

Enquiring about sustainability

Through philosophy for children and communities (P4C)

Grace Lockrobin with examples from a project with Michelle Sowe



How can philosophy help us
to learn well and live well?





In an environmental crisis, what does it mean to learn well and live well?



What is wrong with extinction?

When is a situation hopeless?

Do the lives of future people matter as much as our own?

Is it ever okay to be selfish?

Can children change the world? Should they have to?

Does nature have any value besides its worth to humans?

Should today's children have children of their own?

What do those alive now owe future generations?

Can we save the planet and treat people fairly?



WHAT IS P4C?


P4C is a pedagogy that creates a 'Community of Philosophical Enquiry (CoPE)'

A CoPE is a **group of people** who come together **to think philosophically**.

They do this *together* because **diverse perspectives** shed light on specific **conceptual problems**, and because engaging in dialogue helps us **understand ourselves, others and the world around us**.

Introducing P4C requires the creation of a CoPE, somewhere people feel safe *enough* to **share their ideas** and **to make philosophical progress together**.

In a CoPE, we cultivate **critical, creative, caring and collaborative thinking**.

A photograph of two women standing and talking. The woman on the left has short blonde hair and is wearing a black jacket over a white shirt and a patterned scarf. She is holding a clear plastic cup. The woman on the right has long, dark, curly hair and is wearing a blue patterned dress. She has a red lanyard with a badge around her neck. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Environmental enquiry
requires both

flexibility
and
steadfastness

A group of children and adults are sitting in a circle on a blue carpeted floor in a classroom. The children are wearing school uniforms, and the adults are wearing casual clothing. They are all looking towards the center of the circle, where a person is kneeling and holding a piece of paper. The background shows a whiteboard and a desk with a laptop.

Environmental enquiry must be flexible

It should:

be sufficiently **informed**

enable the **balanced** consideration of alternatives

be **sensitive** to emotions

Be **empowering** and explore agency

... and **non-indoctrinatory**



But environmental enquiry risks being...


Directive **instruction**

Unlicensed **therapy**

A **debating** competition

Activism


Ideological **indoctrination**



P4C about the environment (or any topic) does not aim to give answers.

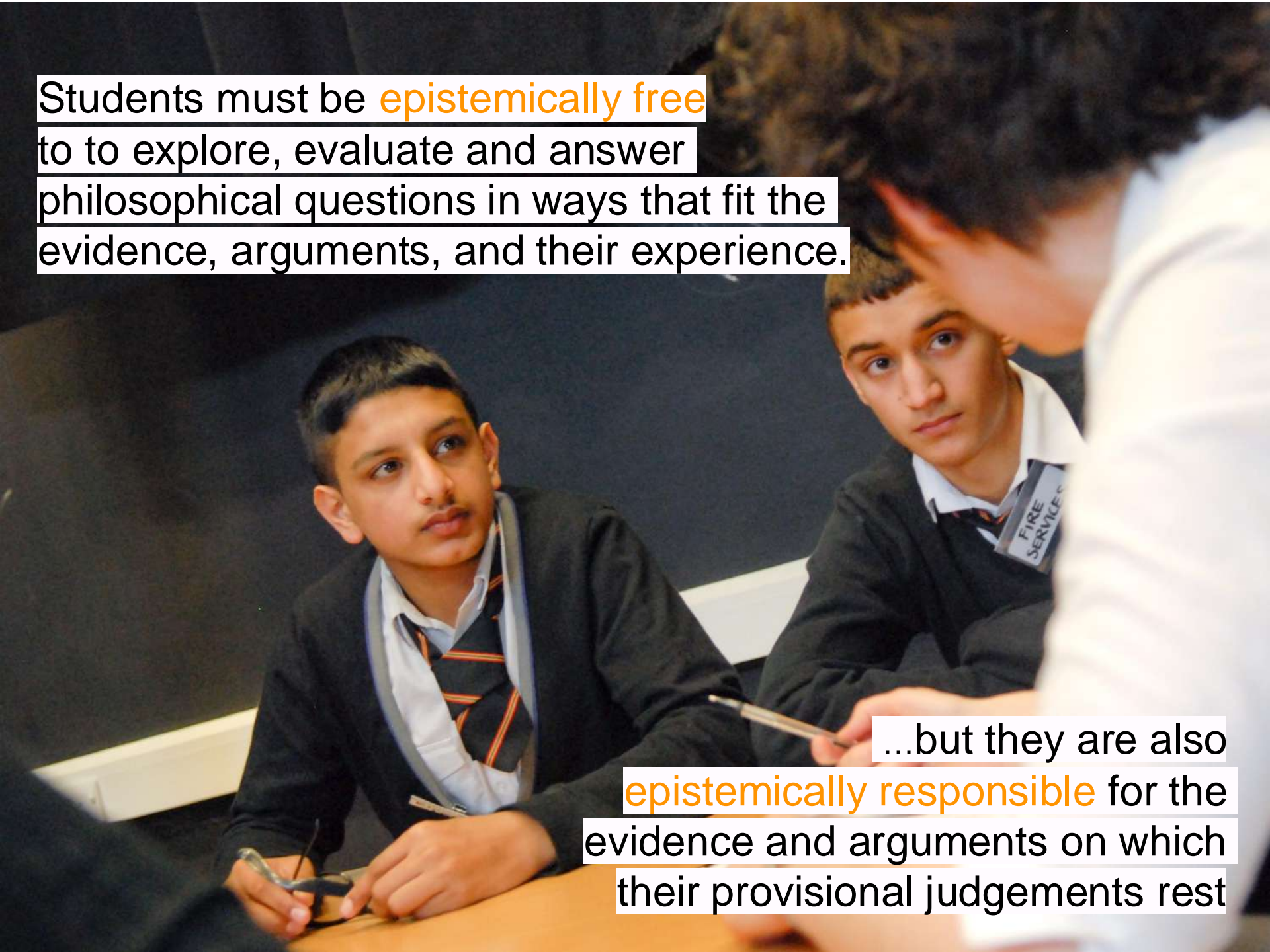
It aims to enable students:

