

# DESIGNING A SPACE FOR THOUGHTFUL VOICES: ALIGNING THE ETHOS OF ZINES WITH YOUTH-DRIVEN PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY

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## Abstract

This article strives to lay some necessary theoretical groundwork for justifying an alliance between zining and youth-driven “philosophical inquiry” (Lipman, 2004)—two important practices that operate outside the mainstream yet can shed light on conventional (mis)understandings of youth by illustrating innovative ways of designing space for young voices to emerge and thrive in their educational experiences and beyond. By highlighting the shared ethos between zining and philosophical inquiry as practices that foster meaning-making, this article aims to emphasize their common participatory, do-it-yourself, experimental, politicizing and transformative features, while noting the challenges involved in extending them to the context of childhood. Further, it illustrates how aligning zining and philosophical inquiry can contribute to a re-envisioning of children by portraying them as capable cultural producers and social historians of their own discourse communities. Lastly, it explores issues of adult authority, suggesting conditions that may help to authenticate the philosophical use of zines with youth.

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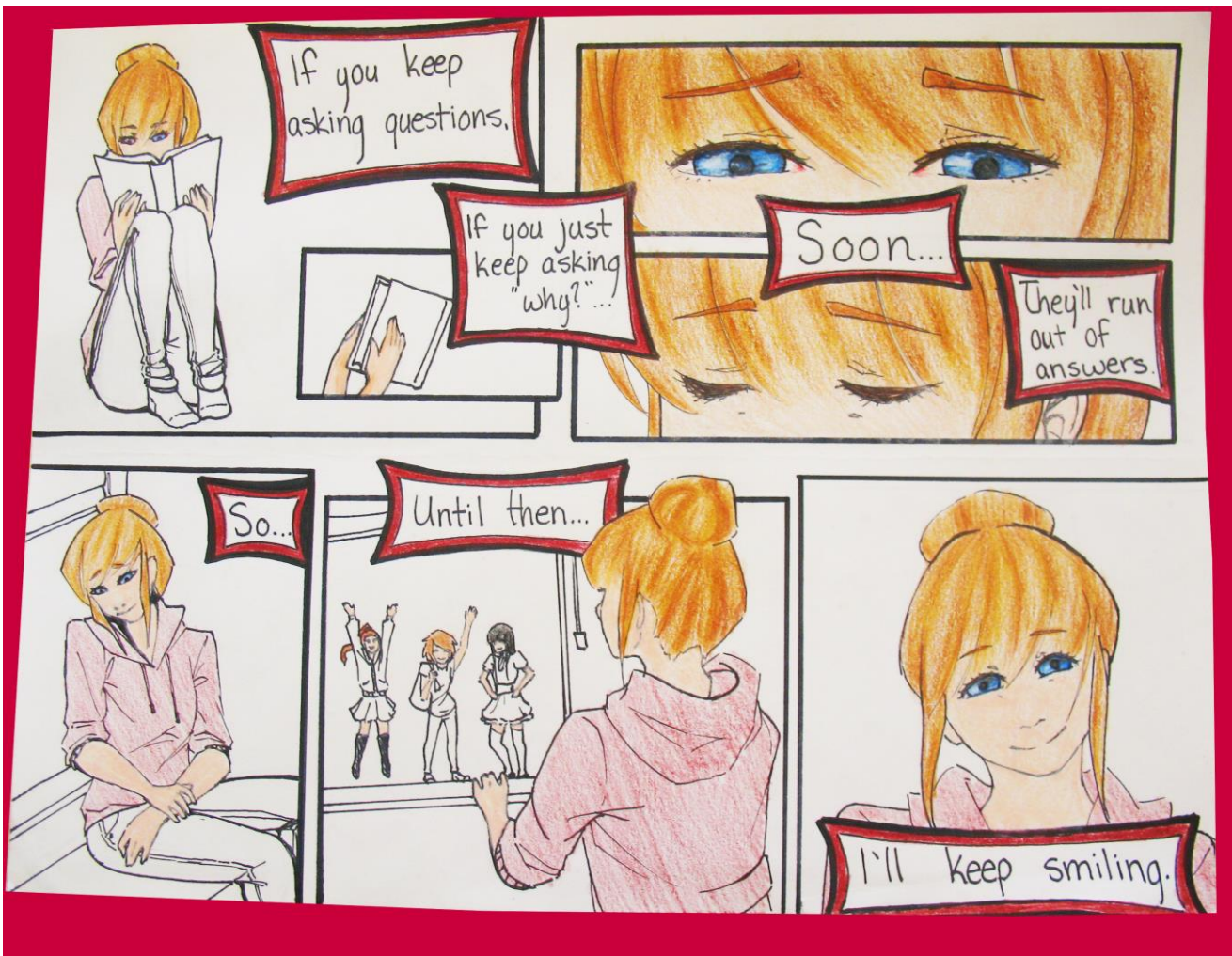
**Keywords:** Philosophy for Children, Zines, Philosophical Inquiry, Youth Agency

Those without power also have the capability to create a culture—  
one that arises out of their way of understanding the world.

—Stephen Duncombe, *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*

An eight-year old philosopher is sitting in front of a small booklet wondering what she will write next. She’s deep in thought about the nature of imagination after a heated dialogue with other kids over the possibility of imagining something that does not exist. In a burst of inspiration, she scribbles down her ideas then launches into a drawing frenzy, illustrating what the world might look like without imagination. She crumples her

paper, flattens it out, and colours the creases in brown to really drive at her point. Moments later she's sharing her work with her friends, swapping her booklet with theirs and comparing their creations, giggling at the results of their attempts to illustrate each other's imaginings. "I never get to do this at school!" she exclaims excitedly. She calls this experience freeing. We call it her *philozine*: a self-published, mixed media bricolage of her wonderings and wanderings—the combination of philosophical inquiry and zining adapted (though less drastically than one might assume) for children.



Philozines are a niche contribution to the zining movement—mini-publications that treat philosophy as a creative way for children to engage with life's intriguing complexities through open-ended thinking prompts designed to spark curiosity and multifaceted self-expression. Beyond serving varied learning objectives, from enhanced literacy to critical reasoning to artistic ability, they act as concrete reminders that childhood wonder should not be delegitimized as an important instigator of thoughtful voice. Philozines are the brainchild of Brila, a registered Canadian educational charity committed to inspiring young people through philosophical dialogue and creative

projects, largely in informal learning contexts.<sup>1</sup> As a member of the international Philosophy for Children (P4C) movement, Brila uses the Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI) pedagogical model in its educational programming to recognize young people's love of thinking and carve out a space for their collaborative deliberation, in hopes of enabling dialogical exchanges that will give voice to their pursuit of meaning-making.<sup>2</sup> As an endorsed P4C practitioner, I have been privy to the transformative epiphanies that youth have gained from having their voices taken seriously, yet I have also sought ways through Brila of extending their CPI experiences with creative projects that offer tangible evidence of their efforts—philosophical artifacts like philozines that attest to the discernment in their wonderings. Though many creative endeavours are worthy candidates, one venture has held the most promise and allure for me thus far: zining.

