

“LIFE GOES ON EVEN IF THERE’S A GRAVESTONE”:  
PHILOSOPHY WITH CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS ON VIRTUAL  
MEMORIAL SITES

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Abstract

All over the Internet, many websites operate dealing with collective and personal memory. The sites relevant to collective memory deal with structuring the memory of social groups (nations, states, ethnic groups, religious groups, etc.) and they part of “civil religion”. The sites that deal with personal memory memorialize people who have died and whose family members or friends or other members of their community have an interest in preserving their memory. This article offers an analysis of an expanded philosophical discourse that took place over a two-year period with three groups of young people (children and adolescents) who had experienced loss in their families or their communities and who were partners in writing texts on memorial sites or had established websites as part of coping with the loss. This article seeks to offer a narrative analysis of the philosophical discourse and to contribute to an expansion of the discussion regarding the connection between Philosophy with Children and its methods (such as Community of Inquiry) and the social networks where entire lives involving philosophical dimensions are conducted.

Keywords: virtual memory; loss; philosophy with children

“A vida continua, mesmo que haja uma tumba”: filosofia com crianças e adolescentes nos sites de memória virtual

Resumo

Por toda a Internet, muitos sites operam lidando com a memória pessoal e coletiva. Os sites relevantes para a memória coletiva lidam com isso estruturando a memória de grupos sociais (nações, estados, grupos étnicos, grupos religiosos, etc.) e eles contêm parte da “religião civil”. Os sites que lidam com a memória pessoal rememoram pessoas que morreram e cujas os membros da família ou os amigos ou outros membros de suas comunidades têm um interesse em preservar sua memória. O artigo oferece uma análise do discurso filosófico extenso que toma lugar durante o período de dois anos em que três grupos de jovens pessoas (crianças e adolescentes) que tiveram uma experiência de perda em suas famílias ou comunidades e que parceiros na escritura de textos em sites memoriais ou que estabeleceram sites como uma parte da integração da perda. Esse artigo busca oferecer uma análise narrativa do discurso filosófico e contribuir para uma expansão das discussões sobre a conexão entre Filosofia com Crianças e seus métodos (como a Comunidade de Inquérito) e a rede social em que vidas inteiras, envolvendo dimensões filosóficas, são conduzidas.

Palavras-chave: virtual; perdas; filosofia com crianças

“life goes on even if there’s a gravestone”:  
philosophy with children and adolescents on virtual memorial sites

“La vida continua, incluso exista una tumba” Filosofía con niños y adolescentes páginas de memoria virtual.

#### Resumen

Por toda la internet, muchas páginas operan lidiando con la memoria personal y colectiva. Las páginas web relevantes para la memoria colectiva lidian con eso estructurando la memoria de grupos sociales (naciones, estados, grupos étnicos, grupos religiosos, etc), ellas contienen parte de la “religión civil”. Las páginas web que lidian con la memoria personal rememoran personas que mueren y de las cuales miembros de su familia o amigos o otros miembros de sus comunidades tienen interés por preservar la memoria. El artículo ofrece un análisis de los discursos filosóficos extensos que tiene lugar durante un período de dos años en que tres grupos de jóvenes (niños y adolescentes) que tuvieron una experiencia de pérdida en sus familias o comunidades escribían textos en páginas memoriales o establecieron páginas web como forma de hacer frente a la pérdida. Este artículo busca ofrecer un análisis narrativo del discurso filosófico y contribuir para una expansión de la discusión sobre la conexión entre Filosofía con Niños y sus métodos (comunidades de investigación) y redes sociales en que vidas enteras, implicando dimensiones filosóficas, son conducidas.

Palabras clave: memoria virtual; pérdidas; filosofía con niñas y niños



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MEMORIAL SITES

The Internet offers a huge space for expressing collective and personal memory which is devoted to various forms of user participation and information exchange (Beer & Burrows, 2010). Some of the sites serve as a sort of community of individuals or groups who have set up a closed space (sometimes involving passwords) where the members can write and share thoughts and ideas, and uploaded videos or texts. These sites, accordingly, are a virtual home. Some of the other sites serve as open spaces where members of the mourning community, as well as the public, can also participate in reading, open discussion, writing texts or posting thoughts. Recuber (2012) terms these sites’ visitors, who contribute to the memory bank, “prosumers”. According to him “Like other forms of online activity associated with the phenomenon commonly described as “Web 2.0”, in which websites offer users a platform or framework that they can add to or modify, contributing to a digital memory bank is simultaneously a form of production and consumption. The consumption of these online archives and memory banks constitutes a form of production as well because users frequently add their own stories, submit files, add links, tag through the database as a means of customizing their own existing content, or even simply search experiences” (Recuber, 2012: 533).