to think together and
to think for themselves

A group of children and adults are sitting in a circle on the floor of a classroom. The children are wearing blue school uniforms. There are several adults, including a woman with short dark hair and a woman with long white hair. They appear to be engaged in a discussion or activity. The room has a blue wall with various decorations and a window in the background.

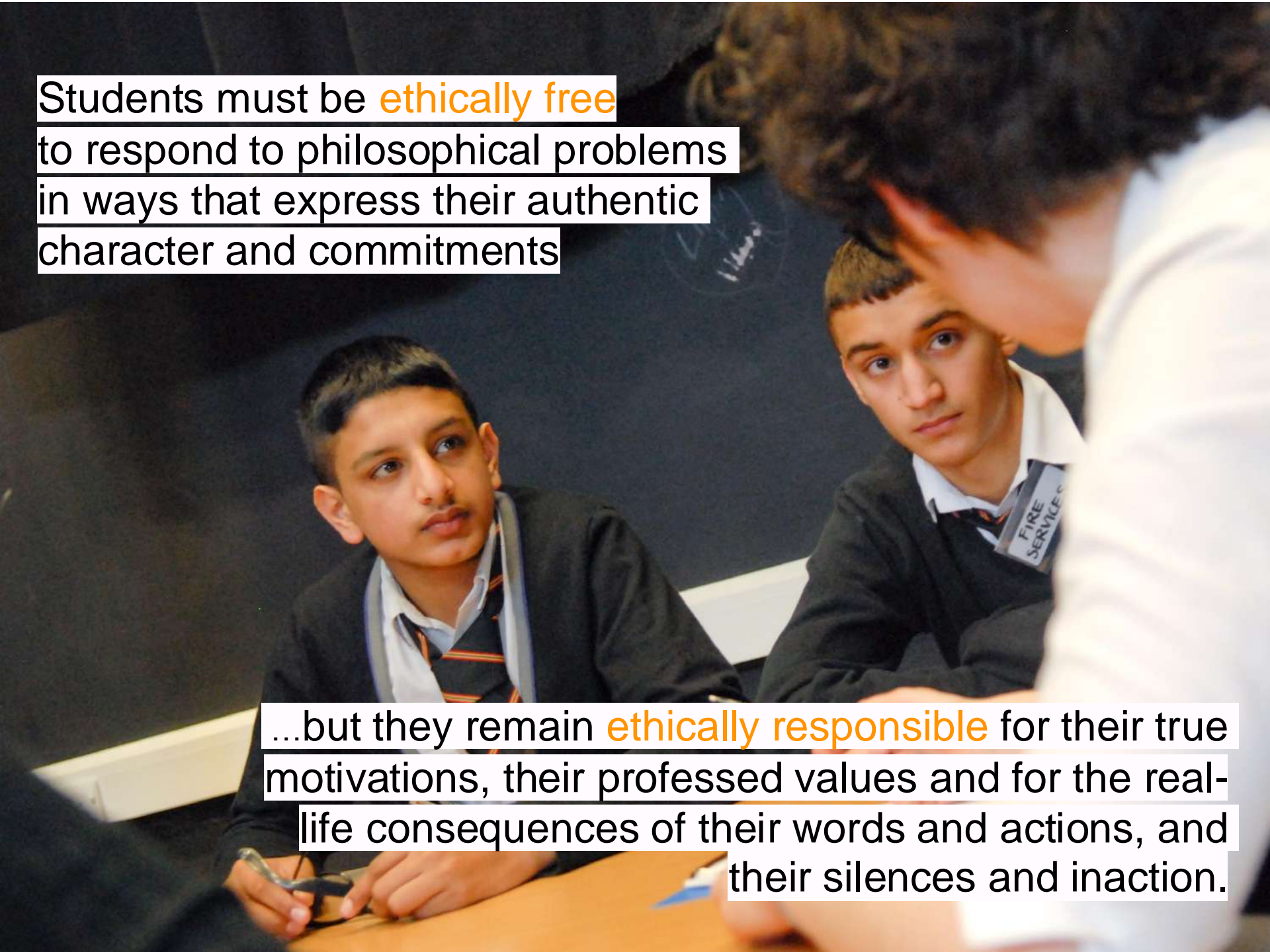
Just like all P4C, environmental enquiry
must safeguard

