

## A CASE FOR PHILOSOPHY LITERACY AT BASIC EDUCATION LEVEL IN NIGERIA

**Hilary Anayochukwu Eke**

Department of Social Sciences  
Akanu Ibiam Federal Polytechnic Unwana,  
Afikpo, Ebonyi State.  
Email: [hilaeke@gmail.com](mailto:hilaeke@gmail.com)



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### Abstract

There is a need to address the declining educational standards in Nigeria. Using the old methods that yielded the present unacceptable result might mean repeating the same process and getting to the same conclusion. This paper re-examines the age-old assumption that philosophy is not for the young and shows that this assumption has been debunked following educational policies and practices in some advanced states in the world. It becomes imperative to try a new way that has worked for other nations of the world in order to get a better result for Nigeria. The solution suggested here is not a quick fix but a gradual revolutionary approach aimed at identifying the cause of the decline, and proffering a solution to the problem. This paper argues that the exclusion of philosophy courses in pre-tertiary education has adversely contributed to the decline in quality education. While making case for philosophy literacy from the basic level, it recommends the introduction of implementable policies for philosophy literacy in the primary and secondary levels of education in Nigeria. This would allow learners to take the initiative, and become confident and self-reliant in the pursuit of their research and dream careers. This surely will be a step in the right direction for purposeful education needed for the production of critical and actively creative manpower in the 21st-century.

**Keywords:** Philosophy, literacy, education, children, Nigeria.

### Introduction

Several scholars have shown that the standard of Nigeria education has suffered some record decline in the recent past.<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>

Some of the reasons adduced for this falling standard of education did not take seriously the non-inclusion of philosophy in the pre-tertiary educational curriculum

1. Chinelo Ogoamaka Duze, Falling standards of education in Nigeria: an empirical evidence in Delta State of Nigeria, *LWATI: A Journal of Contemporary Research*, 8 (3), 1-12, 2011.
2. C. C. Nwagwu, Reforms in Nigerian education system: challenges in the secondary education sector, *UNIZIK Orient Journal of Education*, 3(1); 9-15, 2007.
3. Nnamdi Okoroma, The falling standard of education in Nigeria: Implications for National Development, *Journal of Research in Education*, 4(2); 67-75, 2007.
4. Bolarinwa Olajire, Causes of the collapse in the standard of education in Nigeria, <https://servantboy.com/causes-collapse-standard-education-nigeria/> December 6, 2021.

in the country. In the light of this exclusion this paper makes a case for child philosophy literacy by speculating that the introduction of philosophy into the basic educational system of Nigeria will be an antidote to this decline using arguments based on related verified experience. The paper re-examines the age-old assumption that philosophy is not for the young and shows that this assumption has been debunked.

There are several ways philosophy may be conceived and there is no universally acceptable definition of philosophy. It may be understood as the inquiry into our understanding of reality, knowledge and how we should live and act. It can be conceived as a process of reflexive thinking and also as the product of thought driven action. There is this intractability problem of defining philosophy among philosophers since there is no generally accepted definition of philosophy. While several attempts have been made at its inception which has given rise to sometimes absurd perceptions like philosophy is; 'I know not what?', 'untying the impossible knot', etc. One of Jean-Francois Lyotard's language for describing philosophy is that of using a metaphor that compares the philosopher to a child. In the use of the child metaphor, Lyotard suggests that there remain some connections between philosophy and childhood whereby he jettisons the stereotype that the wise philosopher is a mature expert and an adult who knows all, and rather describes the philosopher as the child who merely seeks answers but might not master them all. Thus, the assumption that philosophy is not for the young stems

from a stereotypical conception of philosophy where philosophy is taken to be a discipline that requires hair splitting arguments from a long, meticulous and rigorous reflective exercise of thinking about thinking and being conscious of one's consciousness. To think of philosophy only in those terms as expressed above is to miss the essence of philosophy.

