

# The Nature of Philosophy for Children and Its Role in Teaching and Learning

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The claim of philosophy connection with academic education is based upon the assumption that philosophy can change students' critical status (such as surprising, demanding standard...) and train them with reasoning, conception forming, changing, and investigating skills. Philosophy in school, on the one hand, is a progressive discussion about our future educational system so that it can provide safe training about how philosophy can be performed and mixed in school classes and auditoriums. Therefore, philosophy for children explains that how each teacher in each subject is able to accept a model of philosophical search and adapt it to the class situation. Philosophy is much better understood if considered as a public activity and a conversation according to what Socrates did, than just considered as an education subject which should be inserted in child's memory. On the other hand, philosophical opening, questioning, and surprising toward the word—the characteristics which are undeniable, admirable, and comprehensive—can be remained superficial and even bare. Unless, it founts from Socrates' dialectic insight: "I know that I don't know." Philosophy for children is a program which involves them in every class discussion in the field of philosophical subjects. The aim of this program is the improvement of children though via introducing them numerous "Big Question" and enables them in considering these questions. Using this program, teachers encourage children to think more deeply on ideas about their schoolwork. This strategy mainly takes place in project community of classes. Children will deeply concentrate on their thoughts and skill and then improve them while considering and reinforcing their own and others' ideas in response to philosophical puzzles. This article aims to reply the following questions: What is philosophy for children? What aims does it follow? What is its content? What skills does it consider? How does it compose with the current educational programming? What strategies does this curriculum follow?

*Keywords:* philosophy, philosophy for children, P4C, curriculum, dominant approach

## 1. The Nature of Philosophy for Children

What do children have to do with philosophy? Or what does philosophy have to do with children? Children are so inexperienced and immature and know very little about life. How is their philosophical perception in comparison to other people? The philosophy is complicated for adults as well, and why should we engage children in such a complicated subject? Isn't it better to leave them to play and enjoy that? Very soon they have to leave childhood and face the inevitable responsibilities and duties of adulthood.

What is mentioned above indicates a traditional thinking that is present whenever the topic of teaching

philosophy to children is discussed. So, it is better to consider these questions precisely. If there is a relationship between children and philosophy, it should be cleared that what is the meaning of child. Whether it is needed to offer a new concept for it is applicable to philosophy or what concept from philosophy and what concept from child is necessary so that teaching of philosophy to children is justified. Of course, it seems that both concepts need some revision, because both of them are supposed to achieve something in interaction with each other. It is supposed that the children are like strangers who are away from the logical pathway for philosophy and the tradition of thinking philosophically and they should be returned back to this pathway. Philosophical stimulus can be enjoyable and beneficial for the children, and the children are also able to give a new life to the theoretical research in philosophy by their new methods and significant views.

Anyway, there is still the question that whether the children can be philosophical; whether the philosophical discussions bore the children; whether the difficult philosophical discussions deprive the children from the joy of childhood; whether we do not deprive them from the joy of childhood by distancing them from questioning and imposing the answers that we believe to be correct. Philosophy is all amazement and it is not intended at mystifying the universe, but it aims at answering the new and deeply hidden questions. The philosophy is for children, because in philosophy one is allowed to play, but not with bicycle or ball, but to play with thoughts, words, and particles. In philosophy, the children do not need to distance from their plays and adventures, but they get a chance to use their thoughts in those plays and adventures because they are quite able to present some imaginative and play-evoking questions. The world of children is the world of play and entertainment and our duty as the adults is not to detach them from this world, but we should try to incorporate them in the play.

The meaning of philosophy that is offered in P4C neither is the philosophical opinions, nor the philosophy as a discipline or the academic philosophy. These are what make the philosophy complicated from the view of specialized people and non-specialized general public. While this complexity is actually true, it deviates from the philosophical tradition of accurate thinking. There is more consistent on the idea that philosophy does not have such a meaning. As we can see that the intended concept of philosophy by Plato for dialectic and also those of Socrates, Kant, and Descartes, all show it. By a concise consideration, it is clear that Plato is a great philosopher because he had original questions in mind not because he had stored the philosophical thoughts of prior philosophers. Socrates, as the teacher of Plato, has the same reason behind his everlastingness (Ghaedi 2004).