Freedom + Responsibility



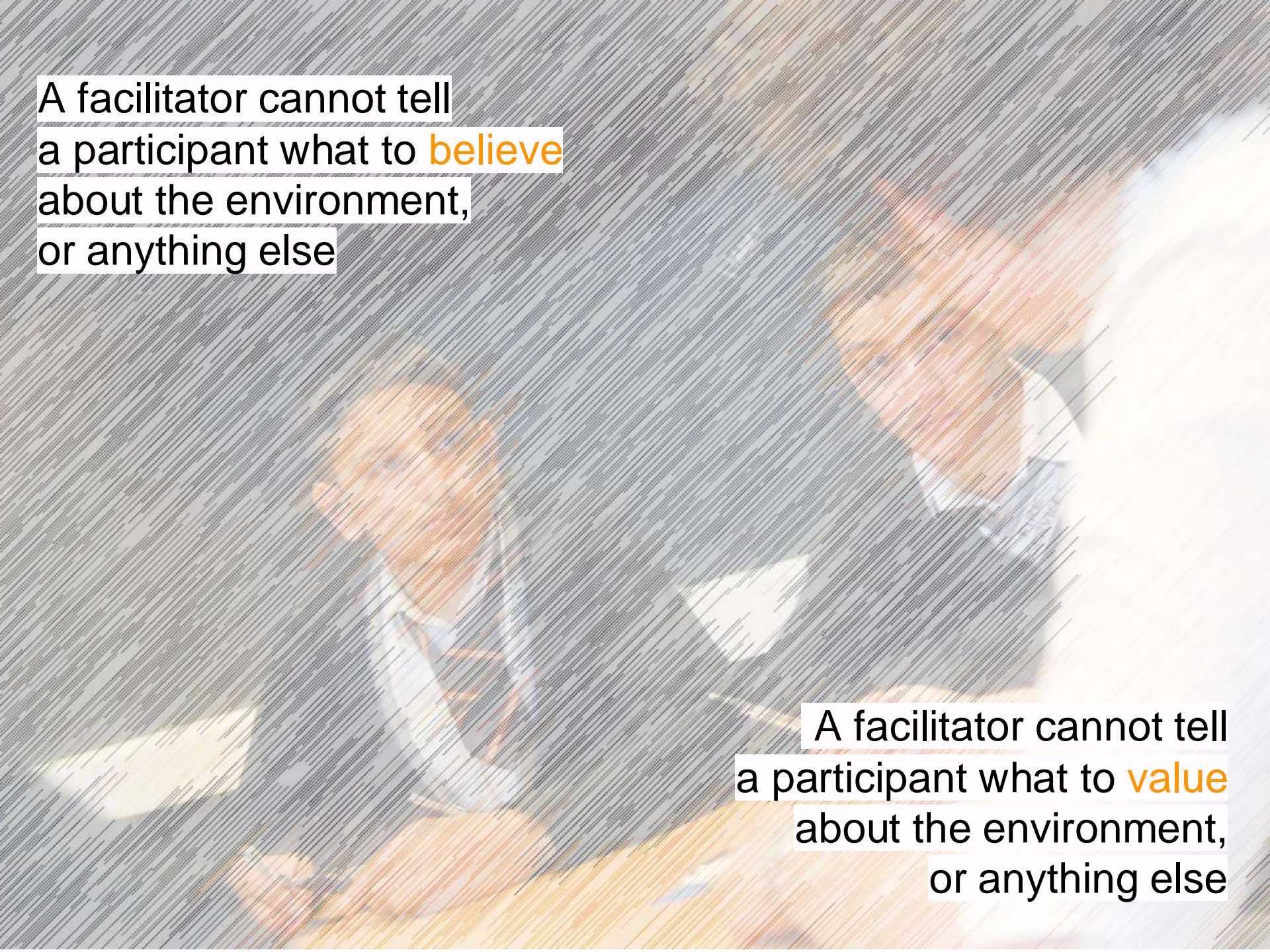
Students must be **epistemically free** to to explore, evaluate and answer philosophical questions in ways that fit the evidence, arguments, and their experience.

