover, if we were to change the rules we would be changing the game: if we allow players to pick up the ball and run with it down field, the players are no longer playing soccer.[5] Importantly, the limits which rules place on players are *embraced* by the players for the sake of the game. No doubt competitors realize that it would be easier to get a soccer ball to some set point on the field if they picked it up; nevertheless, players accept those rules and do so just for the sake of taking part in the game. Recent authors have called this feature the "autotelicity" of games.[6] Autotelic activities are pursued "as ends in themselves," (Suits, 1977, pp. 17-8) or, in other words, as "intrinsic, noninstrumental, self-contained enterprise[s]" (Meier, 1995, pp. 121).

We can illustrate how this discussion applies to Eurekamp by examining one game, Clayorama. Clayorama—a game which is feely available on the internet—is played as follows: each participant is given an equal amount of modelling clay and instructed to build a creature of any shape and size, just as long as its construction allows it to be moved without falling apart. The creature is named by participants and is assigned statistics by an impartial party who is explicit about the rationale for the assignments made. Thus, the more legs the creature has the further it can move; the more arms, more attacks; whether it has "ranged" attacks with fewer hit-points, or no ranged attacks but full hit-points; etc.[7] Children then pit these creatures in battle against one another. Coupled with dice rolling (and a little luck), ultimately only one creature is left standing victorious. The losers are crushed with screams (literally) of agony (not literally) as the modelling clay gods (campers) flatten the creatures.

The philosophically interesting aspects arise when Eurekamp facilitators allow players to play a second round with newly created creatures. During this second round we allow children to make new creatures who will be assigned characteristics in the same manner, but we inform them that creatures

[4] Suits (1978, pp. 44-45) distinguishes between 'pre-lusory goals' and 'lusory goals'. A pre-lusory goal is one describing a state of affairs without reference to the ends of a *game*. Thus, a pre-lusory goal might be maneuvering a puck past a certain line, or running a certain distance as fast as possible (e.g., 400 meters); the lusory goal in these cases, would be, respectively winning the hockey game by outscoring one's opponent or winning the race.

[5] Of course, there are stronger or weaker commitments to this second claim regarding the constitutive nature of rules for a game. On *strong* accounts, any change whatsoever (no matter the magnitude) constitutes the creation of a new game (even though we might be inclined to speak as though the game is the same); *weaker* accounts allow that only some rule changes produce new games (e.g., just changes in the 'central' or 'core' rules). For more on this issue, known in the literature as a question of "Formalism", see D'Agostino et al. (1995). The author ascribes to the weaker view, though no claims made here depend on that stance.

[6] See, for example, Carlson (2013). A quick note that Carlson (2013) addresses the nature of 'play' not 'games'; the author recognizes the slide from 'games' to 'play', and makes it despite the fact that Bernard Suits (1978) has gone to some length to try to distinguish play and games in ways that show games are not a subspecies of play. While some of what Suits says is interesting, it is pertinent to bear in mind the objections raised to this account (cf. Morgan (2008) which strongly suggest that his line is too firm.

[7] Various rule versions can be found online. The following link has been cited as "the original": http://www.portcommodore.com/dokuwiki/lib/exe/fetch.php?media=larry:gaming:clayorama.pdf. Links to a full list of characteristics as well as a full set of rules for Clay-o-rama can be found at https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/9300/clay-o-rama. Original rules can be found in *Dragon Magazine Issue 125*.

will be *randomly* assigned to participants. So, even though a child creates a creature, they may (very likely) end up fighting the battle with someone else's creation. Though there are many adjustments to Clayorama that might be made, this variant for the second round of playing often prompts an inquiry on fairness.[8]

In the six years that we have run this activity at least one child every year chooses to make a character that has a poor attack value, low life points, or little to no ability to move: they choose to make a character which suffers from some obvious deficiency. During CPI sessions, they reveal their reasoning to be (similar to) the following:

> *Stanley*: Well, there are 16 other [players], so it's really unlikely that I will have to use my creature. If I get paired up against [my creature], it's better for me if it's weaker. And it's really likely that I will have to *fight it.* And, I'd rather fight a weak creature than a strong one so I should make a weak one.

Of course, either because of the odds or because of the will of facilitators, creatures often do end up with someone other than those who made them, so playing the game nearly always results in some discontent, expressed mid-game, or in CPI sessions. Here is an example of one complaint:

> *Hina*: But my creature is terrible. It can hardly move and it has only one *very weak* attack; everyone else has way more. I don't have a chance. I didn't choose this creature and it wasn't as fun this time.

