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philosophy and childhood: theory and practice

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Philosophy for Children (P4C) was born in the late 1960s, created by Matthew Lipman. With the cooperation of Ann Margaret Sharp and others, it soon turned into a full-fledged K-12 program. This present dossier was born from the need to foster and deepen the theoretical and practical value of the philosophy for children (P4C) movement, which includes the more classical philosophy for children program and many other forms inspired by it.

A concern with children doing philosophy is inseparable from a preoccupation with childhood and asks for a redefinition of childhood itself. This exploration is at least one fundamental dimension of the group of philosophers and educators who presented their work and experience at the Conference "Philosophy and Childhood: Theory and Practice. A Conference on the Pedagogical and Philosophical Foundations of Philosophical Practices with Children" that took place at Bologna University, from December 3 to 5, 2018. This present dossier was born from the need to foster and deepen the theoretical and practical value of the philosophy for children (P4C) movement, which includes the more classical philosophy for children program and many other forms inspired by it. We could affirm that for these educators and philosophers it is at least as important to bring children to philosophy as it is to bring philosophical thinking to children and childhood.

This Dossier, "Philosophy and Childhood: Theory and Practice" contains seven papers. The texts were initially approved by two reviewers in order to be presented at the Conference, then submitted again to our double-blind peer review process in order to qualify for inclusion in the present Dossier. All papers have

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abstracts in English, Spanish and Portuguese. In the following paragraphs we will propose a short review of each paper.

In "Educational deontology in the community of philosophical inquiry", Silvia Demozzi and Marta Ilardo, from University of Bologna, offer a pedagogical perspective as part of the debate on philosophical practices with children, referring particularly to educational deontology matters emerging when "uncomfortable" questions occur. They discuss what educational deontology is required in order to deal with the challenges that these kinds of questions bring along. Starting from the concept of deontology proposed by the educationalist Mariagrazia Contini and embracing Jana Mohr Lone's idea of children's comfort with uncertainty, the paper offers a discussion on what they mean by educational responsibility when undertaking the task of facilitating a community of philosophical inquiry with children. The paper concludes that the facilitator should be present, attentive, capable of good listening.

Antonio Cosentino, one of P4C Italian pioneers and founder of the P4C Italian Center, in "The philosophical baby and Socratic orality" argues that using the expression "Philosophical Practice of Community" (PPC) instead of "Philosophy for children" (P4C) appears preferable to protect the latter from the risk of being considered, because of its evocative vagueness, both a sort of toy-philosophy, and a kind of pedagogical device suitable for all purposes. Set out in terms of PPC, the project of doing philosophy with children becomes part of a broader field of research concerning each of the three components ("philosophical", "practice", and "community") and their relationships. Among the many questions that a PPC puts on the table, in this paper Cosentino frames three of them: 1) Is it necessary to know the philosophical tradition to practice philosophy with children? 2) Who are the philosophers? 3) How to revitalize the Socratic orality?

In "The paradox of philosophy for children and how to resolve it", Maria Kasmirli, from the School of European Studies in Heraklion (Greece), proposes the following paradox: good teaching starts from the concrete, and it engages with each student's individual interests, beliefs, and experiences. Preadolescents (and to some extent everyone) find this approach more natural than

a more impersonal one and respond better to it. But doing philosophy involves focusing on the abstract and disengaging oneself from one's personal interests and beliefs. It involves critiquing one's attitudes, seeing abstract relations, and applying general principles. So, if good teaching focuses on the concrete and personal, and good philosophy on the abstract and impersonal, how can there be good teaching of philosophy to children? In her paper, Kasmirli explores how teachers might respond to the paradox: should they sacrifice good teaching practice, adopting a heavily teacher-centred approach in order to correct their students' natural biases? Should they lower their expectations of what philosophical skills children can acquire? Should they even attempt to teach philosophy to children? The paper argues that there is a better option, which exploits children's imaginative abilities by encouraging them to imaginatively identify with other perspectives, thus starting from their natural focus on the concrete and particular to bring them into more abstract, critical ways of thinking. The paper also presents a general strategy for implementing this approach, the Scenario-Identification-Reflection (SIR) method, which is illustrated with examples drawn from the author's own classroom practice.

Eleonora Zorzi and Marina Santi, from the University of Padova, offer an instigating text: "Improvising inquiry in the community: the teacher profile" by which they reflect on two different dimensions. On the one hand, the feasibility of improvising inquiry in the community, promoting inquiry as an activity that can be developed extemporaneously when teacher and students form a community with an "improvising" habitus. On the other hand, the intrinsic improvisational dimension of inquiry that takes shape in philosophical dialogue in the community. To develop these two educational and formative perspectives, participants students and particularly teachers must first acquire a "readiness" for improvisation which is a sort of complex attitude. Some results of previous research on improvisation are presented to explain and emphasize the features of this complex disposition. Teachers thus become improviser-facilitators within the community, embracing the feature of a new jazz-pedagogy.

In “The child and the P4C curriculum”, Stefano Oliverio, from Federico II University of Naples, focuses on the concept of childhood. By reading some of the major philosophical works of Descartes, he argues that one of the main thrusts of his conceptual device is a deep-seated, and even anguished, mistrust of childhood and its errors: in the Cartesian modernity philosophy/science and childhood are at odds with each other. Dewey rehabilitates childhood and its form of experience by healing the rift between childhood and science (as his notions of inquiry and qualitative thinking prove). By activating and developing the significance of qualitative thinking, Matthew Lipman and Ann Margaret Sharp were able to progress beyond Dewey and proposed Philosophy for Children inspired by the Deweyan relationship between the child and the curriculum.

Mariangela Scarpini, from University of Bologna, in “Possible connections between the Montessori Method and Philosophy for Children”, focuses on certain aspects of these two education methods: one initiated in the first half of the twentieth century by Maria Montessori, and the other in the second half of that century by Matthew Lipman. The aim – neither comparative nor analytical – is to shed light on the connections and, more specifically, on the elements of the Montessori Method that reflect on Lipman’s proposal. Her paper answers the following question: can P4C find fertile ground in schools applying the Montessori Method?

Finally, in “Why am I here? the challenges of exploring children's existential questions in the community of inquiry”, Luca Zanetti, from the University of Bologna, deals with children’s existential questions, that is, questions about death, the meaning of existence, free will, God, the origin of everything, and kindred questions. He suggests that it is unclear whether the pedagogy of the community of inquiry can accommodate these existential questioning because they might be a cause of suffering: children might be unable to contain the emotional intensity that is experienced when we inquire about topics like death and the meaning of existence. In this paper Zanetti highlights some of the main challenges that we need to face if we want to make room for existential questioning in the community of inquiry.

Through these papers the dossier "Philosophy and Childhood: Theory and Practice" provides the international PwC community with a significant opportunity to explore—both theoretically and practically-- the extraordinary potential of philosophical inquiry with children. Italia is one of the countries usually referred to as being one of the strongest in terms of the development and practice of Philosophy for Children. The authors of this dossier have provided a story that justifies this reputation and do it in an honorable way. Thus, we hope that our readers will find in this dossier a rich source of possibilities for continuing to think and rethink, not only the meaning and sense of philosophical inquiry with children, but also of their practice and place in this worldwide movement.

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