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Underestimated no more

An introduction to Philocreation

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What does it mean to grow up in the face of constant underestimation? This is the evocative question that launched the first experiment in youth-driven creative philosophy camps run by Brila Youth Projects, an educational charity based in Montreal, Canada. Imagine a group of Indigenous teens gathered on a university campus for a multimedia bootcamp during their winter break. It's March 2008 during one of the coldest weeks of the year, and the mood is just as unmistakably chilly. They are not sure what they have gotten themselves into and who can blame them? A leadership intensive of "conceptual play" is hardly familiar territory.

Within minutes, it is painfully clear how unaccustomed they are to being taken seriously without censorship or judgment—and how badly they crave it. This particular group, so vulnerable from dealing with suicide, domestic abuse, and even witness protection programs after losing mothers to murder, mask their curiosity with wary indifference. Though the pilot project has been in the works since the fall with great support from the local friendship center, the hesitation is palpable. "You are going to do *what* with us?" Why, philosophy of course.

To be fair, the uncertainty is two-sided. Though this partnership has already generated amazing creative outbursts—including a youth-driven music video of original hip hop lyrics about Indigenous conceptions of love, fusing traditional throat singing and hoop dancing—never has philosophy been named so explicitly as key to the imaginative process. It is hard to shake the lingering fear of being perceived as the all-white facilitation team imposing so-called wisdom, despite constant reassurance by trusted Indigenous elders that the role has been rightly earned after years of careful collaboration.

And so, the creative whirlwinds tentatively begin, soon mimicking the frantic rhythm of the snow falling outside. The teens embrace the chaos of their multiple interests, trying to find ways of intermingling what they find meaningful within their philosophical chats and creative missions. Given free rein, they pick the concepts that matter to them most in the moment—violence prevention, poverty eradication and healthy relationships—and experiment with their ideas through different art forms. The university seminar room becomes a clutter of paintbrushes, digital cameras and blackboard scribbles, attesting to the wonderings and wanderings of the group.

For five days straight, they think and create together, with such urgency and commitment. Can hope exist in the midst of fear? Should everyone put on a mask… or try to wear their heart on their sleeve? Is pain a better teacher than joy? The teens surprise themselves at how naturally they take to waxing philosophical, as if shocked by their own insights. And after a near all-nighter, chock-full of sugar-induced epiphanies and inside jokes, the first *philozine* (or philosophical magazine) emerges: "Very Indigenous Peoples"—the title a play on the acronym of VIP. Bold yet fragile, and ever so brave.

The government funders backing the project are not so enthusiastic, however. The results are "too dark," they say, as if expecting sunshine and lollipops from such an at-risk population. They seem blind to the beautiful rawness staring right back at them—the philosophical perspectives, poems, photography and paintings that show such generosity of spirit. Disputing the notion that the process should outshine the results, they order the facilitation team to radically change the magazine into a more "upbeat" product, brushing aside hours of serious contemplation as mere child's play. And as the facilitators try in vain to make their case against

such a breach of trust, a new motive—almost a solemn oath—becomes clear to them: No more underestimating the brilliance of youth.

So with this galvanizing start, Brila is born, borrowing from the Esperanto word for "brilliant"—a name that wants to defy the boundaries of age, language and culture to make philosophy accessible and ever re-definable to the youth who grow up with it, not confined to ivory towers or to the misguided impressions of ageist authorities. The team's new charitable status means independence from creative control disguised as government support but also a ton more work: running a business without any of the perks while juggling a million other commitments, from graduate studies to freelance contracts, just to break even.

Through trial and error and steep learning curves, Brila has committed itself to inspiring young people from preschool through college with a blend of philosophy and creativity, or what has become its *philocreation* approach. Its mission—articulated through the three imperatives "think, create, engage"—has been to promote thoughtfulness in both senses of the word. On the one hand, it encourages in youth the capacity to be deeply absorbed in thought and to reason in a careful, discerning manner; and on the other, it fosters their genuine consideration for the world through responsible thought and action.[1]

Twelve years and thousands of camp hours later, Brila has amassed innumerable lessons about the power of philosophy camps, as this chapter will strive to showcase, starting with an outline of its developing theory of youth underestimation and its creative spin on philosophical inquiry, then moving on to an overview of its lighthearted take on self-correction and its potential impact from the viewpoint of its own young philosophers.

