

The Pedagogical Role of Philosophy in a Community of Inquiry

Luke Fenech

University of Malta
luke.fenech.18@um.edu.mt

Christian Colombo

University of Malta
christian.colombo@um.edu.mt

Abstract

This paper explores the role philosophy has in pedagogy when practised in a community of inquiry. Apart from alluding to contemporary research on the philosophy of education, this paper presents a philosophy-based project named EPIX (Exploring Pupils' Inquires on eXistential themes) that was launched in two Maltese secondary schools. This project introduced five existential themes to secondary school students, creating a community of inquiry through its pedagogical use of philosophy. After discussing the EPIX project, this paper highlights what the community of inquiry entails, and philosophy's function in such a community. Next, this paper discusses how philosophy can encourage the community's imagination, examining imagination's importance in fostering social critique. Lastly, we investigate the educational role of philosophy in the Ethics Education community, a subject being taught in Maltese primary and secondary schools. Together, these parts underline the pedagogical role that philosophy has in the community of inquiry, to be nurtured pedagogically by current and prospective educators.

Keywords: Philosophy, Pedagogy, Community of Inquiry, EPIX Project

Introduction

Inquiry has always been part of human endeavour, regardless of age and approach. The child wonders, the adolescent questions, the adult theorises, and the senior reminisce, for instance, albeit inquiry has no exact order. In education, it is the role of the educator to cultivate a community of inquiry: "to help students question what they learn and what they hear, and not just force-

feed them information” (Delicata, 2017, p. 3). This paper is interested in exploring a community of inquiry based on a pedagogy of philosophical questioning, and its role in encouraging learners to be aware of their world. As Lipman (1988) argues, “philosophy [involving existential questioning], provides a forum in which children can discover for themselves the relevance to their lives of the ideals that have shaped the lives of everyone” (p. vii).

Since “philosophy” is rather extensive in meaning and application, in this paper, philosophy is regarded as the critical activity that enables the subject to inquire about the world; the critical activity which provokes existing predispositions in learners and educators. This attitude towards philosophy can be exhibited in different ways, as seen in this paper. As Bailey (2010) mentions, philosophy in the community of inquiry can help the educator to ask critical questions such as “what type of person should educators aim to develop?” or “what should we teach?” (p. 2). Philosophy can also assist the learner to inquire or criticise their education, imagining alternative scenarios, questioning the curriculum, or even prompting change.

A project called EPIX (*Exploring Pupils’ Inquiries on eXistential themes*) was launched in two secondary schools in Malta by a group of tutors (including the authors of this paper). By introducing five themes of existential inquiry, the students were exposed to philosophical thinking and argumentation. Instead of passively hearing the tutors, learners were invited to philosophise about the learning experience, either by discussing, criticising, debating, or proposing their ideas. Moreover, by utilising different pedagogical techniques, the project provided the students with an opportunity to explore existential themes, matters to which students are likely exposed in their lives.

Yet, what is a community of inquiry? What existential matters is this paper alluding to? Lipman (2003), the founder of the Philosophy for Children programme, states that a community of inquiry entails a “community of learning” (p. 94), an open and democratic space for students and educators to inquire and reflect on each other’s questions. He (2003) also defines “inquiry” as being simultaneously ‘personal’ and ‘social’:

All inquiry is self-critical practice, and all of it is exploratory and inquisitive. Some aspects of inquiry are more experimental than others. And inquiry is generally social or communal in nature because it rests on a foundation of language, of scientific operations, of symbolic systems, of measurements and so on, all of which are uncompromisingly social. (p. 83)

Lipman (2003) argues that even though “all inquiry may be predicated upon a community, it does not follow that all community is predicated upon inquiry” (p. 83). This depicts a ‘void’ in communities (such as classrooms) which are neglecting inquiry in their learning experience.

The inquiry in the “community of inquiry” that this paper concerns itself with includes existential themes such as desire and satisfaction, intimacy, journaling, being acquainted with the self, personhood, individuality, and existence. These existential inquiries were also covered in the EPIX project. Author 1 (Luke Fenech) tutored the theme of *Journaling & Being Acquainted with the Self* in the EPIX project, whilst Author 2 (Christian Colombo) was the project applicant for funding purposes, was the chairperson of Humanists Malta throughout the project, and oversaw its execution including communicating/meeting with school management, coordinating with tutors and was present during all the sessions delivered.