Depending on the severity of the complaint, we stop the contest mid-game to address the concerns, which when distilled can be understood as a question about fairness.

Note though that the commitment to addressing the question of what makes something fair seems to arise from the child's commitment to the game of Clayorama (as defined by the rules) and the larger context of the activity of random character assignment. That is, it arises from the child's acceptance of the game's autotelicity. The goal of Clayorama is *not* intrinsically valuable: maneuvering and rolling better than one's opponent such that one's opponent is the first to have his life-points reduced to zero is not something that has value in and of itself; it is not even something that makes much sense outside the confines of the rules of the game. Yet, by committing to the playing of the game, children "buy in" to the game and thus are especially concerned with the lived experience of unfairness that arises when confronted with the task of playing with a deficient creature. The rules, and commitment to them, promise to set the grounds for commitment to P4C-style inquiry. (More on this in the next section.)

[8] Those with a philosophical background will notice the analogue to John Rawls' (1971) musings on the principles of justice. Rawls asks us to consider which principles of justice we would accept, if we were to choose them from a position of self-interest, but where we are unaware of the place we will fill in that society. Thus, he asks us to consider principles of justice from the Original Position, behind the veil of ignorance. At Eurekamp, we put participants in the Clay-o-rama Original Position of choosing how to build a creature, behind the Playdoh-Creature Veil of Ignorance—not knowing which creature one will be assigned. Note that the choice campers often make to create a weak creature parallels the exact choice that Rawls' says the rational observer would not make from behind the veil of ignorance.

Engagement and Dewey on Doubt

To deepen our understanding of the value of games for fostering engagement in CPI sessions, we can draw on John Dewey's "forked road of doubt" which we take as one way to understand the theoretical underpinning for P4C. In CPI sessions, philosophical questions arise from a point within the experience of the stimuli which can be identified as moments of "forked roads of doubt" (Deans, 1999, pp. 16-7). Here we allude to the first stage of John Dewey's (1938) five stage learning model of reflective inquiry, which suggests that educators provide experiences that see students i) experience some form of doubt, ii) offer tentative interpretations of the experience, culminating in a hypothesis, iii) (re-)consider the facts at hand for further clarification, iv) adjust the hypothesis formulated and v) test and apply the firmed hypothesis as appropriate (Deans, 1999).[9]

For our purposes here, the role of doubt in this process needs to be emphasized. For Dewey, learning begins when the agent is snapped from her daily habit; she goes about her day, expecting things to unfold as she has seen them unfold before. When sequences diverge from those expectations—when her non-reflective state is broken—she can interpret that divergence, examine it, and hypothesize about differences in ways that help her to understand it. As Dewey says, doubt arises with the occurrence of "jars, hitches, breaks, blocks… [that occasion] an interruption of the smooth straightforward course of behavior" (Dewey, 1949, pp. 315). Ultimately, successful hypothesizing (in communities of philosophical inquiry, for instance) will allow her to modify what she expects, her habit, and thus learn from the experience.[10]

As we see it, in the story-approach to P4C which are typical of historical approaches (e.g., those using the IAPC novels) the doubt raised is constrained within the stimulus-story. Thus, children are invited to experience doubt but they do so one step removed from the experiencing subject—a kind of "second-order doubting." It is not the child who first wonders whether she can love animals and eat them, but Lisa; it is not the participant's experience of the teasing—that visceral, phenomenologically rich experience—which prompts the query on its difference from bullying, but the fictional character, Sam, from the picture book *Leonardo the Terrible Monster*.

In this sense, the doubt arises from an experience which is fundamentally grounded in the *vicarious*; it is a vicarious experience around which our discussion is based and from which it is drawn. And, while answers to questions prompted by stories are often linked quickly to the children's experiences as they personalize the question, the source of the doubt and of the question is vicarious. Any engagement with the question—however strong—seems then to have to combat the "once removed" nature it acquires from its source.