The architecture of these memory banks seeks to “embody the relationships of participatory cultures and communal memories that are being constructed through next generation Internet technologies such as Second Life, blogs, wikis, and social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace” (Jesiek & Hunsinger, 2008: 193). Although the objects in these memorials are not rewritable in the same vein as Wikipedia entries, some memory banks allow users to add tags to existing items, and memory bank developers are currently exploring new possibilities for added interactivity in future iterations (Jesiek & Hunsinger, 2008).

Some of the Internet sites offer virtual spaces for memorializing or spaces to express either mourning or group or individual sorrow. These Internet sites are a direct continuation of physical sites such as monuments, memorial corners or

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ceremonies involving the dedication of physical sites (such as public parks or libraries) to the memory of the deceased or the existence of memorial projects of various kinds.

### **Collective and individual memory**

Collective memory is one of the narrative components used in national and cultural enterprises in which death also fills a central role. Collective memory as a concept has merited more than a few definitions and many interpretations, such as a collection of facts and perspectives regarding the past held by a certain group of people (Halbwach, 1980; Bodnar, 1992; Assmann, 2007). Collective memory includes past events not necessarily directly experienced, but which have been transmitted by others to society as a whole through various means of communication and society’s agents of socialization (Reese & Fivush, 2008). Collective memory is borne also by myths and rituals, which make up a system of civil religion’s formal “tools” (Harber & Pennebaker, 1992) which are filtered in a tendentious manner by agents of memory, such as the educational system, the media, and art.

Schwartz (1977) sees collective memory as a representation of the past assembled from eternal symbols and historical evidence. Gramsci (1971) maintains that a hegemonous group can shape the opinion of other groups about society, war, and patriotism, and even determine their standards for judging these concepts. McLaren (1989) agrees with this analysis and directs his criticism to the educational system in that, at the end of the process, the interests of the dominant classes permeate the interests of the rest of the groups, the result being that all the other groups develop a consciousness of agreement.

Additional discussions enter into the complex web of relationships of history and memory between past and present. Even if both discussions involve dependent relationships, indeed, they are differentiated analytically (as well as empirically). The former deals with the distance between memory (cultural or collective) and the historical “truth”, and the latter deals with the gap between the past “as it was” and its representations in the present.



The dimension of individual memory is based on the individual, even the child, who organizes reality for himself in accordance with the story he tells himself (Pillemer & White, 1989; Bartlett, 1995; Pillemer, 1998). Similarly, he is influenced by other stories he has been told about himself. There is a circular interaction between these two parts of the dimension of individual memory, constantly influencing each other, activating power relationships in the sense that Foucault (1980) has spoken of and changing them. The partial stability of individual memory is not immune to environmental and group influence which, in most cases, makes them liquid (Bauman, 2000).

In many senses, the tools of individual memory are our means of looking at the world through both a microscope and periscope with high and low resolutions. Memory includes an occurrence that generally has a beginning, middle, and end, even if the end is temporary or dynamic, and can be altered at any moment. Genres such as reportage, story or legend are examples of narrative memories. They help in making it possible to decipher a person's manner of thought and behavior and those of individuals as groups. This is accomplished with the help of narrative structure. Researchers who have adopted a narrative approach perceive it as dialogic, allowing an opening for the encounter between researcher and the subject being studied (Sarbin, 1986), and in our case, between the living and the deceased.

Memory as a foundation for personal structuring also contains a dimension in which narrative and self are not separate. According to McAdams (1985), the perception of self as a narrative allows the individual to fulfill an active role regarding his/her identity. People transmit the events that have undergone thematization in accordance with a clear self image. In this instance, a narrative analysis permits the revelation of the meaning of the narrator's individual identity, and thus, the examination of overt and hidden contextual meanings in the text, without searching for the coherency of memory and narrative, and rather by identifying and examining the multiple voices to be found in it.