A case for philosophy literacy from the cradle is a conscious effort to ask and answer questions around the rationality of introducing philosophy to teenagers prior to their entry into tertiary institutions. 'Cradle' here is intended to be a metaphor for a child or children and not necessarily the period of infancy. The use of the phrase 'from the cradle' is metaphorical and not literal. It is meant to communicate in a figurative sense the early involvement of philosophy as a tool and foundation for critical thinking in humans. This paper is also an investigation into who qualifies to engage in philosophical thinking from the point of view of age. It attempts to argue that the child can be introduced to philosophical themes germane to her age as soon as the child's curiosity begins to manifest. Moreover, it is a call for a reversal of the thinking that philosophy is not for children.

Since wonder and curiosity give rise to philosophy, and these phenomena are common among children, it leaves no doubt then that children are capable of philosophical activities. This argument, simple and straight as it sounds has not been accepted by some theorists of cognitive development. Jean Piaget, holds

that children below the age of twelve are not capable of philosophical thinking.<sup>5</sup> A case for philosophy literacy from the cradle shall attempt to discountenance this kind of assumption clothed in scientific apparel. This paper goes to show that it is already a trounced idea that philosophy is solely for the aged and old sages. Philosophy is not just relevant for the young, the young can engage in philosophical thinking suitable for their age. There should be such a blend as to harmonize philosophy for children and philosophy with children so that the pace of progress is determined not by the teacher but by the pupils and students. The projection here is that early acquaintance with philosophy is possible due to the innate capacity in *homo sapiens* to think and learn even at the primary and secondary levels of education. Any effort towards achieving pupils' philosophy literacy would afford creative and eclectic potentials in the same students, by improving their learning process and performance and by making their mind amenable to such learning when they get to the tertiary institutions, such that they would readily welcome the course as an old friend instead of an intimate stranger.

Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu raises alarm about the absence of philosophy in some Nigerian universities, and it is not healthy for the future progress of the nation. The National Policy on Education endorses whatever improves critical thinking in the Nigerian pupils and students but has not

implemented the introduction of philosophy or its equivalents into basic educational system of Nigeria. The paper attempts to provide arguments why philosophy should be introduced into the Nigerian basic school system.

### **Philosophy for Children, Prospects and Challenges**

In the early 1970s the American philosopher Matthew Lipman proposed what is known as Philosophy for Children (P4C) approach which aims at the development of critical thinking in children through philosophical dialogue. Despite the fact that P4C approach has been implemented in 50 countries and the materials translated into 20 languages, there has been debate among philosophers bordering on the philosophical status of P4C, that is, whether or not the Lipman approach can be considered philosophy, in the strict sense.<sup>6</sup> Marie-France Daniel and Emmanuelle Auriac have argued that P4C is really philosophy. Philosophy is a curious quest to (not only know 'what?' but also to) know 'why?' Why questions involve philosophy in a sense.

Laura D'Olimpio's opinion that children are natural philosophers should not only be interpreted to mean that children are concerned with natural philosophy, but more so that children are philosophers by nature.

I believe that children are natural philosophers in the sense that they are inquisitive and love

<sup>5</sup> Saul McLeod, Piaget's Stages of Cognitive Development: Background and Key Concepts of Piaget's Theory, *Simply Psychology*, 2022, <https://www.simplypsychology.org/piaget.html> Accessed 3 September, 2022.

<sup>6</sup> Marie-France Daniel & Emmanuelle Auriac, Philosophy, Critical Thinking and Philosophy for Children, *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, Vol. 43, No. 5, 2011, doi: 10.1111/j.1469-5812.2008.00483.x

learning about life and the world around them. I think it is important to encourage children's "why?" questions, and take them seriously.<sup>7</sup>

So when three (3) year-old kids ask 'why?' questions, it is simply because they are philosophers by nature. To corroborate this idea Stuart Maclure observes that thinking is natural to *homo sapiens* which includes children: "Homo Sapiens can think without being formally taught to think. Thinking is like breathing, a normal activity for every normal human being. Ordinary life depends on the ability to think."<sup>8</sup> Even though thinking alone does not equate philosophy, it is a prerequisite for philosophy to occur. Available research works of scholars on fetal "learning" with empirical information on the biology and the psychology of the fetus suggest that learning *in utero* was possible and what was learned influenced the subsequent learning and future behavior of the child.<sup>9</sup>

### **Philosophy disparagement and declining educational standards in Nigeria**

Among many other factors, this paper presents the exclusion of philosophy from basic education curriculum in Nigeria as a reason for the decline of quality education standards in Nigeria. Philosophy is a total stranger in Nigeria's primary and secondary education. The pupils and students never get to know about it. If they

ever hear something, then it follows the age-old negative perspectives where philosophy is denigrated and philosophers disparaged.

