Philosophy Bakes Bread, Episode Thirteen with Dr. Lone

"Philosophy for Children"

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[Intro music]

Announcer: This podcast is brought to you by WRFL: Radio Free Lexington. Find us online at wrfl.fm. Catch us on your FM radio while you're in central Kentucky at 88.1 FM, *all the way to the left*. Thank you for listening, and please be sure to subscribe.

[Theme music]

Dr. Weber: Hey everybody, this is Dr. Eric Thomas Weber here at WRFL Lexington, 88.1 FM, all the way to the left on the radio dial. It's a little after 2, 2:03, 2:04, something like that. You're in for episode 13 of *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. Today is a special episode too. We are not only going to have our regular show that runs anywhere from 2 to 3 or 3:15-ish, but after the show we have a special segment that is going to be, at least when it comes out later digitally, it's going to be separate from the episode in terms of how we distribute it. We call this a breadcrumb because it's philosophy bakes bread. We're going to have a short segment, maybe 6 minutes long or something like that, where we have a bonus feature afterwards. Anyway, without too much further ado, again this is Dr. Eric Weber here, and you can reach out to us in a number of ways you'll hear about momentarily. Today's episode is with Dr. Jana Mohr Lone on philosophy for children. I hope you enjoy. Give a listen and get in touch with us in the ways that we are going to suggest to you on the show. Thanks for listening to WRFL Lexington and to *Philosophy Bakes Bread*.

[Theme music]

Dr. Weber: Hello and welcome to *Philosophy Bakes Bread:* food for thought about life and leadership, a production of the Society of Philosophers in America, AKA SOPHIA. I'm Dr. Eric Thomas Weber.

Dr. Cashio: And I'm Dr. Anthony Cashio. A famous phrase says that philosophy bakes no bread, that it's not practical. We here at SOPHIA and on this show aim to correct that misperception.

Dr. Weber: Philosophy Bakes Bread airs on WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, and is recorded and distributed as a podcast next, so if you can't catch us live on the hope you'll reach out to us on any of the topics we raise, or on topics you want us to bring up. Plus, we have a segment called "You Tell Me!" Listen for it, and let us know what you think.

Dr. Cashio: You can reach us in a number of ways. We are on twitter as @PhilosophyBB, which, if you can't figure it out, stands for Philosophy Bakes Bread. We're also on Facebook at Philosophy Bakes Bread, and check out SOPHIA's Facebook page while you're there.

Dr. Weber: In addition, you can email us at philosophybakesbread@gmail.com, or can call us and leave a short, recorded message with a question, or a comment, or bountiful praise that we may be able to play on the show at 859-257-1849. 859-257-1849.

Dr. Cashio: On today's show, we are very fortunate to be joined by Dr. Jana Mohr Lone. Dr. Lone is the director and founder of the University of Washington's Center for Philosophy For Children. You can do philosophy for children? The center brings philosophers and student trained in philosophy into K-12 public school classrooms to facilitate philosophy classes.

Dr. Weber: Indeed. Dr. Lone is also the author of *The Philosophical child*, which explores ways that parents and other adults can stimulate philosophical conversations about children's questions. She is also the co-author of *Philosophy in Education: Questioning and Dialogue in Schools,* and co-editor of *Philosophy and Education: Introducing Philosophy to Young People,* which examines various issues involved in teaching philosophy to young people. A frequent writer and speaker about pre-college philosophy, Jana is the president of Plato: Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization, past chair of the American Philosophical Association's committee on pre-college instruction in philosophy, and the founding editor-in-chief of the journal *Questions: Philosophy for Young People.*

Dr. Cashio: Thank you for joining us today, Dr. Lone. How are you doing?

Dr. Lone: I'm doing fine. Happy to be here.

Dr. Cashio: Well, we are really excited to have you. This topic of philosophy for children has come up in a number of our episodes and we've had a couple of emails and questions about it and this is quite relevant to the wider public. That, and the president of Ireland spoke out about the need for philosophical instruction in public education. We'll come back to these subjects, but our first segment is called "Know thyself". We want to know about you. We want to know how you came to be interested in philosophy, how you came to be, what you think about philosophy, and maybe how you approach teaching philosophy to others.

Dr. Lone: Okay. I came to philosophy as a high school student. I went ato a public high school in New York, and my senior year of high school, our history teacher decided to teach a philosophy class for the first time. I took it and it was pretty transformative, mainly I think because I realized that I thought about these questions, many of the questions that we addressed all the time and had thought about them for a long time but had no idea what philosophy was or that there was a discipline devoted to these subjects that you could really spend your time as a student studying these subjects. That led me to become a philosophy major in college. My own work in philosophy in college was very tight. I became very involved in feminism and did a lot of work with women and kids, around domestic violence and family violence in particular because I was really interested in questions of justice and fairness and et cetera. Then I decided, I went to law school, which was kind of the plan all along, before I had ever discovered philosophy

