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Coping with children's wit: Materials for a dialogical odyssey

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Abstract

In this paper we start by discussing how Philosophy for Children (P4C) was launched by Matthew Lipman (1922-2010) in the 1970s in order to establish philosophy as a fully-fledged school programme in the US, and has since become a movement which evolved through the last four decades, adopting different epistemological and pedagogical discourses (Vansieleghem & Kennedy, 2011). From philosophy for children we arrive at philosophy with children, swapping the fixed method for the modelling and coaching by communal reflection, contemplation and communication, thus giving a greater emphasis to dialogue, while opening up different approaches, methods, techniques and strategies. This is precisely the line of work we personally prefer, when it is articulated with Gareth Matthews' assumption that children can ask the same questions as philosophers do, and sometimes even better ones. Along the lines of Storme and Vlieghe (2001), we think that P4C can allow the child to be philosophical and philosophy childish, an understanding that perhaps can free us from the dominant one dimensional unproblematized realm of the ideology of productivity that envisages education as a process exclusively preparing persons for labour markets, understood as the set of positions gained in an operative and ruthlessly competitive battle. This offers a context where constructing existential meaning, by and for each individual, is excluded from education.

Keywords: Philosophy for children, song, tales, cinema.

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1. Introduction

Philosophy for Children (P4C) was launched by Matthew Lipman (1922–2010) in the 1970s in order to establish philosophy as a fully-fledged school programme in the US, and has since become a movement which has evolved through the last four decades, adopting different epistemological and pedagogical discourses (Vansieleghem & Kennedy, 2011). Lipman's novels covered the themes of identity, language, nature, perception, ambiguity and concepts, such as living a good life, logic and aesthetics. In 1974, Lipman also founded the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children, at Montclair State University, and in 1979 started the publication *Thinking: The Journal of Philosophy for Children*.

The first generation of the movement, precisely led by Lipman himself, placed some emphasis on a strategic uniformity of approach that focused on the development of critical thinking, following the pragmatic educational philosophy of John Dewey. That is why Lipman ended up inventing the genre of the philosophical novel for children, starting with *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery* (1974), which was followed by seven more, with different protagonists aimed at different educational levels. The first phase of the movement was strongly shaped by the intention to developing critical thinking as the ability to think reflectively about the consequences of ceaseless interaction with the environment, in order to enable pupils to become aware of the implications of their actions: 'critical thinking means being able to determine the facts or issues (including ideas, concepts and theories) that cause a problem in order to make hypotheses about how to solve it. Moreover, the logic of the development of knowledge in a given environment and the application of knowledge for the improvement of the quality of living became the horizon against which Lipman's Philosophy for Children programme took shape' (Vansieleghem & Kennedy, 2011, p. 174). The idea was to help children become more thoughtful, reflective, reasonable and judicious individuals in their actions.

One must also give some acknowledgement to Gareth Matthews' contribution to P4C; Matthews problematised the notion of childhood conceived merely as a prelude to adulthood, and criticised the traditional conception of education focused on the transfer of knowledge, which could underrate children's voices. Such an orientation strove for a symmetrical relation between adult and child, as equal companions in thought, thus abandoning the conception of philosophy *for* or *with* children, and assuming instead that children can ask the same questions as philosophers do, and sometimes even more interesting ones, when we give them the chance by entering dialogue with them. This led Matthews to criticise the Piagetian claim about children's inability to perform 'formal operations' and to remove the emphasis on logical thinking skills that aim to clarify inconsistencies or contradictions, and on critical thinking as an instrument of problem solving. P4C, rather, conceived of philosophy as a form of desire, through which children could 'explore and articulate what they have not said or even they have thought before' (ibid. 176). For his part, Englhart (1997) proposed a critical reflection on existing power relations through dialogue favouring multi-logical approaches.