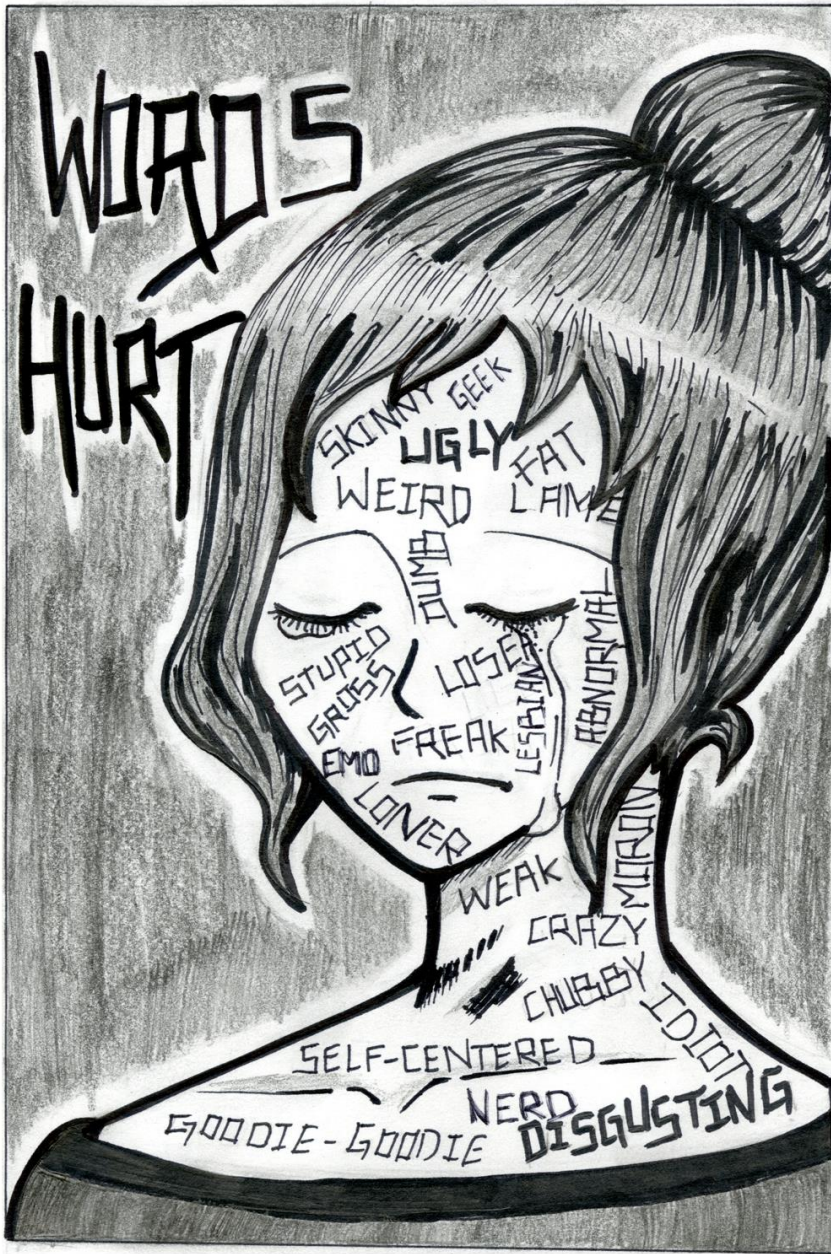
A radical form of self-publishing soon celebrating its centennial, zining has enabled countless voices from the fringes to experiment with creative expression on their own terms through individualized mini-publications that embody ideas they care deeply about, from politics and labour to art and culture. As practices that are concerned with designing a space for thoughtful voices, zining and philosophical inquiry are clear allies. The spirit of zining can provide youth with invaluable opportunities to further ingrain, feel and *live* the existential meaning of their CPI dialogues, while benefitting from the philosophical tone created by their collective inquiry—a reflective atmosphere that elevates wonder and raises creative expression to new heights of conceptual insight and aesthetic nuance. The aim of this article is to lay some necessary theoretical groundwork for justifying an alliance between zining and youth-driven philosophical inquiry—two important practices that operate outside the mainstream yet can shed light on conventional (mis)understandings of youth by illustrating innovative ways of deliberately designing space for young voices to emerge and thrive. It is my hope that these initial findings may prove useful for alternative educators committed to protecting and increasing opportunities for youth to wonder and imagine their way toward thoughtfulness.

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<sup>1</sup> The philozine samples in this article are reproduced with permission from youth projects run by Brila with children ages five through 16. For more information about Brila's charitable mission and programs, and to see its digital zines please visit: [www.brila.org](http://www.brila.org).

<sup>2</sup> Adapting the pragmatist ideas of Charles Sanders Peirce and John Dewey, Matthew Lipman (2003) designed the P4C program to foster multidimensional thought (or combined critical, creative and caring thinking), which he viewed as "a balance between the cognitive and the affective, between the perceptual and the conceptual, between the physical and the mental" (200-201). He believed the CPI model could equip youth with the means to tackle contestable questions they deem central to their lives and formulate reasonable, revisable judgments through structured group dialogue, guided by an adult facilitator who helps them navigate their evolving thought processes. P4C is now practiced around the world and has been recognized by UNESCO as a child-driven pedagogical model.





## // a storm with skin

by Anna Evans

No, I am not a girl. I am a storm with skin. But sometimes I forget that, and I need to look through the eyes of a loved one, to see the galaxies in mine. And that's okay, because I'm living for today. And if I do my best, that's all anyone can ask of me. I don't need voices in my head, telling me who I am, and who I should be, instead. I need the motivation to tell my loved ones that yes, I shot for the stars today, and yes, tomorrow, I might not make it that far. I need to know that I can trust my loved ones, and they won't turn away from me when I'm in need, leaving me on a cold dark street. And yes, it's hard to trust someone when so many trusts have rusted and now sit still like old, used cars, laying in a junkyard. But I have a heavy burden, and I cannot bear it alone. I tried to once, and I sunk to the bottom of the ocean that we call society. No matter how much I screamed or cried, no one would hear me. Why? Because I wouldn't let them try. At the end of the day, I'm a storm with skin, but sometimes I don't see that, from the position I'm in. So I need to look through my loved one's eyes, to see the galaxies in mine.

## VULNERABLE

You can be inspiring  
You can be persevering  
You can act more generous  
But you can also have bad feelings  
You can be more knowledgeable  
But not always courageous and brave  
You can be hardworking  
But you might not always be okay  
You can be vulnerable

—SAMUEL

Childhood is a relatively new context for philosophy and zining alike—one that is not without controversy or immune to serious challenges. I will therefore begin this article by highlighting the shared ethos between zining and philosophical inquiry to clarify their compatibility as practices that emphasize participatory, self-initiated experimentation and thereby have the potential to politicize and transform those engaged in them. I will then argue that the notion of marginalized voice in zining can enrich the P4C project of re-envisioning childhood by offering new roles for young voices that further confirm their capacity and worth. Finally, I will explore the issues of adult authority that could arise from zining as a proposed extension of the CPI model, and suggest conditions that may

help to authenticate this process by making it more youth-driven. For the purpose of this article, the term “philosophical inquiry” will be understood as the CPI model; “zining” will refer to the creation of zines; “youth” will be deemed to encompass children and adolescents, with “childhood” denoting the period that occurs between grade school and voting age (roughly ages five to 16). The concepts of “voice” and “space” will be elucidated as the article progresses but for now can be defined respectively as *the freedom to meaningfully express a perspective* and *the opportunity made available for such expression*.