because I would watch *To Kill A Mockingbird* when I was 10 years old and decided that's what I wanted to do. I went to law school and practiced law for quite a while. While practicing law, I really missed philosophy. I was practicing at a law firm in Seattle and decided to start taking philosophy classes at the University of Washington and ended up doing my masters and then decided, when I had my first child, that I really wanted to do something other than law, to do the work I was doing. As a lawyer, I was involved again with working on women's rights and children's rights, and I found that although the law is a really powerful force for making change in the broader social aspect of people's lives, it is not really well-suited to empowering individuals, at least not children in particular. I was really interested working with the children with whom I was working to think about ways to empower children to be able to take control over their own lives, to develop the confidence and skills that they needed to change the conditions of their lives or the ways in which their lives were expected to go. I became really interested in education and decided, I had my first child and decided I'm in love with philosophy, the department is encouraging me to get my Ph.D., and so I start working to get my Ph.D. in philosophy of law.

Around the time I was getting close to finishing the dissertation, my oldest son, I have three boys, and my oldest son was then four, and he started asking me these questions, "Are numbers real? Can you be happy and sad at the same time?" These are philosophical questions. I recognized them as such and began thinking about my own childhood and the ways in which I had thought about big questions like these from the time I was pretty young. I though, OK, is it something genetic just in my family? Or are there other children who are also interested in exploring questions like this. I talked Will's kindergarten teacher into letting me come in and do some philosophy sessions with kindergarten students, which was actually pretty nerve-racking the first time, because I had taught undergraduates but never kids, and of course it is a very different experience. But it was fabulous. I go into the class and I bring...As an aside, one of the joys of being a parent was discovering how philosophically suggestive picture books are. It seems apparent that children's book authors recognize children's philosophical capabilities, in a way most of the rest of us adults miss. One of the children's authors who I love is Arnold Lobel and his *Frog and Toad* stories, which are almost always philosophical. Interesting. So I brought in one of his stories called *Dragons and Giants*, which raises questions about bravery. We had this lovely conversation for about 20 minutes or so about kindergarten students about what it means to be brave.

It was really clear that the kids were really interested in talking about this and that it was something that they thought about: Can you be afraid and be brave at the same time? Does bravery involve fear because is bravery about overcoming fear? Can you actually be brave if you are not afraid? Et cetera. That really led me down the path to thinking that this is putting together everything I want to do, because I love philosophy, philosophy has been such an empowering and enriching part of my own life, and also understanding that philosophy, because it deals with unsettled questions, can really be a vehicle for children to have a lot of space to explore their own ideas and questions and thereby gain the confidence to learn to trust their own judgments, to develop the skills, to articulate their judgments, to give good reasons for their views, to understand what kind of gaps there are in their thinking about various issues. I think those skills are maybe the most important gifts we can give to children because if you can think well and you trust your own judgments and thoughts and ideas, that's a pretty powerful way to go through life. That's how I ended up on the path that I'm on.

Dr. Weber: Wonderful. I've got two questions for you that are somewhat related. The first is that you mentioned that when you were young, you asked a lot of these questions. I'm curious to know what questions you were asking yourself before you knew to call them philosophical. On the flip side of all this, what do you take philosophy to be? When you say those questions were philosophical, what do you take philosophy to be, such that we can understand those questions as philosophical?

Dr. Lone: The first question is an easier question so I'll start with that one. The questions that I remember asking myself as, say an elementary school child were questions like "What's the reason I'm here? What's the purpose of my life? What am I supposed to do with my life? Why do people die? IS life fair?" Those kinds of big metaphysical and ethical questions. I find that actually elementary school kids, when I ask them what their big questions are, those kinds of questions come up pretty regularly. On the second question, when I think about what philosophy is, which of course is itself a philosophical question, because we philosophers don't necessarily agree on the answer to that question. I think of it as the field that explores questions that have not been finally settled. Questions that strike at the heart of the human condition in all sorts of ways. Ethical questions, questions about knowledge, questions about beauty, questions about nature, et cetera. They are questions that we think about because they are innately puzzling and we aren't able to finally resolve them.

Maybe we make progress, we feel like our answers are getting better, our reasoning about around these qu3estions, at least some of them get better over time, but they are probably, many of them at least, are perennially going to be unsettled. For me, philosophy is a pretty broad part of life. One of the things that was frustrating to me when I was a graduate student was that philosophy, at least in some of the classes I was taking, seemed to me to be getting more narrow and focusing on questions that were pretty specialized. While I saw the value in that kind of very complex and rigorous analysis, I also saw that some of the subjects tackled were going to be of interest to very few people. One of my fears has been that philosophy becomes this sort of narrow, specialized field only. That's one route for philosophy. The other, and the thing I'm more interested in, is philosophy as a part of life. Philosophy is something that we all do. You don't need a PHD to know if someone is a good friend, or to know what the right thing to do is. It's part of being a human being. For me, philosophy is a pretty broad slice of life and something that for example, children can do, and all adults can do. It's not something that is limited to someone who has specialized training. That's one way to do philosophy, but it's not the only way or even necessarily the best way to do it.