Accordingly, Internet sites are spaces in which collective memory and individual memory are shaped. The Internet has created innumerable possibilities

for the construction of memorials devoted to tragic or catastrophic events and the exercise of collective memory (Recuber 2012).

Children and adolescents often find themselves active on such sites where they act in an open manner and reveal their feelings. Threaded posts, profiles, photos, and avatars create a history of online exchanges and allow for the past to be reconstructed (Chayko, 2008). In this way, the interactive and participatory aspects through the Internet generate a writable collective memory (Ulmer, 2005), which captures contemporary norms and mores about social issues.

By way of these sites, they raise weighty subjects, that Roberta Israeloff (2012) terms “The big questions [that] come naturally to us [...] In short, the paths that bring us together this morning vary, but in the end, we’re drawn by our compulsion to ask questions, to question answers, and to value education – which also, we all know, begins to wonder” (p. 5).

This article is based on a study that I undertook over a two year period in three groups of a Community of Inquiry: two groups of seven to nine-year olds and one group of adolescents aged twelve through fourteen who had established sites such as these or had participated in actively posting on them. After having received parental permission for the individuals to participate in the study<sup>1</sup>, the children/adolescents would engage in a Community of Inquiry once every two months related to the content written on these Internet sites. Each one of the groups numbered ten children or adolescents. Most of the participants in the children’s groups were girls (a ratio of 6:4), whereas in the adolescent group the majority were boys (a ratio of 7:3). In most instances, the sites had not been established by the participants in the Community of Inquiry, although a small number of them were established by the participants themselves as part of memorializing and mourning for the death of the person close to them. All the sites with the exception of six, were in memory of relatives such as a grandfather and a grandmother, and a small number of instances were in memory of relatives, such as a brother or sister, as well as a friend from school or youth movement or the community.

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<sup>1</sup> With a promise not to reveal the identities of those who had died or the identity of the sites and, of course, not to reveal the children’s names.



### **The discourse during the Communities of Inquiry**

The Philosophy with Children approach, argue Lipmann, Sharp and Oscanyan (1980) involves the view that children's questions tend to be extraordinarily sweeping in scope and grandeur. According to the three, among the questions the children ask is also the following question "What happens to people when they die? It raises issues of enormous metaphysical importance" (1980: 29). Lipmann, Sharp and Oscanyan added that "The fact that children can raise such questions indicates that they begin with thirst for holistic explanations, and it is patronizing to say the least not to try to help them develop concepts equal in generality to the questions they ask" (Ibid).

A Community of Inquiry provides a framework in which children can think and talk about problematic issues with support from adults and children is vital. Haynes and Murriss (2012) have argued that "The Community of Enquiry pedagogy is not about a return to child-centredness: neither teacher nor pupil is at the centre. The search for better understanding and justified beliefs through collaborative reasoning and dialogue are at the centre" (p. 4). Splitter and Sharp have suggested a different concept by arguing: "A community of enquiry is at once immanent and transcendent: it provides a framework which pervades the everyday life of its participants and it serves as an ideal to strive for" (1995: 17-18).

The children/adolescents in the Community of Inquiry presented at length the texts from the sites they managed or which they posted on. They listened to the opinions of others and discussed among themselves, in open dialogue, the reasons for establishing the sites or for their participation in them. Their words can be categorized according to their reasons for establishing the sites. They can also be categorized according to the reasons why the sites have provided for, what I would like to call a "continuous life" with the deceased or death. Alternately, this could be termed "continuous life" alongside the deceased or alongside death.

The first reason presented by the participants was the attempt to communicate in some way with the deceased individual "because I have no other way to communicate with him", in the words of one of the children. "My relative died and I feel a strong need to keep on communicating with him", added the

same child. “Of course, I can go to his grave and talk to his gravestone, but that’s not the same experience. Life also goes on even if there’s a gravestone. My life and my relative’s life were connected and his life was – and still is – part of my life, so that the grave doesn’t end my life. Maybe it ended his life. A few days ago, I asked myself, ‘Does my life end with my relative’s death’ and another question was ‘Can I end the part of my life the moment my relative died’. My answer was very clear and so, a few days ago, I wrote on the site ‘I know that you see me every day. I feel your look focused on me and I know that you are present here, even if I ask myself sometimes if I’m hallucinating. I know that I am not hallucinating. I feel you and so I know that you are with me. How do I feel you? I don’t know how to explain this in rational words for those around me to understand. I can give an example that sometimes I walk in the school hallway and you’re there next to me. That gives me a lot of confidence. If I talk with those around me about it, maybe they’ll think I’m crazy. The adults, and my parents too, give me a message that seems to say that I need to forget you, but I don’t want to. The truth is that I can’t. I’m not sure that the adults are doing the right thing when they ask me to separate from you. They always think that I’ll get hurt by continuing to live with your memory, but I think that I’ll only be a more complete person because of it. I’m afraid that you’ll be forgotten by me. I’m afraid that I’ll forget you. So when I come here [to the site], I feel at ease. Maybe you also see these words. Who can prove that you don’t see this? And anyway, what does it matter?’”.