## **I. Zining and philosophical inquiry: A shared ethos**

In my view, the shared ethos of zining and philosophical inquiry can be distilled into the liberating imperative of *creating space for voicing what matters most*. I find zines particularly intriguing as a complement to the CPI model because they represent an unprecedented chance for common citizens to communicate in depth with specific audiences about particular issues or concerns through a highly manipulable self-published medium. Rooted in the work of political pamphleteers from 18th-century America and Europe—most notably Thomas Paine—and science-fiction writers from the 1930s, zines are a hybrid media that combine words and visuals into magazine-like publications, or what Williamson (1994) astutely calls a “relatively unstudied site of postmodern bricolage and participatory culture.” Though their breadth and diversity defy categorization, zines tend to reflect the common criteria of being self-published, non-for-profit, noncommercial and nonprofessional, independently serving overlooked niche interests and groups. Of course, in the digital age, the Internet seems to accomplish much of the zining mandate in an arguably more efficient, inclusive and accessible way: nearly anyone can blog, tweet, host a website and post on a forum. Still, despite some notable exceptions, zines appear to differ from online content in terms of format, purpose and effort. Above all, zines are actual publications—whole issues of planned mixed media content created singlehandedly or by a small group of likeminded people—an endeavour which seems more labour-intensive, intentional and time-consuming than the snippet tactics of social media and the journaling character of blogging.<sup>3</sup> Notwithstanding the obvious fulfillment involved, zines are hard work—as Chu (1997) remarks, “the process of zine publishing demonstrates the serious efforts involved in such ‘playful’ youth endeavours” (p. 80).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> My view is echoed by many zine theorists, notably Piepmeier (2008) who contends that “zines demand a level of aesthetic decision-making that blogs do not” (p. 221).

<sup>4</sup> Given the latitude of interactive media, to my mind, the notion of a “digital” zine can further broaden aesthetic possibilities, allowing the typical words and images of paper zines to coexist alongside audio and video content, resulting in more inclusive “bricolage” publications that recognize the wider meanings enabled by diverse creative preferences, while honouring more ecologically sound online publishing. In the zine community, however, this is a controversial proposition: many have persuasively argued that the tangible materiality of paper zines is essential to the zining spirit as it facilitates a more intimate, affectionate and embodied encounter between zinesters and their audiences in an era dominated by screen time and virtual reality (Piepmeier, 2008, Bartel, 2004, Chidgey, 2006). While I am highly sympathetic to these aesthetic preferences, I maintain that the ethos of zining can be preserved in digital form with a certain design mindfulness, and that new generations of zinesters should have as worthwhile creative options the

Zines can be deemed revolutionary as a communication tool in the sense that they have enabled ordinary people to carve out a space to voice their ideas, concerns and convictions within a cultural, political and media landscape that largely fails to represent their lived reality. In the words of Fredric Wertham, a psychiatrist who studied the zine phenomenon at length:

Zines give a voice to the everyday anonymous person. The basic idea is that someone sits down, writes, collects, draws or edits a bunch of stuff they are interested in or care deeply about...and distributes it. The zine creating process is a direct one, remaining under the writer's control at all times. Perhaps its outstanding facet is that it exists without any outside interference, without any control from above, without any censorship, without any supervision or manipulation (Spencer, 2008, 122).

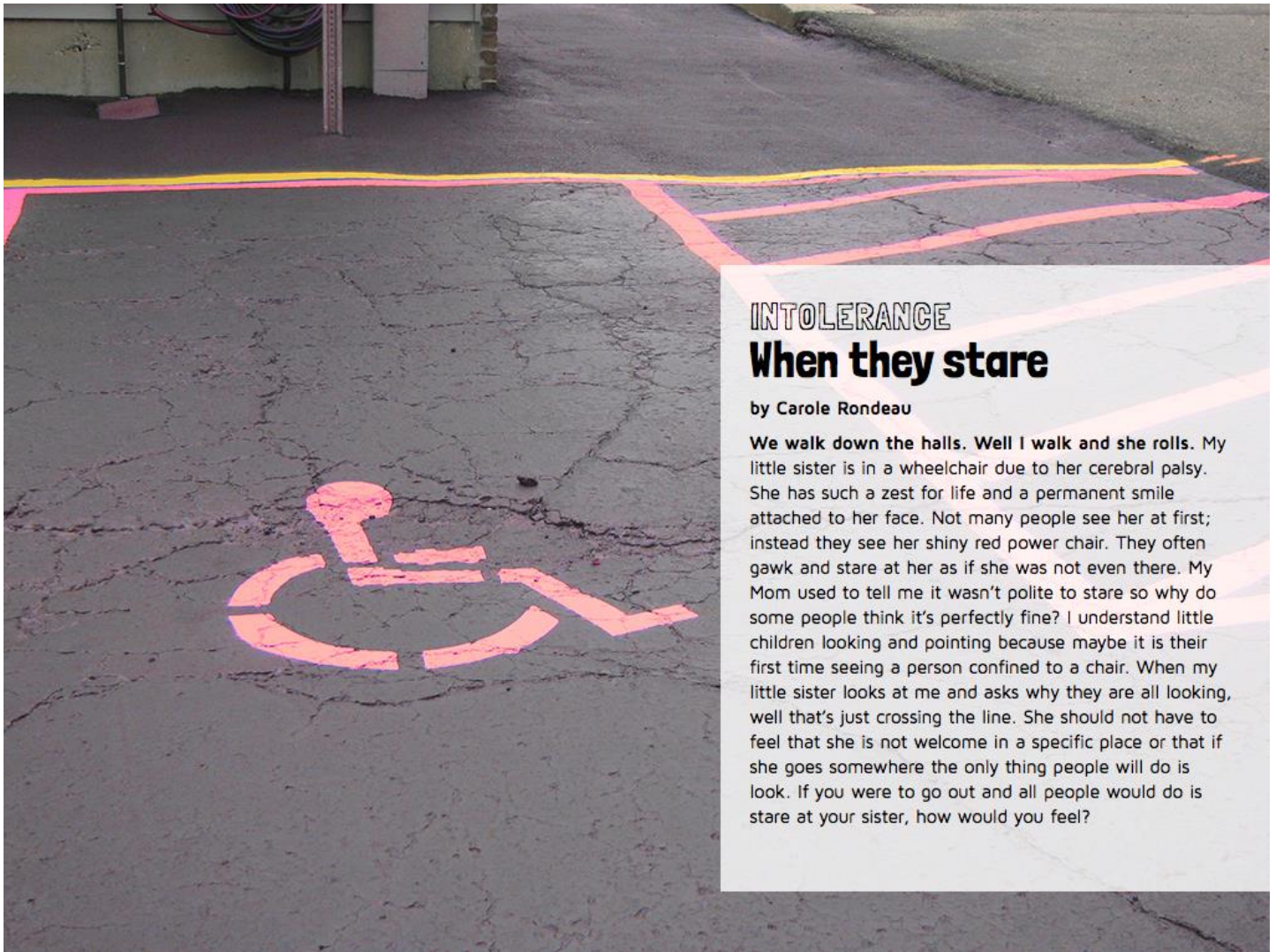
Further, the fact that young adults between the ages of 15 and 30 have historically been the most ardent, prolific zinesters makes the medium all the more compelling as a complement to the CPI model.<sup>5</sup> In *Notes from Underground*, Duncombe (2008) argues that “in the shadows of the dominant culture, zines and underground culture mark out a free space: a space within which to imagine and experiment with new and idealistic ways of thinking, communicating, and being” (pp. 204-205). This description of space could just as effectively describe the atmosphere sought in a CPI. As practices, both zining and philosophical inquiry strive to create a space for unfiltered voices to engage in meaning-making that they themselves consider significant and valuable. Despite their separate roots and respective idiosyncrasies, they share key defining features—five of which seem especially relevant to their ethos: i) their democratic and participatory ideal, ii) their do-it-yourself ethic, iii) their experimental spirit, iv) their politicizing influence, and v) their transformative potential.

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digital multimedia with which they most identify. The design aesthetic of zines—deliberately non-linear, even chaotic in order to reflect its eclectic, multifaceted content—can be replicated in digital form with certain conscientious choices regarding the ways content should inform layout. Beyond aesthetic considerations, if zining is to be aligned with philosophical inquiry, the potential value of digital zines should be measured on environmental, financial and accessibility grounds; paperless may just breed new purpose.