Dr. Cashio: Have life, have experience and have some curiosity and you're good to go.

Dr. Weber: I like to remind people that Socrates had no PHD.

Dr. Lone: Right. He didn't write anything and he had no PHD.

Dr. Cashio: It didn't end very well for him either.

(laughter)

Dr. Weber: Or did it? Well he also spoke with people out in public about things that mattered to the public and engaged with anyone in serious discussion. I like to remind people that because I had a conversation with a new friend of mine who hasn't had a chance to go to college, and I was telling him about the radio show and maybe the fact of his non-exposure to philosophy classes, and that's what I said to him. I said that Socrates took no philosophy classes,

and yet we've learned from him. On that note, thank you so much. I appreciate learning about you and about your experience and your background in philosophy. We're going to come back after a short break with Dr. Jana Mohr Lone, me, Eric Thomas Weber and my co-host Dr. Anthony Cashio. Thank you everybody for listening to *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. We'll be right back.

Dr. Cashio: Welcome back, everyone to *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. This is Dr. Anthony Cashio and Dr. Eric Weber and today we are here talking with Dr. Jana Mohr Lone. We are discussing doing philosophy for and with, and maybe a little bit about children. Jana, the other day, I have two children of my own, and we're sitting with the dinner table, and we do a thing everyday where I say "OK, you can ask any question you want, one quet4sion a day." They ask it. It's usually like "How does this work? How does that work?" Something that we can look up or answer. A few nights ago my five year old my daughter looks at me and goes, "Can you teach me philosophy? Can you do philosophy?" I was like, Oh boy! I'm glad we're having Dr. Lone on the show today. I did my best to do it, but I think you're right. Philosophy for children. What drew you to doing this? I know you have talked about getting into this. We're hoping you can say, why philosophy for children? What drew you to this? Is philosophy different for children than it is for adults?

Dr. Lone: I think what drew me to it once I started doing it and has kept me in it is how much I learn from doing philosophy with children, because although adults who engage in philosophical inquiry, we often approach philosophy with a greater language sophistication, maybe greater conceptual skills, maybe greater life experience. Children approach it with a wide open-ness to the questions. They throw themselves into thinking about philosophical questions without a lot of self-consciousness, without a lot of worry whether they are going to sound smart enough or sophisticated enough. They are not too interested in that. They are very playful with ideas. One of the things that I think is really important in philosophy is imaginative energy to approach philosophical questions without assuming that you already know the answers, trying to keep under wraps all of the things you already think you know, trying to keep your assumptions to a minimum. Children don't come into this with the belief that they already know a bunch of things. They are pretty tentative about knowledge claims. But they are very open to thinking about big questions because they are really curious about them. They haven't yet absorbed the message that it's not a productive way to spend you time. They are really open to spending time thinking about how we know things or what makes someone a friend, et cetera. They have this kind of freshness of perspective, and are often really honest. They will say what comes into their minds without worry of both, that it might sound really silly, or that it might be offensive. They wouldn't really think of that. They are also really willing to self-correct.

I would say almost every class I teach, but certainly many of them, a child will say something like, "That's really interesting. I think I've changed my mind about that." That's such a refreshing place to be, because adults have a much harder time with that, at least in my own experience, than kids do. In terms of why philosophy for children, I would say there are four reasons that come to me. The first is the obvious one. Critical and creative thinking. Philosophy is a very rigorous thinking discipline. You have to learn how to give good reasons, you have to be willing to defend those reasons against views that differ from your own. You have to be willing to anticipate why someone might disagree. It really pushes you to think very clearly and analytically. Second, because philosophy, as I said earlier, deals with unsettled questions, children absorb the message that there are many ways to see the world. You could ask the question "What makes someone a good friend?" I could talk about trust and connection and

someone else could talk about liking to do the same things and enjoying spending time together. We might have very different conceptions of what makes someone a good friend, but one of us doesn't have to be wrong and one of us doesn't have to be right. There are many ways to see this question, and I think children come away understanding that there are a lot of perspectives that make up the world and you can hold fast to your own while recognizing that there are other equally valid ways to see these issues. Particularly at this time in human history, that's a really important thing for things to be learning. Third, I think that one of the surviving acceptable prejudices in our society is prejudice towards children. The belief that because someone is a child, what they are saying is by the fact that they are a child, less valuable than if I said it or you said it. We tend to both underestimate children's capacities for philosophical thinking and then because of that not even hear them when they express profound or interesting philosophical ideas. For children, having the experience of really being listened to and taken seriously, both by the philosophy teacher but also and probably even more importantly, by other students, is a really powerful experience for kids. It really helps them to develop confidence in their own voices and skills in articulating what it is they want to say. Then finally, and maybe this is, for me, the most important reason and answer to the question of why philosophy is for children, and that is that I think wondering is really important. Children spend a lot of time wondering about the world. As we grow up, we absorb the message that that maybe isn't the best way to spend our time. Affirming for children that this is an important way to spend your time, that wondering is part of being a human being, it's a valuable part of you and you should keep developing it and keep it alive. I think that's a really important message to send to children. Philosophy does a uniquely valuable job of sending that message.

