

The Rules of Inquiry Talk in an Inclusive Perspective

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to highlight the main characteristics of the Community of Inquiry Philosophy for Children (P4C). P4C is an educational movement and a curriculum for the education of critical, creative, and caring thinking that adopts dialogical methodologies. The main purpose of this paper is to declare the rules of Inquiry Talk in an inclusive perspective.

KEYWORDS: Dialogue, inclusion, philosophy for children, community of inquiry, teaching thinking

1. WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN?

Philosophy for Children (P4C) is an educational movement spread worldwide, born in the '70s by Matthew Lipman in the United States, which has developed a curriculum for philosophizing with children. It is the teaching proposal which translates into class the research community. The P4C is characterized by

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a complex type of thinking, which integrates critical, creative and caring thinking (Lipman, 2003).

Philosophy for Children is not simply a curriculum for doing philosophy with children, but an educational movement spread worldwide, with a story that was born in the '70s in the US, under the strong influence of Dewey's pragmatist thought, and which then was diversified through different methodologies, approaches and strategies in the different countries of the world where it was tested. It offers not only a curriculum, but also a different approach to education, giving centrality to the learning process rather than teaching, and making the teacher a "facilitator" of processes rather than a holder of knowledge, making pupils' learning the true protagonist. Initially it tends to be used in schools as a methodology for the development of critical thinking separately of the rest of the curriculum, but then it can become part of school subjects (Topping, Tricky, 2015).

Philosophy for Children intends philosophy as an activity, as it was originally intended in the Socratic dialogue: overcoming both the "doctrinal" form in its reduction to a mere history of philosophy, shows the philosophical discipline to a dialogue form and argumentative. Philosophy for Children, at this time of changes that occur rapidly, can have an important role in giving a different vision and mission to school, with a marked enhancement of critical thinking, creative and caring (Lipman, 2003).

Echoing the title of an article "What is Philosophy for Children, What is Philosophy with Children?" (Vansielegem, Kennedy, 2011), it is possible to wonder what kind of relationship there is between childhood and philosophy. Philosophy for Children was born from the link between philosophy and childhood (Kohan, 2013). There is the risk of incurring into two extremes: on one hand the trivialization of philosophy, and on the other the adultization of children initiating them early into philosophy (Kohan, 2006). Then, there is the risk of degenerates childhood and/or philosophy, and that risk is not new; it has been present

in our culture for a long time and it takes shape in sentences like: “Children are naturally philosophers” or “philosophers are like children who ask questions” (Kohan, 2006 pp.IX – X).

The Lipman curriculum consists of a series of stories that have as protagonists children of the same age of the recipients. The stories tell of dialogues between children, and often are set within the school environment. The stories deal with the fundamental themes in the history of philosophy: friendship, thought, the truth, weather, beauty, dreams, the rules, difference. Some themes are taken up in several stories, following a spiral evolution, i.e. presenting an increasing level of detail in relation to the level of schooling.

So that the teacher/facilitator is guided in philosophical practice, each story is accompanied by a manual that contains exercises and discussion plans, again presenting the same philosophical questions but with different degrees of depth. They provide a link between the history of philosophy and children’s questions, thus allowing an educational modeling for the practice of philosophy also for teachers who do not come from a purely philosophical formation.

The exercises strengthen some capacities of thought and each of them pursues specific objectives and plans for discussion simulating the possible philosophical questions of children. The plans of discussion can be cumulative or non-cumulative, that is questions can logically follow each other on the same theme, or in the case of non-cumulative plans each question is individual.

To develop these aspects, we can use the curriculum of Philosophy for Children, which aims to promote and stimulate the development of:

- Democratic attitudes;
- Communication skills;
- Thinking skills and reasoning;
- Attitudes, arrangements, creative and critical attitudes towards the world and knowledge.

2. INCLUSION

The inclusion of the difference in class stands as the emerging paradigm in the international arena, even under the pressure of the Index for Inclusion (Booth, Ainscow, 2014). The class of the differences is, in fact, surely one of the greatest educational challenges of today's school systems, which must propose educational and diversified instruments methodologies to respond to the heterogeneity of the students, in order to fulfill the promise of differentiating classroom (Tomlinson, 2006).