Adultism inspires activism

The prospect of thoughtfulness in childhood is not uniformly prized as some adults may not see it as desirable or even possible. Such an outlook may stem from genuine concern regarding what youth can and should be expected to handle, or point to flat-out ageist views. The term "adultism" describes the tendency to disrespect young people by categorizing them as inferior or unworthy of agency, and is held to be rooted in contemporary ideas about childhood that tend to gravitate around two views.

In the first, the child is seen as a mere eventual adult representing an absence or insufficiency of grown-up qualities—what philosopher of childhood Garreth Matthews (1992) has called the "deficit conception." In the second, the child is seen as a symbol of innocence and playfulness who must be protected from excessive interference by the adult world (Friquegnon, 1997). Many theorists and practitioners of Philosophy for Children (P4C) have sought to identify how such narrow visions might be impacting the ways young people are perceived and treated, notably with regard to their exclusion from social narratives—both current and historical—and to the "impacts of being treated as inferior…the sense of powerlessness, hopelessness and insecurity" (Haynes et al., 2014, p. 25).

Over the years, with every new partnership, Brila has run up against these impoverished conceptions of children—a mindset so widely accepted that it seems barely noticeable, even though these perceptions can be as pernicious as any other form of discrimination. Brila's experiences suggest that the threat lies in the underestimation such a mindset can trigger, notably on two key levels. First, there is the tendency to regard youth as less capable than they actually are in terms of their thinking, creating and collaborating, specifically in their ability to cope with complexity and ambiguity—or what will be called capability underestimation.

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[1] The charity's website defines these three aspects of its mission as follows: by "think," it means youth participants are able to explore and analyze their perspectives in a supportive atmosphere that emphasizes the process not just the results. By "create," it means participants are able to quench the performance pressures associated with creative projects, connecting to their sense of playfulness and quieting their self-censorship. By "engage," it means participants are able to face the serious, perplexing challenges of their day with strong reasoning skills and genuine empathy. For details, please visit www.brila.org/about.

Second, there is the propensity to judge youth's perspectives as less important because of their age, even if their ideas are as strong or even superior to those of adults—or what will be called standpoint underestimation.[2] In both cases, this mindset misconstrues, minimizes and underrates youth, and can thus be deemed to judge them incorrectly—it does not do justice to what they can do and thus fails to recognize their true or potential value. This two-pronged underestimation can get instantiated in both people and processes. On the one hand, adults may have high regard for youth but adopt pedagogical methods that are too easy or infantilizing; on the other hand, the educational approach might be quite considerate but get implemented by people with questionable adultist views.

In fairness, such underestimation may not be tantamount to disparagement: it could be more about having no specific expectation of a young person rather than feeling outright aversion toward them. This mindset should therefore be seen as a judgment error rather than an assumed lack of care or even love. But its impact should not go unnoticed since it can color the kinds of perceptions and opportunities that children and adolescents are attributed. What's worse, this stance may be adopted by young people themselves, leading to underestimation of their own capability and standpoint. One cannot help but wonder: How can their growing be supported in such adultist circumstances?

In response, one promising avenue might be to create educative experiences that endeavor to ensure both the people and processes involved do not underestimate youth in these ways. But how? Brila's hypothesis—now the focus of multiple longitudinal empirical studies—is that the curation of immersive spaces for aspirational yet joyful learning through philosophical dialogues and creative projects may enable youth to experiment with different forms of agency in ways that prevent or remedy capability and standpoint underestimation.

In a world overflowing with complex issues and viewed through the prism of youth with such distinct life experiences, Brila deems it crucial to carefully curate spaces for its campers to explore concepts that matter to them and figure out for themselves—and with each other—the kind of world they want to live in and the kind of people they want to be. This aim connects directly to the issue of adultism since it requires a different conception of youth that values—rather than underestimates—their capability and standpoint. By extension, Brila sees its campers as capable individuals with perspectives worth sharing, who need meaningful opportunities to practice autonomous thinking and creating in ways that highlight their "epistemic advantage of coming new into the world" (Haynes et al, 2014, p. 130).[3]

Conceived in this way, philosophy camps become a political project—a kind of activism for redefining childhood and adolescence so that ageism does not get in the way of their emerging agency. But to curate such spaces, philosophy needs to connect to its inner creative force so that youth can self-identify as agents capable of actualizing the valuable ideas they envision within their current circumstances. Enter the possibility of philocreation.

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[2] Though these views are the author's own, they are inspired by the theoretical frameworks of the Capabilities Approach (Sen 1985 and Nussbaum 2011) and standpoint theory (Harding 2004) respectively.