<sup>5</sup> Chu (19997) refers to zines as “one of the only independent sites for tens of thousands of youth voices in a media environment otherwise dominated by corporate adult interests” (p. 71).





## INTOLERANCE

### When they stare

by Carole Rondeau

**We walk down the halls. Well I walk and she rolls.** My little sister is in a wheelchair due to her cerebral palsy. She has such a zest for life and a permanent smile attached to her face. Not many people see her at first; instead they see her shiny red power chair. They often gawk and stare at her as if she was not even there. My Mom used to tell me it wasn't polite to stare so why do some people think it's perfectly fine? I understand little children looking and pointing because maybe it is their first time seeing a person confined to a chair. When my little sister looks at me and asks why they are all looking, well that's just crossing the line. She should not have to feel that she is not welcome in a specific place or that if she goes somewhere the only thing people will do is look. If you were to go out and all people would do is stare at your sister, how would you feel?

First, both zining and philosophical inquiry share a democratic, participatory ideal in that they advocate for various publics engaging in dialogue on the issues that affect them. They aim for inclusion, valuing a multiplicity of voices and values—a literal and metaphorical bricolage of perspectives—not just the dominant ones, thereby rejecting meritocratic principles that assess worthiness based on exclusionary criteria like age, wealth, political status and cultural capital. Both practices strive to eliminate hierarchies by placing their participants on equal footing—as Duncombe puts it, even the “losers” have a place since their inability to win at particular rat races make them representative of important alternative viewpoints and lifestyles (p. 25). Similarly, in a CPI, members with the highest grades or popularity do not necessarily excel more than their so-called underdog counterparts—they may even find themselves eclipsed or outshone by those who might otherwise be low on the usual “merit” scale. Interestingly, both practices have also been critiqued for failing to embody the democratic, participatory ideal since their advocates tend to be from white, middle-class backgrounds—though this trend is by no

means deliberate.<sup>6</sup> Still, open participation remains their lodestar: they aspire to enable active involvement in perspective-sharing which includes positive identification with shared principles but also resistance to societal norms that motivate mistrust. Beyond the freedom to describe realities from multiple perspectives, zining and philosophical inquiry encourage individuals to explore and formulate normative claims about how these realities *ought* to be, thus re-defining their ideal world and ways to approximate it. In this light, they promote democratic citizenship: as Lipman (1988) writes, “good citizens are reflective citizens, vigorously insistent that ideals not merely be professed but that they be operationalized and implemented” (p. 60).

Second, both zining and philosophical inquiry celebrate the do-it-yourself (or DIY) ethic in that they encourage people to embrace their lack of expertise and amateurism not as a symbol of ineptitude but of genuine love for self-expression and community-building. In zining, the DIY ethic is completely explicit: inspired by the punk and sci-fi movements, zinesters incarnate the notion that anyone can take action and make their voice heard. Further, as Bartel (2004) observes, “the question is not just ‘why not do it myself?’ [but] ‘why does someone else’s work deserve more recognition or legitimacy than my own?’” (p. 22). In a CPI, this impetus takes the form of a collective quest for wisdom: members appreciate their capacity to take on life’s greatest questions without the assistance of professional philosophers, believing that they can learn from each other’s generalized life experiences—“the community of inquiry is in one sense a learning together, and it is therefore an example of the value of shared experience” (Lipman, 2003: p. 93). In both cases, the hope is that the DIY ethic will filter into other spheres of living, enhancing personal agency as opposed to docile passivity. The sense of immediacy becomes irresistible: life is happening now—how can we address it? In a CPI, members respond by choosing the questions that best reflect what concerns them in the moment; for zinesters, self-publishing preserves the memory of the present in what Chidgey (2013) calls a “survival strategy: not to lose one’s self, one’s beliefs, and one’s hopes” (p. 667).

Third, zining and philosophical inquiry cultivate an experimental spirit, emphasizing the process over the results, and dwelling in a perpetual, tantalizing state of being unfinished and in progress. The purpose of a CPI is never to resolutely answer a philosophical question but to achieve a temporary settlement in a lifelong inquiry that can be reopened whenever new lived experiences are apt to inform it: “Philosophy,” Lipman writes, “provides ideas for people to chew on—ideas that don’t get used up because they are persistently contestable” (p. 106). Similarly, Gordon (2012) notes that “zines are unabashedly content with coming across as a work in progress,” allowing their creators to be more authentic in their conceptual and creative explorations since they do not operate within the constraints of completion (p. 4). As a result, both practices can be described as

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<sup>6</sup> Wan (1999) discusses the issue of privilege in zines (p. 17), while Chetty (2014) describes racial underrepresentation in P4C.

