PHILOSOPHY WITH CHILDREN, THE POVERTY LINE, AND SOCIO-PHILOSOPHIC SENSITIVITY

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Abstract
A philosophy with children community of inquiry encourage children to develop a philosophical sensitivity that entails awareness of abstract questions related to human existence. When it operates, it can allow insight into significant philosophical aspects of various situations and their analysis. This article seeks to contribute to the discussion of philosophical sensitivity by adducing an additional dimension—namely, the development of a socio-philosophical sensitivity by means of a philosophical community of inquiry focused on texts linked to these themes and an analysis of them with the help of narratival tools that explain the children's philosophical moves. The ability to ask questions regarding complex social issues in the field of economics and to ask oneself personal questions about oneself is thus also exemplified in the deconstruction of the "great narratives" and their transformation into more accessible, human dimensions.

The first section of the article presents the philosophic framework within which discussions of this type are conducted with children and the historical background of this field as a method employed across the globe. The second section examines selected transcripts from philosophic encounters in which children discuss social and economic themes. The third section engages in a narrative analysis of philosophical discourse that seeks to broaden the discussion of the link between philosophy with children and the way in which children themselves construct philosophical sensitivities that can develop into socio-philosophic sensitivities.

In the case of discussions relating to the issue of poverty, the children raised basic questions relating to the core of philosophy. Unsurprisingly, they did not make exclusive use of examples. Their ability to address these issues allowed a discussion that also led them to develop caring thinking, which is based on friendship thinking. This is based on a social sensitivity founded on both empathy and the raising of logical arguments.

Key Words:
Philosophy with Children, Community of Inquiry, Philosophical Sensitivity, Socio-philosophic Sensitivity, Pedagogy of Fear

Filosofía con niños, la línea de pobreza, y sensibilidad socio-filosófica

Resumen:
Una filosofía con niños de una comunidad de indagación alienta a los niños a desarrollar una sensibilidad filosófica que implica la toma de consciencia sobre cuestiones abstractas relacionadas con la existencia humana. Cuando esta sensibilidad opera, permite una introspección sobre aspectos filosóficos significativos de varias situaciones y de su análisis. Este artículo busca contribuir a la discusión de la sensibilidad filosófica, aduciendo una dimensión

adicional, es decir el desarrollo de una sensibilidad sociofilosófica por medio de una comunidad de indagación centrada en textos relacionados con estos temas y un análisis de ellos con la ayuda de herramientas narrativas que expliquen los movimientos filosóficos de los niños. La capacidad para hacer preguntas sobre temas sociales y económicos complejos y hacerse preguntas sobre uno mismo, es por tanto, también ejemplificada en la deconstrucción de las "grandes narrativas" y su transformación en dimensiones humanas más accesibles.

La primera sección del trabajo presenta el marco filosófico con el cual las discusiones de este tipo son conducidas con chicos y los antecedentes históricos en este campo como un método empleado globalmente. La segunda sección examina manuscritos elegidos de encuentros filosóficos en los que los chicos discuten sobre temas económicos y sociales. La tercer parte se dedica a un análisis narrativo del discurso filosófico que intenta ampliar la discusión sobre la relación entre filosofía con niños y la forma en la que los propios niños construyen sensibilidades filosóficas que pueden desarrollarse en sensibilidades socio-filosóficas.

En el caso de las discusiones relacionadas sobre el tema de la pobreza los niños realizaron preguntas básicas relacionadas con el núcleo de la filosofía. Como era de esperar, ellos no hicieron uso exclusivo de ejemplos. Su capacidad para hacer frente a estos temas permitió una discusión que los llevó a desarrollar un pensamiento cuidadoso que es la base de un pensamiento amistoso. Este se basa en una sensibilidad social fundada en la empatía y en el nacimiento de argumentos lógicos.

Palabras clave: Filosofía para Niños, Comunidad de Indagación, Sensibilidad filosófica, Sensibilidad Socio filosófica, Pedagogía del Temor.

Filosofia com crianças, a linha de pobreza, e a sensibilidade socio-filosófica

Resumo:
Uma filosofia com crianças de uma comunidade de inquérito alenta as crianças para que desenvolvam uma sensibilidade filosófica que implica na tomada de consciência sobre questões abstratas relacionadas à existência humana. Quando esta sensibilidade opera, permite uma introspecção sobre aspectos filosóficos significativos de várias situações e de suas análises. Este artigo busca contribuir para a discussão da sensibilidade filosófica, adicionando uma dimensão, quer dizer o desenvolvimento de uma sensibilidade sociofilosófica por meio de uma comunidade de inquérito centrada em textos relacionados com estes temas e uma análise deles com a ajuda de ferramentas narrativas que expliquem os movimentos filosóficos das crianças. A capacidade de fazer perguntas sobre temas sociais e econônmicos complexos e de se fazer perguntas sobre si mesmo, é portanto, também exemplificada na desconstrução das "grandes narrativas " e sua transformação em dimensões humanas mais acessíveis.

