RESEARCHES AND CHALLENGES IN PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN

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Summary. *Philosophy for children is understood as an approach of learning built around the development of children's philosophical questioning, thinking and reasoning capacities through involvement in structured research communities. The emotional and moral development of students is also a central element of Children's Philosophy. This article highlights the results of various studies carried out in the field of Philosophy for Children, starting from Nelson and Lipman, to Sharp and Tozzi.*

Keywords: philosophy for children, P4C, critical and creative thinking.

CERCETĂRI ȘI PROVOCĂRI ÎN FILOSOFIA PENTRU COPII

Rezumat. *Filosofia pentru copii este înțeleasă ca o abordare a învățării construită în jurul dezvoltării capaci-tăților de interogare filosofică a copiilor, de gândire și raționament prin implicarea în comunități structurate de cer-cetare. Dezvoltarea emoțională și morală a elevilor este, de asemenea, un element central al Filosofiei pentru copii. Acest articol pune în evidență rezultatele diverselor studii realizate în domeniul Filosofiei pentru copii, pornind de la Nelson și Lipman, până la Sharp și Tozzi.*

Cuvinte-cheie: filosofia pentru copii, P4C, gândire critică și creativă.

Children's philosophy aims, in Lipman's opinion, to teach children how to think for themselves and how to make informed decisions. Thus, the development of critical and creative thinking is the fundamental objective of philosophy for children.

The studies carried out in the field of Philosophy for children can be grouped into two categories depending on the generations in which they were written. Thus, the first generation consisted of Leonard Nelson, Matthew Lipman and Gareth Matthews. This generation advocated philosophy for children as a tool for equipping students with certain skills, for example: „Lipman (2003) – logical reasoning; Martens (1999) – as a critical practice aimed at neutralizing unequal power relations; Gareth Matthews (2003) – as a way to bridge the gap between adults and children, with an emphasis on children's philosophy as a valuable activity in itself" [11, pag.80].

The second generation of children's philosophy is made up of an important number of researchers in the field, namely Ann Margaret Sharp, David Kennedy, Karin Murris, Walter Kohan, Michel Sasseville, Joanna Haynes, Jen Glaser, Oscar Brenifier, Michel Tozzi, Marina Santi, Barbara Weber and Philip Cam. According to Vansieleghem and Kennedy [12, pag.177], „a notable characteristic of this generation is that they do not present new ideas as attacks on what has come before, but as a form of self-correction that takes into account the changing circumstances of the global and educational environment".

By changing circumstances we mean the rise of postmodernity and new ways of thinking. Philosophical pedagogy is simply characterized as common reflection, contemplation and communication, therefore philosophy for children should be changed to philosophy with children.

The second generation does not treat the process of philosophy for or with children in terms of method, but rather as a „movement encompassing a mixture of approaches, each with its own methods, techniques, and strategies" [12, pag.179].

Margaret Sharp and Ronald Reed brought up a series of studies carried out in the field of philosophy for children, addressing discussions on the variety of the concept of authority and the evolution of philosophy for children from the point of view of women and children.

According to Reed [7, pag.36], the discussions that children have in mind (the beneficiaries of children's philosophy) can distinguish between the child's interests that can be starting points in the discussion itself and the children's non-interests. A child will not give up the right to privacy when entering into a discussion. Thus, interest is a necessary starting point, but not sufficient in starting a discussion in philosophy for children.

In the discussions of philosophy for children there are no suggestive questions that can lead to random answers or that would generate answers dependent on the teacher's preferences. The questions in a philosophical discussion for children should be asked in such a way that the answers to them are not already known by the people who answer them. It should not be understood that philosophical discussions for children are authoritarian or indoctrinating, but on the contrary, they develop alternative models of thinking, based on respect for the opinions of children and adults.

In order to be able to use the children's philosophy approach in lessons, teachers should know the principles of practice and how they should be carried out. For this, first of all, the teachers who will ask questions should detach themselves from the concept of teacher, in the traditional sense [8, pag.387]. Studies show that teachers who approach learning in the traditional way fail to philosophize with children. It is also important for teachers to adopt the role of facilitator, not transmitting information, but guiding children to think and accepting that children can do philosophical research.

Regarding the evolution of philosophy for children, Ann Margaret Sharp considers that although they are two different movements, feminist philosophy and philosophy for children have in common the fact that they both make the unheard voices heard, respectively the voice of the woman and the voice of the child [9, pag.49]. Both movements show the importance of balancing multiple perspectives on a particular topic, in order to know and understand what is actually happening.

P4C proponents believe that philosophy should not be limited to academic field, but rather to the fact that children aged three and up are capable of critical, creative and caring thinking. The best way to make citizens more reasonable is to teach philosophical thinking skills from an early age. The purpose of teaching philosophy in schools is to develop

and train critical, caring, creative and cooperative thinkers [5, pag.119].

D'Olimpio and Teschers were interested in highlighting the distinction between two approaches to philosophy and education: Lipman's philosophy for children and the concept of "Lebenskunst" which refers to the art of living.

Schmid [5, pag.114] explores the concept of a beautiful or good life, asking what is really necessary for each individual to be able to develop their own art of living and what aspects of life are meaningful when shaping a good and beautiful life. An element of Schmid's theory is the practical application of philosophy through the notions of (self-)reflection, prudence, and practical wisdom, as well as the requirement that each individual take responsibility for actively shaping his or her own life as a work of art. In this sense, each person is the artist responsible for living their own beautiful life.