The inclusion of children and youths "could be central to fostering their present well-being, agency, responsibility and participation with the aim of empowering them (taking into account their priorities, values and aspirations), to move their societies towards a better future in which the minds and thoughts of children and youths might be able to make a difference" (Biggeri, Santi, 2012, p.374).

The capacity of developing a complex thinking (Lipman, 2003), including dialogical attitudes and argumentative practice, becomes central. The development of a democratic society implies the promotion of critical, creative and caring thinking in its citizens" (Biggeri, Santi, 2012, p.374). Into the perspective of the Capability Approach (Sen, Nussbaum) the assignment of the education is to expands the individual and social opportunities or capabilities. Nussbaum emphasizes the importance of school as "crucial for the health of democracy" (2006).

3. TEACHING THINKING

Philosophy for Children can be traced back to the broader movement of teaching thinking. Teaching Thinking is a line of composite and heterogeneous studies (Wegerif, Li and Kaufman, 2015), within which positions are strongly divergent among them-

selves as concerning what are the best practices to promote the development of thought.

Promoting critical thinking is one of the necessary skills for contemporary society, and there are different philosophical matrix approaches, psychological, etc. that allow its development. The development of critical thinking is indicated by Nussbaum as one of the essential requirements for the maintenance of democratic societies, and the same philosopher indicates the curriculum of Philosophy for Children as one of the teaching methods to develop it. Even Baldacci, one of the most important Italian pedagogues of today, says that the good school is capable of forming to critical thinking. Educating critical thinking through the use of the Philosophy for Children does not become an issue more than the curriculum, but it is configured as a cross-cutting and interdisciplinary teaching methodology: each subject can be taught and learned setting in critical thinking.

The curriculum of Philosophy for Children permits to develop a complex thinking (Lipman, 2003; Santi, Oliverio, 2012) for a complex word.

4. BUILDING A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

What are the elements that characterize a good school? And what is a good school? And is it possible to imagine/implement programs within schools, methodologies, curricula to teach critical thinking? How can you promote the development of cultures, inclusive policies and practices (Booth, Ainscow, 2014) within our classes, towards inclusion? What values can we pass on to younger generations? How to foster dialogue between the diversity present within the school and society? In a world where diversity is the rule, from the school, it is necessary that the issue of diversity is addressed in school, using participatory teaching methods that are put in listening to children. A road tested to pro-

note inclusion is that of Philosophy for Children (Lipman, 2003). Educating to critical thinking is in fact one of the most important educational challenges of today in our society, as also proposed by the Capability Approach' studies of Amartya Sen, further explored and developed by Martha Nussbaum. The ability to put children into dialogue promoting the free expression of children's thinking. We know and respect the difference only if it is problematized, known, analyzed, thanks to the educational care of those who take care of the younger generation. The construction of inclusive citizenship starts right from the school, and its implicit and explicit curriculum. So it is important as the implementation of curriculum that deals specifically to this issue, as the promotion of an inclusive culture that pervades the whole school community. Maintain and develop democratic society is intimately linked to Nussbaum, the development of critical thinking. Only citizens educated in critical thinking can allow the development of our democratic societies. Teaching critical thinking is certainly one of the most educational challenges in the educational debate in the world, and even in Italy. Many programs are to develop it. The critical dimension, creative and affective-values are integrated. In fact, these 3 dimensions together allow the development of that complex thought that is required for complex societies and liquid (Bauman, 2011) that is subject to a rapid change. It is not as important as the acquisition of knowledge, which quickly becomes obsolete, the well head full of Morin (2010), as promoting the ability to learn to think, which is a fundamental skill that should be developed in school curricula. Finally, the ultimate goal of school should be to form a right school (Canevaro, 2013), guided by the principle of equity of educational opportunities. The school is one of the most important formal educational contexts for the development of learning and socialization in the younger generations. The potential of social interaction, dialogue and co-construction of knowledge among peers remains often unspoken, for the greater emphasis on the acquisition of disciplinary

knowledge. The concept of competence at times threatens to lose the whole value of school, not only a place to learn something, but also a place for younger generation growth, a place of true life, socializing, integrating the different mission of the school is now true educational challenge, without the opposition between learning and being, the formation of the child as a citizen of today and tomorrow. The constant reference to the concept of competence makes in danger of losing sight of what is the broadest pedagogical value of school, or the formation of the person, the opportunity to develop critical thinking, the ability to enjoy an inclusive school where everyone can learn. It allows to overcome social inequalities and develop a school system based fairness. In which of the skills can school children with difficulties, whatever they are, have adequate welcome and receive like all good training opportunities, in the interests of fairness which should be guaranteed by the educational systems?