The situation, we suggest, is notably different with the use of games and other activities as stimuli. In light of this discussion, games might change the P4C experience for children, adding to the wrinkles of engagement. First, an activity stimulus like a game has the capacity to move children beyond—or perhaps better, into—the vicarious experience. While with the story-based approach the

[9] From our perspective the entire proposed model is one that captures the CPI process, with the question formation 'hidden' between steps one and two, and the inquiry captured by stages two through four.
[10] This is comparable to what Gregory (2007) says regarding the inquiry process.

pertinent happening, which gives rise to the moment of doubt, is essentially a happening to someone else, with the activity-based approach children take part directly in, and are committed directly to the outcomes of, the activity that gives rise to the central question. The child's commitment to the autotelic features of the game firmly grounds the discussion. They do not *merely* read about Harry discovering (or inventing!) his rule; they do not merely witness a potential case of unfairness. Instead, they invent the rule (or discover it!) themselves; they feel the unfairness it as it is evoked from the game to which they have committed. Insofar as this is true, we can say that the "forked road of doubt" is a *lived* forked road of doubt: the experience of doubt is no longer *vicarious*, but felt and sometimes vividly (as anecdotes suggest), just because of the commitment to the activity from which it arises.

Admittedly, in the case of fairness in Clayorama, there appears to be a spectrum of experiences. The child who is given the statistically deficient character (and perhaps the child who created the creature in question) will be confronted with stronger visceral feelings (generally) than those who did not. And, while those who face off against the poor character might share some of the discontent because of their capacity to empathise, it seems reasonable to suggest that they will feel the unfairness less than the slighted participant. Insofar as this is true, it would seem that the experience is a vicarious one (to some extent) for some and not others. Nevertheless, this spectrum seems at least in part to depend on the actual activity and how it unfolds. So, for example, if the creature creation process was riddled with randomness (as would be present were the counselor to assign statistics randomly) it would seem to be more likely to produce the required impetus in more (if not all) participants who had committed to the aims of the game. Moreover, it is not clear that this concern undercuts the general point being made—namely, that there is something significantly different about the experiences (for some) which lead up to inquiry, even if it clarifies that these experiences themselves sit on a spectrum.[11]

One way to further cash out these differences is as follows: with the more traditional story-based approach it is often the case that children can be confronted with some dilemma while nevertheless unproblematically choosing to continue to read more of the story, ignoring the dilemma. They are confronted with an interesting point—invited to consider it—but are not obligated to do so. Yet, with the activity-based approach typical to summer camp programs, the immediacy with which these objections arise is so compelling that completion of the game is often no longer an option: the very pursuit of the game itself is called into question and it cannot be completed satisfactorily without addressing the concern that has reared its head.[12]

While primarily a phenomenological claim about how stimuli are experienced, this lived doubt—or so we speculate—might serve to bridge the gap between what Tim Sprod has called "discourses of justification" and "discourses of application" (Sprod, 2001, 155). Discourses of justification are discussions wherein participants puzzle through largely conceptual troubles on an issue while paying

[11] Here I would like to thank Jordan Sifeldeen for insisting that I take these issues seriously.

[12] Of course, this line of argument reveals a pressing issue which needs to be held firmly in view when using activity-based stimuli: we are dealing with actual feelings as the impetus for philosophical discussion, so care has to be taken when employing activity-based approaches. Thanks to our friends at Brila—including their youth board—for reiterating the importance of this point.

careful attention to the guiding ideals of dialogue.[13] Participants "attempt to redeem a contested norm, a highly abstract, generalized principle which, ignoring questions of application, can gain consensus" (Sprod, 2001, 107). Discourses of application, however, are those conversations that arise when participants take the conclusions of the former discourses and aim to apply them in the real world. With questions of application, children must begin to weigh how their conclusions might fit into less than ideal circumstances; that is, how the justification fits the real world, rather than merely the insulated atmosphere of the inquiry.

Living the experience which gives rise to a dialogue anchors the ensuing discourse of justification into the discourse of application. In the case of Clayorama, no response to the question "What makes a game fair?" can pass muster without applying directly to the game from which it arose. If it fails to make sense of that phenomenon, if it does not fit with the "icky-goo" of the real-world particularities, the conclusions to the discourses of justification rarely have merit for the children. In the face of the objection "But Clayorama was already equal when we started so equality can't be what counts as fairness!" is a driving, central concern to participants that simply cannot be ignored when a child proposes that equality is fairness.[14]