[3] While total self-determination may not be possible or advisable because of developmental and legal limitations, youth in their various stages of growing up already exercise degrees of agency in meaningful ways that should be recognized to ensure they are treated not merely as eventually useful but as people able to take an active role in their own lives.

Curating a space of conceptual play through philocreation

A space for philocreation

What do brainteaser relays, feet painting, robot construction and recycle-fashion have in common? Creative engagement with unfamiliar forms of agency that are primed to prevent or remedy capability and standpoint underestimation. There is nothing like an immersive space to help uncover hidden skills and unexpected insights—it is no coincidence that P4C trainings tend to be retreats from reality that prioritize deep thinking and human connection.

Philocreation camps represent a privileged space for time manipulation: what can be curated over a few intensive days seems far greater than the sum of hours.[4] As Brila's history can confirm, something magical happens when youth get to bathe in creative philosophy without interruption—preliminary data suggest they progress much faster in a camp setting than in the equivalent of weekly school sessions. There is an expectation of imaginative boundary-pushing minus the pressure to perform: everyone is dedicated to having a go without fearing failure.

With this in mind, Brila's philocreation camps are designed as youth-driven imaginative thinking labs that offer daily challenges to reflect and make outside the box. Each camp is loaded with 35 to 60 hours of brain candy, zeroing in on a philosophical concept and investigating it from every angle for maximum mental gymnastics. As this section will illustrate, campers delve deep into dialogues, playing leapfrog with each other's thoughts, then expressing their newly hatched ideas through customized creative projects that are showcased in their own publications, thus gaining a sense of responsibility for what they say, how they communicate it and who is affected by it.

Inspired by the pragmatist sense of indeterminacy found in Charles Sanders Peirce's notion of the irritation of doubt, the stimuli that Brila uses to spark its "philosophical itchiness" are not limited to inquiry-rich stories. They also include theatrical renditions, role-playing and problem-setting games that highlight the omnipresence and pertinence of philosophical concepts. Campers also take part in special guest workshops led by practicing

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[4] Many philosophers of childhood have explored the concept of time in relation to philosophical inquiry in youth, notably Ann Margaret Sharp (1997) and David Kennedy (2010).

professionals who model what is possible beyond the confines of capability and standpoint underestimation by sharing their expertise in areas ranging from guerrilla gardening to fine arts to STEM disciplines.

Accordingly, while still purist in terms of its commitment to P4C's core principles and facilitation techniques, over time Brila has developed its own approach of philocreation in an effort to address concerns around youth underestimation, and honor the diversity of educational settings in which it conducts its bilingual charitable activities, from its day camps to its classroom sessions, after-school workshops and tailored programs in partnership with youth theatres, science centers and art galleries.[5] Specifically, this assortment of settings has translated into the great privilege but also the significant responsibility of working with children and teens from myriad backgrounds, including indigenous, underprivileged, neurodiverse, refugee and new immigrant youth, some of whom have spent their first days in Canada doing one of Brila's camps.[6]

This breadth of participants—and with it, the array of needs and forms of engagement—has meant that the traditional steps of the P4C's Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI) have at times seemed overly structured in circumstances where everything from cultural to linguistic to economic barriers, coupled with divergences in learning and discourse styles, have demanded greater contextual sensitivity. Accordingly, though the philocreation approach continues to celebrate the classic P4C style—or what founders Matthew Lipman and Ann Margaret Sharp nicknamed the "plain vanilla" version—it has also added its own sprinkles, as the following examples will show.

While these might seem like quite a departure from the original program, Brila has sought to reflect Lipman's pragmatist insistence on the cruciality of a reflective model of educational practice, one that is appraisive and self-corrective, constantly analyzing itself in order to meet the changing demands of learners and their environments (2003, p. 18)—in this case, the moral obligation of overcoming youth underestimation.

For starters, Brila's philosophical dialogues comprise over half a dozen specific types beyond the traditional version to help youth form reasonable perspectives through the use of key thinking tools that protect complexity and ambiguity. To name but a few, the first day of camp usually starts with the "multiversation" dialogue type—a thought experiment to provide youth with a whimsical icebreaker: they dip their toes into divergent thinking by imagining an alternative universe that can help them better understand their own world, while learning to identify assumptions and take different contexts into account.