The second generation of P4C tried to develop the original idea in order to adapt it to changing circumstances, namely, the postmodern critique of the assumptions about truth, universal reason, the rational subject and Lipman's stress on analytical skills, reasoning, categorising and ordering. Thus, P4C is now determined to achieve a new insight, as 'philosophy is not perceived primarily as a provider of skills or 'answers' —whether in the realm of fact or value—but as a site in which students can determine what the important questions for our time are, and where they can seek their own answers through the practice of thinking for themselves and with others in communal deliberation' (ibid. 178). From philosophy *for* children, we arrive at philosophy *with* children, swapping the fixed method for the modelling and coaching by communal reflection, contemplation and communication, thus giving a greater emphasis to dialogue, while opening up different approaches, methods, techniques and strategies. This is precisely the line of work we personally prefer, when it is articulated with Gareth Matthews' assumption that children can ask the same questions as philosophers do, and sometimes even better ones.

Along the lines of Storme and Vlieghe (2011), we think that P4C can allow the child to be philosophical and philosophy childish, an understanding that perhaps can free us from the dominant one-dimensional unproblematised realm of the ideology of productivity that envisages education as a process exclusively preparing persons for labour markets, understood as the set of positions gained in an operative and ruthlessly competitive battle.[a] This offers a context where constructing existential meaning, by and for each individual, is excluded from the education. But, if we understand philosophy as the art of creating concepts (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994), not subservient to some external logic, namely, the logic of usefulness and efficiency, then we can conceive of the philosopher as the friend of concept creation, or as a 'neotenic infant',[b] as the proper figures of its practice, due to the child's potentiality for 'openness, i.e., helplessness and rejection of any destiny' (Storme & Vlieghe, 2011, p. 195). This means being able to think anew, free from any heteronomous framework of thinking. In such a point of view, even adults have a lot to learn from children, as does philosophy itself, if it wants to escape obliteration within the landscape of the performative ideology that, as Lyotard (1979) prognosticated, would become dominant in our times.

2. Why philosophy for children?

Aside from the virtues that many have recognised in P4C, the project, to put it one way, has also been questioned. Some have raised objections because they believe that philosophical issues are beyond the reach of pre-adolescents; others assume that P4C will distract students from the core subjects of the curricula, while at the same time encouraging scepticism more than learning. In times of school ratings and standardised tests, a prevailing thought is that there is no time for such a 'useless' thing as 'drifting speculation'. However, we could argue that philosophical inquiry has the power to both infuse meaningfulness into education as a whole and to make a decisive contribution to fostering critical thinking, while overcoming the closed-off disciplinary approach; moreover, it can promote children's ability to think for *themselves* at the same time that it encourages them to think with others, within a community of inquiry, the latter being, in and of itself, a strong context for developing inclusive socialisation, which is one of the higher aims of education nowadays (Banks & Banks, 2010).

Gregory (2011) wrote on 'Philosophy for Children and its critics' in a fictitious dialogue supposedly carried out between Ann Sharp[c] and a group of philosophers, during a seminar that took place at a convent in Mendham, New Jersey, in 2008. Joe, one of the supposed participants, concludes:

> I think the nuns are about to ring the lunch bell, and before we stop I'd like to try to summarise what we've been saying. First, we've been uncovering - some of us, and others I guess are just reiterating - that P4C, as conceived by Mat and Ann, is a practice or a set of practices that derive from, and re-inscribe a particular norm of what it means to be human. That norm has roots in the Hellenistic tradition of philosophy as a way of life given to the search for, and the experience of, certain kinds of meaning, and also in American pragmatism–especially its emphasis on qualitative experience and its theory of inquiry—and in American and Soviet social learning theory. This normative account of P4C attracts at least five kinds of overlapping and conflicting criticism that we've identified: from religious and social conservatives who don't want their children to question traditional values; from educational psychologists who believe certain kinds of thinking are out of reach for children of certain ages; from philosophers who say it's not real philosophy

[a] For further discussion of the issue of the utilitarian climate we are living in, which feudalises the meaning of education to the performativity mentality, assuming, as if it were obvious, that the only admissible purpose is the one that strictly prepares the educands for the labour market in the current economic environment, forcefully bringing the humanities under siege, see also Smeyers (2010) and Standish (2003).