Philosophy has suffered so much disparagement in the history of human development, yet it proves inevitable in the survival of the human species. No wonder it is part of the core areas of many institutions' faculty of humanities or sometimes faculty of social sciences. It reflects on itself and all other disciplines. Its contribution is not usually measurable in quantities but is determinable in qualitative attributes. Utility is not typically the standard for evaluating philosophical contributions. Science can inform technology to produce machines that aid humans to do some jobs easier than in the past. That is at the level of understanding and knowledge. Science however, may not be in the position to determine how those machines are used for either good or evil because the same gun that kills the dangerous snake around a man's house could still kill the man's child or even the man himself. That is at the level of wisdom. Bertrand Russell argues:

'Philosophy' means 'love of wisdom', and philosophy in this sense is what men must acquire if the new powers invented by technicians, and handed over by them to be wielded by ordinary men and women, are not to plunge mankind into an appalling

<sup>7</sup>. Laura D'Olimpio, "Why children should study philosophy" in *The Conversation AU*. Australasian Association for Philosophy in Schools (APIS) 2014.

<sup>8</sup>. Stuart Maclure as cited in Joyce I. Fields, Young Children as Emergent Philosophers, *Early Child Development and Care*, 107: 1, 57-59, 57, DOI:10.1080/0300443951070107

<sup>9</sup>. Carlee M. Kirkpatrick, *When does learning begin? An inquiry into fetal cognition*, (A Senior Thesis in General Studies submitted to and approved by the General Studies Council in the College of Arts and Sciences at Texas Tech University, May 1999) p. 2.

cataclysm.<sup>10</sup>

It is not to be supposed that what offers the world the habit of exact and careful thought and gives impersonal angle to conceptions of the ends of life should be treated with so much scorn. Despite all its contributions philosophy has continued to be disparaged creating an enigmatic situation where it has become a necessary evil that cannot be avoided.

The aversion for philosophy is traceable even to the ancient period. It was from Plato (427-347BC) we learn that Thales, the first philosopher of the Western tradition, was mocked by a maiden when he fell into a ditch while making some astronomical observations. The lady reportedly denigrated him saying that Thales was so preoccupied with things above his head that he could hardly notice something at his feet. The killing of Socrates who was regarded as the symbol of philosophical activity is yet another clear evidence of Athenian aversion to philosophy in ancient times. Aristotle (383-321BC) had to run away from Athens to avert being killed. Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) a renowned philosopher of French extraction ran for his dear life and at some point became paranoid before his death.<sup>11</sup> Russell has argued that several other pieces of evidence show that the enemies of philosophy seem to have increased with the rise of modern science.<sup>12</sup> The impression that philosophical concerns are far removed from the concrete and

everyday human experiences and endeavours may be a viable source of this loathing for philosophy.

Paradoxically, those who cast aspersions on philosophy only do so with some form of philosophy. Civilizations have thrived on philosophical ideas that revolutionized the world. We discover even among reputable scientists that philosophy has been a strong pillar to their recorded successes. Notably our revered scholars of science were all strongly influenced by philosophy or rather, they are philosophers and rightly qualify to be called so; Pythagoras for instance, was a great mathematician, Aristotle was a strong influence on modern botany, Archimedes did same in physics, Francis Bacon was a notable scientist who believed in induction, René Descartes was a renowned mathematician who invented the Cartesian plane, John Locke was a medical doctor and a strong influence in modern physics, Nicolaus Copernicus was gifted in his scientific enquiries to the extent that his theory about the heavenly bodies revolutionized the science of his day, Galileo Galilei developed the scientific telescope and provided a backbone for Copernican astronomy, Gottfried Leibniz invented calculus independently of Isaac Newton, Newton revolutionized modern science with his hypothetico-deductive method and his laws of gravitation, Max Planck and Robert Boyle were renowned in physics and chemistry, Albert Einstein propounded the relativity theory  $E=mc^2$ ,

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<sup>10.</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Philosophy for Laymen*, in *Unpopular Essays*, (New York: Simon and Schuster Inc., 1950), 22.