During the Community of Inquiry, one of the children said about this text: “I think that there are two central elements here: one, you’re trying to prevent the death of your personal memory regarding your relative by holding a continuing dialogue on the site. You’re always talking about wanting to continue the memory (which apparently is very pleasant) that you had with your relative. The site and your role on it is a sort of struggle, a struggle for the memory, to revive the memory. Once, people wrote diaries and they had other ways to preserve memory and today this site lets you do this. I also think that the moment you post pictures, that you share, you basically don’t permit death. The person is essentially not dead. The second element is your desire to prevent your own death. If the memory dies – something in us dies and that’s your struggle. In a logical sense,





you know that your relative won't come back, but you know that if you forget him, or don't remember everything about him, something in you will die. I mean your relative is part of you. You had a shared world. The minute this world dies – something in you dies”.

Another child wrote about something similar on the site: “Dear grandpa, like always on Sabbath, I'm here like I would be at your house with grandma and the whole family. I come to this site wanting to communicate with you. Maybe you also are here on Sabbath because you always promised me that you would be with me and I'm sure that you don't want to break your promise. Grandfathers don't break promises to their grandchildren. That's something I always knew you would do – that you would always keep a date. Who said that I have to meet you face to face? I can be here, write, post my pictures for you, and feel that I'm still in touch with you. And I feel it”.

The second reason for virtual contact that arose during the conversations of the Community of Inquiry was the desire to perpetuate the memory of the deceased individual. One of the girls said: “I'm afraid that my brother will be forgotten. I know that time goes by and it's not easy for me at all. I have felt in the past months that the beloved image of my brother is gradually becoming blurred for me and I am trying to hold onto it. I try to dream about him more. When he appears to me in a dream, it's as if he's come back to me in life. He is so realistic, but through the website I feel that I have to remember him in the good sense of the word. Not have to, but committed to. I have this commitment to the connection and the memory. I'm afraid that a person leaves this world – he simply is forgotten. He disappears. I understand now how temporary we are here. This is a temporary state that seems to some people like an eternity. Today, after my brother's death, I understand that it is temporary, the most temporary. It is basically the most temporary thing on earth. Because of this, I feel that the people who are alive don't really want to keep in touch with the dead and don't really want to bother with them because it hurts. But the dead also always remind the living of life's impermanence. Through the memorial site, I preserve the dead, his memory. I want to say this by using a metaphor: it's as if I am holding the corner of my brother's jacket and don't want him to leave. He basically has already left

but every moment that I enter the website – lets him live, I perform an act of leaving him in eternity”.

An adolescent who memorializes his mother on a website said during the Community of Inquiry: “Perpetuation has a very important role in order to cause that the person and his deeds in this world won’t be forgotten. I sometimes wonder about our role in this world. We’re not only visiting here but we have influence here and we have traditions that have been constructed by humanity. When I enter the website and I write about what my mother did and see how others relate to her, I understand that her tradition and our loyalty to her tradition is very important”.

The element of loyalty to a person who died came up in the words of many of those present. Children who participated in the Community of Inquiry remarked that their remaining in the world of the living has a function and that they had to continue the role of their family member who was no longer among the living. “At the moment of death, I took up the sceptre. Someone had to do it. It’s now my watch,” said one of the teenage girls.