The second way in which games can change the P4C experience arises from the much-emphasized role that rules play in games (in the previous section). Rules create artificial structures—arbitrary confines—within which children are actors or agents. And, when agents actively flout those confines, or act in ways that reveal they have a different understanding of those confines, this gives rise to moments of doubt. Flouting the rules breaks the propensity—or habit—that children quickly develop to act within the rules of the game: an opponent (or sometimes a teammate) seems to understand the confines differently, so differently that it is becomes impossible to carry on without addressing this seeming divergence in understanding. Or, even more jarring, there are cases where others might simply refuse to accept the rules of the game entirely: my opponent rejects the presumed autotelic feature of the game. Playing requires "buying in" to the game, thereby accepting the limitation of one's own actions to the less efficient means of completing the task just for the sake of the game. Without this, there can be no game at all. Anyone who has experienced, in grade school perhaps, another's active resistance to a proposed game can likely recall the disturbances produced as the resistor actively flouted the rules in play. With such actions, the resistor makes an implicit call for justification of the value of the game itself. In our experience, this is often the most engaging feature that arises from considerations of rules.[15]

[13] Sprod discusses two ideals, drawing from Habermas: "[1] universal moral respect (everyone has a right to be included in the discourse) and [2] egalitarian reciprocity (there is an equal right to make assertions, ask questions of others, introduce new subject matter, call the validity of claims into question and so on)" (2001, 61).

[14] This cannot be ignored in two senses: first, participants in a CPI are compelled to respond to the complainant just because the concept of *fairness* is up for debate; second, they cannot be ignored because the circumstances and properties of the game (i.e., its '*autotelicity*') are also up for debate.

[15] Simpson (2013) references one such example of a youth at *Eurekamp* who resists the activity that had the campers building bat houses. The off-hand comments, which rejected the value of the activity, grew into a larger discussion about what obligations, if any, we have to care for the environment. (Simpson, however, uses the example to illustrate the importance of a kind of inquiry—what we have termed 'micro-philosophy'—which is typical of an informal learning environment.)

In both ways, we can see how the edifice of games helps to address a concern noticed by Dewey—namely that we need to establish "*conditions* that will arouse and guide *curiosity*; [we need to set up] the connections in things experienced that will on later occasions promote the *flow of suggestions*, create problems and purposes that will favor consecutiveness in the succession of ideas" (Dewey, 1933, pp. 56-7). These conditions, the rules, are the kind of structures that, because they require commitments by the participants to even have the game commence (i.e., are autotelic), lend themselves very easily to the impetus needed to drive dialogue to deep meaningful levels (i.e., bridge the justification-application gap).[16]

Play and Activity-Based Philosophy

In this section we shall turn our attention towards the concept of play to explore its importance for CPI sessions. Our exploration will focus on the disposition of playfulness, rather than the act of playing, to distinguish our discussion from the preceding section on games. The hope will be to draw out how infusing P4C with the attitude of playfulness can improve the practice of CPI with children. As an attitude, playfulness indicates a particular disposition towards the activity we are undertaking: given that we can play in a variety of situations (e.g., we can play at work), and given that we can work at tasks that might *prima facie* appear to be prime grounds for play (e.g., professional athletes work at their craft, despite that most of us play at them), it should be clear that playfulness is more a matter of our stance towards an activity than of the particularities of any activity itself. And yet, though playfulness is importantly linked to a desire to have fun, it is not merely this desire. Instead, "it is a mode of comportment towards things, a mode of being-in-the-world which, although not utterly peculiar, is nevertheless different from our mode of comportment when we consider ourselves to be not playing" (Hyland, 1980, pp. 88). When we are not playing, we toil, work, or strive; we rest or recuperate. Each of these involves a stance that is in many ways different from being playful.[17]

One important feature of playfulness is captured by what Drew Hyland (1980) has called "responsive openness" (1980, pp 90).[18] When we are "open," we have an increased sensitivity and awareness of what might otherwise go overlooked. The open soccer player is acutely aware of the size of the pitch, the movement of other players, and the variations in the pitch itself, all of which are constitutive of how the match unfolds. New opportunities continually present themselves as others are closed off and he is aware of these opportunities to the extent that he is open.

[16] Participants can actually resist dialogue in similar ways as they resist games. This is perhaps more likely in informal learning contexts such as at summer camp programs, especially when participants are often signed up by their parents and do not have full understanding of the nature of the Eurekamp programming. Nevertheless, even those situations of doubt (perhaps better described as 'active resistance') can be harnessed successfully. One instance arose at Eurekamp where one youth asked "Why are we having all these discussions, anyways?". What followed was a very productive inquiry session on the value of thinking with others, which even managed to change the resister's mind.