Their appreciation for nuance then gets heightened with the "perspectrum" dialogue type, which invites campers to literally position their bodies or name tags on a yes-to-no line in reaction to a philosophical question. They must then offer good reasons in support of their chosen spot, which can change as the inquiry exposes new shades of grey, sparking the use of consequences, counter-examples and opposite viewpoints.

Later in the week, campers engage in the "narascopik" dialogue type—a philosophical spin on story circles inspired by the emancipatory practices of Myles Horton (1990). They take turns sharing personal narratives in connection to a particular concept, learning to trust the wisdom of their own experiences as they build a rich, vivid collective definition, and create a special intimacy that strengthens their community bond.

Philocreation dialogues also build in components that are not focused on talk, such as written and image-based inquiries with interactive visual and tactile aids, including Brila's signature MetaMission cards and a physical thinking toolkit that gamifies complex metacognitive processes without compromising pedagogical

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[5] Since its founding, Brila has become an endorsed affiliate center of the original Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC) founded by Matthew Lipman and Ann Margaret Sharp, where all of its senior staff have been trained. It has also worked closely with first generation practitioners, including Prof. Michel Sasseville from Université Laval in its home province of Quebec as well as international partners through its Brila Globo programming. Philocreation is now a trademarked term that denotes the approach to the P4C model that Brila has designed to integrate creativity into every phase of philosophical inquiry with youth.

[6] Though the camp fees are very affordable, bursary funds are distributed on the basis of financial need and granted to those who would be unable to attend camp without financial assistance.

integrity. For example, the "concept arithmetic" cards inspire campers to create surprisingly juicy philosophical questions by juxtaposing otherwise unallied concepts through the playful use of math symbols (+, -, =, ≠, ², %, >, <, etc.).

In an effort to accentuate the often neglected embodied, affective and aesthetic dimensions of philosophical inquiry, Brila's dialogue types also include movement-driven exchanges rooted in dance and other performance arts, promoting inclusion of youth who have exceptionalities, are visual or kinetic learners, or are less fluent in the two languages of the charity's program delivery.

Taken together, for instance, campers could explore the concept of discomfort through a thought experiment depicting a hypothetical land where it was impossible to ever feel uneasy, then cross-examine it with a perspectrum considering the potential value of discomfort, and later personalize it through a story circle highlighting truly uncomfortable moments, and finally test it by way of a movement inquiry that drives them beyond their comfort zone into the topsy-turvy world of circus arts.

Indeed, philocreation camps carve out a significant amount of time for creative projects to provide campers with invaluable opportunities to further ingrain, feel and live the existential meanings of their evolving perspectives. At the heart of the philocreation approach is the "Owl Challenge"—the complex team project culminating each camp that invites campers to use the same thinking tools and reflective dispositions they mobilize in their philosophical dialogues but toward the mission of collaboratively constructing some kind of solution to a given problem representing a current contemporary issue, whether ethical, political or societal.

In light of youth's environmental sensibilities, a camp favorite is Brila's "sustainable homes for gnomes"—a challenge that entrusts participant teams with the mission of designing an ideal ecotown, considering each aspect of community life according to their fantastical clientele's specific needs and goals, then building it using only recycled materials and presenting their proposal to their fellow teams.

A model of an ideal ecotown as part of a Brila "Owl Challenge"

Such projects are paragons of philocreation because they prompt campers to explain and justify their creative choices in the same way they would their philosophical positions during dialogues, thus applying the rigor, imaginativeness and collaborative spirit of P4C to a hands-on project that enables them to test and expand their theoretical claims, all the while being scaffolded and supported by facilitators. In turn, their creative brainstorming gives rise to more dialoguing, including Brila's strategic inquiries in which apt concepts are put to work to problem-solve as if they were living, breathing characters who could share their wisdom toward the creation of practical solutions.

This imaginative engagement helps campers see philosophical inquiry not merely as a mental exercise with sporadic applicability to real life—one which can be powerful yet also periodically frustrating or existentially dissatisfying—but instead as an actionable process that can seamlessly extend to everyday encounters. This portrayal also reflects Brila's commitment to using P4C's pragmatist roots to counter capability and standpoint underestimation: for inquiry-based learning to be transferable, children must be engaged in reflective reasoning with corresponding actions, or more colloquially, they must learn to walk their talk.

Covers of recent philozines showcasing the creative philosophical works of campers

Last but not least, philocreation draws on multiple creative forms to bridge the gap between dialogical and non-dialogical meaning-making, and these come together in the production of the campers' *philozines*. These mixed media mini-publications act as their philosophical artifacts, offering tangible evidence of their inquiry efforts and attesting to the discernment in their wonderings.