This paper is divided into four parts. Firstly, the “EPIX” project is discussed; its rationale, community, and existential themes are explored. The second part investigates the community of inquiry and the pedagogical role of philosophy in forming part of this community. Thirdly, philosophical inquiry is explored alongside the notion of imagination insofar as philosophy can lead students in their practice of imagination. Lastly, this paper examines the presence of philosophy in the subject of Ethics Education in the Maltese curriculum, including its influence on the EPIX project. Together, these parts will highlight the importance of having philosophy as part of the educator’s pedagogy in forming a community of inquiry. Throughout the paper, the authors will also express their observations concerning the EPIX project and the pedagogical role that philosophy played in nurturing its respective communities.

The “EPIX” Project

For centuries, Maltese cultural identity has been shaped by the Roman Catholic Church. However, things have been rapidly changing in recent years with surveys showing that faith and mass attendance are sharply declining, especially among the youth (Farrugia, 2019). This phenomenon also needs to be taken in the context that state schools have been exclusively teaching the Christian religion. Given these societal changes, and if religion is not felt as relevant anymore, one would question how younger generations get their formation when it comes to ethical values and philosophy of life. In 2014, the government introduced the Ethics Education syllabus as an alternative for students who opt out of the default religious (Roman Catholic) classes. This has been an important step towards encouraging students to question their ethical beliefs, but anecdotal evidence suggests that this option is not available in all schools and only a small percentage of students choose this option even where this is available.

The Project

Against this backdrop, Humanists Malta^[i] - a Maltese NGO promoting Humanist ideals - in collaboration with the Dialogue and Existential Inquiry Platform (DEIP)^[ii] has successfully applied for funding the project *Exploring Pupils' Inquiries on eXistential themes* (EPIX)^[iii]. The project aimed to collaborate with Maltese secondary schools on deepening their students' inquiry of existentialist themes beyond the curriculum; through the pedagogical use of philosophy. Targeted at 14 and 15-year-olds, the project sought to present profound existential topics such as the meaning of existence, anxiety, the nature of personal identity, authenticity, the possession of a free will, and discomfort or fascination with death. Aware that it does not operate in a vacuum, the project content was designed to build on the valuable existential groundwork laid by the Personal, Social and Careers Development (PSCD) programme, as well as the Ethics Education, Religious Knowledge, and Maltese/English Literature SEC syllabi; subjects within the Maltese education system.

Project Syllabus

The project consisted of five dialogue-based small-group tutorials:

1. *Journaling and Being Acquainted with the Self*

In the first tutorial, students were introduced to the idea of journaling - a useful tool to enable a person to sift through thoughts and organise them into written notes. This session helped the students to appreciate the use of journaling to further explore one's thoughts and formation.

2. *Intimacy*

Given the age of students targeted, mid-teens, we felt it would be a good starting point to start focusing on relationships. In this session, students reflected on the difference between love and sex, intimacy, and healthy vs unhealthy relationships.

3. *Desire and Satisfaction*

Next, we focused on desire and satisfaction by presenting questions such as: What are your deepest desires? Which desires can never be completely satisfied? What does this say about us and our deepest needs?

4. *Essence precedes existence*

In this tutorial, students reflected on what it means to be human and whether we have been designed for a particular purpose like a watch. If our human essence is not predetermined, then this gives us lots of scope for defining ourselves - to create ourselves. Students found this idea liberating and full of possibilities.

5. *The Individual and Personhood*

Building on the previous sessions, students were presented with the central question of personhood: “Who am I?” and guided in a stepwise fashion to reflect on personal freedom and the responsibility this brings with it. “You can not do your homework but there are consequences,” as one student put it.

Project Execution

Given the limited resources, the project aimed to target a minimum of two schools. To this end, several schools were contacted until we found two which were willing to participate. Unfortunately, two state schools which were contacted never replied to our email. When negotiating with the other three schools, the project structure had to be adapted to fit within the school’s framework. For this reason, schools asked for substantially different ways regarding when the sessions are given and how they are presented to students, e.g., whether as part of a chaplaincy session, as an extracurricular activity, or a conventional session during normal school hours:

1. *Church school, group of 75 14-year-old students*

School 1 suggested that we use timetabled sessions which are usually allocated to the chaplaincy. We agreed to use two such sessions involving 75 students and then invite those who wish to delve deeper to attend a one-off day event with further sessions. During these two chaplaincy 40-minute sessions, students were initially reluctant to engage but then started to participate as time went by. Unfortunately, no student applied for the extracurricular activity scheduled on a Saturday. It is unclear how to interpret this outcome. One of the school educators explained that this was not surprising and that resistance to critical/philosophical questioning has come to be expected. Anecdotal evidence suggests that students thought that the project activities involving personhood and intimacy were religious, and most students threw away our invitations as soon as the session was over.