The third reason that arose from the words of the participants was the perception that the deceased individual is essentially not dead and that he lives even if it is not physically. One of the children said: “The person I’m attached to didn’t die. He did die physically, but he’s not dead in the emotional sense and he isn’t dead in the spiritual sense. The world is built from material things such as bodies, but there is also a soul and also a spirit and these don’t die. I don’t accept their death, because it’s a fact that I feel the person who isn’t physically here. In other words, death has a number of dimensions. When I – and I stress, I – decide that a person who isn’t with me is still with me – he’s basically with me. I really want to touch him, to hug him, to feel him, to be with him. I miss that a lot, it doesn’t exist and I know that cognitively, but I think that life has more dimensions. One of the dimensions is our perception of a person who existed and is no more. If this person is alive for us, that is, his presence is significant, the experiences with him exist and continue to exist, his appearance lives, he has a kind of spiritual freshness. For example, through pictures that I post on the website – I can say with certainty – and I want to say this – that he lives. Today,



my ability to communicate with him is huge because there are videos that I uploaded on the website and he moves in them, through his texts that I scanned and put on the site, through the pictures I posted. The second dimension is the desire for contact. When I want contact with someone who is not with me in material life and I talk with him, keep the ember of dialogue burning that doesn't go out, I essentially create him again each day. If I think what he would do, if I do something as a result of something he said, if I remember ideas he gave me - I basically am always perpetuating him. That a person's existence is more spiritual/emotional than physical comes out of this".

Another participant asked the question: "According to that, when you die - he'll also die". The child: "That's true. This chain will end at some point. But I assume that then I will be the person who will remain here for my children who will surely perform the same process when I die and have left this world".

Another participant: "I also think that the issue is essentially connected to our perception and not to the body's material existence".

The child: "Correct. When my grandmother died and we buried her, I was very sad, but I soon understood that she exists inside of me, in odors, flavors, pictures, in the things that I write about her on the website, in her smile, in the things that I remember that she said. Every time that I bring up another detail about her or something related to her, she lives. I can upload hundreds of items that I have from her long life and they won't disappear. They will live through me and through the website which breathes life into all my memories of her".

The fourth reason for the existence of memorial websites that came up during the meetings was the attempt to rebel against death. One of the teenage boys said: "Our job as living people is not to accept death as an end and as nothing. Life is a ferris wheel which keeps on turning".

A teenage girl responds: "I also find myself in a struggle against death. It's a kind of daily struggle opposed to life's finality. If I fight hard here - I'll attain a richer life. The meaning of my life will be deeper".

Teenage boy: "Yes, I find that our ability to work using the website I established on life's continuity - as opposed to the end - is wonderful. I'll try to define it this way: in the world that will be after our death - many pages will

remain on Facebook, many identities on Twitter, many living-deceased people. In contrast to the cemeteries which are full of graves and monuments, digital media allows us to perpetuate those people, not only in the sense of missing them. There’s a kind of saying here about our need to say ‘No’ to this common death. Yes, I am fighting here. I ask myself philosophical questions as a result of this. For example: is it right to combat death or do I need to accept it? Is death really the end of me and my relatives or is it essentially only part of life’s web which has other manifestations”.

Teenage girl: “In other words, you see the website that you established – as another expression of life as opposed to death”. Teenage boy: “Yes, it is an expression of life as opposed to death and also an expression of life within the condition of death”.

Teenage girl: “But if death is final – how is it possible to live in it?”. Teenage boy: “In the past, it wasn’t possible to live within death, but only by means of the inheritance that you left to the world: books, works, children who go on living after you. Today, using digital media which is infinite and certainly will expand even more and will become even stronger – I think that we have the possibility to attain life within death”.

Teenage girl: “Eternal life?”. Teenage boy: “No. Not eternal life but eternal living memory”. Teenage girl: “But at a certain point, someone won’t go to that page on Facebook anymore. No one will be interested any longer”.

Teenage boy: “That may be what happens, but the page will continue to live. It won’t be possible or necessary to delete it. It may be that at a certain point – and I’m sure that this will be possible – someone will decide – or we’ll all decide – that all these pages are a kind of ‘afterlife’ or even ‘the world’ without any further status updates – and we’ll give them a place even more important, we can walk around among them, we’ll make them live again, we’ll browse through them, we’ll read their contents, we’ll find common elements in them. They’ll make a sort of contribution to us. The past will become present. They will live!”.

Teenage girl: “That is a kind of eternal life. The person really wants to keep himself here. I may not be in this world but someone suddenly will encounter my page, will read about me, will identify and perhaps will be excited by the videos,



the items, the texts. He will perpetuate me and make me live, even for a moment, if I'm really not here. In essence, yes, I will be here through him, through his presence he makes me present, even if it's only momentary".

