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STUDENT LEARNING, CHILDHOOD & VOICES | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Philosophy with Children as an educational platform for self-determined learning

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Abstract: This article develops a theoretical framework for understanding the applicability and relevance of Philosophy with Children in and out of schools as a platform for self-determined learning in light of the developments of the past 40 years. Based on the philosophical writings of Matthew Lipman, the father of Philosophy for Children, and in particular his ideas regarding the search for meaning, it frames Philosophy with Children in six dimensions that contrast with classic classroom disciplinary learning, advocating a "pedagogy of searching" to replace the "pedagogy of fear" that dominates traditional learning systems.

Subjects: Childhood; Philosophy of Education; Teaching & Learning

Keywords: Philosophy with Children; self-determined learning; Matthew Lipman; pedagogy of searching; pedagogy of fear

1. Introduction

The concept of self-determined learning, which posits that students (are capable of) guiding their own learning, contrasts sharply with the classical view of learning that revolves around a "knowledge elevator" that leads the "unknowing" by way of the "knower" to "knowledge"—i.e. "culture", the "world at large", or "success". The traditional approach placing little trust in the learner either as a person or as a knower/one capable of knowing, the school has established itself as a central institution over the centuries, reinforcing student dependence upon its structure and its teaching staff. As Ricci and Pritscher observe, it is thus "little wonder that classroomed children lack confidence in themselves" (2015, p. 4).

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Philosophy with Children as a pedagogical method enable young learners, children and adolescents alike to ask fresh and original questions about life and its meaning. Communities of philosophical inquiry operating for the last 40 years in different educational spaces around the world enable the learners to choose democratically their questions, to cultivate communities which develop critical thinking and creative thinking in an atmosphere of caring and friendship. Therefore, Philosophy with Children offers pedagogy of search unlike pedagogy of fear that is common in schools today. It cultivates self-determined platform for self-determined learning, focuses on the questions rather than answers, communities of learners rather than hierarchy of knowledge, participation rather than judgement, the present rather that the preparation for the future, improvisation rather than determinism and liberating from borders in order to open the way for active and free learning.

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The self-determined approach, in contrast, expands upon the role of human agency in the learning process. Thus, the learner is seen as, "the major agent in their own learning, which occurs as a result of personal experiences" (Hase & Kenyon, 2007, p. 112). This approach believes that what the student "chooses to learn is worthwhile and that she should listen deeply to her mind, body, spirit and emotions as guides to her willed curriculum" (Ricci & Pritscher, 2015, p. 4). In this way, the student needs to be flexible, able to shift as learning occurs, and forges new paths, new questions and new contexts. During this process, the emphasis is put on developing capability, self-reflection, and meta-cognition or an understanding of one's own learning process, double-loop learning, and nonlinear learning and teaching processes (Blaschke, 2012).

Rejecting the view that the teacher (and he or she alone) should direct the learner, it argues that "schooling today is more for grades and degrees than for developing curious, self-directing, lovers of learning" (Ricci & Pritscher, 2015, p. 4). It thus sets out to help learners develop the capacity for self-direction, supporting transformational learning and promoting "emancipatory learning and social action" (Merriam, 2001, p. 9). As learning occurs along a self-directed path, the learner's perspective changes as she matures and reflects on her life-experiences, self-perception, beliefs and lifestyle (Mezirow, 1997).

According to Brandt (2013) "The students' self-determined studies lead to transformational experiences; this benefits individual learners and ultimately society" (p. 111). Today's learners are faced with an environment that is different from that experienced by previous generations. The pace of change is rapid, particularly within the workforce. Employers want and need employees who are innovators, complex problem solvers, and good communicators, and who are able to apply what they learn to real-life scenarios (Hart Research Associates, 2013). Graduates need to be productive at the start of employment, and they must adapt quickly to new and disruptive innovations, continuously acquiring new skills. The complexities of the workforce in the 21st century require that employees have a wide range of cognitive and meta-cognitive skills, such as creativity, self-directedness, innovativeness, and knowledge of how they learn (Blaschke, 2014). According to Gerstein (2014), today's learners need to be inter alia agile and adaptable, to have good oral and written communication skills, to be able to collaborate across networks, to be curious, and be imaginative, to have critical thinking and problem-solving skills, to have empathy and a sense of global stewardship. Given the vast amount of information available on the net, learners need to be able to separate the wheat from the chaff by being able to check data with reputable sources, to analyse and synthesize information, to recognize a good argument, and to differentiate between correlational and causal relationships.