2. *Church school*

The project activities at this school had to be cancelled due to changes in the school leadership. The original plan was to present the philosophy sessions as another extracurricular option which are commonly provided after school hours (on weekdays).

3. *State school, group of 15 14-15-year-old students*

The school offered us a flexible schedule during normal school hours as it aims mainly to help children from the migrant community to learn English. Students

participated enthusiastically in the sessions and several students showed particular insight when replying to philosophical questions posed to them.

Philosophy in the Community of Inquiry

As Evans (2013) argues, philosophy is not simply a process of abstract reflection, but an ongoing practice. This distinction is important when we discuss the pedagogical role of philosophy in a community of inquiry. Delicata (2017) highlighted that “the importance of philosophical reasoning is often underestimated” (p. 1), having educators who prefer traditional means of teaching and transmission of knowledge. This was not the case in the EPIX project; primarily due to the flexibility of the sessions, and the pedagogical approach utilised by the educators. From what the authors of this paper observed, students were introduced to philosophy with the intent to reflect on the activities and the themes being delivered. The project aimed to introduce existential themes beyond the curriculum; however, it was made clear before the sessions that the students were seldom exposed to philosophical inquiry. Therefore, how can one raise a community of inquiry through philosophy, if the *inquiry* is not present in the community?

Before answering this question, one ought to ask *why* inquiry is not present in class, and *what* is preventing it from flourishing. Such queries will not be satisfied by a single answer, as there are different factors which contribute to a classroom short of inquiry (and thus philosophy). Pritchard (in Sharp et al., 1992) identifies two ‘limitations’ that excuse young students from practising philosophical reasoning: *inexperience* and a *lack of rational principles*. Regarding the former, inquiry may be restricted because educators or policymakers may think that children are ‘not experienced’ enough to wonder and question the world. Pritchard mentions philosopher Thomas Reid as someone who contests this claim, arguing that “we should not be surprised at the richness of children’s moral thinking ... morality is everyone’s business, and therefore the knowledge of it ought to be within the reach of all” (p. 16). Reid concludes that opportunities are countless for youngsters to test ethical concepts and principles within their known range of experience. As for the second ‘limitation’, Pritchard criticises 20th-century psychology for presuming that “early morality is shaped by fear and punishment”, and for rejecting that “moral reasoning might play a significant role in moral education before age seven or eight” (p. 17). Pritchard refers to different researchers who present evidence that children, even from the age of four, “have an intuitive grasp of differences among prudential, conventional, and moral rules” (p. 18). Moreover, he disregards the limitation of children having ‘less rational principles’, stating that youngsters are also qualified of empathising with others and thus participate in a community of inquiry.

Apart from the discussed limitations, several theorists criticise the ‘traditional’ model of education as being complicit in diminishing critical inquiry in classrooms. For instance, Peters (as cited in English, 2009) states that in the “traditional *moulding* model of education, the educator imprints a fixed body of knowledge onto the learner’s mind and leaves no room for the learner’s individuality and critical thought” (p. 76). Lipman (1988) claims that the “doing of philosophy requires conversation, dialogue, and community, which are not compatible with the requirements of the traditional classroom” (p. 41). For a ‘traditional’ classroom to transform into an ‘alternative’ one (in which students engage in philosophical inquiry), Lipman proposes the following direction:

[Students] will listen to each other, being prepared to offer reasons for their views and to ask for the reasons of their fellow participants; they will come to appreciate the diversity of perspectives among their classmates and the need to see matters in context. The seminar in value inquiry will come to serve them as a model of social rationality; they will internalise its rules and practices, and it will come to be established in each of them as thoughtfulness, considerateness, and judiciousness. (p. 59)

The previous critique on the ‘traditional’ model does not imply that a ‘progressive’ model is the be-all and end-all for a pedagogy of inquiry to thrive, as Giroux (2020) claims:

Regardless of how pedagogy is defined, whether in traditional or progressive terms, if it fails to encourage self-reflection and communicative interaction, it ends up providing students with the illusion rather than the substance of choice; moreover, it ends up promoting manipulation and denying critical reflection. (p. 41)

Despite philosophical inquiry being at times scarce in a community, it is never too late for wonder in the class, especially since children have an aptitude for asking questions. As Delicata (2017) holds, “one must use this as an advantage and nurture these questions to develop inquisitive minds and develop the child’s full potential” (p. 47). This can be done in different ways. In the EPIX project, the students were first introduced to the respective theme. They were then asked to inquire about existential scenarios, either through personal experiences, group discussions, or case studies. In addition, students were also invited to narrate their experiences, thoughts and reflections through journaling. However, for philosophical inquiry to be fully practised in the community, the students did not just *share* their stories; they *engaged* with the narrative through constructive arguments (both for and against) and raised questions which at times had no answers. As Fenech remarked in his reflection on the project:

*Since philosophy is not being practised in schools, I envisaged that there would be some resistance in terms of engagement. Despite this preconception, the majority of the students engaged with the themes and activities. There was a language barrier present, yet this was mitigated by other students who offered a translation. During discussions, the learners participated by engaging with philosophical questions, presenting arguments, or commenting on their peers' remarks. When explaining philosophical literature (in my case, the *Meditations* by Marcus Aurelius), the students seemed attentive and curious. In group discussions, students were leaning forward and using hand gestures to express their thoughts, signs which portray engagement and interest.*

Further feedback from the authors suggests that the students seemed to enjoy reflecting upon existential matters, such as what their *desires* mean and imply.

In *Experience and Education*, Dewey (1997 [1938]) argues that personal experiences (for example those conferred in the EPIX project), can create relationships within the community, irrespective of maturity: “basing education upon personal experience may mean more multiplied and more intimate contacts between the mature and the immature than ever existed in the traditional school, and consequently more, rather than less, guidance by others” (p. 21). This point by Dewey raises a question concerning the educators’ disclosure with their students; i.e., is the educator part of the community? How much are the educators willing to expose from their personal experiences?

As Delicata observes from Dewey’s interpretations, the educator’s role is not a spectator in class, but a member who personally contributes to learning: “the teacher also aids in furnishing ready-made subject matter. Here, the educator does not take the traditional role but is more of a learner, equally participating in the discussion, with both the students and the teacher, giving and receiving” (2017, p. 28). Moreover, educators (and their contributions) are also part of the pedagogy being utilised. In the EPIX project, the educators’ pedagogy included their personal experiences when discussing existential themes. For example, during the theme of *Journaling and Being Acquainted with the Self*, the tutor narrated his trajectory and his understanding of the world through journaling and meditation. In return, the students started asking questions and participated in class discussions. Furthermore, the shared experiences did not merely serve as a ‘conversation starter’ or as a ‘reference point’; they facilitated philosophical inquiry throughout the session.

Beyond the remit of the project, educators can raise a community of inquiry through philosophy by brainstorming questions, creating narratives and plays, inviting guest speakers, visiting places, or engaging in art and literature. Apart from having the opportunity to engage philosophically with the mentioned activities, students had the chance to explore what the other is. Or as philosopher of education Maxine Greene (1995) holds, to imagine the world from “new lenses”:

The vistas that might open, the connections that might be made, are experiential phenomena; our encounters with the world become newly informed. When they do, they offer new lenses through which to look out at and interpret the educative acts that keep human beings and their cultures alive.
(p. 18)

Ultimately, as Delicata stated, nurturing a community of inquiry implies that “a group of people who reflect and think on different issues share a common goal or purpose and then discuss together these same issues to achieve that purpose” (p. 15).