...but they are also **epistemically responsible** for the evidence and arguments on which their provisional judgements rest



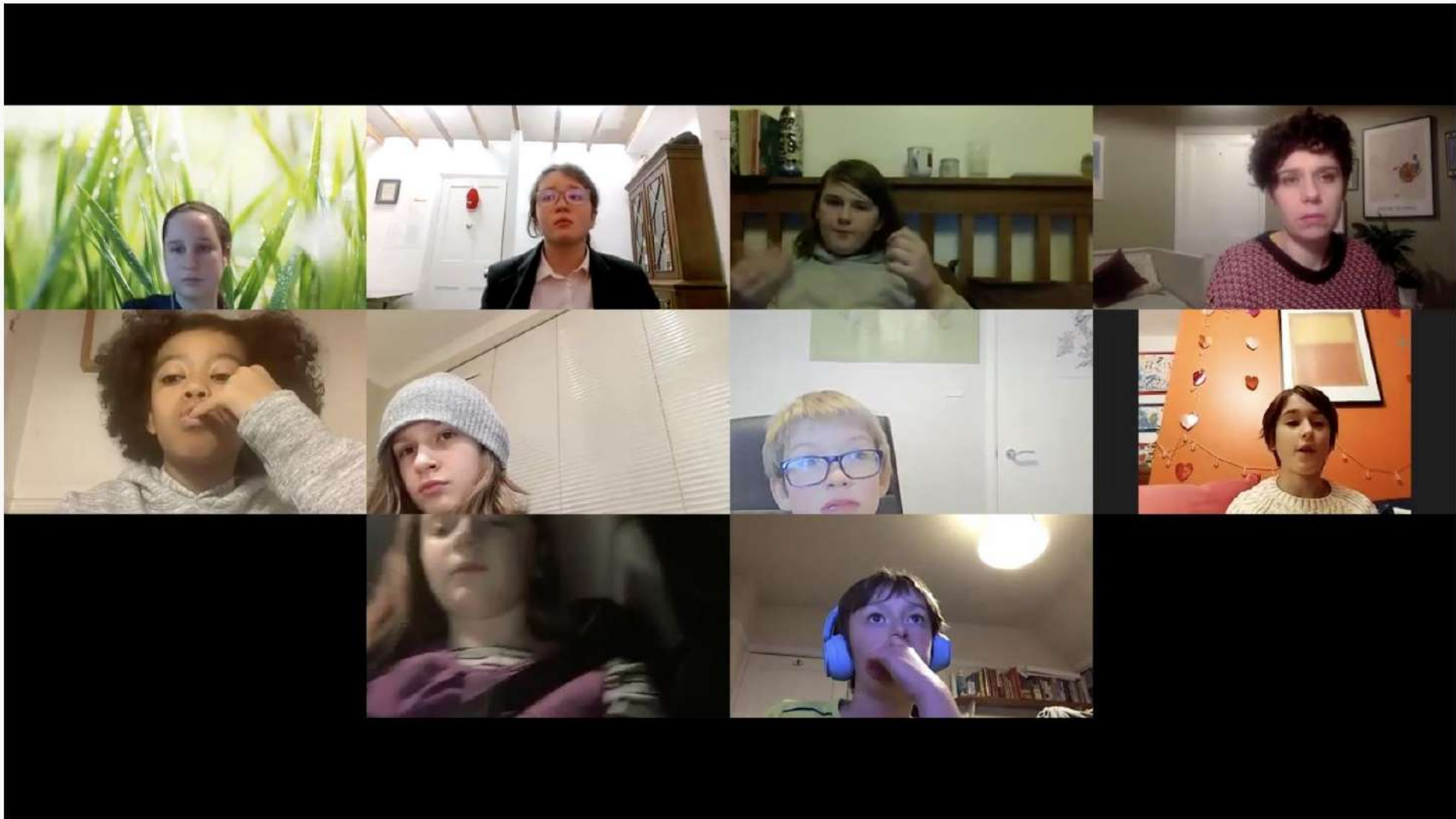
Students must be **ethically free**
to respond to philosophical problems
in ways that express their authentic
character and commitments