Dr. Cashio: It also sounds like it is just fun to do, frankly.

Dr. Lone: It is really fun to do. That is for sure.

Dr. Cashio: I ended up talking to my daughter about friendship, so that makes me very happy that that was an example that you used. I did it right!

Dr. Weber: It's certainly accessible. That's a good topic. In what you've said, Jana, there's a concern that some people have raised in the past number of years. In particular there was a story where a particular Texas GOP platform ended up having information in the platform that apparently wasn't supposed to end up in there, but it was an expression of opposition to the teaching of critical thinking in K-12 education, ended up in the GOP platform. There was a PR spokesperson who said that wasn't supposed to end up in there.

Dr. Cashio: What was the argument there? Why no critical thinking, Eric?

Dr. Weber: The argument essentially was that this is something which undermines parental authority. I wonder what you say to someone who is concerned about teaching kids to think critically and to question authority. How should people who are deeply concerned about parental authority think about the desire of these wacky subversive philosophers who want to undermine their teachings for their kids? What would you say to a concerned parent who is not so sure they want a philosopher in their kindergarten class. What would you say to such a parent?

Dr. Lone: First of all I would say that I don't think this is wacky or subversive, and I don't think of myself as either really, wacky or subversive. Children learning to think clearly is such an important skill for them to have. The fact of the matter is that for parents or educators, we don't

have control over all of the information that is coming to our children. The older they get, the less control we have. We want to teach them certain values, certain ideals that we hope and we cherish. We also need to recognize that we can't cover everything. We want them to learn how to be good thinkers so that when information comes to them that we really would want them to question, they know how to do it. We can't give them an encyclopedia of knowledge to answer every question that they are going to have in their life. We need to give them some skills with which to approach the world as it is going to come at them. As a parent, I would say having spent a lot of time with my own three kids talking about philosophical questions to the point that sometimes one of my boys would say, "OK mom, could you just answer the question? Do we have to have a philosophical conversation? Answer the question!" (laughter) I still had no trouble saying "No, you can't stay out until 2 in the morning. No, you need to be able to finish your schoolwork before you get on the computer," or whatever. To me that's about boundaries. That's about being clear about your role in your child's life. That's a different question to me than the ability to engage in philosophical discussions with you child. That doesn't have to make you their best friend or allow them to fudge all of the boundaries between who is the authority and who is the child. That said, I think we should be questioning for ourselves where the right boundaries are. There are a lot of kids in our society who are really disempowered, who are in situations that are dangerous, neglectful et cetera, and who aren't given the tools to get themselves out of these situations, to know how to seek help, what questions to ask, et cetera. We want to be careful about positing all adults as the authorities and all kids as the obedient subjects because there is some real danger in that.

Dr. Cashio: In all of your working with children, through all of these different grade levels, have you found any, you said you learned things from them all the time. Are there any particular surprising philosophical insights that jumped out to you like, "Oh that's really good. I'm going to write that down and keep that," that you mind sharing with us?

Dr. Lone: All the time. I keep a list of quotes that kids say that are really provocative and so actually I have some here.

Dr. Weber: Excellent.

Dr. Lone: Here is one from a second-grade student, so probably eight years old. "It's what you think that makes you who you are." Here's one, we were having a conversation one day in a fourth-grade class about the nature of love, and the question came up, "Can you understand love if you haven't experienced hate?" The students had this whole conversation about how if you love everything, love becomes meaningless. You have to have something to compare love to in order to really understand that it's love and a student said, "Well, I don't know about that. Maybe you have to understand not feeling anything to understand love. But hate is much more similar to love than not feeling anything", and then said, "Love and hate, actually, are really almost the same thing." That's a fourth grader. Another quick example, this week I taught a 5th grade class on Tuesday, and we were having a conversation about the nature of home, so what makes something a home. We started off, some of the students talked about a place where you are comfortable, a place where you can feel like yourself, one student said. You can be yourself without worrying that people are going to judge you. Some of the other students said, "I don't actually think home is about place at all because you can be homeless, you could not have a shelter to live in, and you could still be surrounded by people who care about you and are trying to help you and when you come to wherever it is that those people are, you could feel at home even if you didn't have a permanent home." Other students said, "You could have lots of houses,

you could be someone with a lot of resources and lots of houses and have nowhere that really feels like home because there is nowhere where you feel safe and comfortable and connected." Those were pretty powerful insights, I thought.

Dr. Weber: No kidding. That's a great spot for us to say that we'll be right back in just a moment after a short break, with Dr. Jana Mohr Lone with my co-host Dr. Anthony Cashio. This is Dr. Eric Weber. Thanks everybody for listening to *Philosophy Bakes Bread*.