Discussing Controversial Issues in a Community of Inquiry

Pedagogically, philosophy plays another role in nurturing the community: that of teaching controversial issues in class. Hess (2009) states that for a more democratic and inquiry-based community to occur, young people ought to engage in “high-quality public talk about controversial political issues” (p. 5). Hess writes that learners need to learn how to dialogue about controversial matters for a more functioning democratic community, defining controversial issues as the “authentic questions about the kinds of public policies that should be adopted to address public problems” (p. 5). Such questions that are raised through controversies can also be philosophical, which can thus help the learner develop the matter at hand. For instance, when discussing the controversy of wars, before alluding to why X had attacked Y, learners can philosophically inquire if a just war exists, or if the end had justified the means of warfare. Hess elaborates on the problem of schools refusing to involve controversial and political issues in their communities:

When schools fail to teach young people how to engage with controversial political issues, or worse, suppress, ignore, or deny the important role of controversial issues in the curriculum, they send a host of dangerous and wrongheaded messages. One is that the political realm is not important, especially in comparison to other content on which schools traditionally have focused. Another is that such issues are “taboo” and therefore dangerous for young people to encounter ... Furthermore, a school that shuns political controversy is not taking advantage of some unique features that make schools an especially good site for learning how to talk about highly controversial issues. (pp. 5-6):

Haynes (2002) explains how philosophical inquiry provides freedom and discipline for adults and children, especially through controversial and challenging areas, “where conflicting beliefs about knowledge, rights, responsibilities and power are rife” (p. 34). In the community, Haynes argues that children engaging in these issues are exposed to matters of power and authority, notions which further expose students to “differences of opinion, conflicting beliefs, strong feelings, and controversial issues” (p. 128).

During the EPIX project, students were keen on discussing controversial issues in the tutorials on *Desire and Satisfaction* and *Essence precedes Existence*. For instance, in the latter tutorial, questions such as what the purpose of life is for prisoners, terminally ill patients, slaves, or people with severe disabilities, were raised. The authors gathered feedback from the tutor responsible for the *Desire and Satisfaction* tutorial. In her feedback, the tutor expressed that the theme of desire is a theme which relates to teenagers. She argued that their age is ripe for notions of fulfilment, frustration, self-discovery, and dissatisfaction. Further, she stated that her tutorial helped students to see beyond the natural horizons of material achievements and ways of life.

Moreover, allowing students to discuss controversial issues (at times philosophically) can help reduce 'silence' in the classroom, which can be a form of violence if such silence is allowed: which stories are we going to tell? What stories are we eliminating? If members of the LGBTIQ+ community are not allowed to share their stories for instance, are we implying that their stories are not important? Therefore, 'silence', in such ways, can be pedagogically destructive to the community.

Weber and Wolf (2017) emphasise the pedagogical importance of questioning in a community of philosophical inquiry. For example, "a question like 'what is friendship?' could lead to the giving of examples of 'friendship' and evaluating criteria determining why one example might be better than the other" (p. 75). The authors also inferred whose questions are allowed to be asked, whether those of the learner or the educator: "this raises the issues of who chooses the questions, referring to the power (im)balances, and how a question is chosen" (p. 75). In addition, Hess (2005) inferred educators' disclosure of such questions, whether they ought to disclose personal views or not, especially concerning controversial issues.

Philosophy and the Community's Imagination

Quenzer (2022) remarks on imagination's role of being "a potent force of personal and social transformation," which is often ignored in education due to the "difficult nature of observing, describing, and interpreting it (p. 35)." Similarly, Seon-Hee (2002) argues that imagination has not always been in the spotlight or emphasised in pedagogy since it has "traditionally been understood as the antithesis of reason, and has been excluded from the discourses of rationality" (p. 39). This part of the paper discusses the importance of imagination in the community of inquiry, and philosophy's role to cultivate such imagination.

The notion of imagination in education can perhaps be best understood with Greene's work, particularly in *Releasing the Imagination* (1995), a set of essays

on themes such as social imagination vis-à-vis emancipatory education. As Miller (2010) states, Greene's conception of social imagination "allows a breaking with the taken for granted, a setting aside of familiar definitions and distinctions, a becoming conscious of and responding to diversities of perspectives and identities" (p. 417). Moreover, Greene (1995) argues that if the learner (and even the educator) is allowed to imagine a different kind of society, one which may not be as just or equitable as the subject is comfortable with, the person can 'emancipate' themselves from preconceptions or misjudgement about the other:

To tap into imagination is to become able to break with what is supposedly fixed and finished, objectively and independently real ... Doing so, a person may become freed to glimpse what might be, to form notions of what should be and what is not yet. (p. 19)

Her pedagogical view of imagination is not necessarily to instigate improvement or resolve issues; it is to "awaken, to disclose the ordinarily unseen, unheard, and unexpected" (p. 28). Imagination thus is a very powerful pedagogical tool for the educator, supposing that individuals in the community of inquiry may include the 'unseen, unheard, and unexpected' that Greene is speaking on. Goldman (2010) mentions Greene's *Teacher as Stranger* (1973), which encapsulates Greene's thoughts on education (including the role of imagination) with her existentialist outlook, encouraging educators "to lead their students on freeform explorations in the classrooms (p. 1)." Likewise, the EPIX project also aimed to directly connect existential inquiry with philosophy and education.