[b] If we define 'neoteny' as the retention by adults of juvenile traits, a 'neotenic infant' would be the everlasting child.

[c] Along with Matthew Lipman, Ann Sharp was one of the founders of Philosophy for Children in the 1970s.

> because it focuses on meaning and how to live, rather than on theory and exegesis; from critical theorists who think it's too value neutral and politically compliant; and from postmodernists who worry that it's imperialistic and hegemonic: training the minds of children on the trellises of scientistic, bourgeois Western liberalism (Gregory, 2011, p. 212).

The above-mentioned points of criticisms are themselves currently being questioned. The Piagetian assumption that children are incapable of the meta-level thinking which characterises the philosophical approach has been challenged by various researchers (Astington, 1993; Gopnik, 2009; Gopnik, Kuhl & Meltzoff, 1999). In fact, it could just be the case that the philosophical thinking manifested by children and children's inherent sense of wonder comes to be simply overlooked (Matthews, 1980).

On behalf of the hypothesis supporting children's ability to question and even open up a philosophical inquiry, we can consider a set of reasons, some drawn from theoretical approaches and others from our experience. Let us start by considering the latter case, which we have recalled from our childhood and can appreciate as adults when relating with children, either as parents or educators. We can also find a poignant testimony to children's propensity to wonder in the famous song by Adriana Calcanhoto, entitled 'Eight years of age'[d]:

Why are you Flamengo and my father Botafogo?

What does 'intrepid colossus' mean?

Why do bones ache while we sleep?

Why do teeth fall out?

Where do children come from?

Why do my fingers shrivel when I'm in the shower?

Why do the streets fill when it is raining?

How much is a thousand trillion multiplied by infinity?

Who is Jesus Christ?

Where are my cousins?

Well, well, well

Gabriel…

Well, Well, Well, Well…

Why does fire burn you?

Why is the moon white?

Why does the earth rotate?

Why do I have to go to sleep right now?

Why do snakes kill us?

Why does the glass fog up?

Why do you paint?

Why does time pass?

[d] We believe this song is a personal collection of child-like questions. The translation from Portuguese of the title and the lyrics is the authors' responsibility.

Why do we sneeze?

Why do our nails grow?

Why does blood flow?

Why do we die?

What are clouds made of?

What is snow made of?

How do you spell Re… vei… llon

Well, Well, Well

Gabriel… Gabriel… Gabriel… Gabriel…

Many of these questions, as good as they may be, can be said to not be intrinsically philosophical, since they have a factual and objective answer, eventually gleaned from different sources, such as our daily experience or science. However, it is absolutely clear that a 'drive to ask questions' is present and, above all, it is striking that some of the questions posed are to be given special consideration. This is the case for 'Why does time pass?' and 'Why do we die?' These are more than good questions. 'Well, well, well… Gabriel...' Such questions are not only philosophical but, indeed, eminently philosophical. Along these lines, we ask, why not use popular songs to do philosophy *for* and/or *with* children?

Many evidences support the idea that the 'drive to ask questions' is very common in children. We can even admit that it is a universal feature of childhood. Nietzsche (2005), analysing the spirit's metamorphoses, uses three metaphors: the Camel, the Lion and the Child. The first refers to the Camel's will to support even the heaviest axiological burden imposed by the tradition, which is shattered by the Lion's determination to say 'No' to false values in order to find his own place and his own freedom. In doing so, a breakthrough occurs making it possible for the Child to appear. And who is the Child but the spirit of beginning that requires forgetting the old, the blindly accepted, and the 'because it's so'? But, the Child goes beyond the Lion's 'negative' stance; the Child represents the disposition to create a new world, and a new world must be created if one wants to have one. In life, there are no borrowed worlds. Outside a personally meaningful construction of the world, we get only inauthenticity and emptiness (McHenry, 1997). In opposition to the environment, where things are either resources or obstacles, 'a *world* is, according to Arendt, a space in which human action is understood to have *meaning*' (Storme & Vlieghe, 2011, p. 186).