This article presents Philosophy for Children, and in particular its development across the globe over the past 40 years as Philosophy with Children, as a platform (philosophy and practice) that facilitates self-determined learning and thus also critical, caring and creative thinking combining philosophical with socioeconomic sensitivity. Analysing the philosophical and educational aspects it possess, I shall argue on the basis of the importance Mathew Lipman, the founder of the movement, attaches to meaning that it promotes and encourages self-determined learning (Kennedy, 2010, pp. 69–80).

Being a meta-approach and field practice, Philosophy with Children exists both within and without educational institutions, thus not being confined to a specific time or place such as a school. 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 has established itself as a model for cultivating human beings who ask existential questions about themselves, their world, and their surroundings from an early age (Kohan, 2014). In contrast to the academic study of philosophy, in which students are passively exposed to 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 young people's philosophical sensitivity (Kizel, 2015a; Mohr Lone, 2012b), presenting questions to them as a living, breathing, vigorous space that fosters creativity, caring and concern (Wartenberg, 2009).

As Lipmann, Sharp and Oscanyan observe, Philosophy with Children is based on the idea that students ask questions that can be extraordinarily sweeping in scope and grandeur: "What happens to people when they die?"; "Am I really 'me' on the Internet?" They thus raise "issues of enormous metaphysical importance" (1980, p. 29). This ability, they suggest, indicates that children "begin with a 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" (Lipman et al., 1980, p. 29). For many years, the director of the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children at Montclair College, New Jersey, Matthew Lipman posits that children begin to develop philosophically when they begin to ask "why" (Lipman et al., 1980, p. 29). Everything making them curious, they demand answers to these 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 community of philosophic 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. (1991, p. 20)

In the framework of an approach adopted in schools worldwide—middle as well as high schools—that has been extensively empirically documented, children sit in a circle and read or watch a text (clip, drawing, etc.) that prompts them to ask questions. Deciding in a democratic fashion which of the questions they will discuss, they listen to one another, creatively develop their thoughts and gain experience of a space marked by empathy and trust.

Philosophic communities of inquiry are frequently run by the children or adolescents themselves, without adult intervention or necessary ties to an educational institution. Taking place in a school environment, as part of a youth movement, or private initiatives, they provide a framework within which students can think and talk about problematic issues with support from adults and their peers. In this way, Lipman argued, classes may be transformed into communities of inquiry whose members listen respectfully to one another, construct ideas together, challenge one another, and above all look for and discover their fundamental values and tenets.

As Haynes and Murris observe, "The Community of Inquiry 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" (2012, p. 4). Splitter and Sharp make a slightly different argument, contending that: "A community of inquiry 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, pp. 17–18). Gareth Matthews (1994) notes that parents and teachers are often so overwhelmed by the burden of nurturing, instructing, reassuring and inspiring children that they fail to appreciate the fresh philosophical perspective children can offer. Children's philosophical discussions have thus added a dimension to Bruner's (1987) view of constructivism as "worldmaking" and narratives as "lifemaking".

The children who participate in communities of inquiry are likely to find themselves in a narrative-philosophical situation that presupposes a world view and subjective interpretation that shun unequivocality and objectivism. On the level of understanding, a person understands herself through narrative. On the level of concern, she—the "self"—seeks to realize her identity and fundamental truth and that of the group as part of her certainty. Existing in uncertainty and pondering whether it has internalized something external in the correct manner that then becomes a solid part of its

identity, the "self" reverberates as narrative. Alternatively, it is the object of an external manipulation that internalizes, determines and establishes a truth—despite its group's narrated (if on occasion imaginary) events of the past—that contains patently incorrect elements the "self" cannot filter and regulate as part of the construction of identity. A Philosophy with Children community of inquiry, in contrast, encourages children to develop a philosophical sensitivity that entails awareness of abstract questions related to human existence (Kizel, 2015b). Hereby, it allows insight into significant philosophical aspects of various situations and their analysis.