A primeira sessão do trabalho apresenta o marco filosófico com o qual as discussões deste tipo são conduzidas com crianças e os antecedentes históricos neste campo como um método empregado globalmente. A segunda sessão examina manuscritos escolhidos de encontros filosóficos nos quais as crianças discutem sobre temas econômicos e sociais. A terceira parte se dedica a uma análise narrativa do discurso filosófico que tenta ampliar a discussão sobre a relação entre filosofia com crianças e a forma como as próprias crianças constroem sensibilidades filosóficas que podem se desenvolver como sensibilidades socio-filosóficas.

No caso das discussões relacionadas ao tema da pobreza as crianças realizaram perguntas básicas relacionadas com o núcleo da filosofia. Como era de se esperar, elas não fizeram uso exclusivo de exemplos. Sua capacidade para fazer frente a estes temas permitiu uma discussão

que as levou a desenvolver um pensamento cuidadoso que é a base de um pensamento amistoso. Este se embasa em uma sensibilidade social fundada na empatioa e no nascimento de argumentos lógicos.

Palavras-chave: Filosofia para crianças, Comunidade de inquérito, Sensibilidade filosófica, Sensibilidade Socio-filosófica, Pedagogia do Temor.

PHILOSOPHY WITH CHILDREN, THE POVERTY LINE, AND SOCIO-PHILOSOPHIC SENSITIVITY

Introduction

As a way of life and educational method, philosophy with children differs from philosophy as taught in schools and academia alike. While the teaching of philosophy is becoming increasingly common in schools (especially high schools), within the history of philosophy and philosophical thought philosophy with (and for) children regards itself as cultivating human beings who ask existential questions about themselves, their world, and their surroundings from an early age. In contrast to the academic study of philosophy, in which students are merely passive observers of philosophical ideas, philosophy with children seeks to create a place and space for active engagement in philosophical thought that promotes broad, critical thinking skills in its young practitioners. Rather than focusing on acquaintance with philosophy as a field of knowledge to be mastered (Mohr Lone, 2012a), it revolves around questions relating to the pupils' existence in the world. It thus develops their philosophical sensitivity (Mohr Lone, 2012b), presenting questions to them as a living, breathing, vigorous space that fosters creativity, caring, and concern (Wartenberg, 2009).

In this article, I would like to suggest that young children can develop socio-philosophic sensitivities within a community of philosophical inquiry devoted to addressing issues related to poverty, the poverty line, and the status of weak sectors of society. The first section presents the philosophic framework within which discussions of this type are conducted with children and the historical background of this field as a method employed across the globe. The second section examines selected transcripts from philosophic encounters in which children discuss social and economic themes. The third section engages in a narrative analysis of philosophical discourse that seeks to broaden the discussion of the link between philosophy with children and the way in which children themselves construct philosophical sensitivities that can develop into socio-philosophic sensitivities.

Philosophy with children: Philosophic sensitivity in a community of inquiry

As children's philosophic pedagogy proponents such as Lipman (1988) noted early on, dealing with existential questions relating to human beings, human life, and human nature requires making place and space in which close and focused attention can be given to the authentic and original philosophical questions (even if these are not sophisticatedly formulated) raised by children. Philosophy with children also demands that adults be willing to (temporarily) relinquish their conventional, normative knowledge and authority, foregoing the claim to be responsible for elevating children's levels. Placing the question at the centre of its addressing of human beings qua human beings, philosophy with young children endeavours to liberate itself from false truths and their justifications—or at least question these from a position of uncertainty as part of an open and intelligent dialogue.

Adults frequently find this a weighty and intimidating intellectual task that demands returning to beginnings and a readiness to allow children a free, safe educational space in which to ask initial, fruitful questions about themselves, their lives, their surroundings, and, in particular, the changing world they discover as curious students not yet affected by an education system that claims to be perfect. Typically, when philosophical discussion is engaged in at all, it is determined by adult answers rather than the questions themselves. In many cases, children are prevented from developing thinking skills in the name of (adult) wisdom and experience. Educators, teachers, and parents must all abjure their habitual "adult colonialism" in order to let children form themselves, recognising innocence to form the proper bedrock for a philosophical sensitivity that is not necessarily naïve but imbued with the hope that questions will nourish discovery and, most importantly, serve as the core of human happiness.