Along with the fact that we do not only have to get to a certain understanding of the world that could be somehow provided by a heteronymous source and personally accepted, once each personal world must be personally constructed, we also have to deal with the fact that the world is forever changing and, so to say, widening; thus, 'every generation has to find answers' (Van der Leeuw, 2009).[e]

Getting back to our central concern, it is quite reasonable to admit that Nietzsche has captured children's disposition towards questioning and playfully launching new games of meaning, just to make a parallel with Wittgenstein's (1986) concept of 'language games'. As Zarathustra notes, 'Innocence is the child, and forgetfulness, a new beginning, a game, a self-rolling wheel, a first movement and a holy Yea. Aye, for the game of creating, my brethren, there is needed a holy Yea unto life: its own will, willeth now the spirit; his own world winneth the world's outcast' (Nietzsche,

[e] A sonnet from Luís Vaz de Camões, that we took the liberty to translate, could be taken as an insightful description of such an existential challenge: Times change, wills change, Being changes, and trust changes: The whole world is composed of change, Always taking new qualities. […] And besides changing every day, Another change brings more astonishment, Thus now it changes differently than it did.

2005).[f] We can now see why the spirit's last figure is the one of the Child because it is through recovering the Child's wings that it regains its openness and creative powers; hence, 'It is here that philosophy [itself] becomes childish' (Storme & Vlieghe, 2011, p. 195). One must allow "the experience of childhood to occur so that we can 'think anew'".

Now, returning to example of the song: as much as that kind of questioning could be considered philosophical, one should bear in mind that philosophy is also a matter of being capable of having a sustained philosophical discussion. Regarding this issue, Matthews (1980) and Pritchard (1996) also provided some good insights into children's ability to sustain a philosophical reasoning process, not only for inquiry but also for argumentation.

While children's abilities to sustain a philosophical process could be a matter of discussion, one cannot doubt that children ask questions, and good ones, with a strong and authentic need to search for the answers. For that reason alone, educators should be concerned with opening a space where children may deepen and expand this disposition. P4C not only opens this space but also offers a dynamic methodology to address the process.

3. How to address P4C: fairy tales and popular stories

Let us start by considering the process of using pre-fabricated 'philosophical novels', like Lipman's (1974) Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery. The advantage of using these novels derives from their adaption to the intended purpose as well as from the broad span of materials already available. But, one should not discard other resources, especially fairy tales and fables, which are rich means of conveying very profound and dense symbolic contents (Bettelheim, 1976). Matthews (1992), for instance, has used simple stories, anecdotes and puzzles to start inquiries, carried out by children, on philosophical subjects. Tales, especially fairy tales, in their intimacy with children's world, can be very easily used to induce wonder and to motivate their questioning, thinking and argumentation.

The use of 'philosophical novels' entails a complementary methodological problem, that Megan, another of the supposed participants in the dialogue quoted above, points out very straightforwardly: on the one hand, the lack of multiculturalism, due to the use of American colloquialisms and cultural norms portrayed in the novels; on the other hand, the 'exclusive focus on dialogue [which] eclipses other kinds of philosophical practice, like exegetical and contemplative' (Gregory, 2011, p. 211). That is why Maughn, one of the five interlocutors, says:

> And let's not lose sight of how the globalisation of P4C, almost from the beginning, has changed the programme. There have been many, very successful cultural adaptations of the novels. And people from many different parts of the world have adapted the programme to blend with local methods, have written a new curriculum that draws on local cultural themes or incorporates regional children's literature, and have brought the work of a wide range of philosophers to bear on P4C practice. The early emphasis on critical thinking has been transformed by theorists who see the community of philosophical inquiry as a political laboratory, a method of wisdom training, an operational application of social learning theory, a means of raising philosophical questions across the school subjects, a method of religious exegetics and education, and even a contemplative or spiritual practice. I'd say the programme has had little chance of being culturally or theoretically insulated (Gregory, 2011, pp. 211–212).

