

## Norvège : Children and Youth Philosophers

Children and Youth Philosophers is a registered company owned by Ariane Schjelderup and Oyvind Olsholt, both Masters of Philosophy from the University of Oslo, Norway. We were the first Norwegian philosophers to start working systematically with children in 1997 and in 1999 we wrote the first book in Norwegian on philosophy for children.

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International associations

Children and Youth Philosophers is a member of International Council for Philosophical Inquiry with Children (ICPIC) and SOPHIA, European Foundation for the Advancement of Doing Philosophy with Children.

### Objectives

Our objectives are partly to spread knowledge about philosophy (in general) and philosophy with children (in particular) among adults, partly to stimulate children and youth to engage in philosophical activities. We try to achieve these goals by arranging seminars and offering consultation services for people who engage in philosophical practice with children and youth, by facilitating dialogues with children and youth, and by spreading information through the web, writing articles etc. It is also an objective of ours to seek out international partners.

An important tool in order to reach our objectives - and to get in touch with other practitioners and practitioners-in-training-is our web site [www.buf.no](http://www.buf.no). Here we publish all sorts of relevant material : articles, research papers, project updates, links, reviews, general information on conferences and workshops (in Norway and abroad), minutes from philosophy club meetings etc. Here is also an internet forum (international) and an e-mail list (so far Norwegian only).

### Activities

#### School

Autumn 2006 we did a philosophy project with two 10th grade classes (16 yo) at Veienmarka comprehensive school located at the outskirts of Honefoss, a small town 60 kilometres west of Oslo. We had an hour philosophy a week in each class. We made the students, their teachers, and two control groups answer an adaptation of the New Jersey Test of Reasoning Skills. The project was sponsored by the organisation "The Freedom of Expression Foundation". A report from the project will be published in spring 2007.

This project (one session a week from August till mid December) was remarkable in many ways, of which the most important probably are: 1) This autumn philosophy sessions entirely substituted the Religion subject for these two classes; i.e. the pupils had no education in Religion this semester but did philosophy instead. 2) We were supposed to evaluate quantitatively each pupil based on his or hers individual performances in the philosophy groups during the autumn. To this purpose we also arranged several written assignments as well as a concluding oral (group) test. This means that the pupil's level of activity and the "quality" of their contributions in the philosophy sessions determined their Religion marks for this semester (whether they got an A or a D). Neither the systematic substitution of the Religion subject with philosophical dialogues nor the quantitative evaluation of the pupil's general thinking skills have been done before in this country, so this was indeed a pioneering project. A report based on the project will be written. This will be forwarded to the Norwegian Ministry of Education where it will hopefully be taken into consideration in regards to the ongoing discussion whether or not philosophy shall be launched as a separate subject in the Norwegian grade school.

Autumn 2005 and winter/spring 2006 we took part in another pioneering project facilitated by "The Cultural Rucksack" (a national scheme for professional art and culture in schools in Norway; the scheme helps school pupils aged 6 to 16 to become acquainted with all kinds of professional art and cultural expressions). The main idea in this project was that all 5th, 6th and 7th graders in the county of Ostfold (10-12 yo, approx. 10000 pupils!) were to experience ninety minutes of philosophical dialogue with a professional philosopher. Eleven philosophers were active in this huge project. We met the pupils either at their own schools or the pupils were transported by bus to the nearest local library. The name of the project was "Who am I?", and the dialogues were focussing on issues of identity, self-consciousness, history and knowledge. This question was also the name of the project.

Autumn 2004 we visited ten secondary schools (so-called "youth schools", 14-16 yo) in Oslo and the neighbouring county of Akershus. Our task this time was to facilitate philosophical café's with groups of pupils concerning their experience with mobile phones, communication and mobbing. Through the philosophical dialogue we wanted to increase the pupils level of awareness regarding these "hot" topics and as well to make them communicate with each other so that they could discover each other's underlying assumptions and attitudes. We wrote a comprehensive report from the project and found that the pupils were generally critical and partly negative to much of the modern communication technology-although most of them acknowledged that they were deeply dependant of it. The project was financed by "Fritt Ord" (The Freedom of Speech Foundation).

## Pre-school

Our first practice as philosophical facilitators was carried out in two kindergartens in the Oslo-area in 1997. Here we had weekly dialogues with the children during a period of two months. The dialogues centered around topics from the Adventures of Peter Rabbit by Beatrix Potter.