Further, how can philosophy lead the community to its praxis of imagination? As Greene (1995) remarks, philosophy is a form of social critique, which helps the subject to overcome false consciousness:

Philosophy is seen as a way of posing questions about inequities and brutalities that offend shared norms. It involves an unmasking of the ways as well in which communication is distorted ... [philosophical critique] takes us into the examination of ideologies and their coercive effects on thinking. (p. 60)

Given this, an argument being presented throughout this paper is that when philosophy is pedagogically utilised as means of social critique, raising questions and discussions on personal or socio-political issues, the community can be moved to imagine situations involving discomfort, empathy, contempt, or even hope. These situations can imaginably lead the community to further inquiry, action, and perhaps social transformation.

The ideas being presented are in line with critical pedagogy more broadly. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (2017 [1968]) speaks of imagination and creativity as being inhibited by the "banking" concept of education, as the latter

reinforces “alienation, fatalism, and submersion in a worldview of domination, discouraging critical thought and transformative action” (Darder, 2018, p. 109). The alternative to the “banking” model that Freire proposes is the “problem-posing” model, one in which students are ‘free’ to practise their imagination, involving “a constant unveiling of reality” (Freire, 2017 [1968], p. 54). In a “problem-posing” model of education, Freire states that individuals foster their power to observe critically “the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation (p. 56).”

In addition to Freire’s model, Fenech (author 1) observes how philosophy helped students to imagine different realities and scenarios:

Since the project dealt with themes that are scarce in Maltese education, its unique approach was more appealing to the people involved. Philosophical inquiry (through existential matters) guided the students’ imagination to picture and think of situations that were not necessarily familiar with. It also helped the students to decipher the world around them, question it, and imagine realities that the other is witnessing, to do something about it.

Moreover, the pedagogical role of philosophical inquiry and critique in the community is to try and incentivise the “problem-posing” model which guides the imagination, to become a “search for a social vision of a more humane, more fully pluralist, more just, and more joyful community” (Greene, 1995, p. 61).

In the following section, both the community of inquiry and the pedagogical role of philosophy discussed so far will be explored from the lens of Ethics Education, a subject in the Maltese educational system.

Philosophy in the Ethics Education Community

The last part of the paper focuses on the role of philosophy in Ethics Education, a subject in the Maltese education system. From an alternative to Catholic Religious Education to a much-pursued subject, Ethics Education has been a key opportunity for students to start forming a community of inquiry from the very start of their scholastic education. As the drafter of the vision of the Ethics Education programme, Wain (2016) states:

The whole Ethics [Education] programme is taught through the numerous resources offered by philosophy, and it draws on considerable work done over the last decades in philosophy programmes with children in classroom settings. Central to these programmes is the representation of the classroom community as a ‘community of inquiry’, which is the responsibility of the ethics teacher to set up from the first years.

To build the “community” that Wain mentions, Ethics educators aim to pedagogically create a safe space to debate and learn about today’s socio-political issues, including ‘controversial’ ones, encouraging learners to use philosophy in their arguments and their perception of the world.

As mentioned above, the EPIX project was designed upon subjects like Ethics Education, sharing with it its philosophical underpinnings. For instance, the tutorial on the topic of intimacy aimed to philosophically explore intimacy, asking questions such as:

- Is privacy still evident in a relationship?
- What kind of relationship I would like to have?
- What is the difference between love and sex?
- What are my thoughts about intimacy?
- How can you give yourself without losing yourself?