[f] We are aware that Nietzsche envisages far more than we are just claiming here now. The appearance of the Child at the end of the spirit's transformation announces the overcoming of the Lion's limitations: the obsessive and reactive struggle to defeat the 'Thou-shalt'. It takes the child-like spirit that assumes Life as a celebration of one's powers, of sustained pure affirmation, the innocence of perpetual creation to overcome the Lion's nihilist stance. So, what Nietzsche is saying is not only that the child has the drive to question and create, but that adults should 'get back', metamorphosise themselves into the child-like spirit of wonder, free thinking and free will.

Taking into consideration, the difficulty of using original stories suited to children's sensitivity and understanding, Bobro (2004, pp. 80–81) says: 'There is a time-honoured solution, however, for those of us looking for enjoyable, inspiring philosophical stories appropriate for children. I have had success introducing philosophy to children through the discussion of folktales, stories handed down from generation to generation.' From his point of view, we should not encourage an introduction to philosophy by reading the classics; instead he proposes a 'more ethnographic approach'. Bobro discards the unsuitably esoteric readings of classic texts and chooses the 'story approach' develop by P4C, since 'it is reasonable to make philosophy less exotic and intimidating by using stories' (2004, p. 82). However, a question remains: Why should we prefer folktales to original philosophical stories as the point of departure like P4C does? The author gives us several reasons: educational function, diversity, provenance, ambiguity of meaning and self-interest.

Regarding the 'educational function', he points out that fairy tales, popular stories and jokes afford an enjoyable escape from reality; they offer a legitimate way to exercise social control and to gain favour in one's community; and they promote a group's feelings of solidarity and purpose. But, his main reason is the following: 'Folktales aid in the education of both young and old, by sharpening the wits and disseminating the wisdom of past generations' (Bobro, 2004, p. 83).

As to the second issue, he praises folklore for its realistic and fantastic content and cultural diversity, to which children respond eagerly and creatively, while opening a way for their imagination to flow through 'What if?' contexts. What is more, folklore not only presents cultural assumptions, it also expresses universal truths.

As for 'provenance', it is important to note that folktales are not the invention of a philosopher or any individual, but rather the expression of a community of persons or a culture; being anonymous they are intimately connected with tradition.

Ambiguity of meaning is one of the strongest features of folktales, fairy tales and fables. Their power relies on their openness: they inspire more than they say, thus letting the imagination flow so that one's understanding finds a personal means of expression.

Regarding the last reason, Bobro (2004, p. 86) says it best:

A fifth reason for using folktales is that of self-interest. As a teacher of philosophy, folktales are generally much more interesting to me than other stories that I create myself or that others have written specifically with a philosophy class in mind. This makes sense since it seems that only stories that naturally hold interest for both the teller and the listener would be passed down orally from generation to generation.

As good as pre-fabricated stories may be—and some indeed are—we also would prefer folktales or the classical fairy tales and fables to trigger the work of 'communities of inquiry'. A critical defence of the choice of folktales and the like is that we avoid placing ourselves in the role of storyteller-supervisors who seem to have nothing to learn alongside the very children we are trying to teach open-mindedness to.

In the defence of the preference for folktales and fairy tales, or indeed simple anecdotes, we would like to present here some examples drawn from tradition. One is an anonymous fable the other a classical Aesop's Fable. The first one could be entitled 'We should all do our part', and goes like this:

> Once upon a time, in a magic forest, there lived many animals—big and small, crawling and flying. Some ran about on four legs and others only needed two. They were of every colour and were very friendly to each other; at least they didn't bother their neighbours.
>
> Unfortunately, one day, a huge fire raged through the forest and was about to take over everything. Many animals were caught by the flames: the magpie lost its nest, the fox had to leave its burrow and the zebra ran to not get scorched and had to live with only

> black stripes. Finally, in desperation, all the animals ran, trying to protect themselves and their relatives.
>
> One little bird, who was really just a little guy, did not surrender or panic. He flew and flew, back and forth to the river and, on each trip, he carried water to pour over the fire. The other animals were astonished and then burst out laughing in chorus.
>
> The flamingo, whose grand beak was like a nozzle, rubbed its eyes from so much laughter and asked him, 'So you think you're going to put out the fire carrying water in your beak?' The little bird, without interrupting the task at hand, looked sideways at the flamingo and said, 'All by myself it will be difficult, yes, but I'm just doing my part.'