...but they remain **ethically responsible** for their true
motivations, their professed values and for the real-
life consequences of their words and actions, and
their silences and inaction.



A facilitator cannot tell
a participant what to **believe**
about the environment,
or anything else

A facilitator cannot tell
a participant what to **value**
about the environment,
or anything else



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Clip three: Is no one too small to make a difference?

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?

STEADFASTNESS

How does the facilitator promote **freedom and responsibility**? Are the children **thinking together** and **thinking for themselves**?

FLEXIBILITY

Is the enquiry **informed, balanced, sensitive, empowering and non-indoctrinatory**? If so, how?

Environmental Enquiry in
practice

A group of children and adults are sitting in a circle on a blue carpeted floor in a classroom. The children are wearing school uniforms, including teal sweaters and white shirts. An adult is sitting in the center, holding a piece of paper. The background shows a whiteboard and a desk with a laptop.

Environmental enquiry must be flexible

It should:

be sufficiently **informed**

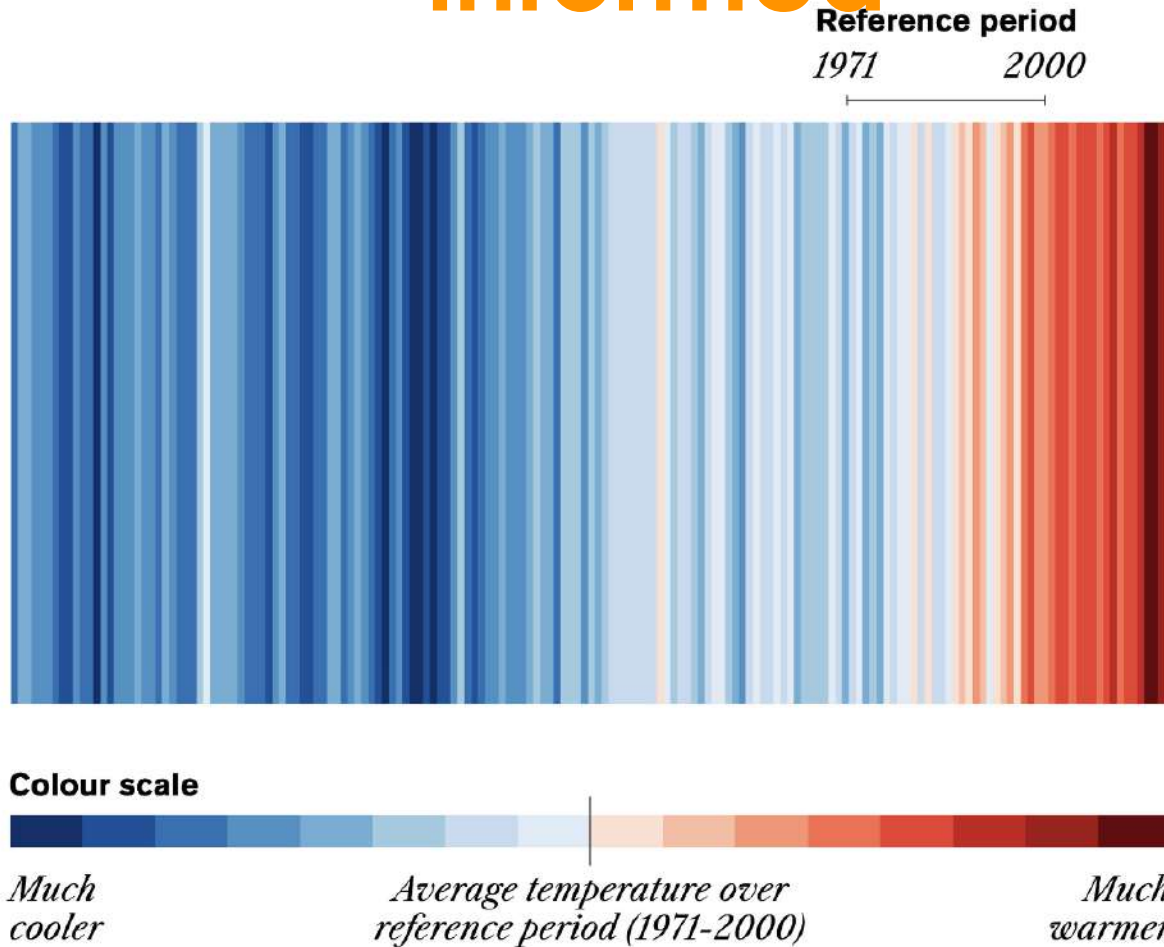
enable the **balanced** consideration of alternatives