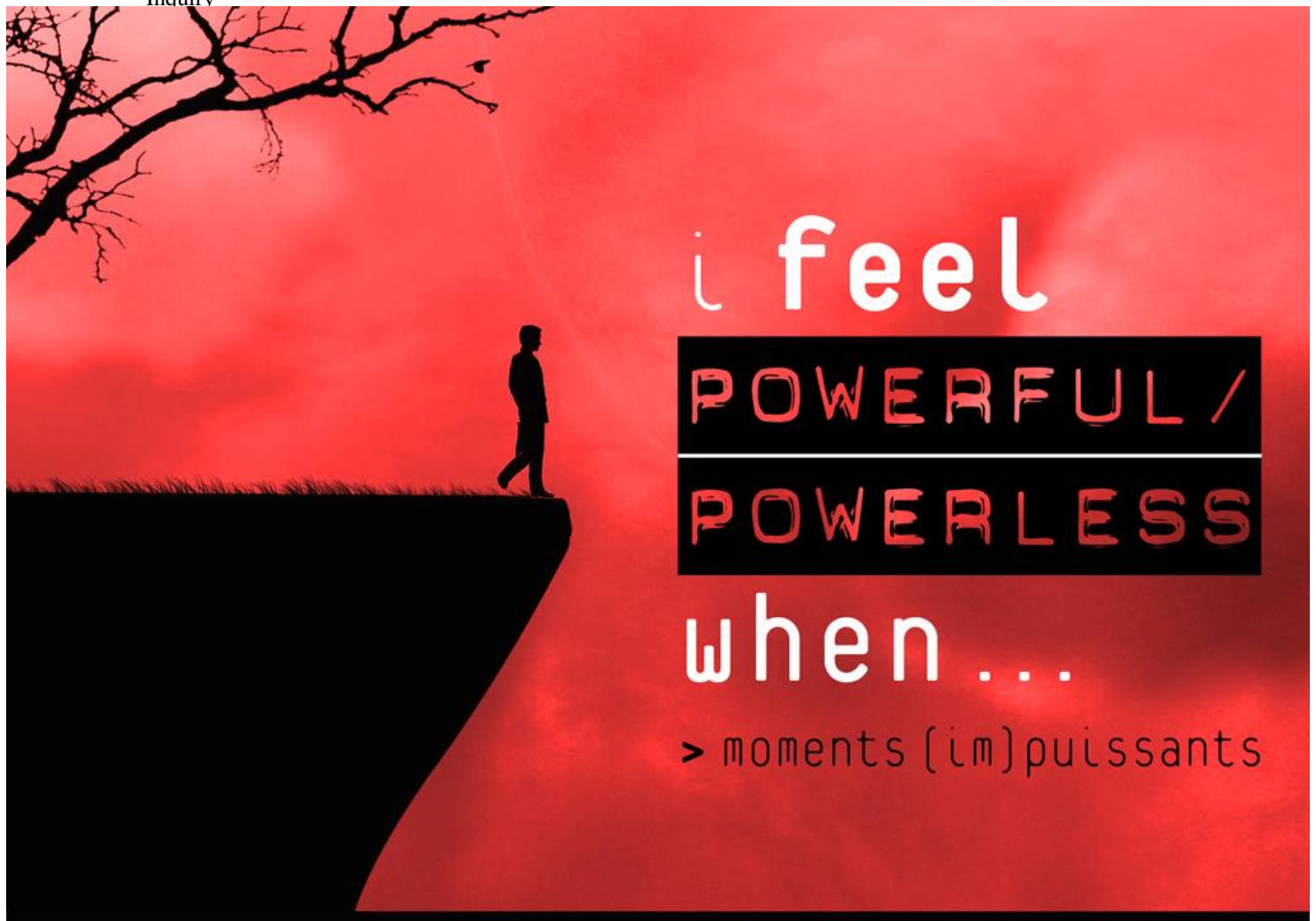


playful—they create a pressure-free space of experimentation where individuals can test unfamiliar ideas, heightening their willingness to try and err. Otherwise said, zining and philosophical inquiry offer similar opportunities to perform different possible subjectivities— Asbell calls these “space[s] for identity play,” where anything can be tried with relative safety since the performance is aimed not at the general public but at a counter-public of “sympathetic strangers” (DeGravelles, 2011, p. 101). Just as philosophical inquiry eschews dogmatism, zines proliferate unheard points of view. As Radway (2001) writes, “Zines stage a tense cacophony of contending voices; they ventriloquize subject positions that jostle for control and dominance...They perform endlessly. They exuberantly multiply personas in defiance of demands that they be only one way and not others” (p. 18).

Fourth, thanks to this powerful experimentation in performativity, both zining and philosophical inquiry can exert a politicizing influence by helping individuals realize their own power, as evidenced in their testimonies as zinesters and inquirers. Through personal accounts that take the form of anecdotes and commentary pieces, zinesters bear witness to their own lives, thus “complicat[ing] reality by giving personal voice and experience to political projects” (Gordon, 2012, p. 5) and posing “challenges to the boundaries of what is deemed legitimately political” (Collins, 1999, p. 68). Similarly, a CPI relies on its members to produce many possible considerations to inform the group’s overall position on their chosen question, making room for personal narratives in the form of constructive examples and counterexamples, illuminating analogies, and missing perspectives, which in turn problematize and subvert assumptions. Lipman (2003) describes the process as “combining their touchingly fragmentary observations into a massive whole,” one that helps them judge the political power of their own voice (p. 110).

Fifth and finally, because of their participatory, do-it-yourself, experimental and politicizing features, both zining and philosophical inquiry have the potential to be transformative for those engaged in them. Celebrated zinester Mike Underlay (1989) underlines how zining changes personal priorities and outlooks:

They are changing people’s lives...They certainly changed mine—the food I eat, the clothes I wear, the music I listen to, the ideals I believe in, and the places I want to live have all been influenced (and not subtly) by my constant immersion in the sea of alternatives (p. 53).



i am  
**POWERFUL**  
because...

- > I play guitar
- > I can relate to some music
- > I performed in front of 450 people
- > I feel happy when I make others happy
- > I am capable of dreaming
- > I can put myself in other people's shoes

i feel  
**POWERLESS**  
when...

- > I don't have hope
- > I'm scared of what people think
- > I am not acknowledged
- > I can't express myself
- > I can't sleep
- > My voice breaks

—SAM

je suis  
**PUISSANTE**  
parce que..

- > Je suis généreuse
- > Je joue un instrument de musique chinois
- > Je ne me décourage pas
- > Je lis beaucoup
- > J'étudie fort
- > Je sais cuisiner

je me sens  
**IMPUISANTE**  
quand...

- > Je suis triste
- > Je me sens rejeter
- > J'ai rien à faire
- > Quelqu'un me dit des choses méchantes
- > Je rate mon examen

—YI XIN

i am  
**POWERFUL**  
because...

- > I can make people laugh
- > I am independent
- > I'm good with technology
- > I'm kind
- > I'm generous
- > I go to school
- > I'm alive

i feel  
**POWERLESS**  
when...

- > My parents order me to do something
- > I'm late to school
- > People aren't nice to me
- > I'm sick
- > I fail a test

—CARLO

In like manner, the CPI experience has enabled deeper self-understandings: for instance, youth testimonials from Brila include such statements as philosophy “taught me about what I want in my life and what I want out of life” and “I can now reach new levels of thinking” and “be creative in many more ways than I’ve ever imagined.”<sup>7</sup> In both practices, individuals are forming and endorsing positions in the world in ways they did not previously, transforming from objects into subjects. Here the zining literature’s notions of “resisting” subjects who are “engaged in a project of transformative world-making” (DeGravelles, 2011, p. 59) also mirrors the self-transcendence features of philosophical inquiry since “not to endeavour to go beyond previous achievements is to risk engaging in a form of inquiry that lacks integrity” (Lipman, 2003: p. 246). By extension, due to their transformative potential, both practices can become sources of hope and change for individuals—an important possibility for youth whose voices go largely unnoticed.

## **II. Youth as marginalized, unfiltered voices: Re-envisioning childhood**

Among its accomplishments, the P4C movement has been celebrated for helping to inspire a new conception of childhood by demonstrating the value of young voices. The CPI model characterizes youth as persons in their own right—as opposed to adults-in-the-making—and aims to strengthen their emerging sense of agency through engagement in meaningful, collaborative inquiry.<sup>8</sup> Controversially, Lipman and the philosophers of childhood he has inspired have highlighted problematic assumptions in many accounts of youth capability, making a pressing call to create designated spaces in which young minds can deliberate thoughtfully on issues that matter to them. As Kennedy (2006) writes, “the child’s difference makes of her a text that is just distant enough in time and experience for theory to not just appropriate, but to colonize” (p. 12). Indeed, amid efforts by P4C initiatives and other educational methods with similar missions to give voice to youth, resistance to the re-envisioning of childhood persists. Giroux (1998) captures this unfortunate reality:

Youth as a complex, shifting, and contradictory category is rarely narrated in the dominant public sphere through the diverse voices of the young. Prohibited from speaking as moral and political agents, youth become an empty category inhabited by the desires, fantasies and interests of the adult world. This is not to suggest that youth don’t speak; they are simply...refused the power to make knowledge consequential with respect to their own collective needs (p. 24).