One can easily imagine how inspiring such a folktale can be for starting a dynamic group reflection among the children. It could be suited to deepening their consciousness about personal responsibility on common matters, as well as occasioning a discussion regarding sustainability, especially in those countries that have recurrent natural disasters in summertime.

The second example we would like to present is a very simple fable from Aesop, entitled 'The trees and the axe'[g]:

> A Woodman went into the forest and begged of the Trees the favour of a handle for his Axe. The principal Trees at once agreed to so modest a request, and unhesitatingly gave him a young ash sapling, out of which he fashioned the handle he desired. No sooner had he done so than he set to work to fell the noblest Trees in the wood. When they saw the use to which he was putting their gift, they cried, 'Alas! Alas! We are undone, but we are ourselves to blame. The little we gave has cost us all: had we not sacrificed the rights of the ash, we might ourselves have stood for ages.'

This simple fable could be a striking motif for opening an intense debate about a very important, although perhaps rather difficult, issue for children to grasp the meaning of, if one wants to approach it in a direct way. Children's egocentrism often becomes an obstacle to making them realise the need to respect others' rights. Sermons on this subject usually fall on deaf ears. But by presenting this simple story to a group of children, one can smoothly awaken a profound sensibility towards the idea that we should always protect the rights of the most humble of us, since giving up the rights of one of us could be the precondition for losing our own rights, which has unfortunately been demonstrated too many times when mankind has surrendered to dictatorship or colluded with barbarism.

4. How to address P4C: films

The philosophical content of films (Cox & Levine, 2012) and their use for philosophical purposes (Kowalski, 2012; Litch, 2010; Teays, 2012) has been acutely discussed. But, as Wartenberg (2009) notes, an intense debate on the philosophical potential of films has arisen. Some say that films do 'little more than raising philosophical problems in an accessible form for film audiences, others assert that films can actually philosophise' (549), meaning that films can indeed 'do' philosophy. However, such a discussion does not have to be taken up here and now, since both the above suggested ways of using films can be useful for our purposes.

[g] This fable is available at http://www.medellindigital.gov.co/Mediateca/repositorio%20de%20recursos/Esopo/Esopo-Aesop's_Fables_1.pdf. There is also a YouTube video of this story at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=posoxLnmJJg.

Films can be an adequate resource to trigger simple questioning on relevant subjects, as well as to foster philosophical inquiry, debate and reasoning, while they can also be 'philosophy in action'. Given their strong appeal to the 'M Generation',[h] the great variety available and their increasing accessibility, it would be wise to take films not only as an educational resource, broadly speaking, but also as philosophical instruments.

Just to give one example, we would like to draw on Victor Flemming's film, The Wizard of Oz, which we assume is familiar ground for most of our readers. The whole film is a source of subjects that fire children's interest, questioning and wonder, from the music, 'Over the rainbow' by Harold Arlen, to the lyrics sung by the character Dorothy, played by Judy Garland.

Somewhere over the rainbow

Way up high there's a land I heard of once in a lullaby

Somewhere over the rainbow

Skies are blue

And the dreams that you dare to dream

Really do come true

Someday I'll wish upon a star

And wake up where the clouds are far behind me

Where troubles melt like lemon drops

Away above the chimney tops

That's where you'll find me Somewhere over the rainbow

Bluebirds fly

Birds fly over the rainbow

Why then oh why can't I?

If happy little bluebirds fly

Beyond the rainbow why oh why can't I?

Image in the debates that could be triggered by listening and, when possible, reading the lyrics. What empathy can such a song create within children? Considering the curricula of basic education, how many interdisciplinary threads could be advanced? To say nothing of the change in the film from black and white to colour after the tornado and, especially, the three friends: the Scarecrow, the Tin Man and the Lion, as metaphors for virtues or the complex human complex: reason, sensibility and courage. Why did they join Dorothy in a common quest? What does the 'yellow brick road' stand for? The path of the righteous, certainly made of adversity and requiring effort, but also promising personal fulfilment?