### **The philosophical and narrative discourse with the deceased**

Over the course of the young people's involvement with the Internet concerning the individuals who had died and their philosophical discourse with them and about them during the Community of Inquiry, a variety of philosophical and narrative processes have been performed. These certainly confirm the argument of Lipman, Sharp and Oscanyan: "Philosophy is therefore of enormous benefit to persons seeking to form concepts that can effectively represent aspects of their life experience" (1980: 90). It also strengthens Bruner's (1986) claim that narrative is a part of the way in which we perceive and understand the world and it's the way humans organize their knowledge and transmit it by means of meaningful messages in different manners, some of which are implied.

In many senses, these young people have created on the Internet philosophically-based narratives and they are their way to observe their reality by writing "a life story", in the words of one of the children. "Even after my grandfather died", he describes, "I continue the story of his life. I refuse to put a conscious gravestone on him. I go on living with him and this is expressed by my often examining my changes, the path of my life through the man who is no longer physically with me, but who is with me at every moment. It was only through this involvement with the website, that I became a philosophical person. I look at my life in an existential manner, look for its meaning, discuss the question of human existence with myself and with the people who write on the site". These narratives are the public revelation of the mind in action, windows to the content of the mind and the actions that take place in it (Chafe, 1990).

In many ways, the philosophical involvement of the children and adolescents in their lives in contrast and with those who have died (some of whom have refused to refer to them as "deceased" but refer to them by their names) has made their lives dynamic and able elevated through spoken or written language, and able to contain "moving images" (Barthes, 1986: 251).

During the Communities of Inquiry, the young people demonstrated by their words, the close connection they found between the question of truth (expressed by the physical death of their relative) and the question of narrative (the perception of his non-death). By means of this narrative, they emerge from philosophical wonder which has moments which are “perplexing or enigmatic” (Lipman, Sharp & Oscanyan, 1980: 31) and which shapes their truth regarding themselves and their surroundings.

This is an unending narrative in the young person’s search for his being. He can become an anchor of freedom and one of the ways for the young person to actualize his search for “being there” is the ontological structure of the individual. It can be said that the narrative is the young person’s possibility to fulfill his potential for authenticity, the voice of his conscience. Narrative is dynamic, and through the young person’s writing of his life (even by poetic means on the Internet), it is possible for the young person to implement a struggle for authenticity.

Branigan (1992) claims that when people tell stories, anecdotes, and other types of narratives involving them, these are conceptual acts that organize a base of facts into a special pattern that represents and explains experiences exactly. In the same way as the children and adolescents presented their life stories with death and the philosophical questions that arose as a result of life vis-à-vis death, within death, and as opposed to death as oral descriptions or explanations of the human experience according to which we can examine the recounted representations and explanations of the experience (Cortazzi, 2002).

In the Community of Inquiry centered around the perpetuating and memorial websites, narrative implements a configuration of sometimes eclectic events, into an event explained by its unity and internal coherence, although sometimes it contains imaginary elements. It is a story arrangement and by these actions, the narrative connects the proceedings of the individual and it is cast into a clear composition, whose organizing elements expressed in a narrative format (Polkinghorne, 1998).

The structuring of the narrative allows the young people to identify themselves within the whole, and to develop empathy or emotions such as



longing, love, anger, disbelief, and sometimes suspicion. The narrative story includes sometimes a cause and effect explanation which is often a human need permitting the strengthening of identity and identification. During the conversations, the young people found themselves dealing with organizing their human knowledge based on the axiom that the private human experience is generally told in a narrative manner and human identities are structured through it (Heikkinen, 2002). Supplying multiple perspectives of their attitudes about life, they frame their understanding of themselves and their world.