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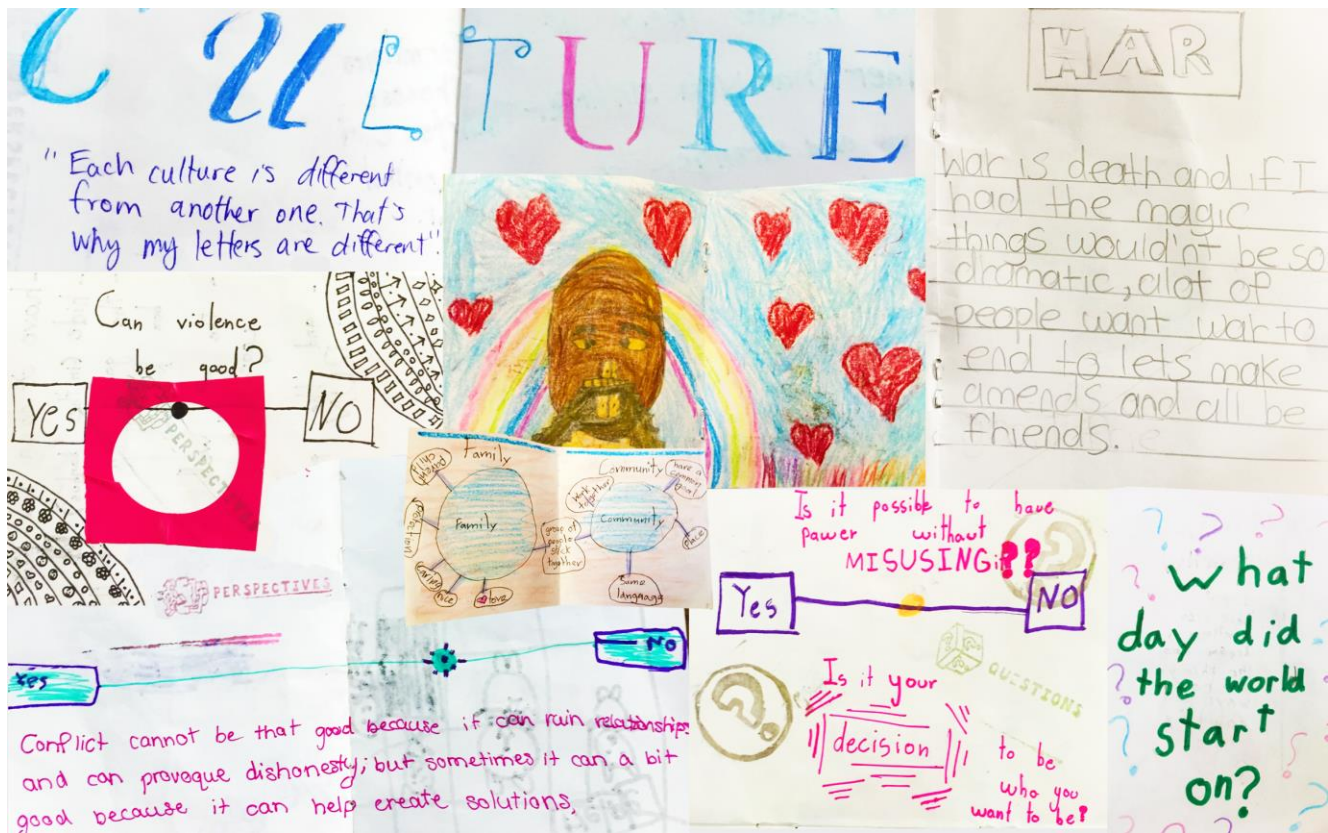
<sup>7</sup> For a selection of full testimonials, please see [www.brila.org/about.html#testimonials](http://www.brila.org/about.html#testimonials)

<sup>8</sup> Lipman (1988) contends that many developmental theories “frequently assume that childhood is a preparation for adulthood and is to be viewed as only a means to an end, or as an incomplete condition moving toward completeness” (p. 194).

In many ways, this portrayal of youth mirrors the descriptions of marginalized voices that permeate zining culture and scholarship. Like other disenfranchised minorities who have taken up zining—notably feminist and queer groups—youth represent a significant subset of society that is neglected, or at the very least misrepresented. While differences among them abound in terms of gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic status, etc., together they form a pack of underdogs—a demographic whose powerlessness links them without unifying them. Zining, however, has the potential to forge such unions in ways that support and extend the aims of the CPI model by providing another outlet for unfiltered expression. After all, the zining ethos has facilitated the unfolding of many outsider narratives, from the array of Riot Grrrl zines in the 1990s that pushed beyond gender binaries (Radway, 2011, p. 12) to more recent queer activist zines that reframed mass media representations of AIDS “victims” (Long, 2000, p. 403). As Sinor (2003) writes, “Because the story they tell is an outsider’s story, it, like so many of the stories told by those rendered invisible, must be told in ways that break expectations and disrupt assumptions” (p. 243). From my perspective, the enabling of youth voices as not only philosophical inquirers but also zinesters has the potential to help re-envision childhood by introducing new possible roles for youth, specifically two: i) cultural producers and ii) social historians.

First, as zinesters, youth can take on the role of cultural producers simply by virtue of creating a zine. This shift is significant in itself given they are usually relegated to the status of cultural consumers, ingesting adult-generated content in the form of picture books, animated films, video games and the like, often created with corporate interests in mind. It seems safe to claim that an undiluted child perspective in mainstream culture is next to nonexistent—instead they are presented with assumption-laden, caricatural portrayals shaped by adults without their input. As cultural producers, however, through formats like philozines, youth can assert themselves as writers, illustrators, photographers and new media artists, constructing through these creative forms a series of alternative views on the experience of childhood, and possibly even sparking new memes about youth capability to replace outdated stereotypes. After all, as Klaus (2012) notes, the power of cultural production lies in its potential to “irritate and challenge the way we ‘normally’ see and do things...[and] in this sense can be understood as an intervention in the process of producing meaning” (p. 1-2). Further, the zining ethos can protect youth from scrutiny to the extent that it celebrates raw expression rather than the more polished, scripted character of many school assignments, opening up possibilities for increased adult-child understanding. As Lipman (1988) writes, “the differences between child and adult perspectives represent an invitation to the shared experience of human diversity rather than an excuse for intergenerational hostility, repression, and guilt” (p. 191). As cultural productions, zines offer space for unfiltered young voices to be thoughtful and, with any luck, taken more seriously.





Second, as zinesters, youth can also adopt the role of social historians by publishing mixed media narratives of their lived experiences as a marginalized group. Although historians disagree on the value of such narratives for their overall discipline, what seems clear is that a social lens on history has “demonstrated the usefulness—and indeed the priceless quality—of whole classes of documents which were previously held in low esteem” (Samuel, 1985). Zines can be deemed as part of this documentation since they “are currently one of the means by which hidden histories occasionally come to light” (DeGravelles, 2011: p. 63). Since youth can articulate their contextualized experience of childhood where adults can merely speculate, in offering up their own version of social history data, they contribute to an amassing of information which may illuminate the misunderstood societal subset they represent. Their more recent and fresh encounters with certain human realities—schooling, injustice, violence, fear of death, to name but a few—may also provide clearer perspectives on how youth as a category navigate and negotiate the world of adults they inhabit and eventually inherit. For instance, at Brila, school is a consistently popular theme for creative expression in philozines: it is not surprising that youth have many thoughts on issues of authority and learning given their daily lives are dominated by their experience of schooling. By extension, as I see it, zine content that reflects their present concerns—in the case of school, whether they should have more say in their class choices, in the hiring (and firing) of teachers, in their educational approaches, etc.—can provide what Boellstorff (2004) calls “a window into broader systems of meaning” (p. 375).





So, through zining, youth can assume the roles of cultural producers and social historians, which in turn can lead to the formation of their own discourse community—with its own way of communicating its common goals, values and vantage points. For Lipman (1988), such community-building is essential to agency development: “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...endeavouring to establish themselves as mature and responsible individuals” (p. 197). Yet for such developments to translate into a meaningful re-envisioning of childhood that seeks to recognize and rectify the problem of marginalized youth voices, the onus falls on adults, who must increase their willingness to perceive youth as worthy of understanding—the focus of my next section. Otherwise, as Lipman cautions, “if children are to be ‘seen and not heard,’ their silencing deprives the rest of us of their insights” (p. 194).

### **III. The adult as designer of voice space: Challenges and conditions**

If, as a space for voice, the shared ethos of zining and philosophical inquiry has so much to offer youth, how can it be introduced to them in an appropriate way—commensurate with their maturity and experience? It seems likely that at some point adults might have to enter the equation. Surely, youth might discover both practices on their own and choose to engage in them on their own accord, but it appears probable that given the practices are not widely available in many educational contexts, an adult might have to stage the space for voice in order for youth to even have access to zining and philosophical inquiry as worthwhile options to consider. Yet can the DIY ethic really survive if the circumstances demand more of a do-it-yourself-(with-an-adult’s-guidance) approach? The problem of adult authority is a possible threat to the integrity of both practices—a reality that poses specific challenges for youth’s exposure to zining and philosophical inquiry, while also begging for certain well delineated conditions.