[17] Of course, we are not asserting that these are incompatible with the attitude of playfulness. We can play at our work, for instance; and when we do, dispositions from both stances will overlap.

[18] We echo, here, Hyland's insistence that this not be understood as a formal definition of 'play'.

The modifier "responsive," however, indicates that mere openness is insufficient as an understanding of playfulness:[19] instead, "I [also] have to be capable of responding to that openness in a way called for by the situation" (Hyland, 1980, pp. 89). If possibilities present themselves but the soccer player is unable to take advantage of any of them, as Hyland says, the athlete can hardly be taken to be playing the game of soccer (Hyland, 1980, pp. 90). In fact, in that case, he is not much different than an alert spectator of the game.

Importantly for both our purposes as well as a general understanding of playfulness, it is this capacity to respond to the openness which grounds our success as individuals who play: "my success as a player, my very status as a player, demands that I respond as best I can to whatever possibilities my openness to the game elicits" (Hyland, 1980, pp. 90). It is perhaps fruitful, then, to picture responsive openness as both an awareness of the challenges, puzzles, or queries with respect to the aim of the activity that we are currently undertaking, as well as a capacity (to try) to respond to the unfolding situation that one faces. Each situation we approach playfully presents a task, a bar to be cleared, a marker to pass which implicitly asks us to confront it as we become aware of it and in relation to our overall aims.

To see how this might apply to P4C, consider an activity from Eurekamp we have dubbed *Imagineering*. In Imagineering, we task children with using all or some provided equipment to produce a novel or unique activity or game. Typical equipment includes things you might (at least peripherally) associate with games—like baskets, Tupperware containers, over-sized cardboard tubes, balls, and pylons—but also items which, at first glance you would not, such as bubble wrap plastic, a lemon, cardboard boxes, a household plant, and the like. After working in small groups to create their project, participants are tasked with finding a way to pitch it to others—a process which includes explaining the rules (if any), purpose (if any), and use of the items (if any). Children then take part in the most popular creation. This activity has resulted in the creation of competitive games with clearly defined win conditions (like "wide games" resembling capture the flag or team-bowling[20]) as well as cooperative tasks where the groups struggle together to make something semi-permanent that is also a piece of art.[21]

The direction of the CPI following *Imagineering* is dependent on the type of activities that the children make. Thus, unlike Clayorama (for example) we do not have preset themes we anticipate discussing after the activity. However, we can often predict them: sometimes the CPI explores whether a proposal really counts as novel (either because it closely resembles some other game already in existence or because two sub-groups created something very similar to one another); or the CPI explores the value of playing games in general; or the CPI explores how we can effectively articulate the aim of a game to others (which usually arises because the creators of the task had something in

[19] In fact, mere openness might even be a detriment in some cases. Consider, for instance, the issue of home-field advantage: presumably it is this heightened awareness which plays a role in allowing the home-field crowd (putatively) to influence play on the field in favour of the home team.

[20] A "wide game" is one which uses a field or large space. These are games like capture the flag, soccer, or hide-and-go-seek.

[21] We occasionally assign to groups labels or roles with primary and secondary objectives that need to be fulfilled in the creation of the novel item. Thus, one group might be "capitalists", another "engineers", or another "pacificists". This, obviously, changes the approach and results fairly significantly.

mind when relaying it, but that something was not properly conveyed, which lead to something dramatically different than intended); or, finally—given the way the groups may have worked or failed to work together—it has prompted a larger dialogue about teamwork and leadership.

It should be clear that Imagineering provides ripe grounds for fostering and exercising the disposition of playfulness. When presented with a pool noodle, a house plant, and medium-sized Tupperware bin, for example, a child is asked to have an increased sense of openness to these objects, to her group's suggestions, and even to her surroundings. She is asked to be creative in how these might be implemented in the fulfillment of the task she has been given, including how the very nature of the task might be interpreted. Moreover, the group's success at advocating for the game or task that they have created hinges on their capacity to capitalize on their own openness to the objects, presenting them in a novel and compelling light to others. And, the task's successful presentation depends on the openness of others to the proposal that each group puts forward. Playfulness, as a disposition adopted during the period when the stimulus is experienced, is crucial.