be **sensitive** to emotions

Be **empowering** and explore agency

... and **non-indoctrinatory**

Enviro-Enquiry must be informed



Enviro-Enquiry must be balanced

Are the solutions to the
climate crisis simple?

Enviro-Enquiry must be balanced

- Sasha S: Yes, it is quite simple, just if everybody worked together [to] do all these things, then it will be very simple.
- Facilitator (GL) Earlier, Rebecca gave us a theory then about why, if [the solution to the climate crisis is] simple, people haven't done it yet... she says: *"Because they can't be bothered"*. How do you respond to that, Skye?
- Skye: Well, I agree with that because most people just think that if they don't do it, it doesn't make much of a difference, when actually, if everyone did it and it would make a lot more of a difference.
- So, it's, it's not the fact that people think that it's all simple, it's not! [It's that] most people think that they can't make much of a difference if they [do] contribute so they don't, because they can't be bothered.

Enviro-Enquiry must be balanced

GEORGE

MONBIOT

Why think young people should
do anything about the climate
crisis?

Enviro-Enquiry must be balanced

- Facilitator (GL): Why think that young people should be doing *anything* to address the climate crisis? Is George Monbiot right to be telling young people what they can do?
- Daniel: Yes, he is right because young people still contribute to bad climate for example, young people are several times more likely to play video games, which take a lot of power.
- Xanthe: Sorry.... I think that young people *have* to fix it, because [although] we may not have got us into the situation, if we start fixing it now, we will learn habits - good habits - and those habits will make a *big* difference. And also, I just wanted to say, we only have 12 years until climate change will be unstoppable!
- Luca [Children do have to do something] not because they caused it, but because young and old people (it doesn't matter): *All of us are people* that can do the exact same tasks.

Enviro-Enquiry must be sensitive

Luca: But I still feel like a worm in nothingness, that is completely powerless.

Facilitator (GL): Thank you Luca and I hear that, what you said there about still feeling powerless.

Kai: I think that feeling is powerful - when you feel in control of a situation for example, or maybe when you feel that someone's finally trusted you with something. For example, I felt powerful when I managed Grade 5 ukulele, which was quite a big achievement for me, and I felt that I could do the ukulele. And I actually had achieved something, when I got the distinction for it.

Enviro-Enquiry must empower

Kai: Yes they [the government] are talking about it, they are thinking about it, they are planning to try to make a difference, they are realising that we're driving ourselves into a mass extinction of the world. But ... words won't make a change without someone actually doing something.



Should you strike from school every Friday?

Enviro-Enquiry must empower

- Facilitator (GL): So Luca, do you think that young people should give up their education for this cause?
- Luca: Basically, I don't think so because [you must] remember [that] you're dealing with *the government* here. The government can always find an alternate solution. For example, just orphaning the kids, or something like that.
- Facilitator (GL): Oh, I (saw) Kai's eyes widen when you said 'orphaning the kids'. I wonder if you could say what you mean there Luca?
- Luca: Basically, they would either fine the parents [...] or they would send them to prison and then get the children away, sent somewhere else.
- Skye If eventually enough people contribute, then they can't put everyone's parents in prison... can they?

Enviro-Enquiry must empower

- Luca: Then they would find an alternate solution. They are still the government. They can do *anything!*
- Facilitator (GL): Can I ask you Luca, do you think the government is so opposed to acting for the climate crisis that it would rather silence the parents to stop the kids?
- Luca The government is never nice, it never get lets us win, it really doesn't.
- Kai I think that - opposed to Luca -I think that the government wouldn't be so extreme as to punish the parents because of their children's independent act. And if they would have punished the parents, then wouldn't they have done it with Greta Thunberg instead of actually listening to her?