The child that is addressed in P4C is not the psychological child, not the child with no right and in the margin, not a clear and white tablet that anything can be written on it, not the guilty child of Freud, not the deprived child of Calvinist, but this child has passed from all of these pathways as well as Rousseau, Darwin Montessori, Dewey. For Lipman and for P4C, the child is a child.

## **2. The Goals of Philosophy for Children Curriculum**

The philosophy has clear cognitive goals for children. It forces the mind to operate. This is done through the challenges, principal thinking, and structural interaction. This program has social goal as well, which is teaching the process of democratic decision making. It can lead to the development of regular participation and the consciousness of the individual (Haynes 2002, 11). The teaching of thinking method can be considered as the most general and public goal of this program. From the view of Lipman (1980, 53), the most important goal of this program is to help the children to learn how to think for them.

### 3. The Educational Content

The educational content is provided from three resources, which are:

(1) Short philosophical stories, (2) Teacher guidance, (3) Teacher.

The educational content of Philosophy for Children program is traditionally what Lipman offers between 1970 and 2000, but during the same period some other points have been added. It includes poetry, the news report, children games, music, picture collections, documentary, and other references that contain philosophical programs for children. The experience of the children is also another significant resource. Moriss and Hanish (2000) have designed some sequential stories from the books stories (1996) and games (1997) that are applied in order to develop thinking in the classroom. There are other pictorial books available that their application methods for investigation are explained by Moriss (1992). There are also some videos that are designed for the younger children and that are more proper for use in the kindergarten and pre-school ages (Splitter 1985).

### 4. The Dominant Approach in the Teaching of Philosophy for Children

There are two main approaches that are rather general and provide the curriculum with a structure. They are Integrated Approach and Philosophical Approach.

#### 4.1. *Integrated Approach*

By integrated approach, we mean the interweaving of the different types of mental and philosophical status, the cognitive skills, and the resources for subjects and their methodology in a community of inquiry classroom. The philosophical approach focuses on philosophizing and developing the power of reasoning which should be both the basis for the curriculum and an umbrella term which includes and leads all the activities in this program. In the integrated approach, all of the elements related to the P4C curriculum would be integrated so as to attain the goals for P4C. In P4C, on the one side, the psychological, social, and cultural grounds are considered and, on the other side, enough attention is paid to philosophical, educational, and philosophy of education grounds. P4C claims to be an extract of educational strengths and is empty of most of the educational weaknesses; therefore there is a need for an appropriate integration of them.

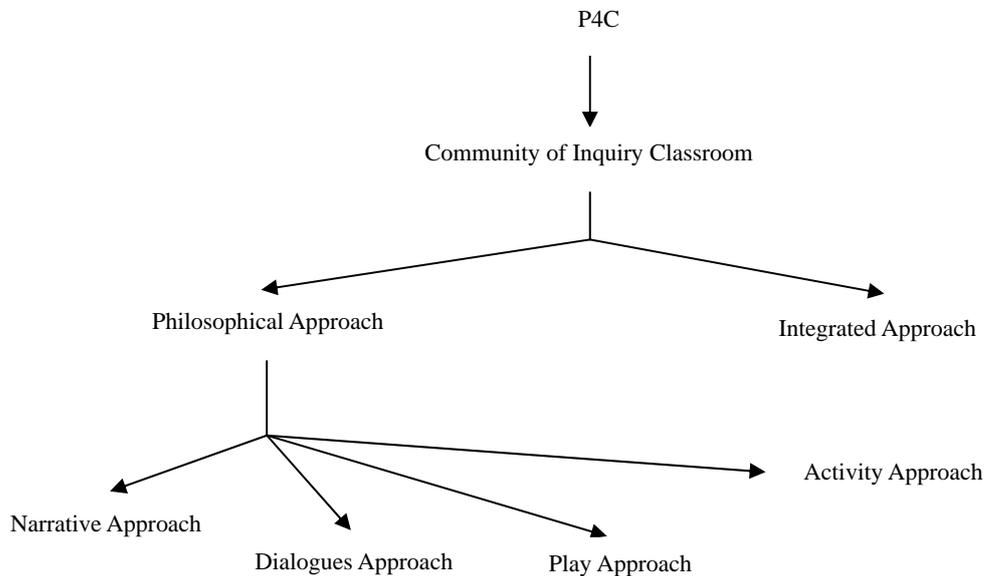
#### 4.2. *Philosophical Approach*

Philosophical approach refers to all of the cases that are implicitly or explicitly originated from philosophical views or opinions, or the cases that are created by philosophy. For example, dialogue is the heart of creations and most of the events are influenced by dialogue. The philosophical approach itself is comprised from other approaches which are: Narrative Approach, Dialogues Approach, Play Approach, and Activity Approach.