<sup>11.</sup> Christian C. Emedolu, *Originality*, vol. Originality. Vol. 1. (Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt Press, 2010), 98.

<sup>12.</sup> Bertrand Russell (1969: 153-161).

Ludwig Wittgenstein was a great mathematician and a member of the linguistic / analytic tradition, Thomas Kuhn was a scientist and historian too, Carl G. Hempel was a member of the Vienne Circle and a scientist whose contribution helped in the bombardment of the atom and production of the atomic bomb, and the list goes on and on. If the success story of these scientist philosophers were told to Nigerian minors perhaps their view of philosophy would have improved and there would have been less aversion for philosophy and an improved quality of education.

In an earlier co-authored work the problem of exclusion of philosophy from the Nigerian basic education system has been highlighted. It was noted that students in Nigerian Universities and other tertiary institutions meet philosophy with some rude shock, since they were encountering this intimate stranger as a taught course for the first time in life. For several reasons as stipulated herewith, Hilary Eke and Lorretta Eke in "Why Science Cannot Avoid Philosophy" blame the lopsidedness of the Nigerian basic educational curriculum on the inability to enshrine any philosophical subject into the primary and secondary schools curricula:

Whereas the subjects taught both at the primary and secondary levels of education included some level of introductory science, there are hardly any philosophical subjects, whether covertly or explicitly, that made the list of courses taught at the

basic and intermediate levels of Nigerian education curriculum. It is equally unfortunate that some Nigerian tertiary institutions (including polytechnics) have opted to jettison philosophy in pursuit of what may be rightly termed *dogmatic* pursuit of science and technology. What a disservice to national development!<sup>13</sup>

The absence of philosophy then in pre-tertiary education in Nigeria partially explains why philosophy appears strange to tertiary undergraduates. This strange component coupled with the already existing problem of perceiving philosophy *via negativa* as incapable of practical utility, has yielded bad fruits. It has encouraged some departments in some Nigerian tertiary institutions to not offer philosophy courses, even though they are part of the curricula requirements recommended by the parent boards like the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and the National Universities Council (NUC). This problem is a case of curriculum non-implementation as well as a case of value misplacement. Whereas the former problem belongs to experts in measurement and evaluation, the latter is within the purview of philosophy to handle. The ethics of education requires that we place our values aright. As an advocacy for quality education this paper lends its voice in support of philosophy literacy for children as a means of improving the quality of Nigerian education.

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<sup>13</sup>. Hilary Anayochukwu Eke and Lorretta Nneka Eke, Why science cannot avoid philosophy, *The Melting Pot*, 3: 99-116, 101.

### **Philosophy Literacy and Education**

Literacy is commonly defined as the ability (or the process of learning how) to read and write. No wonder then some countries classify as illiterate any person over a certain definite age who is incapable of reading and writing, whereas a person who has passed through six years of basic education is considered literate. Literacy may be more complex than the cursory outlook it is given in the last preceding sentences. Differences in cultures and various cultural perceptions make the definition of literacy dynamic. This makes literacy apparently, if not almost entirely, relative. The introduction of the comparative term “functional literacy” seems to have solved the problem of differentiation in terms of the meaning of literacy. A functional illiterate is “one who, despite his accumulated time in school, is unable to read and write well enough to meet the demands of the society in which he lives.”<sup>14</sup>

Literacy may imply then an understanding of something, example computer literacy, etc. It also means competence or knowledge in a specified area as well as knowledge in a particular cultural context. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO (2013) *Education Sector Technical Notes on Literacy and Non-Formal Education* presents literacy as a right which brings along with it human, political, social, economic and cultural benefits for individuals, families and societies. This is because literacy plays a vital role to quality education for liberation and development. UNESCO's operational definition of literacy seems

more comprehensive and diversified in its application:

Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve his or her goals, develop his or her knowledge and potential and participate fully in community and wider society.<sup>15</sup>

Within this ambient of UNESCO's definition one can locate philosophy literacy as 'the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with' philosophy. It should be noted that any case for philosophy from the cradle has to respect the level of the child's understanding and psychological capacity. In the context of philosophy literacy for children, we do not intend to mean the capacity to read the spruce and elegant philosophical language of Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, or Heidegger. It could just mean the ability to read basic-level texts with philosophical lenses and communicate basic philosophical ideas and debates. It should aim at ignoring philosophy at a professional level or what Bertrand Russell calls “philosophy of specialists.”

Philosophy literacy may suggest a disciplined way of reading, writing, and discussing rooted in the fundamental questions that have engaged humans for

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<sup>14</sup>. Funk and Wagnalls Encyclopedia (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, Inc., 1973)

<sup>15</sup>. UNESCO, 2013, 2.

thousands of years and taking cognizance of one's level of psychological development. Philosophy is rather the subject that helps the world - in line with the National Policy on Education - to produce competitive, reflective, creative and innovative employees. Harping on scientific literacy Ogunkola observes that the world needs critical thinkers:

The world is in need of citizens with critical thinking skills, people who are capable of questioning the foundations on which certain assertions are constructed, and who can independently search for information to build rational and well-supported opinions.<sup>16</sup>

Literacy in philosophy leads to an appreciation of the world, its science, technology and the right use of their products and the ability to communicate this appreciation in a clear and intelligible writing capacity. Kapitzke from a post-structuralist and constructive perspective believes there is no monolithic or universal definition of information literacy.<sup>17</sup> We can glean from his analysis of information literacy facts connected to philosophy. Literacy in philosophy or philosophy literacy is apparently a very large concept that covers almost every aspect of literacy.

John Willinsky presents reading as an indispensable component of literacy.<sup>18</sup> One has to read before understanding, or interpretation, and then possibly communicating one's understanding and interpretations in writing or otherwise. Whereas literacy generally involves reading, philosophy literacy involves 'reading for thinking'. Thus, philosophy literacy aims among other things at critical thinking which of course should be at a very introductory level in basic education. Let us examine Nigeria's educational policy, its philosophy and goals with the view to identifying whether or not philosophy for children may be accommodated.

### **Nigeria Education Policy and Philosophy**

The National Policy on Education (NPE) under the section on Philosophy and Goals of Education in Nigeria aims at realizing the five main national goals of Nigeria, which would serve as a necessary foundation for the policy by considering education as an instrument for national development.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the Nigeria's philosophy of education is subsumed under the overall philosophy of Nigeria. It is in harmony with the Nigeria's national goals to the extent that "no policy on education...can be formulated without first identifying the overall philosophy and goals of the nation"<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup>. Babalola J. Ogunkola, Scientific literacy: conceptual overview, importance and strategies for improvement. *Journal of Education and Social Research*, 3(1): 265-274. (January 2013).

<sup>17</sup>. Cushla Kapitzke, (In)formation literacy: A positivist epistemology and a politics of (out)formation, *Education Theory*, 53(1): 37-53, 2003.

<sup>18</sup>. John Willinsky, *The New literacy: Redefining Reading and Writing in the Schools*, (London: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>19</sup>. *National Policy on Education*, NPE Section 1 sub-section 4a, 2004 subsequently to be abbreviated in the format: NPE I.4a, 2004

<sup>20</sup>. NPE 2004: 1.1;1.6.

One of the four national educational goals which this paper is interest in is, “the **training of the mind** in the understanding of the world around.”<sup>21</sup> Comparatively we can notice that Goal III of the National Education Goals of the United States of America meta-policy document clearly stated that schools will ensure that students “learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible learning, and productive employment.”<sup>22</sup> Since philosophy provides the right avenue for adequate training of the human mind, it is within its purview to accomplish the requirements of Nigeria's educational goal c and the American Goal III.