Such a space is characterised by the legitimacy it grants (on the basis of deep understanding) to a form of philosophical inquiry that encourages the asking of unlimited, broad-ranging philosophical questions rather than focusing on content. The pervasive uncertainty of this space allows children to change and grow rather than

develop along a predetermined path and nature. Herein, adults must fade into the background in order to let children access questions in their purest form without adult intervention. Frequently "contaminating" children's questions or the understanding that produces them, this often turns them into banalities. Adults must thus cease casting intimidating intellectual shadows over children, in particular over their fundamental questions regarding their world—which is not necessarily ours. They must scale down their presence and exhibit the rare quality of allowing children to find their way through the jungle of questions on their own without attempting to protect, limit, or make them afraid. They must let go, release, trust, and support.

In a world in which existential fear (of physical threats) is so omnipresent, the ability to allow children to be themselves—even on a metaphorical/philosophical level—has become virtually extinct. Gareth Matthews (1994), notes that parents and teachers are often so impressed with the burdens they bear in having to nurture, instruct, reassure, and inspire their children that they fail to appreciate what children have to offer adults a new philosophical perspective.

Contacts with parents, educators, and teachers who seek to give children an enriching and enabling educational space—especially in a multi-narratival world—constantly confirm that most adults have inherited a fear from their predecessors which they have turned into an ideology and pedagogy, not to speak of a way of life, thereby preventing the flow of philosophical questions that acts as existential oxygen for young life. This strangulation does not merely "normalize" children but also contains elements that threaten the very possibility of human spirituality.

In the current celebration of technological progress, such behaviour reduces human contact and the potential for any enterprises that do not affirm natural human ability. Turning them into banalities and self-evident entities, it thereby compartmentalizes and categorizes them as improper, "pompous," and "badgering." In a world of currencies and commodities, the capacity to think pure thoughts irrelevant to instrumental reality has become a luxury. It is therefore rejected as not possessing real economic value.

Adults have invented the theory of the "little person," according to which young children develop in order to become citizens of society, not fully belonging to it as children. Over the years, this candidacy has cast serious doubt on their philosophical capabilities, delegitimizing any attempts to allow them to ask philosophical questions. This trend has been exacerbated by virtual unanimous educational subscription to Piaget's (1972) psychological theory of child development. Under the patronage of educational psychologists, a complete theory, supported by a professional "lexicon," has emerged that denies not only the possibility of but also the very basis for the use of philosophical questions as a learning method amongst young children. The educational system has thus promoted multiple systems for drilling disciplines of knowledge into children a deliberate endeavour to avert the asking of existential questions. The only legitimate questions currently recognized therefore relate to learning achievements in areas of knowledge determined as important by adults.

Delimited, hierarchical educational practices in the form of educational institutions (the Ministry of Education, supervisory districts), educational programmes (narrow and constricted age-appropriate learning curricula anchored in defined fields of knowledge), and strict regulations regarding the status and authority of the subject studied (assessment tests, certificates that affirm the authority of those granting them)— all create a circular practice (that thereby possesses intrinsic force) of the exclusion of engagement in philosophy from the educational world. This phenomenon is characteristic not only of elementary schools but also of high schools.

Adults involved in education—principally the teachers, who have become victims of these mechanisms at the same time as their creators—hide behind the walls of knowledge or in the dark caves of pretension to wisdom and experience, no longer being capable of critiquing themselves. Fettered, they no longer believe in Gareth Matthew's claim that children possess a philosophical freshness and inventiveness that allows them to ask questions such as "Does the world have a beginning, and if so, when was it?"; "How do I know that all this isn't a dream?"; "Am I alive when I'm filmed on YouTube? Is it me on YouTube? Am I alive when I've already died but am on YouTube?" According to Matthews (1994), children's philosophical thinking has been

excluded from pedagogic academic and views because of the—too tight—grip held by the theory of developmental psychology, which posits that children develop in well-delineated, sequential stages.

Matthew Lipman, for many years the director of the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children at Montclair College, NJ, posits that children begin to develop philosophically when they begin to ask "why" (Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyon, 1980). Everything making them curious, they demand answers to their endless "why?" questions, constantly questioning the answers they are given and asking further questions. Building on Charles Peirce's ideas regarding the scientific community of inquiry, Lipman proposed the concept of a philosophic community of inquiry:

> We can now speak of "converting the classroom into a community of inquiry" in which students listen to one another with respect, build on one another's ideas, challenge one another to supply reasons for otherwise unsupported opinions, assist each other in drawing inferences from what has been said, and seek to identify one another's assumptions. (2003, p. 20)

In contrast to the competitive atmosphere and rivalry currently frequently promoted (even if only tacitly) in schools, such communities of inquiry encourage cooperation and collaboration amongst the children in order to support shared learning. The diminishment of the competitive element in classrooms in and of itself helps further the establishment of communities of inquiry characterised by inclusion, partnership, and cooperation. These traits enable the openness necessary for the emergence of— sometimes way out—philosophical ideas. By delimiting the space in which students are allowed to voice certain ideas, adults tend to ensure that these remain banal, serving their surroundings and adults.