What should we do?

YOLO

We should ignore the crisis, because it makes us feel bad and there's nothing we can do about it anyway. We should enjoy life as much as we can, acquire things that make us happy, eat what we like and travel as much as possible.

Business-as-Usual

There is no need to worry about the crisis too much. We are already doing things to slow climate change and protect the environment, like phasing out coal and recycling more plastic. Something is better than nothing. If we carry on like this, technology might help us out in the future. Plus, for the time being, we can enjoy the kind of normal life we are used to.

Keep plugging

The crisis is important and what we do now matters. Individual and collective action can work, it just hasn't happened yet. Concerned people should keep voting, talking about the crisis and lawfully protesting etc. and hopefully their continued efforts will persuade leaders to act and enable us to avoid the worst impacts of climate and ecological breakdown.

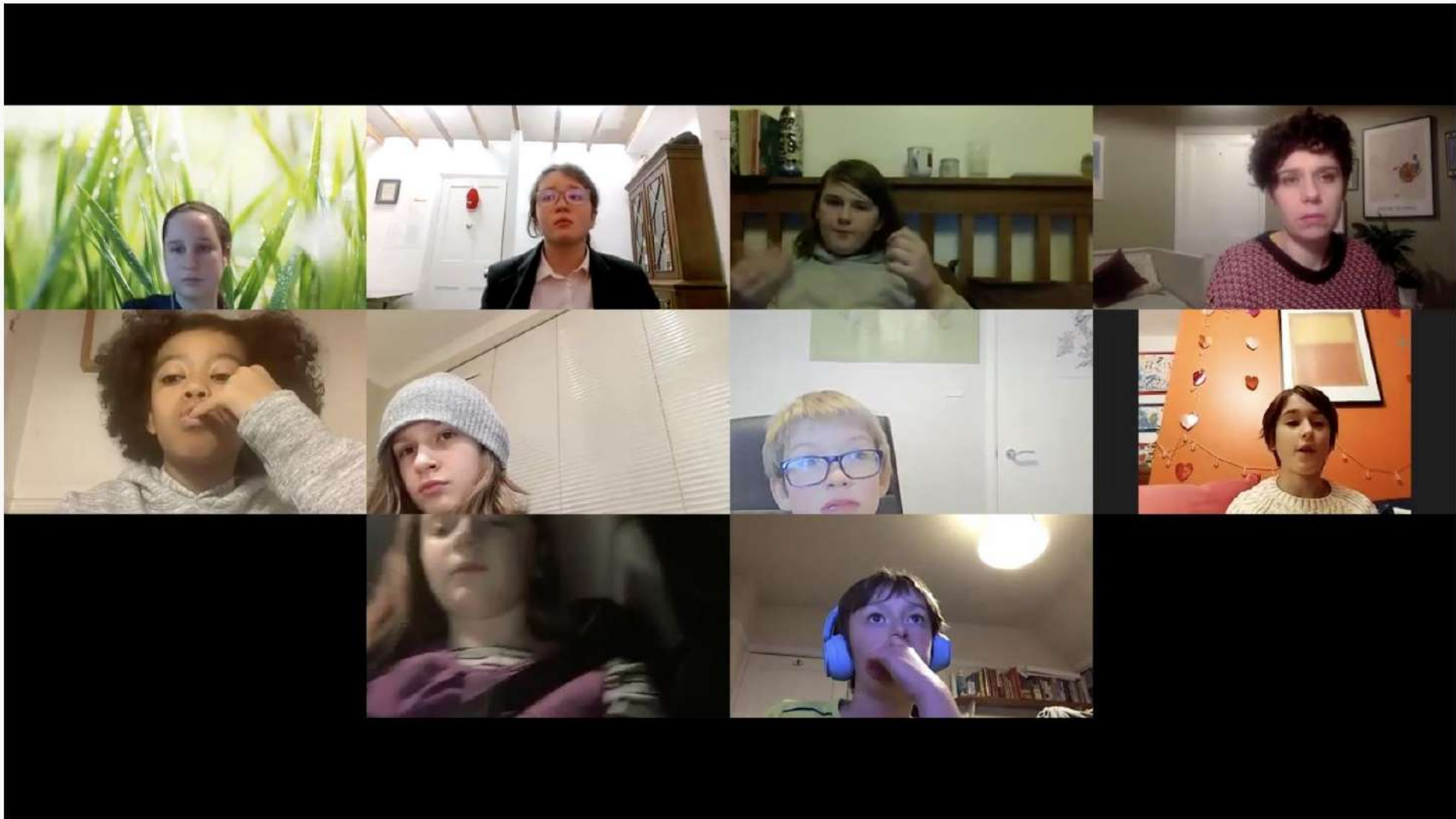
Double-down

The crisis is the biggest challenge humanity has ever faced. What we are doing isn't working. Radical action is needed. Citizens of all ages should engage in acts of civil disobedience. To get political attention, protesters should break the law for example by blocking roads and blockading businesses. We must not stop until there is real change.

Enviro-Enquiry must empower

Luca:

I am in between..... we should enjoy your life as much as possible, not just because of climate change, because of the possibility of the world ending, but just because we only have one life...we have to enjoy as much as we can here on our time on this world. [But] I do agree that we should protest to stop climate change... climate change is indeed a huge crisis



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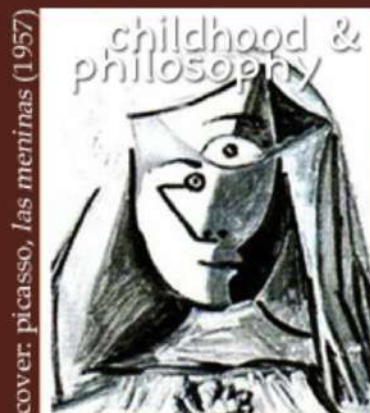
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Enviro-Enquiry must be free and responsible