The policy document talks about measures government should take to implement the policy and also the concept of “educational revolution” and “fundamental change” in intellectual outlook of a society. This is a call for a radical approach to education which only philosophy could adequately offer. Revolution is of course a radical change. In section 2 which deals with early childhood and pre-primary education, the policy listed as one of the purposes of pre-primary education “to inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity”. Philosophical literacy enables the child get kaleidoscopic view of different issues under discussion and the child learns how to be creative using philosophical tools. The policy which in section 3 stipulates that a programme of nine (9) years basic

education comprising six (6) years primary education and 3 years of junior secondary education also made provision for adult and non-formal education programmes. The six years programme of primary education is described as “the key to the success or failure” of the whole system of education and so must be “tuition free, universal and compulsory.”<sup>23</sup> Among the goals of primary education “to lay a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking”<sup>24</sup> calls for philosophy literacy for those in the primary school. Ironically, the contents of the curriculum to achieve the primary education goals tactfully excluded philosophy. The same observation is made concerning the goals of secondary education which broadly includes to prepare the individual for useful living and higher education<sup>25</sup> and several specific goals including to “raise a generation of people **who can think for themselves**, respect the views and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labour, appreciate those values specified under our broad national goals and live as good citizens.”<sup>26</sup>

Training of the mind, raising people who can think for themselves and critical thinking are surely found among the goals of philosophy literacy. Philosophy trains the mind to make right choices, that is, choices from a mind trained to withhold judgment in the absence of evidence. Let us consider how amenable kids are to doing philosophy.

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<sup>21</sup>. NPE, 2004: 1.7c

<sup>22</sup>. *America 2000: An Education Strategy*.

<sup>23</sup>. NPE: 4.19a, 2004

<sup>24</sup>. NPE 4.18b.

<sup>25</sup>. NPE 5.21a-b,

<sup>26</sup>. NPE 5.22g, 2004.

### **Philosophy literacy for children**

As intricate as learning is, Cartee M. Kirkpatrick has shown in her research project that it begins *in utero*. The support she gave to her position stems from both the biological and psychological dispositions met by the fetus in order to qualify to be said to have learned. The answer deducible from the questions about fetus learning boils down to the fact that “even if a baby can learn *in utero*, it has plenty of time for learning after it is born”.<sup>27</sup> In more developed climes, Britain, Australia and America for instance, there seems to be more tolerance to philosophy as their curriculum incorporates the subject in the primary and secondary levels of education. This attitude however does not reflect in the colonial curriculum which seems to exclude those subjects that specifically mold the creative ability latent in every rational being including children. That is the missing link. Many of us began to do independent thinking in our various disciplines only when we have reached the tertiary level of education say for instance university training. What is it about university education? It trains one to be independent to a certain degree due to exposure to critical thinking. In university education, with the incorporation of some philosophical discourses, the researcher intuitively begins to appreciate the difference between the possible meanings of education from the Latin roots, *educare* and *educere*. The former means *to mold* and the later, *to lead out*. Primary and secondary education in Nigeria all attempt to mold the pupils and students, but do not attempt to lead out.

In a somewhat dogmatic pattern the molded material always takes the exact shape of the mold that forms it. The material does not make any suggestions about what shape it should take. The mold rather predetermines what shape the molded object takes. Universities attempt to lead out in their education especially through introduction of courses that lead to higher level reasoning. The student is allowed to creatively make inputs in the area of research, and not just replicate what was taught. That is why a student of the university may be allowed to challenge an old theory in his or her field giving reasons, and if possible, providing evidence for thinking his or her new theory should be preferred to the old one. That is critical thinking, opposed to dogmatic reception and recycling of old knowledge. It leads to new knowledge, new discoveries and breakthroughs.