To begin, the notion of a zine pedagogy has raised understandable concern in zinesters who fear that the domestication of zining within education will institutionalize it out of coherence.<sup>9</sup> Instead, many have advised that adults interested in the educative potential of zines create “zine-like” assignments that plant the seed of zining culture without co-opting it. Others have cautioned against introducing zines into schools without a very clear sense of their history and ideological commitments, since an oversimplified representation could lead to misguided pedagogical choices, such as the desire to assign grades to zines, establish clear creative rules or prescribe themes of study like social justice. For myself, I am extremely uneasy with the idea of an adult regulator overseeing a group of young zinesters, though I also acknowledge that youth may have little to no

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<sup>9</sup> Sinor (2003) makes this point well: “Zines are part of a thriving subculture, one that despises commodification and consumerism...In fact, zinesters write against the very same audience that holds this essay in their hands” (p. 242).

opportunities for critical, creative expression within their educational experience, making the marriage of zining and philosophical inquiry too enticing to dismiss. In justifying a zine pedagogy, Sinor (2003) notes that she only discovered zines as an adult since her “adolescence was far less informed, far less empowered, and far more marked by passive conformity” (p. 240). It is because this may be true of so many youth that I think the zining ethos should extend to them through the careful guidance of adults. As P4C co-founder Ann Sharp argued, “you have to be awakened to the ethical and political meaning of your experience—emotionally as well as conceptually—before you can sense, and then articulate that there is something wrong with it” (Gregory, 2011: p. 204).

To protect the shared ethos of zining and philosophical inquiry, the adult as designer of voice space must first be willing to re-envision childhood in the ways described above. Kennedy (2006) describes this process as a kind of hermeneutic that enables a new interpretive stance:

The hermeneutical situation begins when we (adults) confront a text (child) from which we have become distant, thus creating a relation in which we encounter both familiarity and strangeness, and a certain level of alienation and misunderstanding...It involves a new self-understanding, which includes at the least an understanding of the child as a positive phenomenon—a real interlocutor, a full-fledged other. (...) Through my dialogue with children and childhood, I am provided with a new pattern for reading experience (pp. 17-21).

In turn, perceiving youth as “real interlocutors” demands that adults set certain conditions for the space they design to ensure young voices can communicate safely, without unnecessary authoritative intervention. To my mind, these conditions can be divided into zining-specific considerations as well as requirements inspired by the CPI model. Below I suggest an initial series of possible conditions for adults to authenticate youth zining practices:

- *Protect youth as vulnerable populations.* For better or worse, in many circumstances, youth are legally considered vulnerable populations until they reach voting age. As such, certain dimensions of zining like copyright infringement and insurrectionist speech should be abandoned or at the very least problematized so as to protect youth from legal violations. Issues surrounding censorship should also be discussed to ensure youth can establish age-appropriate guidelines for their zine production.



# six-word memoirs

can the paradox and complexity of identity be captured in a sentence? by telling their stories in a handful of words, these memoirists embody the key rules of writing: do not ramble, keep it simple and have the guts to cut.

lost: identity last found on

**facebook**

—Jamie Tenn

tried  
to drown  
my fish;  
failed.

—Katie Zwierchowski

Got grounded,  
went shopping  
next day.

—Vanessa Vogler



Life's  
tough... so is  
beef jerky.

—Josh Chartrand



Not a dumb blonde...  
I think.

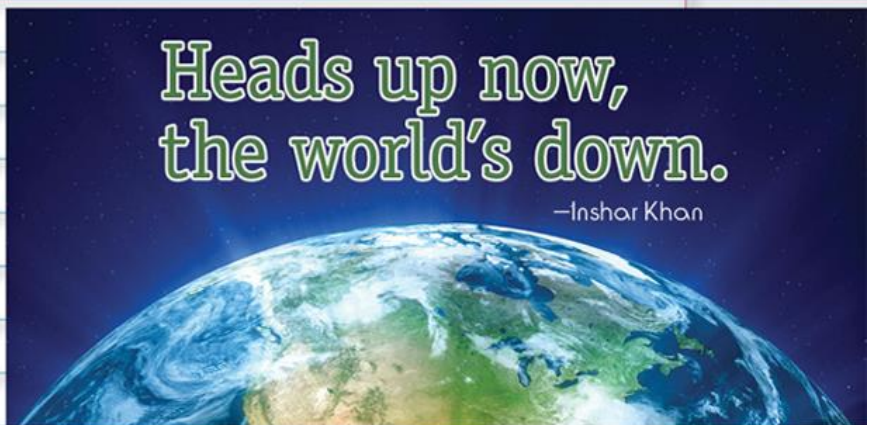
—Shawna Merkley

**SCARED TO FACE  
EVERYTHING  
NOT FACTUAL.**

—Morgan McNeely

Heads up now,  
the world's down.

—Inshar Khan



- *Let youth set their own agenda.* Adults should resist imposing order or meaning onto the zine content that youth produce, and instead enable them to select or interpret their own creative themes and styles from adult's suggestions. Certain aesthetic and conceptual choices may seem unintelligible or even trivial to adults but in fact represent for youth a profound experimentation with freedom of expression. Indeed, as Duncombe (2008) writes, through "the refusal of some zines to make sense," or their imaginative, parodic tone, "zines perform the difference they are trying to make" (p. 39). Through zining, youth may just be imagining a world in their image.
- *Foster youth's comfort with voice.* Youth should be granted time to grow into their new opportunity for voice. Adults ought not to misconstrue initial responses of fear, unease, anxiety and rejection in youth who may have never had their ideas taken seriously before. Comfort with the experimental DIY atmosphere of zining is not necessarily automatic—youth may need room to develop their self-efficacy as they begin to perform new roles and embrace fallibility. Sharing of zine content should not be coercive but gently encouraged.
- *Avoid patronizing assessments.* Adults may be tempted to marvel at the unexpected quality and sophistication of youth zine content but they ought instead to strive for constructive feedback to ensure the zining process is intrinsically valuable for youth rather than merely instrumentally worthwhile as a way of gaining adult approval. At the same time, adults should not be the arbiter of zine "greatness": the point of zining is not to produce masterpieces but to explore new ideas and creative forms thoughtfully through an original contribution, no matter how unpolished or tentative.

To further enhance the zining practices of youth, I think the extensive CPI literature on facilitation can be highly illuminating. In particular, the following three requirements can further reduce the threat of adult authority while expanding the potential of zining as an emancipatory experience for youth:

- *Focus on procedure rather than content.* CPI facilitators are expected to prioritize youth voices by refraining from offering their own philosophical contributions to the dialogue and instead focusing on procedural interventions that help young members stay on track and follow the line of inquiry. Further, facilitators strive to prompt and deepen philosophical reflection without providing answers through careful facilitative moves that motivate critical and creative thinking: they ask for definitions and examples to clarify meaning, they gauge agreement and disagreement among members, they pick up on conceptual inconsistencies to enhance nuance, they help highlight the implications of positions so they can be

strengthened, and they encourage new perspectives and possibilities. In colloquial terms, they hone the art of knowing when to push and when to hold back. Applied to zining, this procedural expertise can enable adults to help youth enrich their creative expression without content intervention—instead, they prompt reflection on theme and style choices that can complexify emerging youth perspectives. When faced with previously unknown topics and forms to explore, youth can become more attuned to ethical, political and societal issues through their zining practice.