In contrast to the competitive atmosphere and rivalry frequently promoted (even if only tacitly) in schools today, communities of inquiry encourage cooperation and collaboration in order to support self-determined and shared learning. The diminishment of the competitive element in classrooms in and of itself further promotes the establishment of communities of inquiry characterized by inclusion, partnership and cooperation (Sharp, 1988). These traits enable the openness necessary for the emergence of—and sometimes solutions to—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 adult needs, wishes, and goals.

In his day, Lipman argued that Philosophy with Children should be thought of as the philosophy of science, the philosophy of religion and the philosophy of history. This goaded Gareth Matthews, who had initially cast doubt on children's capacity to philosophize, into begin working with children. This involvement promptly led Matthews (1994) to discover that the latter were not only curious but also capable of asking profound philosophical questions. Numerous studies conducted in recent years across the globe have confirmed and proven time and again that children possess the ability to engage in inventive thinking, their questions and work in philosophic communities of inquiry developing their creative and caring thinking skills (Cam, 2013; García-Moriyón, Rebollo, & Colom, 2002; Gorard, Siddiqui, & Huat, 2015). Rather than impinging on their learning achievements in diverse fields of knowledge, these in fact hone their faculties.

The first dimension of Philosophy with Children I wish to propose places learning from a place of questions rather than a corpus of answers at its centre. The second focuses on a community that facilitates a form of learning that resists the educational hierarchy that boasts of omniscience. The third places the coordinator as a participant in the learning process rather than as a "judge". The fourth sets learning in the (real) present against learning for the (unknown) future. The fifth legitimizes improvisation as a way of learning in place of predetermined content. The sixth regards learning as liberating the learner from disciplinary boundaries. All six dimensions view Philosophy with Children as a pedagogy of searching at whose centre lies the pursuit of meaning that facilitates personal development—and thus self-direction and capability. This stands in stark contrast to the pedagogy of fear (Kizel, 2016a) that makes perpetual demands on the learner, induces apprehension about taking risks, reduces her competence, and creates a constant need for an omniscient "guide" that is so prevalent within traditional learning settings.

1.1. Learning from a place of questions vs. providing a corpus of answers

Philosophy with Children centres around the fresh questions that arise in the student's mind. A brave intellectual mission, it frequently arouses fears amongst adults who, in accordance with the classical school model, seek to offer a ready-made corpus of answers merely demanding regurgitation as established truths. The intellectual task requires returning to the beginning point and a willingness to create a free and safe educational space within which students (young or old) can begin to ask fertile questions about themselves, their lives, their environment, and above all the changing world they discover via their as-yet unfettered originality that is still free from the search for perfection. It calls upon educators, teachers and parents alike to shake free of their adult colonialism and open themselves up to childlike immaturity, regarding it as an existential and spiritual fount of innocence that forms the foundation for a philosophical sensitivity that is not necessarily naïve but holds out hope that the question will fuel discovery and human happiness.

This space is characterized by the legitimization (out of profound recognition) of a philosophical inquiry that rather than focusing on the content of the answers gives centre stage to questions—above all, philosophical questions that range across the whole spectrum of life without borders or predetermined parameters. In many senses, this legitimization is of existing in a space in which protracted uncertainty allows the child to live her life as ever-changing rather than bound by an (imaginary) certainty.

The determining factor of whether or not a philosophical discussion will ensue in this space is the adult responses to questions rather than the questioners themselves. In many cases, the mask of wisdom, experience and adult fear obstructs the development of children's philosophical thought, in effect closing off and preventing them from cultivating the philosophical sensitivity required around educational questions. Philosophical inquiry should rather be informed by the asking of unlimited, broad-ranging philosophical questions rather than focusing on content, the pervasive uncertainty of this space allowing children to change and grow rather than develop along a predetermined path.

In this setting, adults should 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, they often turn 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. Scaling down their presence, they must exhibit the rare quality of allowing children to find their way through the jungle of questions on their own. Rather than attempting to protect, limit or make them afraid they must let go, release, trust and support them.