After this, we have initiated several further education programmes in kindergartens. The first one was in Kristiansand municipality in South-Eastern Norway. Here we were included in a regional scheme - a "quality project"- called "The good kindergarten with a focus on the children's perspective". First we held a lecture for the participating kindergartens. One of these showed particular interest in philosophy with children, so together we started to work out a tuition programme suitable for this kindergarten. We decided to visit the kindergarten three times (one day each) during a six month period and to round the project off with a one-day seminar. During our visits we had many philosophical sessions with the children (4 and 5 yo), the staff observing, and we monitored and commented sessions that the staff had with the children. The last two or three hours of each visit we evaluated together what had happened during the day. We also gave the staff "homework:" a collection of questions and exercises designed to enhance their understanding of philosophy, philosophical way of thinking and the facilitation of philosophical dialogue with groups of children.

### Seminars and teacher training

We regularly arrange entry level workshops, mostly aimed at schools and kindergartens. These workshops usually last for one or two days.

We have been co-organisers of several national conferences, the first featuring the Belgian philosopher Richard Anthone in 1997, the last held at the University of Oslo, June 2006. In addition to this we have participated and/or given presentations at several international conferences, e.g. the ICPIIC conference in Mexico in 2005. In 2005 we were also involved in a further education semester course at the University of Oslo.

October 2006 we arranged our own seminary for and with philosophical practitioners - some of which worked with children, some worked solely with adults. The purpose was to gather as many resource persons in this field as possible for a week-end in order to learn from each other's practices. The seminary was a great success with several external (non-practising) participants so we would like to do this again.

### Publications

In 1999 we wrote the first Norwegian textbook about philosophy with children: *Filosofi i skolen* (Philosophy in School). In 2001 Ariane published her book *Filosofi - Sokrates, Platon og Aristoteles* (Philosophy-Socrates, Plato and Aristotle), and in 2006 Oyvind published *ExphilO3*, cowritten with Harald Schjelderup. This is a textbook specially written for the preparatory entry course in philosophy that is required for new students that want to start studies at the University of Oslo.

We have also published several articles in Norwegian journals, and we have published reports of our long-term projects on our website.

## Academic research

Since the Norwegian government declared in 2004 that philosophy may become a separate subject in primary and secondary education, there has been a need for experimentation and field research before a decision is made. Here we wish to make a contribution. It is crucial for us that we do academic research as it contributes to our growth as philosophical practitioners and facilitators. The report from the Veienmarka-project (see above) will be our first research report.

## Materials

The second half of our book *Filosofi i skolen* (Philosophy in School), contains teaching resources for the Religion subject (a subject that includes ethics and knowledge of parts of the history of philosophy). In this latter half we have created lots of discussion plans, exercises and questionnaires to accompany a multiplicity of religious and philosophical texts, ethical dilemmas etc.

In 2002 we started developing [www.skoletorget.no](http://www.skoletorget.no) ("skoletorget" means "the school agora") a web site for teachers and pupils in primary and secondary schools. Here we offer teaching material in the six main school subjects (Norwegian, English, Social Studies, Religion, Mathematics, and Natural Science) accompanied by heaps of questions and exercises (hopefully) to be used in philosophical dialogues in the classroom. The idea is to help pupils and teachers to discover philosophy as an integral part of all school subjects. The Skoletorget project is perhaps particularly interesting in view of the latest declarations from the Ministry of Education: "The Ministry would also like to stimulate new projects with philosophy as a separate subject in the school, as well as the use of philosophy in other subjects in the entire range of education." (From, Parliamentary Proposition, no. 30: "Culture for Learning.") Regrettably there has been no further development of the site since autumn 2004 due to lack of financial support, but we know that the material is being used and appreciated by a number of teachers around the country-and abroad.

## The Lipman method

### Community of enquiry in Scandinavia

In Scandinavia we adhere to social democratic thinking where justice and equality are leading ideals. Then it is quite natural for a Norwegian teacher to treat children with humility and respect - both important facets of Lipman's "caring thinking." On the other hand, the image of philosophy as an esoteric art for the "inner circle" still prevails with many educators. This sometimes makes it difficult to introduce philosophy for children to new audiences: they simply do not think that this is something they can do.