The findings of studies conducted in recent years across the globe (Lewis & Chandley, 2012; Haynes & Murris, 2012; Chesters, 2012) have confirmed and substantiated that children think inventively and that by asking questions and working in philosophical communities of inquiry they develop both creative and caring forms of thinking. Such forms of learning do not impair their learning achievements in traditional fields of knowledge but improve them.

Philosophy with children educators across the globe have discovered that young children are far less bound by premises that impair their ability to ask philosophical questions than is commonly assumed. The problems attendant upon discouraging children from engaging in philosophical thought are manifest in the fact that first-year philosophy students in university are already subservient to the conformity that functions as a national or ideological—and frequently even an educational—home known for its "scientific" and "professional" terminology. Young even —very young— children naturally perform the Cartesian move of "beginning from the beginning." This allows authentic—albeit naïve—statements regarding things (in our case, questions) that have not yet been "contaminated" ("normalized") by the thinking environment. Such moves also reflect their (undefined) philosophical sensitivity (Mohr Lone, 2012b). This is the natural tendency most children exhibit to ponder basic and conventional experiences and behaviours and ask innocent but profound philosophical questions (Matthews, 1994). Questions, we might thus say, form their most natural living space— the warm womb that allows them to them to develop their thinking abilities.

Philosophical sensitivity relates to the Aristotelian concept of a natural instinct that can be through practice developed over time. According to Aristotle, development of the tools associated with the ethical view we hold ultimately leads to an intuitive grasp of complex ethical problems. As our thinking abilities grow through experience, we develop a unique capacity to look at ethical issues simply and calmly via our life experience. The more we hone such ethical awareness, the better we understand ethical dilemmas. Philosophical sensitivity is embedded in alertness to the abstract questions relating to human existence. When such an awareness emerges, it allows us to discern significant philosophical aspects within diverse situations by focusing on specific elements and creating a philosophical form for things we do not understand. Development of philosophical sensitivity is thus one of the natural outcomes of a philosophical community of inquiry whose members practice the skills of logical and critical thinking, conceptualization, and reasoning.

The philosophical self is created by the human capacity to contemplate existence and think about our experiences. It is challenged by the complexity of daily life,

primarily by the profound significance of the way in which we understand life, which reveals itself in our tendency to ask questions about our views and the way in which they develop. The traditional perspective attaches great importance to the intellectual, social, ethical, and emotional development of identity, being less concerned with our philosophical identity. It is thus no wonder that the philosophical self of most children remains underdeveloped, compelling them to understand life concretely in the way presented to them by adults via all the social agents the latter have at their disposal. Philosophical abstraction as a skill withers and its significance vanishes in the face of the reality of life, adults conveying the clear message that children must deal with the latter with "concrete," "practical" tools.

Dependent upon our philosophical sensitivity, our philosophical self cannot develop if we neglect philosophical thinking and, most importantly, the conditions of existence necessary for philosophic thought. These capacities rest on the degree to which we are interested in inquiring into philosophical questions and the practice and education we have received. In her seminal book *The Philosophical Child* (2012a), Jana Mohr Lone argues that, in most cases, we exhibit a tendency to develop abilities that appear to be naturally human capacities. It is thus reasonable to assume that those of us who are drawn to the philosophic approach will be those who develop their philosophical thinking skills. Philosophical sensitivity begins in an interest in unresolved questions relating to all areas of life. Thinking about such questions makes us aware that the way in which we understand things is not necessarily commensurate with what they actually are. This awareness leads to further questions. The more we examine the nature of our existence, the more questions we ask. Cultivation of this philosophical identity strengthens our ability to pay attention to the complexity that lies below the surface of life. Just as Aristotle's ethical notion links learning with identification of the ethical aspects in events and experience, so the development of philosophical sensitivity enhances our ability to more easily and simply discern and distinguish the philosophical aspects of the situations we encounter.

Mohr Lone contends that the concept of philosophical sensitivity is associated with Gardner's (1999) theory of multiple intelligences, corresponding to the "existential

intelligence" Gardner defines as the tendency to ask and ponder questions about life, death, and ultimate reality. It is the ability to locate ourselves in the eternity of life and within this in the human condition, which entails issues such as the meaning of life, death, physical and psychological fate, and other profound experiences, love, faith, etc. Philosophical sensitivity tends to start from what Gardner calls existential questions (linked to life, death, or reality—or the economic realm in our case) and other philosophical subjects, such as ethics, knowledge, faith, beauty, justice, and freedom. These questions arise from reflection on human existence and the world in which we live. Although many questions cannot be conclusively answered, they play a central role in the contemplation of the human condition.