1.2. A community that facilitates a form of learning that resists the omniscience educational hierarchy

Communities of inquiry promote and encourage mutuality, collaboration and cooperation between their members in such a way as to support common learning. They thus stand in stark contrast to the atmosphere of competition and power-struggle (even if hidden) that routinely pervades schools. Moving away from the competitive and confrontational milieu of the traditional classroom facilitates adoption of a community-based principle. Characterized by inclusion, cooperation and collaboration, this allows an openness to develop that seeks to allow philosophical ideas (including unusual ones) free rein rather than delimiting a space that only recognizes certain ideas and narratives that tend to be banal and adult-pleasing/appeasing. School learning is frequently enclosed within a "cage of limitations" because of the educational hierarchy that boasts of omniscience (customarily in the name of "science"). To this end, curriculum planning organizes learning into disciplinary fields of knowledge that rely on conservative (and frequently outmoded) models that do not revolve around the ability to listen to original ideas, let alone give centre stage to curiosity.

This conservative learning gives students the sense of being trapped within an oppressive, repressive discourse in the classroom, on occasion even within a conceptual prison they do not always understand. The latter is powered by a mechanism known as "normalizing education"—a matrix of practices and theories devoted to establishing, shaping and policing in order to create a desired type of human being. According to Gur-Ze'ev (2010), this type of education creates conditions that determine what a person can and cannot do within and in the face of the world, thereby giving rise to a "human subject as something" that precludes her becoming "someone, a true subject" (Gur-Ze'ev, 2002, p. 66).

This form of learning normalizes subservience to the psychological view that students learn something at a specific age, thus requiring a "tree of fields of knowledge" to enable them to pass from stage to stage. Structured around predetermined schemes, languages with accurate tools, and transition exams from field to field as part of the "learning tree" or "peak of knowledge" type, this in effect precludes learning within a community that fosters openness and curiosity. Children's philosophical thinking has thus been excluded from pedagogic academic and views because of the tight grip held by the theory of developmental psychology, which posits that children develop in well-delineated sequential stages.

1.3. The coordinator as participant in the learning process vs. "judge"

The classical school format revolves around student dependence on a teacher who leads the students through all the learning processes—most prominently in the assessment of their success. Philosophy with Children, in contrast, regards the group coordinator—if one even exists—as a participant rather than "knower" nor "judge". As opposed to the requirement model that characterizes the regular hierarchical system, Philosophy with Children is based on a model of support, at the heart of which lies a coordinator who cultivates each member's growth as an individual. In this way, it facilitates access to the discourse and a process of what I call "enabling-identity" (Kizel, 2016b).

Murris (2013) maintains that the primary obstacles to hearing children's voices include conceptualizing them within the human rights discourse, developmental psychology, race and gender. In many classrooms, "learners are often punished for making their voices heard. In fact, talking in class has a "bad name" and children who do so are covertly treated as exhibiting disobedience" (Ndofirepi & Shumba, 2012, p. 253). According to Chetty (2014), concerns for safety and security in gated communities promote the maintenance of social distance. In such a social climate, the unfamiliar is viewed with suspicion—a potential intruder whose presence is illegitimate. The gated community can thus serve as a "cognitive shelter".

I suggest that situations in which children cannot express their identity and narrative constitute what Murris (2013, p. 245) calls "structural epistemic injustice"—i.e. spaces that resist essentializing and normalizing discourses about children and quench their unique voices:

> Teachers do not believe a child, because it is a child who is speaking, with typical responses such as: s/he is not telling the truth, or is immature, or at the other (sentimental) end of the scale: endearment: smiling, laughing, or expressions such as "oh, how sweet". Credibility deficit is related to age, in that being a particular age has significant impact on how much credibility a hearer affords a speaker, and when and how s/he is silenced systematically. (Murris, 2013, p. 248)

Quoting Fricker's statement that "the injustice of having some significant area of one's social experience obscured from collective understanding owing to a structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource" (2007, p. 155), Murris elaborates it as follows:

> That is, the power relations and structural prejudice undermine child's faith in their own ability to make sense of the world, and constrain their ability to understand their own experiences. Children's situated lived experiences of learning, their friends, family or community are irrelevant to the "real" work in class. As a result, child will lose confidence in her general intellectual abilities, to such extent that she is genuinely hindered in her educational development. (2013, p. 248)

The communal structure of Philosophy with Children allows students to engage in self-direction as they form their identities in a way that does not necessarily require the teacher's or principal's sanction.