Dr. Cashio: Welcome back, everyone. This is Dr. Anthony Cashio here with Dr. Eric Weber on *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. Today we are talking with Dr. Jana Lone. We are very lucky to have her on the show. We are discussing how to engage philosophically with children. It has been an exciting discussion so far, and I think we can get a lot more out of this too. What do you think, Eric?

Dr. Weber: Indeed. I think actually, I want to ask the first question of the segment. Exactly how do you go about your engagement in doing philosophy with children? Surely there are some ways in which there is different—vocab is going to be different surely, as well as maybe some methods. Do you focus on stories more? How do you engage in philosophy with children if it's in any way different from work with adults who are in undergraduate or elsewhere?

Dr. Lone: I think it's quite different because typically in an undergraduate philosophy class for example, which is where most people first are introduced to philosophy, usually we spend a lot of time teaching arguments made by historical or contemporary philosophers and make sure the students understand the arguments that have traditionally been made over various issues or topics. Whereas with children, we certainly don't go into a second-grade class and try to teach Descartes' dream argument or something like that. We don't go in with much of an agenda at all. It's very different in that way. We go in typically with some kind of prompt. I'm a big fan of picture books and children's literature, so I use that quite a bit. We might also have an activity or a game or an art activity or something else that we think will spur philosophical thinking. Then we typically ask the children, "What questions does this make you wonder about?" The subject that becomes the topic of discussion really emerges from what the children say. Even if we come in with an activity that we think will be about friendship, for example, the children might veer it off into something that has very little to do with friendship. I'll come in and think they're going to talk about free will after hearing this story, but in fact they end up wanting to talk about something completely different, like how do we know things about the world, or whatever. The idea is not to teach children philosophy, it's really to encourage their own philosophical thinking.

We want the children to learn to express their ideas to start to see what questions underlie other questions and how when you ask a question it often raises related and multiple other questions. We want children to be able to learn to follow the thread of a conversation, to respond to each others' thoughts. We are there to facilitate the dialogue and to keep it philosophical, to keep asking questions that push at what the children are saying. We're not there to teach a specific subject or to give them a sense of what philosophers in the past have said about the nature of beauty or what have you. It really is very different and I would say that one of the challenges for both educators and for parents is to be able to step back a little bit and let the child lead. Not to come in and say, "Didn't you think that raised interesting questions about dreams. Why do you think we dream? I think we dream because blah blah blah". Take it

from where the child wants to go and really give the child a lot of space. A, you don't want to push a discussions that the child is not interested in or isn't ready for, and B, this isn't about how philosophically sophisticated or skilled you are, it's really about helping them to think philosophically. It's less about teaching philosophy and more about engaging in philosophical thinking.

Dr. Cashio: That's good. When you are thinking about topics or ways to approach it, are there things that just shouldn't do? Are there topics you shouldn't touch on, that you should try to avoid discussing with children? Something maybe that you have discovered that we shouldn't get into?

Dr. Lone: Not in my view. Probably not everyone would agree with me on that, but I have a pretty robust sense of trust in kids and they are able to carry on conversations on pretty sensitive issues in thoughtful ways. You want to keep it philosophical, so if for example the conversation veers into questions that touch on religion or God, you would certainly want to make sure that the conversation wasn't about "Is this religion better than that one?" I've actually never even see that happen, because in my experience kids understand that this is about talking about...for example I had a conversation not too long ago with a group of second-graders where we were talking, I'm trying to remember what the question was. I think it was something like, "Could the world have begun without a beginning?" or something like that, and one second-grader said, "OK this is going to go nowhere, because some people are going to say that God created the world and some people are going to say that there is no such thing as God and we're just going to start fighting and this is not going to go anywhere." It was really interesting to watch this meta-conversation happen for the second-graders because another second-grade student said, "I disagree. I think we can have this conversation because even if you believe in God, you still have the question "Where did God come from? Could there be God and God just always existed?", which is kind of a similar thing to asking "Could the world have always existed?" I just watch the kids without me having to do much of anything, just take it on in a way that was really sensitive, really thoughtful, and seemed to provide a level of comfort for everyone no matter from what perspective they were coming at the question. My own experience is no. I do not avoid subjects. Kids want to talk about things like death for example, which is another subject that people shy away from, but if you ask a set of elementary school kids, "What are the most important you think about?" death is always on the list.

Dr. Cashio: When my son was in kindergarten one day he just looks at me and goes, "Dad, one day you're going to grow old and die." I was like, "Thanks son. I really needed to remember that." They are definitely thinking about it.

Dr. Weber: The conversation you describe is fascinating because I remember loving learning about Aristotle on the notion of "Could time have begun?" My understanding of his answer is that that would mean that there is a time at which or before which there wasn't time. He thought it was conceptually confused that there be a start to time. But the notion that you have second-grade students coming to something like that kind of insight, thinking "If God created the world, where did God come from?" is a fairly similar kind of notion, in a way. That's fairly brilliant.