We should, however, look beyond the importance of the stimuli as a source of playfulness to consider its role as an attitude during a CPI dialogue. In brief, we want to suggest that playfulness qua responsive openness is a characteristic which, when it is embodied, can be very beneficial to the CPI for both participants as well as facilitators. Broadly speaking, one larger purpose of implementing the CPI is to foster in participants a set of dispositions related to thinking. Consider just two authors on the issue: Lipman (1991, pp. 15-25) speaks of the CPI as fostering creative and critical thinking in a shared social context with a special interest in developing higher-order thinking skills, whereas Sprod (2001, pp. 21-43) speaks of using the CPI to develop the five aspects of reasonableness, including critical, creative, committed, contextual and embodied thinking. For both, successful development of the respective skills requires dialogue with other thinkers: in dialogue with others, children are able to engage with ideas, arguments, and perspectives to which they might otherwise not have had access. Sometimes they are even able to think through questions and issues which they would not have been able to think through on their own.[22]

To be playful in a CPI is to be responsively open to the content of the dialogue. It would be to see examples, arguments and perspectives presented by others in the dialogue as salient or important in ways that other mind-sets (e.g., one of work) might prevent. To be playful would be to view the content of each person's contributions as presenting a challenge, task, or bar to be considered and addressed; to be worked with and built upon; to be assessed and represented. Each sets some standard; and, as players in the dialogue it is our task to meet that challenge in ways that are consistent with achieving the goal of the inquiry, determining reasonable belief. Thus, success as a participant in the dialogue requires that we respond in the best ways possible, insofar as those challenges are ones which somehow contribute to determining what is most reasonable to believe. In this light, children should aim to advance the dialogue by taking those examples, stances, and proposals as serious attempts to examine the quality of the position(s) under consideration in our mutual pursuit of reasonable belief.

[22] Lev Vygotsky (1962) labels this conceptual space the 'zone of proximal development'.

We can see responsive openness in the following CPI session, which followed a session of Imagineering. During that activity, one group of children created a fictional machine called 'The Upcycler' which received the most votes for the best creation. That machine "takes recycling and makes something new".[23] As the children considered their reasons for their votes, the conversation turned to discussion of the criterion for their choices.

> *Emily*: Well I chose the Upcycler because there's never been a machine that can recycle things like this [...] and it could be possible [... to make] in 20 years. [...] It's a good reason to make it! It's a good cause.
>
> *Facilitator*: Okay so for you it's not just that it's innovative, it's that it's, one, the most possible and, two, the best cause. Thank you! You can pick someone else to speak.
>
> [...]
>
> *Marie-Eve*: I chose the Upcycler as well because with all the other inventions, it's just convenient. It's convenient for the consumer, the person buying it, but it's only for that one person and it doesn't actually contribute to something bigger than just that one person using it.
>
> *Facilitator*: So, for you what makes it stand out from all the other inventions is that it is for a bigger cause than just the one consumer's convenience.
>
> *Salman*: Hmm... well now I changed my mind... I am choosing the Upcycler now too because I agree with Emily and Marie-Eve, and because I can do upcycling too so I know it is possible.[24]

In this instance, Salman is responsively open to the contributions of Emily and Marie-Eve to such an extent that their contributions are legitimate answers to the question of which invention is the best. These are so legitimate in fact that when coupled with his genuine commitment to the discovering reasonable belief he is persuaded to change his own view (presumably reevaluating the weight or force of his own reasons) about what counts as best.

For P4C *facilitators*, playfulness can also serve a useful role as they strive to gain insight into the over-arching process of the dialogue.[25] During facilitator trainings on successful dialogue, one point stressed at *Eurekamp* is that facilitators are not always able—at first pass at least—to discern what a child intends by her comment or to perceive how her contribution fits into the overall structure. It might be, for instance, that she is not really answering the question; instead, she is recounting an anecdote. However, as often happens in dialogue with all ages (not just the very young), our initial impression of what is being said or of how some contribution fits into the overall scope of the dialogue, can be

[23] The dialogue which follows was recorded by friends at Brila, who agreed to run the activity and share the results for this chapter.

[24] In fact, as this dialogue progressed the discussion became so complex, with a number of competing incompatible criteria to which the children appealed, that eventually *all* the children's votes were moved off their original placements.