Poverty and economic depression:
Children's discourse in a philosophical community of inquiry

Philosophy with children establishes a context in which children can openly ask questions and discuss broad issues and subjects. Haynes and Murris (2102) suggest that the community of inquiry places searching at the centre rather than either the child or the adult (parent or teacher), pursuing better understanding and reasoning through dialogue. The community of inquiry is thus a forum in which questions are asked, queries voiced, ideas mooted, views exchanged, and explanations raised within a non-confrontational, non-competitive framework that promotes intellectual enrichment and shared creativity. As Splitter and Sharp (1995) note, it is thus 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.

This section of the article is based on a philosophical community of inquiry I conducted for two years with a group of year four and five students. Having gained consent for participation in the study from their parents under a guarantee of anonymity, we held philosophy sessions every couple of weeks. The community engaged with texts the children brought from media channels relating to poverty issues—stories of impoverished children, poverty in society, and the consequences of

poverty. The children were asked to read the texts they brought to the sessions and discuss them philosophically. All Jewish and from well-established neighbourhoods in the centre of Israel, the participants were divided equally with respect to gender. They presented the texts they brought in details, asked questions, and listened to the views of others, engaging in open dialogue with one another about the philosophical ideas raised and then summing up the discussion with several central notions in line with the methods used in communities of inquiry across the globe.

One of the questions discussed was "What is poverty?" The answers fell into various categories, one of which related to poverty in the eye of the beholder. Following is the dialogue that ensued:

Boy: "I think a person is poor only when he decides that he is—in other words, that it's his idea of himself and his situation. I can have very little but decide that I'm not poor. In other words, I control my definition of myself."

Girl: "Do you think that a person can decide his self-identity for himself in isolation from his society?"

Boy: "Yes, of course. I'm sure he can. A person can not just decide that he decides about himself and decides how to define himself but, in my opinion, *has* to decide about himself. Precisely because we live in a society in which we're always comparing ourselves with others means that a person has to do so—has to take that decision."

Girl then asked: "How can a person even do such a thing if he lives in society? For example, he's always seeing people who can do more because they have more."

Boy: "I take what you say and add another step to it: a person who surrenders to the pressures of his environment is a person who in effect is not himself. At that moments, he becomes what his surroundings dictate him to be. He loses his self. If I already don't think about myself what I think about myself but change what I think about myself because of my environment, I'm in effect the environment and not myself."

Opposite this view another opinion was voiced arguing that poverty is relative. One of the children asserted that "Poverty is something that is measured and can be measured all the time. You have to look at what everyone has—property, salaries, for

example—and then make a table. The person who has more is rich, the person who has less is poor."

Boy: "But if the little a person has is sufficient for him why should he be called poor?

Girl: "It can't be enough for him because he lives in society and if most people have more than him that means that they get to better places economically or possibility-wise. That means that he'll never get to where they get to. There's no equality at all in this situation."

Boy: "So you don't take a person's ability to determine for himself into consideration at all but say that a person is part of society, perhaps a product of society. But I don't think that a person has to be a product of society. I want a person to be a product of himself."

Girl: "But what is 'a product of himself'? He doesn't live on an island. He lives in a society. Of course he's part of society. Of course he compares himself with society. Poverty is something comparative by very definition. The very word 'poor' means that something's relative—poverty in relation to something. In other words, in relation to others and to the rich person."

The second issue discussed was the treatment of poor people. The first view touched on the question of equality. One of the girls stated: "I think that equality is more important than the right to own property. If there was equality in society we could achieve the idea that people would love one another—or at least not hate each other. If there's equality, there's less war, for whatever reason. The central thing that divides people in society today is property, which gives rich people greater rights than poor people. I also think that poor people naturally want more and thus they have to steal more often."

Boy: "So you think the poor aren't responsible for their poverty? But there may be some who don't try hard enough."

Girl: "You can't just 'do more.' When one person has a lot and another has nothing, that's not a similar starting point. I think that equal opportunities start from true equality. Lots of times people speak about equal opportunities and it's mostly just

words. Some people don't want, don't have any interest in everyone having the same. They earn more than the poverty of others."

Against this view, some of the children supported the idea that a person's right to acquire property and be rich is more important than the right to equality. "I don't think that if a person is more talented than someone else that he's bound to give some of his property and money for the benefit of general equality. That infringes on his own right to succeed more. Competition between people is one of the greatest incentives for human progress. If everyone possesses the same amount, mediocrity would immediately flourish. People don't need to make more effort."

Another girl: "So you're claiming that what motivates a person to look out for himself and society is precisely competition—not what's called 'the good of society.' I think that's wrong. Competition doesn't produce good things. It creates what we read in the press and see on television—social inequality. I think that that's the gravest mistake."

The third issue the children discussed pertained to the importance of money and economic possibilities in society. One of them said:

"Money is very important. When a person has money he's more regarded in society and that's only natural."

Girl: "Who decides what's 'natural'? Society has to decide that. We call these 'norms' and they can change. I don't determine who's better or who's less good on the basis of money."