The practice of zining first appealed to Brila because of its revolutionary, do-it-yourself roots. As a radical form of self-publishing soon celebrating its centennial, it has empowered countless voices from the fringes—who were often grossly underestimated in terms of both capability and standpoint—to explore ideas they care

deeply about on their own terms.[7] In a similar spirit, before, during and after philosophical dialogues, campers receive philozine missions which provide open-ended thinking prompts connected to the concepts at hand. These *zinactions* push their thinking through writing, drawing, diagramming and the like, while giving them space to not only take a breather from the intense focus of inquiring but also determine their own perspectives within the group. Multimedia components like philosophical videos, slam poetry and photography are later added to the online versions of their philozines.

Campers wondering the day away while working on their philozines

From counterfactual explorations to metaphor mapping to Brila's much-loved gratitude postcards written to a personified concept, philozines come alive with campers' philosophical ideas and imaginative play. By giving them the chance to take on the roles of cultural producers and social historians, philozines help them form their own discourse communities in ways akin to Lipman's vision:

> If children are to be 'seen and not heard,' their silencing deprives the rest of us of their insights…the formation of childhood communities, where candor and trust mingle freely with wondering, searching, and reasoning, provides a needed social support during those critical years in which children are...endeavoring to establish themselves as mature and responsible individuals (1988 194-197).

[7] At Brila, the practices of zining and philosophical inquiry are seen as clear allies in their shared concern for designing spaces for youth voice. For details, please see Fletcher 2017a and view digital examples of philozines at www.brila.org/zines.

The kooky spirit of self-correction

Brila's philocreation camps are aspirational in that they challenge youth to surpass their own expectations by taking on projects that are a bit harder than what they might normally do. Elsewhere, this orientation has been described as "aspirational eros," or the aim to cultivate in children their own aspirations for growth by harnessing their desiring energy of wanting to be, know and experience more than what they currently do (Fletcher and Oyler 2016). The idea is that while philosophy is undeniably difficult, it is not unreachable for youth, especially in a curated immersive space that seeks the delicate balance between pushing them too hard and elevating their agency to new heights.

The informal atmosphere of camp helps by turning traditional learning on its head. Without the formality of evaluations, top-down instruction and scheduling constraints, and thanks to a generous facilitator-to-camper ratio, youth are immersed in choice, free to work in close-knit groups, stretch out on floor cushions, dress up in costumes, make elaborate blanket forts—in sum, allow "real spontaneity to flourish without chaos," as one parent so eloquently phrased it. Yet this freedom presents a new challenge of engagement: since campers *choose* to spend their time at Brila—often their precious vacation days—there is the added pressure of making the tough stuff of philosophy irresistibly fun.

This need for aspirational yet joyful learning was thrown into sharp relief during Brila's second pilot program involving a group of youth with a different kind of vulnerability—the infamous "gifted and talented" label so often misinterpreted by outsiders as an easy ride rather than a potential source of crippling perfectionism. By mid-week, even as campers were creating amazing artwork inspired by their philosophical insights, they got bogged down in self-criticism that hinted at internalized capability and standpoint underestimation.

Taken aback, the facilitators gently observed that the group seemed to be killing their creative energy. In response, one youth exclaimed, "Keep the kook alive!" And Brila's motto was set, epitomizing that ever significant but often elusive spirit of self-correction that P4C fosters through dispositions like acceptance of fallibility, intellectual humility, comfort with uncertainty and openness to mutual support.

One of the early renditions of the kook, Brila's mascot for self-correction

Since then, the kook has taken on a life of its own as the mascot of philocreation—to say nothing of its countless depictions in kid drawings, sculptures and mascots—representing the curious, quizzical spirit inside everyone that needs a chance to play, experiment and try new things without the pressure of being perfect or the fear of making mistakes. When campers are overwhelmed by an idea onslaught or discouraged by a difficult task, they remind each other to take their work seriously but not themselves, embodying Horace's famous advice to "mix a little folly in their plans for it is sweet to be silly at the right moment."

Perplexi, Ambigou, Curio and Skepticus – Brila's kooky puppet philosophers

The spirit of kookiness is not simply about comic relief, however, as the underlying message is much more serious. It highlights philosophy's unique ability to cultivate epistemic flexibility, which frames the willingness to check one's assumptions and change one's mind as a sign of strength instead of weakness, thus acting as a crucial alternative to the rigid habits of mind that breed dogmatism, radicalism, even violent extremism.