##### 4.2.1. Narrative Approach

Teaching philosophy for children has led to the significance of the theory and practice of philosophy in curriculum much more than what is expected from a curriculum for children. What is able to integrate some unorganized childish stories that each of them contains some practices and discussions with the historical western philosophy in its general concept? This simple educational instrument (device) can lead us to the revision of some of the basic images about nature of activity and using tradition as a whole. We can find a way for understanding and implementing philosophy with the help of philosophy for children. Although these discussions have been implicitly present, they have been applied only in short periods and only accidentally.

The fields, which offer creativity, innovation, and also attainment of the subjects that have previously been in tradition, can extensively be included in the domains of dialogue and narrative, and the dialogue has a particular importance here. “The reason is that it is the basis for the methodology of the program that is known as the community of philosophical inquiry” (Kennedy 1992).



**Fig. 1. The relationship among the approaches.**

#### 4.2.2. Dialogue Approach

The experience of collective dialogue is a basic exercise which faces us with the primary condition of philosophy in which the philosophy is not only a type of dialogue but also a story of thoughts and ideas. This is a multi-voice dialogue in which the ideas and thoughts regarding other people and universe are improved through the interaction. And it pulls over the model of traditional discussion of existence and theology more than any other deconstruction for the tradition of Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI) which has been present at least from the time of Aristotle (Kennedy 1992). Dialogue in traditional forms that dates back to Socrates occurs between two people and this is considered to be the best method for dialogue. But, in P4C, dialogue is considered through community of philosophical inquiry. Some questions may arise at this point: How much of Socrates' method are followed in this type of dialogue? How the main characteristics of dialogue that are based on interaction between two people can be extended to the idea of collective discussion? Whether the characteristics of an individual can be directly transferred to the others? “There are some similarities among the dialogues between two people and a group dialogue. The group can be a ‘you’ for each individual in group dialogue. In the inquiry community, the interaction can be between me and the whole group instead of me and you” (Kennedy 1999).

#### 4.2.3. Play Approach

It is Gadamer who integrates dialogue with play and offers it to be at the service of CPI. The multiplicity of meanings of the word game is a grant here, because all of them are provided in a concept of CPI. This is possible in the more general meaning of play that is an event/construct structure that takes the players beyond

themselves and in which the terms of classical game theory dominate the daily relationships that are mostly based on benefit and goal seeking and the integration of opportunity, chance, and innovation. This is possible because game is in-exploitative by nature. These are not the players the play upon the universe, but it is the universe which functions through players. The players are reconstructed through play which means they are released to the innovative offhandedness of a construct which is beyond any individual player (Gadamer 1975; 1983).

#### 4.2.4. Activity Approach

In the curriculum of P4C the students are in the center of learning activities. They participate in the Community Inquiry of classroom, because the process of community inquiry is organized in a way in which the students must take part in dialogue, and the speaker cannot be inactive in any way. The story narration preserves the consistent attention of the children and the performance, and play mode makes the whole learning process more attractive.

### 5. Conclusion

The nature of P4C is investigated in the present article and two concepts of child and two concepts of philosophy are presented. The concept of child is compared to adult and it is shown that P4C program has reconstructed the concept of child in a way that it can be welcomed in this program. The concept of philosophy is also reconstructed. In philosophy studying, the ideas is not philosophy but it is philosophizing. The main goal of P4C is helping children to think for themselves not to copy the others' ideas. This goal is attained through stories, teacher, and his/her guides; therefore, the teacher plays the role of a facilitator. The main point in this study is inducing the approaches that are implicit in this program that are: Integrated Approach and Philosophical Approach which is divided into other approaches.

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