Boy: "You might not, but I do, and it is 'natural.' Why is it natural? Because everyone knows that the person who has more money is more successful—not just in relation to what he can do but also in relation to what he's made. He made this money—in other words, he's succeeded, and society judges him on the basis of money."

Another girl: "So you're judged according to what society determines. If you have more money you're better?"

Boy: "Not better as a person but better in terms of success."

Girl: "What does 'better in terms of success' mean? Obviously, you can make more from the money, but I think that it is the person who determines if he is

successful. If he decides to live modestly, for example, does that mean he's not successful? In my opinion, he's only successful then. He succeeds in overcoming the 'norms' of society. I often feel that society dictates how we should behave and thus how to make money and how much to make. That's very problematic. Then I'm like a puppet on a string."

The philosophic-narratival significance of the discourse on poverty

During the community of inquiry sessions various philosophic-narratival moves were also performed. These undoubtedly confirm Lipman's and his colleagues' assertion that philosophy prompts people to search out conceptualizations of various types that can effectively represent their experience of life (1980, p. 90). In many respects, communities of inquiry afford young people the opportunity to create philosophically-based narratival conceptualizations through which they can observe their reality. For example, one of the children stated: "All the time I compare the situation of children whom I read about with the economic situation of my family and I'm beginning to understand where we're wrong." Another girl added: "I'm not convinced that my family and surroundings are sufficiently sensitive, for example, in school, to those kids who have nothing. Lots of times, up until to this discussion, I've not thought about them in this way but just knew that I'm better. I'm beginning to think that I haven't been sensitive enough. I've never had a discussion with myself and others about this."

Two types of narratives emerged during the community of inquiry: narrative as a foundation for personal construction and narrative as a socio-cultural product. In some examples of the first type, the children organised their statements on the basis of their life experience, giving this meaning through a narratival process during which they frequently adduced examples from other children in the neighbourhood or school. This process enabled them to select certain aspects and order them into explanations. This form of narrative thus allowed them to organise and construct their mutual relationship

with society and locate themselves within its economic power games (White & Epston, 1990).

Narrative as the foundation for personal construction also contains a dimension in which the narrative and the self are not separate. As McAdams (1985) observes, self-sense as narrative allows people to play an active role in forming their identity. The children filtered the events about which they had read and discussed through a process of thematization in accordance with their self-image. In this case, a narrative analysis allows us a peak into the significance of the narrator's personal identity. This helps us examine the implicit and explicit contextual meanings in the text. Rather than looking for narratival coherence, we can focus on identity and discerning its multiple voices.

Narrative as a socio-cultural product enables children in a philosophical community of inquiry to live their culture and undergo a process of reexperiencing during which, according to Bruner (1986), they revise and refashion the history of their lives. Hereby, patterns of behaviour, views, tenets about life are reflected upon, established, and changed. Meta-cultural codes being transmitted without the individual or group's ability to decipher the inner and outer manipulations performed or adopted, sometimes with good intentions and self-conviction, sometimes without any critical capacity. These meta-cultural codes containing diverse alternative narratives, this narrative type not only allows their decipherment but also lets the narrator evaluate him/herself and shape his/her behaviour. Thanks to the engagement in questions and the raising of alternative possibilities, a narrative process is conducted in the framework of which the members of the community of inquiry can examine the social-cultural construct of which they are the product.

During the discussions, the children adduced numerous examples regarding the way in which they were accustomed to thinking about the poor. "If I ask myself how people around me—and me in school—perceive the poor, I can say honestly that we look at them in an accusatory way, in a bad way," said one of boys. "Until this discussion, I had no empathy for the poor person because I didn't see him in such a way as to ask the question 'Why is he poor?' Just the reality, the surrounding society, made me think about him negatively."

Another girl: "I admit here that for me the poor are simple, uneducated people who don't make an effort. That's how I saw them until now. But right here I've started to understand that they're people. Suddenly, through the questions I asked myself and you've asked, I've been prompted to think. I've understood that first and foremost they're members of my society. Yes, I'm suddenly seeing them."

Another boy: "I've always blamed these people somewhat. Why don't they find work? Why don't they want to get out of their situation? Suddenly, I'm seeing things differently. Suddenly, I'm beginning to think that a person who has things, it's his role to give to those who don't. I'm talking here about my responsibility as a member of society, all of us as members of our society. I've never asked myself questions like this before."