As a fluffy reminder of this imperative, Brila's custom puppet philosophers visit camp at various stages of the philocreation process, modelling self-corrective dispositions in the face of aspirational learning without losing their kooky sense of humor, from the inquisitive aliens of Planet Purple with their insatiable (if bewildering) thirst for knowledge about humanity, to the watchful eye of MetaMax who silently observes the ebb and flow of philosophizing to cue the stepping back necessary to think about one's own thinking processes.

MetaMax examines the campers' latest collection of philosophical questions

On a more macro scale, such metacognitive awareness is encouraged through the creation of *philosograms*, a mapping tool that Brila designed to help campers make sense of the phenomenological experiences of engaging in philocreation with others. By focusing on the patterns that emerge across dialogues over time at intellectual, affective, corporeal and intersubjective levels, campers gain a better understanding of themselves as collaborative inquirers while establishing strategies for improvement, allowing them to gain a sense of ownership over their self-correction and support it in each other. As one child put it, philosograms act as mirrors of their individual and collective growth—"it makes me imagine… imagine another thinking."[8]

A young camper maps out her first philosogram

On being underestimated

In Brila's early years, P4C was not exactly a welcome proposition, with some suspicious parents and teachers fearing that the program's hidden agenda was to indoctrinate young minds when its very mission mandated the exact opposite. As a result, staff would have to do literal door-to-door flyering to get enough campers for a single week of camp, too preoccupied by mundane logistics to consider the overt possibility that if kids enjoyed themselves they might just want to come back.

Flash forward more than a decade later, as P4C starts to enjoy international appeal, the same young participants continue to seek out philocreation experiences, with camps selling out within minutes of registration opening and facilitators spurred to constantly think up original programming. Yet the

[8] This diagramming tool was developed in response to research interviews with Brila campers who spoke highly of the impact of doing collaborative philosophy but confessed to feeling ill-equipped when describing the nature of their experience. It is inspired by the *aesthetigram* model created by Boyd White to analyze individual encounters with artworks. For details, please see Fletcher 2017b.

underestimation of youth capability and standpoint endures, even from well-meaning adults who seem genuinely interested in what philosophy can offer children and teens.

Case in point: A few years ago, a journalist from a major newspaper visited Brila to interview its young philosophers. After witnessing a two-hour philosophical dialogue outdoors on the nature of wisdom with a group of campers ranging in age from five to eighteen, she approached the youngest boy with her version of a compliment: "That's really cute what you just said." He leaned back, looked her straight in the eye and replied: "Sure it's cute but is it reasonable?" Speechless, she scribbled in her notebook and sat back down. Laughing as they reminisced about the exchange, some members of Brila's youth board—who have literally grown up with philosophy—reflected on their initial experiences with philosophy camp:

Alejandra: Once my friends asked me "Do you go to camp?" and I said, "Yes, it's called Brila and we do philosophy!" I was so excited about it… but they were totally confused.

Carmen: I was kinda forced to come the first time, and I remember thinking, "Not only do I have to do a camp, but now I have to do this thing called 'philosophy'?" But then, it was just so different—what I had heard about it and how we do it here.

Soledad: Me too! My friend was like, "Your camp gets kids to do philosophy—how do you even do that? Isn't that a little too hard for them?" So I told her that we talk, we ask questions, we try to build on each other's views. And she was like, "I wouldn't be able to do that stuff. I'm not smart enough." People have this idea that philosophy has to be super hard and complicated, and that for some reason the younger you are, the less capable you are, but no!

Gabriela: Exactly! I started doing philosophy when I was six so I've been at Brila for over half of my life. I've realized that I know a lot of things when it comes to philosophy that people have no idea even exists. Even people much older!

Rosalie: Me too; I started Brila when I was so little! Philosophy has become a part of my life and I really like it because sometimes at home, I have all these sorts of questions and I can't sleep because I'm thinking of all kinds of things. Brila gives me a place where all my ideas can come out and not just stay in my head unanswered. It makes me re-question everything! It makes me think deeper than just facts, and really analyze stuff. Like really be conscious of the world… it's hard to explain!