1.4. Present vs. future oriented

Traditional classroom learning centres primarily around preparation for the future, the students being "candidates" as it were, for intellectual posts and "adult" life. This view encompasses every aspect of learning, ignoring the development of skills pertaining to the present and precluding discourse about oneself, self-direction and coping in real time. Based on the premise that the student is an "apprentice", it dictates all areas of school life because it rests on the experience of adults that always takes priority over (that of) children. Adults who view children from their own life-experience tend to dismiss children's present curiosity and imagination, thus rejecting self-directed methods. They thus promptly snuff out childish wonderment about the world—the heart of the philosophical enterprise.

Regarding the present as a real space, Philosophy with Children views learning as taking place therein (thereby demonstrating the importance of self-directed learning), giving no preference to the (unknown) future. It therefore fosters the ability to ask philosophical questions amongst young people at this age. It also opposes developmental psychological theories in their various forms, maintaining that they give no space or sanction to children's capacity for self-direction and learning. Acknowledging that when learners are competent they demonstrate the acquisition of knowledge and skills that can be repeated and retrieved, it provides a place for this task to be performed in situations that, while unfamiliar, are nonetheless safe and secure. Capability then becomes the extension of competence, lack of competency forestalling capability. Through a process of double-looping, learners become more aware of their preferred learning style. Easily adapting new learning situations to it, they become more capable learners. This dual focus on competencies and capability enables them to better address their needs (Bhoyrub, Hurley, Neilson, Ramsay, & Smith, 2010).

These philosophical questions threatening some social and educational structures, those interested in maintaining them claim that philosophy is irrelevant, ineffective, "pompous" and "badgering" and has nothing to do with success—certainly not financial or real-life prosperity. This definition of philosophy stands in stark contrast to that propounded by Gareth Matthews. Countering the view that "Piaget has taught us to suppose that children of that age [2–7] and even those who are much older are highly egocentric" (1984, p. 114), his experience demonstrated to him that children as young as three can pose "interesting puzzle[s] in the logic of counterfactual conditionals" (Matthews, 1984, p. 114).

He thus maintains that the psychological model of children's "stagal maturation" that has been accepted without question or reservation by childhood scholars is biased and erroneous from top to toe. Although compatible with biological or psychological development, it is incongruous with philosophy. No reason at all exits to assume that children are incapable of discussing and debating. Any person, whatever their age, who listens to the philosophical responses and questions children ask, understands that they possess a freshness and inventiveness that adults sometimes find difficult to grasp. Maturation and maturity frequently bring with them a staleness and loss of inventiveness that coalesce into conformist or normative education—or at the very least acquiescence and mediocrity. The fresh philosophical perspective children brings to the table demands a willingness to engage in dialogue and a shaking free of the fear of innocent yet profound philosophical questions (Matthews, 1994).

Practitioners of Philosophy with Children worldwide have discovered that young children are far less bound by premises that cast a shadow on their ability to ask philosophical question than first-year university students of philosophy, who are already fettered by an education system that serves as a national or ideological home—or even educational base—conspicuous for its "scientific" or "professional" terminology. In this respect, young children (even very young ones) naturally adopt the Cartesian move of "beginning from the beginning". This also reflects the philosophical sensitivity that in many respects I identify as a space that contains a sensitivity to the present free from the manacles of the unknown future.

1.5. Improvisation vs. predetermined content

Traditional learning methods regard the learning space as pre-planned, engineered and prefigured, viewing this structure as one of the advantages of a systematic learning that is orderly, organized, internally logical and goal- (future) oriented. This stands in complete antithesis to the possibilities Philosophy with Children holds out of self-determined learning as a legitimate, fertile and living and breathing form of improvisation within the context of dialogue. Two aspects of improvisation are fostered herein: the learner's creative capacity to engage in variations on a standard theme—inventing something "on the fly"; and doing so within a dynamic, interactive context with others in the community—listening to them, anticipating what they might say or do next, taking advantage of serendipity, and in the fullest sense interweaving their own improvisation with that of others, thereby stimulating and inspiring new levels of creativity. In this sense, a dialogical classroom can form a type of performance ensemble.