Philosophy literacy from the cradle is an advocacy for children getting involved in philosophy or philosophical activities like critical thinking. The environment is already found in every child's inquisitiveness and curiosity. The method with which the teacher imparts philosophical knowledge into the child plays an important role. No doubt philosophy involves some rigour and knowledge of basic literacy as McCourtie and Miller try to show:

Philosophy, as we practice it, requires that students demonstrate both willingness and sufficient writing ability to engage original theoretical works.... Our department has had

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<sup>27</sup>. Carlee M. Kirkpatrick, When does learning begin? An inquiry into fetal cognition (Texas Tech University, May 1999), 2.

a long-standing concern with student's literacy, but in different ways at the senior and introductory levels. When students in senior courses flounder at basic writing skill, both we and they are frustrated and the subject matter is compromised.<sup>28</sup>

The idea here is that without basic literacy one cannot talk about philosophy literacy, yet, philosophy literacy draws philosophical thinking from any text no matter the area with the direction of an expert. The sort of philosophy literacy advocated for children may not come from technical texts in specialized sciences, arts or history, but literature in the form of plays, prose and poetry which often dilutes the highly corrosive philosophical concentrates into simpler non-corrosive solutions amenable to kids. People read for many reasons. No wonder reading for thinking has been recommended as a good reason to read.

Growing up we read many inspiring stories about the courage and other virtues of the Spartan boys. How they faced death with equanimity and were delighted to die in order to save others. Shakespeare's plays were made avenues for inculcating virtues in children through the summarized versions from John Lambs and Mary Lambs in *Lambs Tales from Shakespeare* and *More Tales from Shakespeare*. While David A. White's approach involves primarily analysing brief passages from important

philosophers throughout the history of philosophy (primary-source philosophy to primary and secondary school students), teachers and literary authors can add value to their work in literacy by incorporating philosophical discussions with children through an approach Robert Fisher refers to as *Stories for Thinking*. He sees this as one of the best ways to add value to the work of teachers:

It outlines what 'philosophy for children' is and how it can be used for developing the thinking skills that underpin literacy and higher order reading skills. It argues that a *Stories for Thinking* approach can enrich thinking and learning in the Literacy Hour, and uses evidence from teachers and children to illustrate the effects of the programme on classroom practice and on raising levels of pupil achievement.<sup>29</sup>

The aim of this approach is to develop not just a child's literacy in a language, but a thinking or critical literacy.

Ron Gilmore who argues that kids can think and have fun with thinking also provides a way of introducing and training our children in the art of philosophical skepticism and critical thinking, so that educators may not be found guilty of "exposing children to vast, unmanageable quantities of information"(we can think about the proliferation of information especially on the social media) but prepare their mind to be discerning and cautious of distinguishing and utilizing "quality

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<sup>28</sup>. Lena McCourtie & Peter Miller, Philosophical Literacy: Dialogue on a Pedagogical Experiment. *The Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 27 (2) 3; 113-156, 1997.

<sup>29</sup>. Robert Fisher, Philosophy in primary schools: fostering thinking skills and literacy. *Reading*, July 2001: 61-73. Doi:10.1111/1467-9345-00164

information from the inaccurate, the misleading, or the invented.”<sup>30</sup>

### Conclusion

There is apparently something wrong with the received (colonial) curriculum, and that is the pedagogy. We can now appreciate that education is key especially when the right methods are employed. My method as an educator is not necessarily to give my students the contents alone. It includes the right way of applying the formulae of the contents. Pragmatically what is meant by the right way is no particular way but the most excellent way among various alternatives that the initiative of the student or pupil creatively suggests. It is not just by applying the formulae to every particular instance, but by teaching the students the creative ability to discover for themselves how best to apply the formulae. That is the way of critical thinking which philosophy literacy produces in the pupils or students.

The paper has strived to advocate for the attitude that higher level reasoning skills are introduced at the basic schools, then continuing with that at the tertiary level would produce less friction than is more apparent now in our citadels of learning. If our teachers equipped us with the knowledge of how to extrapolate the ideas they nursed in us, then we would have been able to do a lot with our basic training. Introducing complex reasoning skills found within the ambient of philosophy into the curricula for basic skills and literacy at the primary and secondary levels of education is hereby recommended.

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<sup>30</sup>. Ron Gilmore, *Kids Can Think: Philosophical Challenges for the Classroom*. (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

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