Similar questions are also tackled in module 2 of the SEC (Secondary Education Certificate) Ethics programme. Titled “Respect for Self”, module 2 presents students with “issues of intimacy and personal privacy, and their values are brought into the discussion of the dangers of self-exposure identified in it” (MATSEC, 2021). One of the objectives of this module is to “exercise students in the evaluation and writing of arguments on selected topics or issues” (MATSEC, 2021), which is also in line with the tutorial on intimacy. In the project, students were asked to explore the aforementioned existential questions in writing, by self-reflecting on themselves. Afterwards, students had the opportunity to share their remarks with others, creating a space for more questions and arguments to occur. Reflecting on his observations of the EPIX project, Fenech (author 1 of this paper), who was also a student-teacher of Ethics Education at the time, noted a connection between EPIX and Ethics Education:

My education experience in Ethics [Education] has helped me notice the similarities between the subject and this project. For instance, the philosophical atmosphere that I aim to create in the Ethics class was evident in EPIX. Students inquired, imagined, criticised, and even wondered, about notions that the mind needs to transform and better understand oneself. The tutorial that I was responsible for [Journaling and Being Acquainted with the Self] resonated with modules 1 & 4 of the [Ethics Education] syllabus, helping me pass the teaching and learning of the Ethics community to the project, including its learning outcomes.

To pedagogically form a community of inquiry, Ethics educators are encouraged to use Lipman’s (2003) Philosophy for Children programme (Mizzi & Mercieca, 2021). Shaw (2008) praised this programme and its use of philosophy for its ability to: refine learners’ linguistic, logical and cognitive abilities; provide students with skills of enquiry, helping them understand the

world and their experience of it; help in alertness and skilful, considerate thinking; develop cooperation, trust, care, and respect, and finally, it encourages a good preparation for life. As highlighted by Shaw, the pedagogical role of philosophy can be very beneficial to the classroom community.

Delicata (2017) mentions how philosophy (through the Socratic method) can help the Ethics educator create a community of inquiry:

The Socratic Method gets the students to defend their views by taking the opposite view and asking questions. Identifying what is at hand, and finding possible solutions and counterarguments enables the student to practise their critical thinking skills. Through this, the students would be also judging the credibility of each other's information. They would be also able to identify and clarify the difference between an opinion, a judgement and a fact. (p. 66)

She also stressed that educators should not feel impatient with students' views and that every individual can interpret and encounter the world "with a different meaning which is related to them and the signs they receive" (p. 67). Furthermore, philosophical inquiry can assist in this interpretation of the world, opening doors and possibilities for students to search. Shaw (2008) argues that educators ought to be comfortable knowing that the educator "does not know at the beginning of the session where the discussion will lead the group, and is not in control of where the class ends up after the session" (p. xi).

Thus, philosophy plays an important part in the Ethics Education community. However, simply having a curriculum founded on philosophical underpinnings is not enough. The educators' will to implement philosophy in their pedagogical methods is imperative for students to cultivate a critical attitude. Nevertheless, philosophy ought to be placed in high regard in teacher training programmes, as stressed in *The Importance of Philosophy in Teacher Education* (Colgan & Maxwell, 2020) and *Rethinking Teacher Education* (Edwards et al., 2002).

Conclusion

This paper discussed the role that philosophy plays in pedagogy as set in a community of inquiry. The first part of the paper expounded on the commencement of the EPIX project, which provided learners with a democratic opportunity to engage in philosophical inquiry through several existential themes. Both the research and the feedback gathered from the project's tutors presented philosophy as a 'tool' to be further developed in pedagogy. To elaborate on the pedagogical role of philosophy, the second part of the paper focused on examples of how philosophy is utilised in the community of inquiry. The third part of the paper discussed the notion of imagination in the classroom, and how philosophy can nurture imagination in both learners and

educators. Lastly, the pedagogical role of philosophy was explored with Ethics Education, a subject in the Maltese curriculum, including its influence on the EPIX project and beyond.

Acknowledgements:

The authors are grateful to the tutors, schools, and students who participated in this project, and would like to wholeheartedly thank Dr Kurt Borg (University of Malta), for his pertinent contribution and interest towards this research, both in the EPIX project and the ensuing paper.

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More information on Humanists Malta can be found on: <http://humanistsmalta.org>ⁱ

More information on DEIP can be found on: <https://deip.info/>ⁱⁱ

More information on EPIX can be found on: <https://maltahumanist.org/epix>. This ⁱⁱⁱ project has been funded by the Small Initiatives Support Scheme (SIS) managed by the Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector (MCVS) supported by the Ministry for Inclusion, Voluntary Organisations and Consumer Rights (MIVC).