Following Frost and Yarrow (2007), communities of philosophic inquiry cultivate spontaneous responses to the "here and now", responsibility and commitment to improvisation as an encounter between people, and recreation of the relationship between the participant's inner reality and the outside environment. Requiring less instructor control and course structure, improvisation allows learners to engage in more self-directed learning (Canning & Callan, 2010; Kenyon & Hase, 2010). Cognitive development—a requirement for critical reflection and discourse—can also be integrated into this process commensurate with learner maturity and autonomy (Mezirow, 1997).

According to Gur-Ze'ev (2010), the heart of improvisation lies in the movement within co-poiesis prompted by the love of life—giving birth to the totally new and wholly unexpected as a form of non-instrumental playfulness that manifests erotic responsibility to life at its best. It thus combines non-dominating, pre-rational dialogical knowledge with experience and an aesthetic form that is also a pre-ethical positioning. In exhibiting the dialectics of response-ability and respond-ability it is neither "constructive" nor merely "negative"—resistance to oppression or suffering and loss. When true to itself, it transgresses contexts, borders, dogmas, regulations, drives, habits and fears, dwelling in the infinity of the moment and the ecstasies of the here and now.

Philosophy with Children contains all these elements, cultivating improvisation within the philosophic community of inquiry. As members raise questions and choose which they will discuss, they embark on a process that allows for many different, creative philosophical answers that in turn raise new questions and responses, positive and negative. Although a technique, an organized process of improvisation takes place here.

1.6. Learning as liberating the learner from disciplinary boundaries

Philosophic communities of inquiry enable a form of learning freed from the constraints of disciplinary fields and their laws and rules—"the boundaries of most fields [that] are formed by agreement of practitioners in a given field so that certainty and avoidance of chaos is avoided" (Ricci & Pritscher, 2015, p. 10). As John Holt observes, "academic fields are simply different ways in which we look at parts of the wholeness of reality and human experience" (2004, p. 16). In this context, he quotes Ivan Illich's remark that "there is no knowledge in the world; the world is as it is. Knowledge is a process in the minds of living people" (Holt, 2004, p. 17).

In this framework, the philosophic community of inquiry opens up disciplinary boundaries by making use of the inner motivations of its members, who frequently regard multidisciplinary questions as representing the "borders of the possible". Hereby, the community frees itself from discipline-bound knowledge, liberating it from its (academic) confines and turning it into soft putty suitable for the students' needs. In this way, it facilitates a form of self-determined learning in which learners acquire both competencies and capabilities (Stephenson, quoted in McAuliffe, Hargreaves, Winter, & Chadwick, 2009, p. 3; Hase & Kenyon, 2001, 2007)—competency being defined as proven ability in acquiring knowledge and skills and capability characterized by learner confidence in her competency, leading to the taking of "appropriate and effective action to formulate and solve problems in both familiar and unfamiliar and changing settings" (Cairns, quoted in Gardner, Hase, Gardner, Dunn, & Carryer, 2008, p. 252).

The open space free of disciplinary boundaries revolves around the desire to ask the broadest and most interesting (to the asker) currently relevant (age, etc.) questions rather than a predetermined essentially organizational (i.e. institutional) preemption. In this sense, rather than pretending to "speak" in the name of scientific certainty Philosophy with Children seeks to remove this arrogance from the educational agenda, replacing it with a modesty that fosters the creation of an uncertainty out of which a form of learning unchecked by disciplinary boundaries can grow. According to Knowles (1975), self-determined learning constitutes a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating their own learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes (p. 18). In this context, communities of

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inquiry offer a holistic approach to developing learner capabilities, learning comprising an active and proactive process and learners serving as "the major agent in their own learning, which occurs as a result of personal experiences" (Hase & Kenyon, 2007, p. 112).