Dr. Lone: One of the things that is very interesting in that those of us involved in this work talk about all the time is the way children will sometimes recreate the history of philosophy. I had a student in one class basically re-create Descartes' argument "I think therefore I am" when we were talking about how you could know anything. Kids were saying all kinds of things and then

she said, “Well, I’m thinking, so I know I must be thinking and so something exists that is thinking” and I was like “Oh my God!”

Dr. Weber: No way. That is impressive. You’ve mentioned that you don’t really shy away from topics. I wonder about, though, how direct and honest you might be about some things if you might get asked, for instance, about “Is Santa Claus real?” How do you think about and address those sorts of questions?

Dr. Cashio: We’re going to have to put a disclaimer at the top of this show. (laughter) By the way, we were preparing for this and he asked me that question right as my son was walking in the room. (laughter)

Dr. Lone: First of all, I try really hard to not give the students my own point of view in general, because students, especially elementary school children, who are the ones with whom I work the most...they really are trained to think that what the teacher thinks must be right. I’m really careful about if someone asks me “Is Santa Claus real?” for example, I’m way more inclined to say “What do you think?” than I am to answer directly because I think that I’m not there to give them my philosophical views about the world. Second, I would say, at least in my experience in that topic in particular, kids are so sensitive. Kids who know that Santa Claus is not real in the world know that there are other kids in the class that don’t know that yet and they are really careful about it.

Dr. Cashio: That’s a different situation than I was in. everyone couldn’t wait to tell when I was a kid.

Dr. Lone: That’s interesting. No, in my experience it’s not that way at all, at least not in the classroom. Maybe there is stuff going on when I am not around that I don’t know about. It sure doesn’t seem that way to me. I would leave that, if that question came up, I would see where the kids took it.

Dr. Weber: So in that sense it’s not that there is subject matter that shouldn’t be broached, but rather that you try to avoid being a source of knowledge and rather stimulate them into questioning and thinking.

Dr. Lone: Yeah. I think of myself as the source of philosophical sensitivity, recognizing when a conversation could go more deeply and knowing how to ask good questions to help the kids take it there but not the source of philosophical wisdom. It’s not that I’m going to come in and tell them here is how you should think about knowledge or here is how you think about truth or whatever. Quite to the contrary. It’s very careful about being completely self-effacing about my own views.

Dr. Cashio: This seems like really good and important work you are doing, and you mentioned before we even began recording that is used to be that people didn’t pay attention to that much, but now it has become a really hot topic. What do you think has changed? Why is suddenly everyone very interested in this philosophy for children?

Dr. Lone: It is really interesting and I will say so. I started the center when I was finishing my PHD about 20 years ago and I had a faculty in my department tell me I was committing “career suicide”, that this was not a legitimate area of philosophy, et cetera. I now have really seen quite a turnaround. My department has always been really...despite a couple people who were very skeptical, in general the department has been really supportive of this work because I started

this center as not part of the university. I started it as an independent 501C3, an independent nonprofit organization, thinking that we needed some autonomy from the university, and then the university really approached us about becoming part of the university. We have had a great support all of these years from the University of Washington, but there was almost nothing going on in this country, or very little, around doing philosophy with kids. Certainly the main academics in the philosophical world were completely uninterested in this work and thought of it as sort of a baby philosophy. I've heard all that kind of stuff. I think there is a couple of think. One, things are changing. The discipline is becoming more diverse. There's a wider range of philosophical interests that are considered legitimate than there used to be. This is one of them. I think second, as you know, the job market for philosophy PHDs in the academy is pretty dismal, and so universities are looking to widen what the possibilities might be for people interested in getting higher education in philosophy who aren't going to or don't want to become tenure-track philosophy professors. I think there is a real interest in broadening the reach of philosophy, which has been really great for us in pre-college philosophy fields.

Dr. Weber: Well we have one more segment that we'll conclude our interview with Dr. Jana Mohr Lone. Thank you so much for all that you have been teaching and telling us about. We look forward to talking with you one more time after this short break that is about to come. Me, Dr. Eric Weber with my co-host Dr. Anthony Cashio. Thank you everybody for listening to *Philosophy Bakes Bread*.

Dr. Cashio: Welcome back, everybody to *Philosophy Bakes Bread*. This is Dr. Anthony Cashio with Dr. Eric Weber and Dr. Jana Lone. Today we have been talking about doing philosophy with children and about children, and philosophical engagement with children. I have found it to be a great conversation so far. In this last segment, we're going to wrap it up with some big-picture questions, some light-hearted thoughts, and I think we'll end with a pressing philosophical question for our listeners as well as info about how to get a hold of us at the end of this show.

Dr. Weber: Thank you so much for talking with us and being here, Jana.

Dr. Lone: You're welcome. It's been a pleasure.