Kai: I think we should also be part of this because as Luca said... age doesn't matter, we can all be a part, whether it's planting trees in your garden... in the end it's our future that's going to be changed.



childhood & philosophy

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e-issn: 1984-5987 | p-issn: 2525-5061

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In the end, it's our future that's going to be changed: Enquiring about the environment with freedom and responsibility

grace clare lockrobin

Abstract

The environmental crisis—because of its complexity, urgency, unpredictability, and scale—requires a defence of the educational role of philosophy and an account of how to implement philosophical pedagogy in the exploration of environmental issues. This is the aim of this paper. As we face an uncertain future, all educators must consider what knowledge and “know-how” young people need, and what kind of people they need to become, if they are to survive and thrive in this changing world. Philosophical educators cannot assume the ongoing utility of their practice, nor can they expect that their practice should remain the same. In the context of the philosophical exploration of emerging environmental issues raises challenges for those who work in the spirit of Community of Enquiry and these require both discipline and flexibility from practitioners and participants. This paper outlines some of the adaptations that I have used to try and respond to this predicament. But I also defend an issue on which I believe philosophical educators should hold the line—namely the importance of being non-directive on matters that are philosophically contentious. I defend the view that despite the existential nature of this emergency and its profound urgency, it is not the role of philosophical educators to convince or coerce philosophical learners to adopt particular views on the philosophical questions that this crisis raises. This is because

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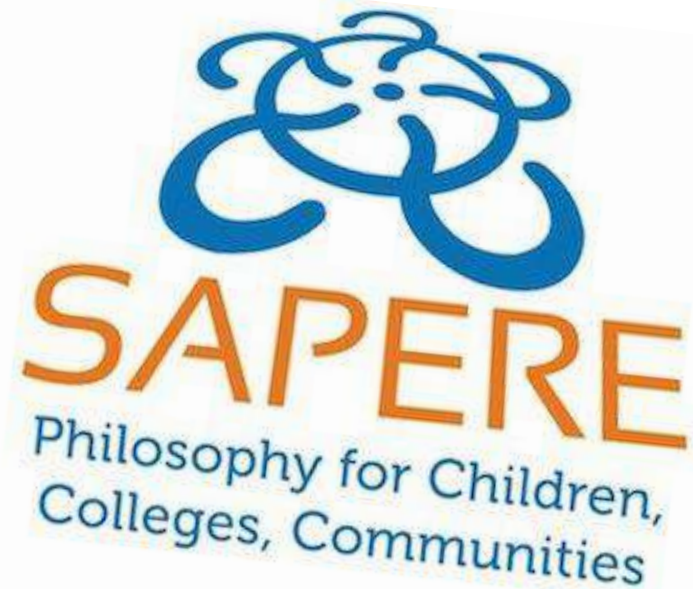
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