DECSY AGM, 4th May at 4.30pm

Ethical enquiry and the importance of freedom and responsibility

**Abstract**:

Ethical enquiry involves creating an environment of freedom and responsibility — with respect to what we believe to be true and what we do as a result.

A learner engaged in ethical enquiry is free insofar as they are not constrained by the teacher’s plan for the dialogue, nor are they engaged in a game of guessing what the teacher wants to hear. The teacher’s ethical views, however sincere and well-founded, are simply not the subject of the enquiry at all. Instead the focus is on helping a community of students to think together and think for themselves, so that each can arrive at their own view, and acquire the skills needed to navigate new ethical issues in the future with independence. Yet, this freedom comes with significant responsibility. When students are liberated from what we might think of as the script on certain ethical issues, they sometimes arrive at ideas that undermine their existing ethical commitments or reveal ways in which their views are incomplete or inconsistent. Some of their thoughts they have may have the power to hurt others. When this happens, they must also take responsibility for their thinking, recognising when there is more work to do, either in further dialogue or in action. By taking responsibility for their explorations, participants in a community of enquiry realise that they are not free to say anything at any cost. The perspectives shared should rest on sincere and well-justified foundations and should take account of the implications for others.

As students begin to see the connection between playing freely with ideas about what is true and what is right, while at the same time, taking responsibility for demanding evidence and accepting consequences, it becomes more obvious that the freedom and responsibility cultivated in P4C is both ethical and epistemological.

Ethical enquiry can promote this vital freedom and responsibility to a greater or lesser degree. Sometimes ethical instruction can masquerade as enquiry, only to direct children towards certain pre-determined conclusions through the use of leading questions and moralising stimuli. Elsewhere, ethical enquiry can satisfy the requirement to be non-directive while at the same time remaining excessively intellectual with little concern to the relationship between thoughts, feelings and actions.

This short talk will explore some of the ways to optimise freedom and responsibility drawing on some examples of dialogue with children around the climate and ecological emergency.

**Speaker** **Biography - Grace Lockrobin** - *BA (Hons), MA, FHEA, PhD Candidate*

Grace is Co-Director of the national charity SAPERE. Founded in 1992, SAPERE introduces educators to P4C — a philosophical pedagogy that encourages learners to be critical, creative caring and collaborative thinkers.

Grace is also the founder of the public philosophy not-for-profit Thinking Space; a Board Member of the European philosophy network SOPHIA and a member of the editorial board of the Journal of Philosophy in Schools.

Until recently, she was also a Teaching Fellow at the University of Leeds, where she ran a philosophy outreach project with local schools and was awarded a Fellowship of Advance HE.

Grace is currently writing up a PhD in Philosophy of Education at University College London’s Institute of Education where she was awarded an Economic and Social Research Council scholarship. Her research is on ethics education and the importance of philosophical enquiry through stories.

Grace’s co-edited book *Philosophy and Community: Theories, Practices and Possibilities* was recently published by Bloomsbury.

Grace lives in Sheffield with her husband and two young sons.