How can we promote inclusion in classes and then in the society? What is the role of the dialogue in this process? Building and developing democratic and inclusive society is strictly connected with the use of critical thinking (Nussbaum, 2010). There are numerous curricula and school programs that have the objective to develop critical thinking; in particular, Nussbaum cites the curriculum of Philosophy for Children (P4C), a thinking program used in every parts of the world. The author of the program, Lipman, underlines the link between democratic societies and critical thinking, in a Dewey's perspective.

Baldacci underlines the inherent link between the development of critical thinking and democracy (link missing in the reform document), two aspects strongly related to each other as already theorized by Dewey and then by Lipman that draws up its proposal in the curriculum of Philosophy for Children. Nussbaum asserts that a school system must first train people who know how to live in a democratic society, rather than focus only on economic issues, aware of their rights and the importance of democratic

coexistence among peoples. Kant himself said that the task of school in democratic society is “to educate and teach the young so that they can take part in democratic life”.

5. THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE CLASS IN AN INQUIRY COMMUNITY

School can be understood as a place of co-social construction of knowledge, in which every member of the community, from the central to the peripheral, can make a contribution for the construction, transformation and conceptual advance, allowing the creation of what Vygotsky defines as “zones” of the next development. In fact, Vygotsky’s thought always proceeds from the social to the individual (internalization), and is closely related to trading with others.

P4C goes back to the constructivist conception as it is conceptualized by Vygotsky, which sees knowledge as an eminently social construction, and learning as knowledge transfer from inter to intrasubjective plan. The community of P4C becomes “the preferred framework to build an inclusive learning and integration”.

The concept of the next development zone introduced by Vygotsky itself contains within itself all the importance of the dissemination and appropriation of knowledge, which allows learning through the help of an adult or an even more experienced person, thus allowing the mutual enrichment through the diversity of participants. The peripheral members of the community can become central in philosophical discussion, allowing the LPP (Legitimate Peripheral Participation) theorized by Lave and Wenger.

The class is not born in the community of inquiry, but it gets through the philosophical practice of Philosophy for Children, which plays the transforming action on the environment. Peirce was the first to speak about the research community, and Lipman

declined this concept in education. Lipman says that the transformation of the class in the research community involves a class “in which students listen respectfully to others, integrate the ideas of others, ask others to provide reasons to support their opinions, help each other to draw conclusions from what has been said and try to identify the assumptions of others. A research community wants to go to where research leads, rather than shut themselves within the boundaries of different disciplines” (Lipman, 2003, p.31). Listening and mutual aid, as well as integration with others, are the elements of the community that can be read into an inclusive perspective.

The realization of the Activity Theory of school by Leont’ev and the thought of Vygotskji, with his semiotic mediation constructs, internalization, zone next development, activity) are possible with the transformation in the “community class”. The concept of “community of inquiry” was introduced by Peirce. Lipman then takes this concept to create its research community in Philosophy for Children, which is characterized by the fact of being a philosophical research community. “For both Peirce and Lipman, the community is essentially the generative context of a continuous process of building/re-building/validation of shared meanings and sensibilities, employing thought to go beyond every apparent certainty or static reference, and exercising a systematic cultivation of doubt as the principal investigative tool. In this sense the community is the matrix of a form of deeply critical, self-correcting thought, sensitive to the contexts in which it is generated, and Constantly employed in the search for criteria, reasons, justifications, and the foundations for arguments and for individual and collective actions ”(Striano, 2011, p.95). To achieve this transformation, “the practice of philosophy takes as its main function is to produce a ‘change’: the classes must cease to be what they are to become the community of philosophical inquiry” (Waksman, Kohan, 2013, p.3). The community is declined as “tetracomunity” (Santi, 2006), because it is at the same

time learning community of practice, speech, research, to be and become Inclusion community in which the heterogeneity of the members and their differences are seen in their positive meaning as a source of mutual enrichment in view of the co-construction of knowledge. Santi defines the community of students an environment in which every participant is responsible for its own and others' development through interaction and sharing, making "community integration".