Dr. Weber: In the last segment, we concluded with a few thoughts about perhaps some of the reasons why the field has changed and people today seem to be very interested in philosophy for children and with children and so forth. One of the theories I didn't hear, I wonder what you think about, is actually in relation to your answer. You mentioned that there is diversification in the philosophical field. It is long been a prejudice which has suggested that things involving children are women's work and the field of philosophy has been so overwhelmingly male for so long. I wonder whether you would say something about, I'm postulating here, but it seems plausible to me anyway to say that the disfavor of the initial work in philosophy for children might have faced had to do with that kind of prejudice, that pushback. Do you suspect that the diversification to women in the field is part of it? Do you think that we are seeing, therefore, progress when people are realizing how much there is that is serious and important in working with children?

Dr. Lone: That's interesting. I'm not sure what I think about that, actually. I think what it might have more to do with in my own mind is the growing equality in parenting. More and

more men are involved with children in intimate ways, in ways that weren't much true 50 years ago. Although it's true that there is more diversity in the philosophy profession, I would say in the pre-college field, there's lots, it's not like it's mostly women. There's lots of men involved in it. I think it's maybe a confluence of things. It's that the field has gotten more diverse, certainly there are more women and a greater awareness that the traditional areas of philosophy aren't the only areas worthy of investigation. There's that. When I think about some of the pioneers of philosophy for children, for example Gareth Matthews and Matt Lippman, both older white men who were nevertheless really drawn to this and have created really wonderful bodies of work that have helped those of us who've come after them to be able to launch into this work and take it further. I'm hesitant about attributing it to one thing or the other. I think there are a lot of things that are changing in philosophy. It's still pretty slow. Philosophy is still a pretty traditional field in a lot of places. For example, I don't think at this point, there are any places where you can yet do, and I could be wrong about this, but I think I am not, where you can do PHD dissertation work on philosophy for children. You can do it in colleges of education, but I don't know of any departments of philosophy where you can do a dissertation in pre-college philosophy at this point. That's kind of interesting. I think that will change, and it's already changing. But like I say, it really is still a new field and still on the edge. In a way, that's not a terrible thing. It has allowed those of us in the field to be pretty imaginative and open about what this field means and where we can take it and not necessarily be tied to the academy in the way that some fields of philosophy have been. Like everything, there have been some benefits to being on the periphery, even though lack of resources is not one of the benefits, obviously.

Dr. Weber: It's always nice to hear a more sophisticated answer than something too simple. When there are histories of discrimination and such, there are just things that we want to wonder about and attend to them. I think that's a very interesting point about how men are more involved in the raising of children. I think that's almost surely true, and therefore probably a part of it anyway.

Dr. Cashio: My children will be joining me in my office shortly. It's about to happen. For those who are listening to this who think, "Oh man, this is something I would like to get involved with." Is there a good place they can go for resources? Where does one start teaching themselves how to help facilitate this?

Dr. Lone: I would say there's several websites, including our center's website. We have more than 100 something lesson plans for picture books and children's literature as well as games and activities that you can use, and access to other reference books like the books I've written and other books about how to do philosophy with kids, your own kids or in a classroom. PLATO, Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization, is another national organization with which I have been very involved, which has a really resource-rich website for getting people started with doing philosophy with kids. There is another website run by my colleague in PLATO Tom Wartenburg, called Teaching Children Philosophy, which also has lots of links to ways to use various children's books to engage philosophically with kids. Those are three websites that I think are particularly useful. We all have links to other things as well.

Dr. Cashio: Excellent. We'll put the links to those in the show notes as well for anyone who is interested.

Dr. Weber: Indeed, when it comes out as a podcast. That's right. One of the important final questions, it's not the last question, but among them, that we want to ask you is something that we ask from the inspiration of this show that philosophy bakes bread. We don't want to presume

that anyone who comes on this show agrees with that notion, that it does bake bread, but the question is: Would you say that philosophy bakes bread? Or that it could? Or that maybe some of it does and some of it doesn't? Or would you say that it doesn't? Either way, why? If you do think it bakes bread, I would also ask you to tell us, what do you say to the people that deny the fact? What would you say to that sort of question premised on the idea of this show?

Dr. Lone: Philosophy both bakes bread and doesn't bake bread. It bakes bread in the sense that it gives us very practical skills to use in the world like being able to question information that is presented to us as truth, giving us the skills to know what questions to ask, to recognize when there are unfounded assumptions being made. To see deeper questions behind what's being presented to us and being able to push at what's being presented to us. Those skills can be life-saving. They can really enable us to see risk and to refuse to engage in certain things that turn out to be really bad for us. Philosophy is very practical in that sense. On the other hand, there are aspects of philosophy that aren't about baking bread, that are about wondering about the world, which I think is not a practical skill in the way that baking bread is a practical skill. Those endeavors are equally important to baking bread. That's an important aspect of philosophy and I wouldn't want to lose that. I wouldn't want to look only at philosophy's instrumental value and talk about it in that way because I think we would lose some of the richness in what it means to engage in philosophical enquiry.

Dr. Cashio: Very good. I have a question. Just between us, you teach the K-12, is there a grade level that you like the best, that you just can't wait to meet with this grade?