It can be said that the philosophical discussions of the children added a dimension to Bruner's definition (1987) which sees in constructivism "worldmaking" and narratives as "lifemaking". I would like to add another storey and argue that the Philosophical Community of Inquiry's discussion of mourning and memorial sites performs a process of "meaning making". This is a process connected to a cultural turn about from modernism to post-modernism that has blurred previous existing distinctions, including the line between scientific reporting and artistic expressions. As a result of this, individual autobiographies and narratives are involved more with the social sciences, to such an extent that some writers have begun to ask themselves what the boundary for researchers is, where they can or are permitted to write in a manner closer to the format of a novel, short story and similar genres. The basis of this position is that knowledge is a composition of narratives which are ceaselessly created in a process of social interaction and corresponds to post-modernist thought. This emphasizes multiplicity and diversity as elements of human existence. "I don't have to accept the general position that I hear in society around me", said one of the adolescents, "that when the dead person is buried, he is dead. If everyone believes this, I want to disagree about it and argue that on the Internet, there are already other narratives - for example, that the dead remain with us and that everyone has another narrative on the Internet in everything connected to the dead person". Another girl responded: "In other words, there are many stories about dead people and types of dead people". A teenage girl added: "I tell myself a new story about my relative who died. And that is my story and I believe in it and I feel connected to that story and it is my memory".

Constructivists are of the opinion that people construct their knowledge and identity by means of narratives, exactly like the children and adolescents on the Internet’s various websites, because knowledge is temporary, developmental and not objective and is created by social-cultural mediation. The child and the adolescent – the known subject – structures his/her knowledge on previous knowledge and experiences, dependent upon time, space, and the position of the observer. According to this position, knowledge is a chain of narrative process that has constantly added to it new material from the changing cultural world in the stories, for the purpose of joining it together cognitively. The dynamic Internet websites, in this sense, are these new added materials. These contemporary materials are not therapeutic but rather philosophical in their nature.

The composition of day-to-day knowledge and identities operate in the same way at all times. Their perspective on the deceased is expressed in a series of ways. Thus, for example, one of the children said: “My life on the Internet with my relative is basically a complex one. At the beginning, you may think that I am writing for the computer and that no one sees. But, essentially, I’m communicating with the dead person or with myself through the dead individual or with myself through the memories with the dead in a way that anyone can see – in other words, my website is open to the public. When other people respond, friends as well as family, a community is created which, although it doesn’t meet in the physical sense, it makes contact possible”.

Another adolescent girl added: “Writing allows me a kind of contact which provides me with an emotional experience. I don’t pity the deceased individual because I don’t think he’s suffering and I don’t pity myself – in other words, I am not the victim of my relative’s death – but rather, I feel a closeness and friendship with my relative who is no longer alive. I feel that he is important to me, that I am concerned about him sometimes”. In these example and others, the young people express the caring thinking as articulated by Philosophy with Children along with the cognitive contextuality which subordinates cognition to time, place and social field.

Continuing the thinking of MacHale (1992), who saw the turn about in the replacement of theory by narrative, I suggest here that it is a question of shift or





movement from the life narrative to a philosophical narrative in which there is a ceaseless dynamism. One of the children made reference to that: "I always think that when I'm older and I look at what I wrote when I was a child – and I've kept on writing and corresponding with my relative who died – I'll basically see things in a different way. I already look at the past year during which I've been writing on the website and I feel that my philosophical thoughts about life have changed a lot. Sometimes I've made them worse and sometimes I've been angrier or more mature. It's always in motion like water flow in a river. I've asked myself throughout the passage of the year – am I the same person? Is the person getting older the same person as when he's a child?".

Throughout the conversations, a dialogue in a number of voices was articulated: the child's voice; the deceased individual's voice through the child; the voice of memory and the voice of interpretation by the child during the way the community views the deceased and the world of the deceased. Some of these voices communicate perceptions of struggle or disagreement. "I don't agree with the desire of those around me that I shut down my website because I need to go on with my life", said one of the girls. "I receive messages from my family that lead me to understand that I'm strange and I behave strangely when I communicate with the dead. It's not acceptable in our culture", said one of the other girls. "When I share the texts, people – even my teachers – I feel strong opposition. Most of the responses attack me for not accepting death. The truth is otherwise: it's that I think that I'm precisely the one who accepts death, but I offer another interpretation. My interpretation is that death leaves something in life", said one of the adolescent boys.

Another teenage girl remarked: "We tell ourselves stories about the people we love and who we have said goodbye to because people are storytellers by nature. That's the way we produce meaning. Therefore, the story is a kind of human discourse. I think that's a universal quality".

The philosophical discussions children and adolescents revealed that narratives, created following the establishment of and writing on memorial websites, can prevent a consciousness of victimhood and suffering by the children and they, of course, serve as part of processing grief as well as creating meaning.