[25] We distinguish the participant role from the facilitator role roughly along these lines. The participant strives primarily to add *content* in an attempt to answer the question and learn what is reasonable to believe. The facilitator, on the other hand, focuses her contributions on the process—clarifying contributions, connecting participants, asking for reasons, etc.

mistaken. An attitude of responsive openness would combat the inclination that some facilitators and participants have to shut down or discount proposals of this nature. It would encourage a view that takes each contribution to be a candidate for serious consideration as an attempt to advance the conversation. And, while some will eventually be ruled out, discarded, or deemed to be off topic, the attitude that helps to lend these *prima facie* plausibility is one that P4C facilitators ought to have.

Alternatively, a facilitator who is responsively open to the dialogue finds herself more willing to follow the discussion where children want to take it, rather than direct it towards questions of answers that she herself has already deemed worthy of acceptance or consideration. One instance of this kind of failure to show appropriate responsive openness to the dialogue occurred at Eurekamp in the summer of 2013. Working with a group of grades 1-3 attending Eurekamp's art-camp, one facilitator used *The Dot* by Peter H. Reynolds (2013), to prompt discussion after over-hearing one child claim that he (that camper) could not draw. The story features a girl named Vashti who laments a similar shortcoming: She is not able to draw either! Encouraged by her teacher, Vashti puts a simple dot with a felt pen in the middle of a blank page; the teacher asks Vashti to sign the picture and then hangs it on the wall after framing it. Vashti, inspired, explores all the different ways to draw dots—big; small; different colors; dots made of dots; and dots made by not drawing a dot, but by drawing everything but the dot.

After reading the book to about 20 children, a dialogue started. As the conversation unfolded, the children began to talk about dots and different ways to draw them—including the controversial "drawing the dot by drawing everything but the dot". As the discussion progressed there was some question about whether this 'not-drawing' both counted as drawing, but also counted as drawing *a dot*; the group sat in (what was perceived to be) quiet contemplation about this issue. Then, the facilitator interjected in ways which were neither open nor responsive to the dialogue: she gently asked "Can I ask a question? Did you notice that the teacher asked Vashti to sign the picture? [The children assented.] Do you think that makes it art?". Here the facilitator proposed a shift towards a new question that, independently, might have been a great discussion question given that it asked the youth to assess whether the act of signing was a legitimate "art-making" criterion, but which had not registered as relevant to the children involved. This move changed the entire tenure of the dialogue to that point.

From here the conversation became something of a forced reflection and interchange from the children. The responses tried to address the shift in focus, but it was clear that they were still hung up on the previous "non-dot drawing" issue—often voicing opinions about that concern in ways that were unconnected to the previous child's comments, who herself had tried diligently to address the facilitator's new question. Of course, the insistence by the facilitator here illustrates a lack of playfulness—a lack of responsive openness—to the issue that was central for the children. Given this, the children quickly became restless with the shifting back and forth of the conversation between topics; they seemed to find the facilitator's requests to connect responses to the previous speaker a hindrance, given the bifurcation of the discussion's focus. As such, the discussion fizzled as a direct result of the lack of the appropriate playful disposition in this instance which, were it present, might have helped the facilitator to engage in the topic that the children were themselves more interested.

Playfulness and Philosophy as a "Serious Business"

As a way of concluding, let us revisit the underlying assumption of the current discussion, viz., that playfulness and games are inappropriate for P4C. In light of the above discussion, we can see the sketch of a possible objection which roughly is that to include playfulness and games within an inquiry process—either as a stimulus or as a larger attitude adopted when approaching an inquiry question—is a prescription which invites danger. Playfulness and games are not happy bed-fellows with the P4C approach, the objection might run, because they fail to take the CPI method as seriously as it should be taken. Consider playfulness: to be playful in dialogue might seem to imply a kind of flippancy towards others and the content of the dialogue itself. As the objection might run, CPI dialogue is serious business: children are tasked with determining reasonable beliefs from among all the hypotheses on the table and finding reasonable beliefs is no playground undertaking; it is serious business for serious interlocutors. Thus, playfulness is not for dialogue.

There are other ways to express this concern. For instance, objectors might see the call for playfulness as a call for too much creativity. Playfulness, as a free flow attitude inseparable from the notion of responsive openness, invites a sort of randomness from children. In the comic *Calvin and Hobbes*, when Calvin participates in Calvinball, he is playful with Hobbes to the extent that they are open to the drastic changes and challenges that the other proposes while seeking to counteract that change to their own advantage.[26] For instance, Hobbes may run the football in for a touchdown and declare it as such, but is met with Calvin's clever retort that the rules dictate touchdowns be scored in alternating ends throughout the game; thus, Hobbes has just given up six points, not earned them. Hobbes, of course, quickly notes that winning the game requires having the fewest points—not the most—on Tuesday, today. And so, the (so called) playfulness would continue.