When teachers do engage in philosophy with children, they are often more busy checking that their pupils are active and having a good time than checking that their verbal contribution makes sense. This creates problems for the community of enquiry as teachers are wary of stopping children from chatting away although what they have to say is not even remotely relevant, or of pointing out that this is not a good argument (or example or definition etc.), or of insisting on questioning when the

children are bored with questions etc. Teachers are simply terrified of spoiling a nice and cosy atmosphere in the classroom. Norwegian children are used to be listened to and to, have their opinions taken into consideration in almost every matter. They expect to have a good time wherever they are, and that not too heavy expectations are laid on their shoulders. If they find something boring or too demanding, they quickly lose patience. Still they often react positively to challenges, and one can effectively "push their limits" as long as they are explained what is going on and why.

So, community of enquiry in Scandinavia has its limitations and advantages. The limitation is primarily that children only want to do what they think is fun, and if they find community of enquiry unexciting, you cannot really expect them to "pull themselves together" and make an effort. On the other hand, their dialogical capabilities are well stimulated and developed so you may expect lots of contributions (brainstorm-fashion) in any group setting.

## Method

Given our academic backgrounds, it should come as no surprise that we, the Children and Youth Philosophers, were initially inspired in our practice by Socrates/Plato and existentialist philosophy. But as soon as we discovered the well-structured and comprehensive IAPC curriculum it became a major source of inspiration. During years of practise we have tried different ways of preparing and facilitating philosophical dialogue with different age groups and children from different backgrounds, but our main focus was and is on the dialogue itself, i.e. we are still hesitant to introduce too much "pedagogical" games and "tools", to let the "orchestration" of the dialogue replace the dialogue itself. In the last years the French philosopher Oscar Brenifier has been a great inspiration, convincingly demonstrating a totally new approach to philosophical practice with adults and children alike.

## Resources

We do not use Lipman's material, although we were greatly inspired by the curriculum when we started to create our own material. We do find the curriculum culturally foreign, bearing too much upon American culture and world-view. There has also been the existential qualm that the IAPC seems to use philosophical thinking as a mere tool to achieve certain desirable (and external) ends: improved reading and writing, improved output in other subjects, openness and friendliness, democratic attitudes etc. In this way philosophy loses intrinsic value and becomes more or less identical with "procedure" or "curriculum."

## Institutional activities

Our activities are mostly non-institutional and we receive no general support or subsidies from the state. This greatly limits the possible scope of our activities, as it is difficult to find funding for more extensive projects, especially in schools. This is the main reason why we have concentrated on other arenas (art institutions, philosophy clubs, philosophy camps, etc.). Here we can to some extent expect private or official institutions - and/or parents - to pay our services.

## Recommendations

## Academic foundation of the practice

There is a great need for academic research in this field (philosophical and pedagogical). It is our impression that students of pedagogy and philosophy are often open to test new ways of applying philosophical practice. If seminars were offered at university level, many students would probably enrol. We need academics who practice philosophical methods, who can be the "bridge" between Academy and the work being done in schools and kindergartens. We offered to do this "bridging" effort at the University of Oslo, but regrettably we never managed to organise it financially. And the problem with idealistic work is that there is no guarantee for the continuation and completion of the work- it may cease to develop further any moment as it is based on voluntary contributions.

There is resistance at the institutional level in the University. There is a worry that an opening up towards practice represents a threat to the theoretical work already being done---especially at the philosophical institutes. Maybe something could be done on a governmental level?

## Building networks and exchanging experiences

In Norway we now have a network group whose objective is to gather the human and institutional resources within the field of philosophy with children. The group consists of representatives for different levels of activity in the field; academics and teachers, representing different institutions and parts of the country. The idea of network-building is very good, but this group is also struggling to find financial support for their work.

## Database of resources

Philosophy with children is still in its eclectic stage in Norway. Teachers are still busy trying out different practices and methods, searching and using different kinds of resources. Some of them also creates new resources. We believe that teachers would welcome an open database on the internet where they could exchange and comment upon each other's material. Such a database must be open for everybody to view and review. This is not the time for academics or administrators to make distinctions between "good" and "bad" methods, practises and materials- teachers are competent to find out by themselves what works in their respective classrooms. But academic background information (theoretical considerations) and research could, and should, be made available as an integral part of the database.