In the Community of Inquiry and on websites, the possibility to implement an analysis of the human experience and a manner for accepting its meaning are clarified. Man’s basic aspiration to create narrative coherency or to oppose it in his familial setting is expressed here. During the philosophical inquiry, many signs of philosophical sensitivity (Mohr-Lane, 2012) have been revealed regarding the pressures exerted on the children or the non-acceptance of their deeds. “My mother would want me to change”, said one of the children. “For her, to be changed is not to forget, but to forget a little bit. How can I forget someone I loved, even if he’s not here”.

In this sense, through philosophical inquiry, a completely involuntary act of clarification was carried out of the narrative working upon memory. Covarero (2000) has said that every human being, even without wanting to know it, is aware that he is a narratable self and he is submerged in the spontaneity of memory’s individual story. That being the case, the narrative is home for the subject, for the other and for the distinctiveness that he has thus created for the group. “The narratable self” finds its home not only in a conscious practice of remembering, but in a spontaneous narrated structure of memory itself. For this reason, there are those who define the self as “narratable and not narrated” (Covarero, 2000: 34).

According to Covarero, the narratable self – as a “home of uniqueness” – in our case, the uniqueness of the deceased individual – is not a product of a separate or intimate experience or a product of our memory. It is not a product of a project or a protagonist in a fictional story that we tell ourselves. It is not fiction that can distinguish itself from reality. It is a known sensation, domesticated, for each self temporarily revealing its life story which is one thing and not another. The other – the deceased – who we encounter is therefore, a self which can be narrated even if we don’t know the continuance of his story.

The children who participated in the Community of Inquiry were accordingly in a narrative-philosophical situation which presupposes a world view and subjective interpretation. These are not unequivocal and they fundamentally stem from a flight from pretension to firm arguments for objectivism. On the level of understanding, a person understands himself through the narrative. On the level of concern, the young person, the “self”, seeks to realize



his identity and his fundamental truth and that of his group as part of his certainty. Thus, the “self” exists in uncertainty and ponders whether it has internalized something external in the correct manner which then has become a solid part of its identity. Therefore, it reverberates as narrative, or it is given to an external manipulation that internalizes, determines, and establishes a truth – despite its group’s narrated, often imaginary, events of the past – which contains patently incorrect elements which the “self” cannot filter and regulate as part of the construction of identity.

### **Conclusion: Philosophy with Children and the “continuous life”**

During the discussions of the Community of Inquiry, conducted by children and adolescents as a result of their participation in mourning and memorial sites on the Internet, again and again issues arose relating to the meaning of life in light of the presence of death, the importance of personal and familial memory and the personal narratives that were constructed as a result of the spiritual encounter with the memory of the deceased.

In this article, I have analyzed these issues under the concept of the “continuous life” which philosophically challenged the children whose relatives had died. According to their perception, life, in the spiritual and emotional sense, doesn’t end with their relative’s physical death.

All the children and adolescents who participated in the conversations raised philosophical issues which in one way or another touched upon the relationship of the living with the dead and the meaning of death in the young people’s lives by their use of the Internet which allowed for the preservation of individual memory, today making it a dynamic one. This memory is flexible and today challenges Philosophy with Children (and adolescents) in that it allows for dealing with Communities of Inquiry regarding issues raised by the participants. Among these issues were the important and intimate relationship with the deceased, his memory, and his heritage, the possibility to perpetuate and engage in an ongoing dialogue with the deceased over the span of years, and the

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environmental pressures to end this contact due to others’ fears that it would harm the young people.

Throughout the philosophical discussions, the yearning to continue the contact with the image of the deceased and to carry out a process of “continuous life” were repeatedly heard. In this sense, the participants affected a process that Lipman (1988) called an ethical inquiry of the worthy life. The participants achieved a level of deep, even comprehensive, philosophical discourse in a way that Lipman called “The capacity of children to engage in rational dialogue, to offer reasons for their conduct” (p. 195).

Even philosophical inquiry surrounding sensitive issues such as death and the attitude toward it have proved that children and adolescents can carry out a process which Gareth Matthewes (1994) has termed “philosophical freshness and inventiveness that is hard for even the most imaginative adults to match” (p. 17). The engagement in the deepest meanings of life in the context of memory of the dead was revealed as intensive and valuable and branched out to relevant issues. In this context Lipman, Sharp and Oscanyan (1980) have argued that “adults too often assume that children are curious merely in order to acquire specific information rather than to understand the reasons that things are the way they are” (p. 25).

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