Returning to CPI, we can see that this kind of creativity is not desirable in dialogue: we do not desire this kind of randomness, no matter how creative. We do not want to invite any and all contributions. Instead, we require a more careful serious disposition than this type of playfulness admits, which bears in mind the ends of dialogue. Thus, the assumption and coupling objections are pressing and need to be addressed if the current position is plausible. And we can begin to find a foothold by first noting that even if we accept the proposed objection, it does not extend so far as to undercut the points made about games which primarily highlight the usefulness of their autotelic nature and of the restrictions of rules, both of which promise to engage children more fully in CPI sessions.[27]

Still, the objection itself presumes that playfulness is itself incompatible with a recognition of seriousness or gravitas. In our view, this assumption is mistaken. Adopting an attitude of playfulness need not open the door to rampant creativity. An analogy here might be helpful: the athlete (professional, collegiate, or recreational) who playfully undertakes her sport need not be, ipso facto,

[26] If you are unfamiliar with the details of Calvinball see http://calvinandhobbes.wikia.com/wiki/Calvinball; or, better, read some Calvin and Hobbes!

[27] In fact, if games are *played*–that is, if they are approached *playfully*—we might even make the case that such occurrences are likely to make engagement even stronger, given the role that playfulness has in producing the phenomenon of immersion in an activity. For more on this, see Hyland (1980).

flippant with respect to that undertaking. Nor, it should be noted, is she wise to give free reign to her creativity, trying any shot she can conceive of in any particular instance. Though playful, she must seriously, and within set confines, consider all the options that her playful disposition makes salient to her; she genuinely weighs each possible response as a viable option to pursue in seeking a successful athletic outing. And, she does so with due consideration of the rules and purpose of the game itself. In this way, her creativity ought to be bound by the confines of game and thus limited from the problematic form of rampant creativity. Without this recognition she would be being flippant, not taking seriously the standards for success at that pursuit; she would be being destructively creative. Thus, while she might toy with options creatively, her focus is on making successful athletic moves with respect to those options which are realized through her playfulness.

So too in dialogue. Rampant creativity as a result of playfulness is not what is being encouraged in this instance. Children must always consider the participant proposals on hand from the perspective of success in dialogue—finding reasonable belief. In other words, it would seem that flippancy arises from a sense of openness that is *not* at the same time responsive to the goals of the pursuit in question. It is with responsiveness that playfulness becomes something different than mere flippancy towards the act. Thus, it would seem that those in CPI dialogue are *only* flippant if they flout the full sense of what it means to be playful. If they are merely open but non-responsive, then they are not taking the dialogue itself seriously. And, of course, inquirers who are open but not responsive are not uncommon. In our experience both at the university level implementing P4C methodology as well as in the setting of Eurekamp, we have had very smart children who played the role of devil's advocate, testing each idea *just* to see how robust it is, or how versatile another child is at accounting for the deluge of counter examples to proposals.[28] But, again, these inquirers are open without the appropriate responsiveness to the aim of inquiry: reasonable belief.

If all of this is correct, the implications for P4C in general seem to be that practitioners in traditional classroom settings can gain important insights from informal learning contexts that infuse their P4C methods with games and an attitude of playfulness. These additions promise to enrich the CPI dialogue experience in ways that will may perhaps generate more engagement on the part of children.[29]

[28] The most striking case arises from the author's practice in the university setting where one astute first year student, early in the year, loved inquiry sessions as a means to "play the game" of philosophy. But for him the aim of "the game" was not reasonable belief, because he took there to be no wrong answers (a common plight of first year philosophy courses). Instead, he wanted only to flex his philosophical capacities on ideas (and perhaps others). To his credit, as the year progressed, his approach changed and he strove with the group to identify reasonable beliefs; and, he subsequently went on to be a very valuable facilitator at Eurekamp for a few camp seasons.

[29] Indeed, if the forgoing is correct then the argument can be seen as one which supports the call for further empirical research to determine if the theoretical suggestions track expectations in the practical unfolding of the program.

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