The pragmatic approach of philosophy for children focuses on the development of critical and creative thinking, but the development of the artistic sense necessary to create a beautiful life should not be neglected. For this, it is necessary to combine techniques that contribute to the formation of creative and critical sense with wisdom.

In this context, wisdom implies knowing what is well done at the right time, being able to act with the appropriate emotional disposition. These key thinking skills are encouraged by educators concerned with identifying how students can be supported in developing skills that will prepare them to live a good/quality life.

Critical thinking is of major importance, representing an aspect of the way of thinking. Ennis defines critical thinking as „reflective and logical thinking" [1, pag.43]. „Critical thinking interprets, analyzes, evaluates objectively but is also curious, well-informed, open and flexible, being at the same time honest in making personal judgments and willing to clarify problems and reconcile. Critical thinking is based on arguments; this means that whenever I think critically, I can give reasons to support my opinions" [2].

By combining the elements of Schmid's theory with the educational methodology of philosophy for children, a starting point can be obtained for those who deal with the philosophical education of children, in the sense that they can be supported both in the practice of critical and prudent reflection (essential for the development of democratic citizenship) and in the active involvement in the develop-

ment of an art of living that allows the living of a qualitative and flourishing life.

While P4C was successfully initiated in Eastern culture (e.g. in Singapore [5, pag.115]), Schmid's philosophy based on the art of living has been successfully applied rather in Western culture, where the role of democratic culture is emphasized.

The concept of philosophy for children was developed by Lipman who wanted to encourage reasonableness among citizens and found the best way to do this by suggesting teaching philosophical thinking skills from an early age. The purpose of teaching philosophy in schools was to produce critical, caring, creative, and cooperative thinkers.

In order to ensure progress at the class level, the ideal would be for the teacher to be trained in the methodology of philosophy for children. The trained facilitator encourages students' reflective critical thinking skills by discussing various ideas and building their own concepts from the challenges that may arise [5, pag.117].

Philosophy for children is understood as an approach of learning built around the development of children's philosophical questioning, thinking and reasoning capacities through involvement in structured research communities. The emotional and moral development of students is also a central element of Children's Philosophy.

The fact that Philosophy for Children pursues cognitive development, as well as emotional and moral development, is also demonstrated in many of the initiatives of the programs that support the development of philosophy in schools. For example, in New Zealand the field of Children's Philosophy is defined as „more than a program of thinking skills ... it encourages courage and intellectual rigor and helps to develop qualities that make good judgment in everyday life" [6, pag.50].

In addition, the international society SAPERE (*Society for the Advancement of Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education*) identifies reflection as one of the two key principles of philosophy for children, representing a "key practice that leads to significant changes in thought and action.

Peterson and Bentley seek to explore the connections between Philosophy for Children and character education in two ways:

(1) by highlighting the integral role that intellect cultivation plays in character education, drawing connections to the centrality of thinking skills within the Philosophy of Education; and,

(2) by highlighting the place of moral judgment and action within Philosophy for Children, attracting links with their centrality within character education [6, pag.51].

Over the past 40 years, philosophy for children has developed a dialogic framework for education that has inspired people, both inside and outside academia. The overall goal of dialogue in children's philosophy is „for participants to reach reasonable philosophical judgments". This purpose determines the types and uses the appropriate dialogue for children's philosophy by including five types of dialogue: negotiation, information-seeking, persuasion, inquiry and deliberation. There is also a sixth type of dialogue, called eristic dialogue, but this type is not used in children's philosophy, because eristic argues for the sake of conflict, not for its resolution, and most of the time it refers to an argument that seeks to contradict the conflict of another than to seek the truth. This is not found in the practice of philosophy for children. According to Douglas Walton [3, pag.160], the taxonomy of types of dialogue facilitates a normative analysis of the different types of dialogue practiced in children's philosophy.

Philosophy for Children is based on the pragmatic perception that good thinking is a social phenomenon seen from two perspectives. „First of all, the ability to think well is acquired by participating in a community in which one is both challenged and assisted to be clearer, more explicit or more imaginative. Secondly, individual thinking, being the most competent, is more limited and more capable of error, so that it is possible to be reinforced by being made accountable to a community. In philosophy for children, this responsibility constitutes a kind of objectivity" [4].

Trickey and Topping [10] conducted a systematic review of studies on children's philosophy, in which they considered only those studies that have a controlled experimental design and adequate statistical data. The basic concepts of the studies considered are: logical reasoning, reading comprehension, mathematical skills, self-esteem, listening skills, expressive language, creative thinking, cognitive skills, emotional intelligence.

Critical review of studies based on these concepts and assessing P4C outcomes provides evidence for positive outcomes on children in different countries and age groups. Many of the studies could be criticized from the point of view of methodological rigor, but the quality and quantity of the evidence are

superior compared to other methods in education. Not all measurements in the studies showed significant positive effects on participants in the experimental phase, but this is likely due to the fact that participants are from different social backgrounds. There were no negative effects on children according to these studies.

However, we cannot generalize that the use of P4C will always lead to positive results, since the integrity of its implementation can take various forms. However, a wide range of evidence has been reported suggesting that, given certain conditions, children can gain significantly, in measurable terms, both academically and socially through this type of interactive philosophical process.

Philosophy is constantly being reconstructed, and discussions about body, mind, ego, thought and reality, nature and culture, and so on – cannot escape their contextuality, whether in the lived experience of community or in dialogue, where the imperative of otherness and response is always present.

Although it is a field that requires considerable material contributions for teacher training, philosophy has been, is and will be a tool through which the school will send young adults and children with much higher moral values to the world of adults.

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