The philosophical community of inquiry frequently enables the creation of a new philosophical narrative as a construction of inter-personal interaction in the midst of social discourse. This narrative is influenced not only by personal psychological features but also by the social constructs of the interpersonal situation. In particular, it is the outcome of placing questions at the centre. In contrast to discourse relating to the economic depression—which suffers from an analysis of data or judgmentalism—a community of inquiry discourse seeks to gain distance from the concrete and focus on the meta-philosophical questions that arise from texts dealing with poverty and difficult economic situations, discussing these issues by legitimising any and every question and questioning accepted norms. The positive atmosphere that developed in the discussion—a characteristic feature of philosophical communities of inquiry that do not promote competition and power struggles—created an openness even within non-agreement. This was exemplified by the multiplicity of narratives, such as: "I never thought about your point of view," "I've looked at things that way," "Now I've got lots to think about on the way home," and "I'm a bit angry with myself that I've never thought about this before." The community of inquiry thus created an entity that was not exclusive to the narrator or storyteller but was shared by all, the part played by the listener in shaping the narrative being overt rather than covert. Even when the listener

sought to reduce the narrator's direct influence, the situation itself—face to face, for example—generates an inter-subjective process (Corradi, 1991).

The philosophical community of inquiry also enhanced the students' philosophical sensitivities, principally by promoting multiple identities and meanings. In *Truth and Method* (1998), Gadamer argues that all textual understanding is hermeneutic in nature, constituting a dialogue between the reader and his/her world and the text. Understanding is thus always that based on a particular reading of a specific text. We may develop this thought and contend that the philosophical community of inquiry conducted an interpretive reading of the text via a three-voiced dialogue: the narrator's voice as heard through the written (or filmed) text, those of the children, and that of the community of inquiry, whose philosophical investigative process possessed the capacity to change initial views via the discourse. "I never thought that there were questions here of equality, of the decision of the poor how to define themselves—in other words, of how a person sees himself, questions of comparison between economics and personal decisions and other issues. For me, it was always money, money, money."

The philosophical sensitivity exemplified in the community of inquiry was fashioned on the basis of the narratival premise that people are natural storytellers, "creatures" who produce meaning. The personal story is a universal type of human discourse that seeks to convey a message. This model can be deciphered by the audience (listener, reader) via well-known means—a selected sequence of events relevant to the subject at hand organised on the basis of a linear plot. This relates to a certain entity, developing through cause-and-effect links (Gergen, 2001). Personal experiences are always embedded in a coherent and meaningful context in a biographical structure that comes to expression in the activity of a group. The association between the various events chosen by the narrator in order to represent his story is not chronological but personal-phenomenological. The community of inquiry thus also allows an examination of how meaning is given to diverse events in the present, in particular in regard to their implications for the future—for example, in the development of social sensitivities (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

While the events receive meaning from the story as a whole, the whole is only constructed from the parts. The "hermeneutical circle" in which stories are embedded turns them into a subject that can be interpreted in numerous ways rather than bearing a single, unambiguous meaning/truth. This space, which foregoes striving for a "conclusion," permits flexible thought, the answers given being open to being questioned (the Socratic method of answering a question with a question). The community of inquiry discourse allows social content to be poured into life circumstances, even harsh ones. It also enables children to cope maturely with questions that arise, primarily because the discussion is distant or removed to a certain extent—i.e., philosophical. As Dinesen observes, "All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them" (quoted in Arendt, 1958, p. 175).

The children's philosophical sensitivity also becomes a form of social philosophical sensitivity. Caring thinking is a branch of ethical education. Matthew Lipman and his colleagues suggest that teachers begin work in this field by allowing and helping their charges to develop the habit of logical and critical thinking, encouraging them to engage in a philosophical discourse in which they can express their views and feelings in a shared, group setting that allows them to examine and become acquainted with their own beliefs, values, tenets, and those of the other members. The discussion itself affords them the opportunity to learn to esteem such values as objectivity, non-prejudice, profundity, knowledge, and a deep and comprehensive investigation—values embedded within the philosophical discussion. By being encouraged to engage with ethical issues and take responsibility in the classroom, children gradually become familiar with the ethical dimensions of life and the world.

In the case of discussions relating to the issue of poverty, the children raised basic questions relating to the core of philosophy. Unsurprisingly, they did not make exclusive use of examples. Their ability to address these issues allowed a discussion that also led them to develop caring thinking, which is based on friendship thinking. This is based on a social sensitivity founded on both empathy and the raising of logical

arguments. As Rorty notes, this process involves a detailed description of unfamiliar people and a revision of one's own self-image:

> In my liberal utopia, this replacement would receive a kind of recognition which it still lacks. That recognition would be part of a general turn against theory and toward narrative. Such a turn would be emblematic of our having given up the attempt to hold all the sides of our life in a single version, to describe them with a single vocabulary … A historicist and nominalist culture of the sort I envisage would settle instead for narratives which connect the past with the present, on the one hand, and with utopian futures, on the other. (2006, p. xvi)

Adi Ophir argues that

> An outline of the sequences of shortfalls, losses, and suffering in which such differences exist (between good and bad and between bad and awful, ceaselessly produced within varied and diverse cultural and political practices) is part of the job of the critical theory of postmodern society and culture. This must free the bad from its collective ideological cover stories, from the great narratives told by perpetrator and victim alike and seek to restore individual features—both those of the perpetrator and those of the victim—to evil and most of all to the endless numbers of collaborators in it. (1996, p. 162)