And, what can we say about the Wicked Witch and the Great Wizard of Oz? Who are they, after all: figures of evil, goodness and authority? Why does the Wicked Witch melt when Dorothy casually throws water on her? Can we take from this that many fears from our childhood are not as dramatic as we thought? And, what is there to say about their surprise when they discover that the Great Wizard is nothing more than a mechanical human construction? What is this saying to children about the figure of goodness and, especially, of authority? One can quote Reiter (1998), to gain an insight into the possibilities of such a story, in this case from the point of view of a Freudian orientation:

[h] The 'M Generation' is an expression used to refer to those who are natives of the (hyper)media society that arose after the last decade of the 20th century (Reis, 2008).

> 'The Wonderful Wizard of Oz (original work published 1900) is a book rich with imagery, metaphors and obvious symbolism. Whether utilising the book, film, or play, the therapist has a resource which is extremely powerful as a catalyst for discussion of one's own inner desires, journeys which have not led to the yellow brick road, trips towards those wizards whom we believed had the magic to meet our needs, and other individual journeys of disillusionment and enchantment' (Reiter, 1988, p. 150).

5. Conclusion

Philosophy for Children is, perhaps, a problematic endeavour, but we have many good reasons to promote it and do not lack resources. We can use a large range of materials collected from traditional or contemporary sources, ranging from fairy tales to popular songs and films that are very well suited to engaging children in a community of inquiry.

Globally considered, P4C, understood as a symmetrical and relational practice of inquiry within a group of pairs, also brings us close to an alternative way of teaching and learning philosophy that could be taken as a referential framework for other educational levels.

In the case of philosophy, to shape the implementation of a pedagogical-didactic process, the teacher must critically address the problematic nature and direction of the educational process, in a framework of values and purposes, claiming processes that are consistent with the purposes. From our point of view, if one wants to focus the process on the activity (of philosophising) rather than on knowledge transmission, such a task must refer, both globally and in each and every dimension, to educational issues or 'problematics'[i] chosen by the community of educands (including the educator). Now, philosophy is the field par excellence of the activation of 'problematics': the opening or creation of their deployment, and also of their argumentative articulation through which meaningful prospects are sought to be asserted. Through such a process, educands—within a community of inquiry—can come to think by themselves, articulating what they have to say and eventually what they have never said, or even they have thought before.

This means that we need to find an appropriate route of 'didactisation' for philosophy that focuses on the educands' concerns and interests or, in another words, some chosen issues or 'problematics' rather than a list of contents. Now, in such a case, while focusing on education, one does not cease to refer to philosophical activity or to philosophising in itself, as an activity. A similar challenge was addressed continuously and consistently by Boavida (1991; 2010), who proposed a didactic method established on philosophical ground for teaching philosophy—in line with what Kant (1985) suggested—as the task of teaching how to philosophise and not the simple transmission of knowledge, meaning the teaching of the history of philosophy. This is, firstly, because transmitting knowledge does not guarantee that you learn to philosophise, which is the essential and critical goal, and secondly because, with regard to philosophy, personal experience, itself non-transferable, can only be induced through personally experiencing a certain practice, that precisely grounds the educand in a new dimension of autonomously produced meaning.

In Plato's Meno, Socrates sought to show that virtue is not teachable; in fact, he states that nobody can truly teach anyone, since all learning inherently relies on a personal internal transaction, and not a simple transmission of knowledge, thus being above all the result of a learner's construction. Virtue is not teachable—at least not to Meno,[j] as noted by Koyre (1988)—because one should experience a personal quest in order to achieve it. Likewise, philosophy cannot be taught, not only because its learning can never in fact be completed, but also because it can only be learned by a lived experienced of doing it, i.e., of philosophising. Thus, one cannot teach philosophy by simple transmission of contents, as one cannot teach virtue by prescription. Teaching philosophy aims to introduce the

[i] We use the concept of 'problematics' here to refer to a network of issues.