Dr. Lone: It's so funny because I always answer that question and every year it's different depending on what I happen to be teaching. The last few years my sweet spot is 3rd, 4th and 5th grade, that late elementary school, because the kids are not doing any pre-philosophy skills. I like to think of them pre-philosophy skills, "How does that connect to what someone else said?" et cetera. They have already got all of that, and their language and conceptual skills have already developed. They haven't gotten to the point of middle school self-consciousness yet. They are not posturing for each other. They are still really just open to playing with ideas together. That's currently my sweetest spot for teaching philosophy.

Dr. Weber: I love that you have a favorite at this point. That's good.

Dr. Cashio: As you know, clearly we can be very serious about our philosophy, but we also like to show that philosophy has a light side. That's why I ask you that question. One of our last segment, we call it the unfortunately named 'philosophunnies'. Or fortunately. Eric's son right here:

Dr. Weber: Say 'philosophunnies'

Sam: Philosophunnies!

(laughter)

Dr. Weber: Say 'philosophunnies'

Sam: Philosophunnies!

(child's laughter)

Dr. Cashio: We would love to hear if you have a favorite joke or funny story. I imagine maybe from teaching with children, maybe a funny story or two, or something funny about philosophy in general.

Dr. Lone: Here is a funny story that in some ways I think of as us in pre-college philosophy making fun of ourselves a little bit. This is a story that a colleague Sarah Gerring tells. She has two kids, and when her youngest, her son Graham, was a preschooler, they were driving home from school one day, she and Graham and their daughter Ella, who is a little bit older. Graham says, "Mommy, am I free?" and Sarah is thinking "Wow, he's a preschooler asking me this question. So Ella says, "Well, you're not in school anymore, so I guess you're kind of free." He says, "No no no. Am I free though?" Sarah said "That's actually a really interesting question, Graham. It kind of depends on what you mean, like do you mean are you free not to go to school? Or do you mean like when you choose something? Are you really free to choose it?" He is listening to her and he pauses and he says, "Mommy, how old am I?" and she says three. He says, "Yeah, I'm 'free'." (laughter) Sometimes it isn't just philosophy.

Dr. Weber: That is funny. That is really good. Just because we want to make sure to be ready if someone doesn't have any, Anthony and I always grab a few jokes that we find. We have got a few silly ones that are actually jokes for or by kids. We thought we might add just a few more. Anthony, you want to tell the first one?

Dr. Cashio: Let's see what we got. What is black and white, black and white, black and white?

Dr. Weber: I don't know Anthony. What is black and white and black and white and black and white?

Dr. Cashio: A penguin rolling down a hill! (Laughter) I can say one of my kids' favorite joke. Knock knock.

Dr. Weber: Who is there?

Dr. Cashio: Interrupting cow.

Dr. Weber: Interrupting cow wh-

Dr. Cashio: Mooooo! (Laughter)

Dr. Weber: Question. What do you get when you cross a lake with a leaky boat?

Dr. Cashio: I don't know. What do you get?

Dr. Weber: About halfway. (Laughter) We got one more. Why don't we tell one more, Anthony?

Dr. Cashio: Why did the little girl give her pony cough syrup?

Dr. Weber: I don't know. Why did the little girl give her pony cough syrup?

Dr. Cashio: It was a little hoarse.

(laughter, rimshot)

Dr. Cashio: Last but not least, we do like to take advantage of the fact that we have access to all of you with powerful social media right at our fingertips, sitting in our pockets, on our desks that allows us to communicate with each other in amazing new ways even for programs like radio shows. We want to invite our listeners to send us their thoughts about these big questions that we raise on the show.

Dr. Weber: Given that, Jana, I wonder if you have a question that you propose we ask our listeners.

Dr. Lone: My question it: Why are we surprised when children express profound ideas?

Dr. Weber: Why are we surprised when children express profound ideas? There you have it, folk. We want to know what you think. Send us your thoughts about that.

Dr. Cashio: That is a good question. Thanks for listening to this episode of Philosophy Bakes Bread. We your hosts, Dr. Anthony Cashio and Dr. Eric Weber, are really grateful today to have been joined today by Dr. Jana Lone. Thank you again, Dr. Lone, for joining us. It has been a real pleasure.

Dr. Lone: Thank you for having me.

Dr. Cashio: We want to invite everyone to consider sending your thought about anything that you've heard today that you would like to hear about in the future, or about the specific questions that we have raised for you.

Dr. Weber: Once again, you can reach us in a number of ways. We're on twitter @PhilosophyBB, which surprisingly stands for Philosophy Bakes Bread. We're also on Facebook at Philosophy Bakes Bread, and check out our SOPHIA's Facebook page while you're there, at Philosophers in America.

Dr. Cashio: You can of course, email us at philosophybakesbread@gmail.com, and you can also call us and leave a short recorded message with a question or a comment or bountiful praise that we may be able to play on the show, at 859-257-1849. That's 859-257-1849. Join us again next time on *Philosophy Bakes Bread*: food for thought about life and leadership.

[Outro music]