The ability to ask questions regarding complex social issues in the field of economics and to ask oneself personal questions about oneself is thus also exemplified in the deconstruction of the "great narratives" and their transformation into more accessible, human dimensions. One of the children noted: "Through this discussion I'm coming to understand that sometimes I accuse the poor of being what they are. I also thought that they didn't make enough effort. But today I understand that perhaps I should ask myself why I blamed them without understanding their circumstances. I never asked myself such fundamental questions such as 'Why are some people rich and some people poor?' and in particular, 'What can I do to make someone else not be poor?' I think that it's my responsibility that there shouldn't be any poor people if I'm there."

Another girl commented: "I think I've been quite blind towards the poor person who lives not far from me. I've passed him by. Why have I never asked myself: 'What can I do so that he'll have more?'"

The social narrative within which these affluent children existed formed part of a phenomenology that takes an active stance in regard to human consciousness: when we understand, we organize our surroundings narratively in order to synthesize present and past (Sturrock, 1986). Narratives thus also contain a universality of knowledge and its expression and an unstacitity that allows active thinking. At the same time, they also serve as a tool for transmitting false and processed information. They are therefore more vague and blurred than illuminatory and clarificatory. In the narratival circumstances described above, the children had all operated on assumptions and premises about which they had never thought or which they had never questioned. The philosophic discussion allowed them to develop labile perceptions and subjective interpretations that reflect a willingness to abandon unequivocality and objectivism.

Questioning identity, Bauman observes that

> That work of art which we want to mould out of the friable stuff of life is called 'identity'. Whenever we speak of identity, there is at the back of our minds a faint image of harmony, logic, consistency: all those things which the flow of our experience seems—to our perpetual despair—so grossly and abominably to lack. The search for identity is the ongoing struggle to arrest or slow down the flow, to solidify the fluid, to give form to the formless … Yet far from slowing the flow, let alone stopping it, identities are more like the spots of crust hardening time and again on the top of volcanic lava which melt and dissolve again before they have time to cool and set. (2000, pp. 82-83)

During the community of inquiry, several moves occur that provide its members with the mental tools necessary for asking questions about their social reality, examining their multiple identities, and asking fundamental questions that are not always concrete. In this respect, the community of inquiry was not an economics class in the normal educational sense of the term but enabled the members to ask themselves questions on two levels—the theoretical and the emotico-philosophico-cultural-personal. One of the girls commented: "I now link the great ideas to what's happening in my neighbourhood." Another boy added: "These dry statistics in the poverty report—only now do I understand that they're people. They're my neighbours. They might even be my friends at school. I never made the link."

The philosophic discourse helped the children recognise the immense complexity of all the aspects that must be taken into consideration—intellectual, theoretical, practical, metaphysical, aesthetic, emotional, and cultural. Only when a philosophical discourse of ethics includes a wide-ranging scope of issues and perspective can it avoid being superficial and stereotypical and afford a deeper and better understanding of the subject at hand.

This engagement must be free from what I call the "pedagogy of fear"—a hierarchical structure that operates on the basis of intimidation. Quenching all curiosity and imagination, it thus prevents the development of the philosophical sensitivity that stems from the natural instinct found in most children to ponder experience and basic, ethical conduct. The pedagogy of fear seeks to protect and safeguard children against themselves, the world around them, and the Other. Undervaluing children's abilities, it stops them from playing with ideas and examining and developing things. Despite demonstrating such thought, adults sometimes refuse to believe that children are capable of abstract thinking. Their shadow thus delineates the only space in which children are allowed to operate, the closed answers they are given locking them into a world of fixed and rigid ideas. Buying into this scheme, some education systems have adopted standard, tidily-packed, one-dimensional, monolithic curricula that exclude all multiplicity and plurality. The same closedness also pervades the assessment and evaluation system to which some education systems have became addicted.

One of the pillars of the pedagogy of fear is the need to protect children against the logic espoused by many educators—namely, "We don't need to confuse them from a young age." The fear that engaging with issues such as economic distress or family difficulties attendant upon employment will make children anxious is highly exaggerated, however. One of the children commented: "I've always been afraid of economics because I didn't understand it. Now I'm much more relaxed. I understand that it's just about things that relate to all of us. Adults always try to tell us that these are things we don't understand." Another girl added: "These are means that we must know how to share. I don't see that the adults as so good at these subjects. Perhaps we should be allowed to discuss them a bit more. Why have they hidden them from us for

so long? These are key parts of our lives. All said and done, it's only money." As Lipman observes, "the capacity of philosophy, *when properly reconstructed and properly taught* [can] bring about a significant improvement of thinking in education" (2003, p. 3 [original italics]).

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