Sadie: I think it has changed the way I look at things. If we have to do a school project, I have so many more ideas because of Brila, because I've thought about all of them before. Every time we have a dialogue, it goes really deep into the subject. So I start talking about it with other people and they just look at me like they don't understand what I'm saying. I think people have an image of what philosophy is supposed to be and who it's for… like, it's unusual to see kids doing philosophy.

Béatrice: Some adults seem to think it's cute. But cute is for puppies! You want the person you're talking with to be impressed.

Jacob: It just tells you that they weren't actually listening. And that they aren't interested. They're just trying to humor you because you're young. Then you feel like your time was wasted because it wouldn't have mattered if you hadn't said anything at all.

Logan: It's like they're thinking, "You're just a kid." They're not taking you seriously. But I think it's important to do philosophy as a kid because when you grow up, there's less and less wonder. But when you're a kid, it's like, everything is special, everything is new, and you're always interested.

Zachary: And kids like doing things to challenge themselves, I think. If you don't like doing things that are hard, you'll never try anything new. Philosophy makes the boring, similar everyday events different, because you interpret them differently.

Bernardo: If I didn't do philosophy, *I'd* be different. I wouldn't actually know all these things we do, and sometimes just not knowing them actually makes you a different person.

Noah: Yes, but you do have to feed it. Feed the kook! You feed it by remembering it, by going to Brila again, by giving it more knowledge.

Jacob: Yep! And what are we remembering how to do? Be wise.

Addison: What philosophy means to me is reflecting on a concept or an idea—we all try to define what it means to us. Anyone can do that, as long as you can speak and have a brain.

Zachary: Well, yes, but you need to trust other people that they're going to take care of your idea. But if somebody hears your idea and is like "Oh, you're dumb," it would put you down but it shouldn't really affect your opinion.

Soledad: Yes! I feel like there is a tiny little philosopher inside me who's just like "Oh, you have to say this!"

Rosalie: There's a way to make philosophy part of everything. Every day, philosophy is part of your life. Most people don't realize it, but every day, we choose, we think. It's all linked together. You can always think, all the thought processes you have are thanks to philosophy.

Santiago: It's because we have another way to see philosophy. It's like if you're in front of a boutique and you see the window display—it only shows a few things but if you go inside, you see it all. From the outside, you think it's small but once in, it's everything. I think I'd be more discouraged, more depressed without philosophy because it helps me think every day.

Sadie: Without philosophy, it would be harder for me to feel comfortable saying my opinion. Everyone has a busy life, so there isn't really time for people to be able to listen to you. But when you do philosophy, you don't just sit on the side. If you're going to sit on the side, then there's no point. Because we want to hear your opinion. Everyone is listening, thinking about what you're saying. Like *you have to be heard*.

Gabriela: But I also feel like you shouldn't just be talking all the time. Philosophy is about listening. Because other people can change your opinion as well. And I think that people who do philosophy have a better way of seeing the world and a more open way of understanding.

Jacob: I heard some adult say once that if you change your opinion, that's a sign of weakness. But it's actually somewhat of a strength.

Zachary: Well, yeah, because there's a ton of times when you could be wrong about your opinions when we're doing this. It takes strength to admit that you were wrong.

Jin: So our opinions don't have to be flawless in order to be expressed. I learned to open up others to have a peaceful and open conversation with them: when they are getting agitated, I am still Zen and communicating efficiently. Philosophy camp has created a safe space for so many kids to explore the endless possibilities of interpretation of a single question and dissect them into smaller pieces to chew on. For example, I have been able to notice subtle language nuances in similar words in English and French, as my philosophy dialogues are bilingual. Philosophy now holds a special place in my heart, and I don't think I'll ever be able to detach myself from it.

Fatima: I don't understand how I would be able to live without philosophy now that it has taken such an important place in my life! It has also proven its use not only in the chaos of our brains, but how it can be applied to everyday life in the outside world. When it comes to philosophy, age doesn't matter and everyone's mind has the same power to reach incredible heights. Brila is the living proof of a child's philosophical ability.

Leo: I think kids perceive it in a way that an adult wouldn't because they have different experiences and they're going through a different period of their life. Your life story may change the way you think of a question and you might give a different answer. When I was eight, philosophy was different that anything I'd

ever done. It's not like school where you just learn it and never think of it again—sometimes you use philosophy when you wouldn't even think you would. It really impacted me through my early teens: it's helped me get through tough times to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Jiao: When I started at nine years old, Brila as an eye opener for me. It almost felt like certain elements of my life had been in black and white, and suddenly they were filled with color. Philosophy really allowed me to mature into a human being that is capable of thinking beyond the surface and realize that there are so many different perspectives out there in the world. And that's what makes philosophy so important for humans of all ages, beliefs and nationalities.