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How is it necessary to transform the class in an Inquiry Community to develop critical, creative and caring thinking (Lipman, 2003)? First of all, the dialogue: in particular, in Philosophy for Children (P4C) the dialogue has some pragmatic rules to create dialogical settings of inquiry. The Inquiry Talk that characterizes P4C follows some pragmatic rules recalled by Santi (Santi, in Biggeri, Santi, p.384), that are here declared in an inclusive perspective.

The basic macro-pragmatic rules of this style of discourse are as follows:

- Encouraging participants to put forward their own views in a group: it is interesting in an inclusive point of view that everyone has his "space of speaking" and the whole possibility of participation of the activity, and thus the possibility that diversity was considered like the capacity of seeing the world

from another point of view, and thus is an element of joint value;

- .Reflecting before speaking: P4C allows to learn in a protected didactic setting, to experiment a sort of role playing relative to conversational rules, without freedom of judgment and errors;
- Sharing and discussing relevant information: this allows to experiment different views of see and know the world;
- Motivating their own reasoning: the development of critical thinking takes place in a group context, where the more expert can do the role of scaffolding to their classmates that are in a different zone of proximal development;
- Giving importance to the thinking structure: the reciprocal support allows to develop his/her logical and argumentative capabilities into dialogue;
- Accepting challenges: the possibility of accepting various points of view allows to overtake an univocal vision of world. The heterogeneity of the members of the community founded by the differences of competences, knowledge and experiences are all elements that give a supplementary value at the community, and consent a growing and a major “reciprocal contamination”, a richer thinking together;
- Building on others’ ideas: one of the most fundamental issues of P4C is the possibility to build new conceptualizations starting and thanks to the dialogue, the help and the reciprocal co-construction. Thinking together is built, in fact, by exceeding the individual contributions: the sum is major than the individual interventions to the discussion;
- Discussing alternatives: possibility to explore alternative positions is an element possible thanks to the presence of heterogeneity in class;
- Proceeding in a self-correcting way: the community becomes more and more autonomous in its management, and the intervention of the facilitator decreases, developing the capacity of self-regulation;

- Negotiating a mediation: the capacity of accepting different points of view is a key-element in a plural society, cross by the presence of a range of diversities. The interaction becomes space of re-organization and conceptual development.
- Responsibly participating in decision-making: every member assumes the responsibility of the decisions that take place into the community.

6. PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN AS AN INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY

Lipman describes as among the characteristics that the Inclusive community of Inquiry is a community which is characterized by the difference in religious belief, nationality, experience. He also states that “in a community, however, no one is excluded from the activities that take place within it without proper justification” (Lipman, 2003, p.110), thus extending the involvement of all the children inside. Another distinctive feature of the research community is to encourage participation, but without obliging: even the community member who remains silent is still participating and contributing to the philosophical practice and is part of it in all respects.

In summary, the research community P4C may be understood as an inclusive didactic proposal because:

- it proposes a setting different from the traditional;
- it does not require the use of reading and writing;
- provides the possibility to use alternative forms of communication also to verbal language, being a practice open to language testing “other”;
- it does not require the possession of specific expertise;
- it is a non-judgmental context;
- it is a practice of collaborative learning;
- the teacher/facilitator takes on the role of director and builder of learning environments and not that of knowledge transmitter.

CONCLUSIONS

Philosophy for Children presents many features that characterize it as a teaching methodology that can be inclusive. P4C creates in the classroom the research community, and this may be a promoter of inclusive communities in school and outside school, for example, the important contemporary philosopher Nussbaum proposes the Socratic model and the use of the Philosophy for Children curriculum to educate to critical thinking and democracy (Nussbaum, 2010).

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