[j] Who was eagerly relying on knowledge transmission from Socrates.

educand to the personal process that the term itself indicates: the love of learning, a personal quest, that only by 'zetetic'[k] inquiry can be performed, as Kant himself already proposed by saying that texts should not be used as models for judgment but as means for each one to pronounce a judgment on them (cited Boavida, 2010, pp. 127–128). That is why we position ourselves for an approach in which philosophical issues are to be taken as the starting point of a philosophical activity that itself becomes the engine and the function of teaching—if it is not more proper to say living—philosophy. An approach where the meaning of a philosophical education is envisaged as Boyum (2010) proposed: as a type of growth or formation that philosophical reflection can and should promote, i.e., the educational meaning of philosophy, the effects or consequences and the significance emerging from and through the philosophising process, implying certain intrinsic aspects that cannot be obtained by other means. In this case, a philosophical education would be internally related to the very nature of philosophical activity, thus allowing the emergence of a set of skills—without of a better expression—produced in the philosophical education process, which could not be anything else but to (learn to) philosophise.

Understood in such a way, philosophical education does not result in being merely cognitive or intellectual, simply corresponding to an accumulation of knowledge, although it is expected that this somehow also occurs; rather, it implies a transformation, a change of attitude and character, a transformation of the individual, a kind of conversion. Different people may come to different destinations with different experiences and different results: 'a philosophical education cannot be defined as a linear process of growth of a well-defined entity called 'knowledge', it corresponds more to a quest of the soul' (Boyum, 2010, p. 558).

Such an approach, presupposes that the goals—while always bound to be redefined—and the processes to achieve them are congruent with the nature, essentially operative, of philosophy itself, i.e., that they result from its own intrinsic dynamics and lead to it. Taking a certain issue as a starting point for the activation of what must be learned is to assume a number of tasks that can be consummated by instrumentally requesting certain contents, which should be searched for to feed the process. Therefore, contents do not appear as a structured system or outset that defines a linear path of study. On the contrary, it is expected that once departing from the intrinsic motivation of a chosen issue, the sequence of contents, mediated by tasks to be accomplished, consequently develops by requiring a threefold process of integration: into conceptual frameworks; into philosophical 'problematics'; and, concomitantly, into a structured set of contents, which are requested and hopefully come to be assimilated in a contextualised way by each educand, while becoming part of a community of inquiry and work. Yet this does not mean disparaging contents, exclusively favouring the operative side of the processes, which without the contents would be abstract and empty, but rather pointing towards a conjunction of learning philosophy in relation to a philosophical culture that can and should be explored.

To clarify the process, we could propose, among others, the following developments: (1) a debate on the concerns and interests that are to be taken as issues to be addressed; (2) the use of tales, songs or films that convey the issues in a problematised meaningful way; (3) small group discussion on the tasks to be carried out and assigned to the participants in order to get information about the chosen issues; (4) production of a report of findings, that could take the form of an essay, a video or drama presentation, or all these forms combined; (5) large group debate on the different perspectives on the issues; (6) final report on the issues and (7) public presentation of the findings.

This is not the place to further extend ourselves on this matter. But it is perhaps the place to point out that P4C in itself—understood as an open multimodal process of communal inquiry—opens up a new didactical approach for philosophical education itself. One could even speak of a paradigmatic turn. It is not wrong to expect that from the approach discussed above, one could not only propitiate

[k] The concept is used in mathematics, philosophy and law, as the method employed to investigate and find out the reason and the nature of things.

the educands in developing a disposition more attuned to a later and better receptivity to philosophy, along with a stronger motivation to autonomously philosophise, but we could also give all the participants—children, educators and philosophers themselves—the opportunity to 'give birth to experiences of childhood', i.e., to think anew, which is 'the most difficult and contradictory thing to aspire to, to be oblivious, to be forgetful, to be helpless' (Storme & Vlieghe, 2011, p. 196), to be cast into a world without fixed destiny, where everything represents a creative movement, a beginning, an opening, a new world in perspective. This means that we would also regain philosophy as a personal, free and authentic practice of creating concepts.

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