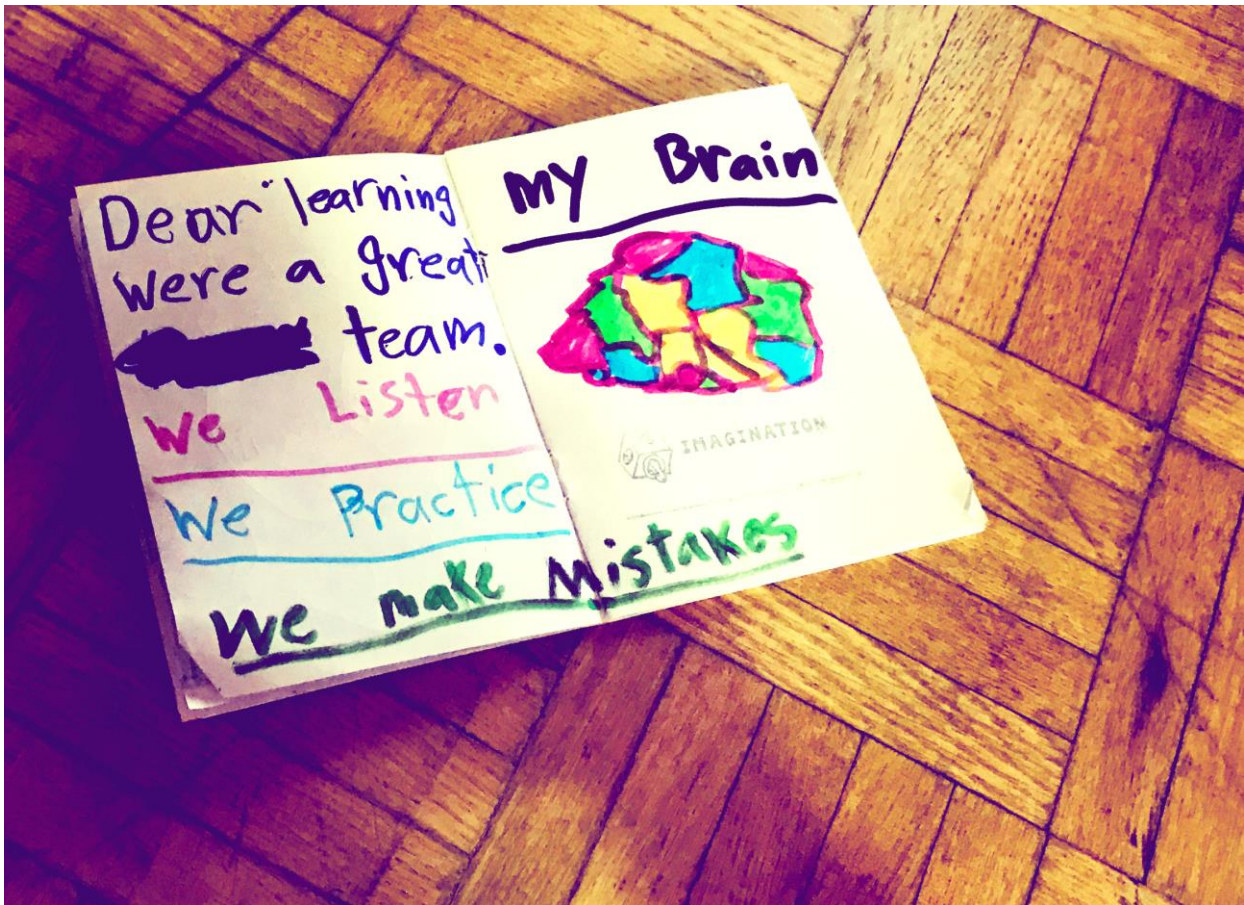
- *Encourage accountability to the community.* In addition to encouraging critical and creative thinking in youth, CPI facilitators are also expected to nurture caring thinking, understood as the capacity to be accountable to others through responsible, thoughtful contributions rather than self-interested talk that derails the inquiry's progress. Individual voices clearly matter in a CPI, and a truly democratic inquiry should reflect everyone's input, yet the collaborative spirit of co-inquiring into a meaningful question takes precedence over providing a soapbox for any domineering member. Accordingly, facilitators must be conscientious about encouraging youth to make connections between ideas and build on one another's contributions, while also providing regular occasions for them to assess participation to ensure inclusion, self-regulation and attentive listening. Applied to zining, this accountability to others can cultivate in youth a sense of responsibility about the positions and effects their zines produce through consideration for their audience. Additionally, the "gift economy" mentality of zining (friendly exchanges of zines rather than impersonal sales) can be adapted as a sincerity test for young zinesters to ensure against narcissistic, self-promotional content at the expense of authentic expressions of meaning-making—the true "gift" of zines.
- *Foster metacognition and self-correction.* Finally, a distinctive dimension of the CPI model is its emphasis on metacognitive assessments that elicit calls for self-correction in youth. Facilitators are expected to not only help young members produce better thoughts but also understand what strengthens or weakens their thinking so they have the metacognitive tools to correct themselves in future. After the dialogue, facilitators therefore initiate a reflection period during which young members assess themselves as a group in terms of their own critical, creative and caring thinking, and establish strategies for improvement. This empowering appropriation of their own learning and growth equips youth with dispositions toward self-correction that embrace humility and comfort with uncertainty rather than obstinacy and fear of failure. Applied to zining, this metacognitive, self-corrective attitude can help youth develop more resilience when tackling unfamiliar ideas and tasks, and better appraise the merits and shortcomings of their work. Further, with the help of adults, they can learn to interpret the intentions, motivations and assumptions behind their various creative outputs, allowing them to become more aware of how various media enable different types of voice.

In short, despite considerable challenges that deserve attention, the issue of adult authority need not be a threat to zining as an extension of the CPI model provided the adults who take on the task of designing a voice space for youth consider and implement conditions like those suggested above, and remain willing to assess their own capacities as facilitative guides.

## Conclusion

In this article, I have aimed to justify an alliance between zining and youth-driven philosophical inquiry in order to illustrate how the spirit of zining can provide youth with invaluable opportunities to ingrain the existential meaning of their philosophical experimentation through greater opportunities for thoughtful expression. I have highlighted the shared ethos between zining and philosophical inquiry as practices that endeavour to create a space for unfiltered voices to engage in meaning-making, emphasizing their common participatory, DIY, experimental, politicizing and transformative features. I have argued that zining and its notion of marginalized voices can contribute to the re-envisioning of childhood that P4C has enabled by portraying youth as capable cultural producers and social historians of their own discourse communities. Lastly, I have explored the issues of adult authority that complicate the ethos of zining and philosophical inquiry when extended to youth, suggesting conditions that may help to authenticate the use of zines within the CPI model. If designed with care, the deliberate voices spaces I have presented may bring great advantages to youth, including increased access to multiple ways of learning through interdisciplinary projects, more equalized relationships with adults, a range of creative and thinking dispositions that can enhance their self-efficacy, and a genuine sense that their voices matter. To my mind, such spaces can legitimize their sense of wonder, thus paving the way for their thoughtful voices to emerge and be strengthened. Hybrid formats like Brila's philozines can serve as memorable evidence of youth's collaborative thinking journey—tangible proof of their consonance of minds. These philosophical artifacts have the potential to affect how childhood is envisioned and experienced, and how dynamics between youth and adults are designed. As ambassadors for voice, zining and philosophical inquiry have much to teach one another, especially with regard to depicting youth as capable, considerate thinkers with ideas worth sharing. To borrow from Duncombe (2008), "although the world of zines operates on the margins of society, its concerns are common to all: how to count as an individual; how to build a supportive community; how to have a meaningful life; how to create something that is yours" (p. 19).





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