Rosalie: I feel like we're really like a little family. Our philo family! I think if you want to be a philosophical person, you can't be somebody that doesn't question… somebody who just lives by the trends of society and doesn't think about things. Philosophy makes us different, and it's not the same if you haven't grown up with it.[9]

Growing up for grown-ups

Luckily, Brila's campers are not the only ones who have grown up with philosophy—the team of "purple people" who make up the charity's staff has learnt an incredible amount from their wacky adventures with philocreation camps. In deference to their commitment to countering youth underestimation, facilitators have had to engage in continuous self-work, making themselves vulnerable to aspirational learning in the same ways they have encouraged in their young counterparts.

Since facilitators were themselves green when they began, their intimate knowledge of feeling dismissed and sold short has been a great source of motivation to practice what they preach by placing themselves on equal footing with campers. For instance, during training days, the team takes on the exact same philosophical dialogues and creative projects as the youth will during camp in order to live the triumphs and tribulations themselves, and provide better support. Parents, too, have admitted to changing as their children have developed philosophical sensibilities: as families, they no longer talk past each other because they can tell when they are not using concepts in the same way and can self-correct accordingly.

Brila now embodies a truly by-youth, for-youth model since the team is propelled by its teen volunteers and junior employees who were campers themselves before they completed leadership trainings in philocreation. They have witnessed firsthand how camp has helped them become more thoughtful, articulate and confident versions of themselves. Indeed, with philosophical dialogues and creative projects becoming second nature, they grasp the intricacies of capability and standpoint underestimation better than novices twice their age—no one has to convince them that kids are capable thinkers with rich, original perspectives. They intuitively understand that campers will rise to the expectations that grown-ups have of them so the staff has to renew its own philosophical curiosities if it wants to inspire new forms of youth agency.

Therein lies the power of curating immersive spaces for learning that is both aspirational and joyful: the team has recently taken on the intimidating goal of fully emergent pedagogy, supporting advanced groups as they playfully plot their own programming and refining facilitation techniques to stretch the intellectual and creative limbs of long-time campers. The team has also taken more risks with camp content and procedures, experimenting with highly abstract notions—tacit knowledge workshops for kindergarteners, anyone?—and

[9] Names have been changed to protect the campers' identities.

with more radical curator moves, like "difficultating" rather than facilitating when campers are oversimplifying ideas or stereotyping concepts.[10]

Internal processes have solidified as well, including trainings in what Brila calls "space literacy," or the ability to read a room from various vantage points to better curate the camp experience. Sustainability has become a top priority, ensuring camps continue to be earth-friendly and gentle on piggy banks, but also staff-sensitive given the absurd amounts of energy required to set the stage for youth to revel in the rubbery time of immersive philocreation.

The strange facial reactions never fail to amuse staff when they are asked what they do for a living and they impishly reply: "We complicate children's lives… because we respect them so much." The solidarity is palpable: as their campers try to grapple with the world they will inherit from adults, the team takes their concerns to heart and try to figure out why they matter, not as a tokenistic gesture but out of profound admiration for the spirit of youth—that sense of uninhibited wonder about this strange thing called life.

At the end of a week-long camp during one of Brila's daily gratitude circles, one staff teared up when her young camper exclaimed: "I learnt I really am a philosopher at heart!" To have youth self-identify this way after just a few days is priceless, clearly indicating that philosophy should be in kids' minds and bodies so they no longer grow up in the face of underestimation. After all, as Lipman (1988) so beautifully wrote: "Philosophy is not a matter of age but of the ability to reflect scrupulously and courageously on what one finds important" (p. 15).

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[10] Playing on the etymological roots of the term facilitation, beyond helping to *make things easier*—beyond facilitating—adults must also be "difficultating." Brila developed this notion in connection to what it calls "high-stakes moments," or moments in a philosophical dialogue when something is said or intimated that challenges youth's capacity for reasonableness, and thus calls for immediate intervention on the part of the adult facilitator. By "difficultating," a facilitator can help the group determine the thinking errors or problematic normative claims that might be jeopardizing their thoughts and actions, and encourage "deliberate moral imagining"—or an active envisioning of the context to bring to light new possibilities for what seems reasonable to value. For details, please see Fletcher 2019.

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