2. Self-determined learning as a search for meaning

The mapping outlined above largely sums up Matthew Lipman's educational thought that led him to propose an alternative philosophy critical of existing educational principles. In his view, this distorted school system suffers from four central flaws: (1) it introduces a negative charisma into the child; (2) it instills in her a gratuitous belief in her intellectual impotence; (3) it promotes in her a distrust of all her intellectual powers other than those required to cope with problems formulated and assigned to him by others; (4) sooner or later, the intransigencies of the educational system beat or batter out of the child the lively curiosity that seems to be an essential part of her natural impulse (Lipman, 1973, p. 7). Philosophy with Children is thus designed to provide students with an opportunity to embark on a search for meaning that is largely guided by self-determined learning and thinking—a pursuit I call the "pedagogy of searching". In his formative volume (1980), Lipman asserts:

> Children frequently complain that their courses lack relevant, interest, and meaning … Since many children actually drop out of school and many others are physically present but would like to drop out, this allegation that school is meaningless has to be taken seriously. … The child's claim can be seen as a demand for meaning, the parents' as a demand for rationality. The existing educational process can only be disappointment to both. (pp. 4, 11)

The search for meaning in education is not merely a way to gain the students' trust but also a way to impact their lives: "If children find the education they are being given meaningless, they will come to distrust it … The children need to be motivated- not to think, but to think in ways that increase the measure of meaning in their lives" (Lipman, 1973, p. 9). Constructing meaning is a complex task, including an inner, immediate, inherent element in the framework of which "Children don't like being told, when they ask what something means, or why they have to do something, "Wait, you'll see". They want meaning now. They want meaning to be intrinsic, not extrinsic" (Lipman, 1973, p. 21).

In his *Thinking in Education*, Lipman elaborates on the notion of the philosophic community of inquiry as social model, arguing that "The community of inquiry wants to build a system of thought" (2003, p. 103). The moves it make are dialectical, calling for a search for a broader social significance: "Above all a community of inquiry involve questioning, more narrowly a quest for truth, more broadly a quest for meaning" (Lipman, 2003, p. 95). The self-determined learning process that constructs meaning thus contains an enigmatic element within the thinking of children. This leads to seven cognitive stages whereby the meanings that arise from experience can be enriched—drawing inferences, identifying relationships, distinguishing, connecting, evaluating, defining and questioning (Lipman, 1988, p. 100).

Philosophy helps children integrate formal and informal logic in order to open up before them the possibility of finding meaning. Two primary cognitive moves aid in this task—evaluation of their own reasoning and assessment of the evidence on which their judgement must be based. Philosophy with Children, Lipman thus argues, "gives sets of interconnected ideas to show them their own thinking need not remain fragmentary". Preserving children's natural inclination to find meaning must be a guiding principle of the educational process: "We have to learn how to establish the conditions and opportunities that will enable children, with their natural curiosity and appetite for meaning" (Lipman, 1988, p. 13). Philosophy and meaning are closely and integrally related, philosophy clarifying meaning, uncovering assumptions and presuppositions, analysing concepts, assessing the validity of reasoning processes, and investigating the implication of ideas and their consequences in human life (Lipman, 1988, p. 108).

This "pedagogy of searching" is the antithesis of the "pedagogy of fear" (Kizel, 2016a) prevalent within the school system in many respects. It touches on the concept of childhood, the child, the rationale for children's education, and practices relating to the pedagogy of upbringing. It fuels the view that the child constitutes a potential educational—generally psychological— problem that must be diagnosed, defended, assisted, and, of course, aided and abetted. I suggest that pedagogy motivated by fear prevents young students—as well as teachers—from dealing with the great existential questions that relate to the essence of human beings. In my opinion, it thus pathologizes children and childhood, stunting the active and vital educational growth of young people and making them passive and dependent upon external disciplinary sources. Under the guise of a living, breathing educational system that seeks progress, it inculcates fear and apprehension of a conscious and alert life guided by an educational space that enables the philosophical life that is so necessary for the young person. It is thus no wonder that Martin Seligman—the founder of Positive Psychology—posits that "Modern psychology has been co-opted by the disease model. We've become too preoccupied with repairing damage when our focus should be on building strength and resilience, especially in children".[1] In its over-enthusiastic adoption of the model of "repairing damage", the pedagogy of fear views students as in constant need of "correction".

3. Conclusion

Philosophy with Children offers a space for addressing existential questions, some dealing with urgent social issues. As outlined above, philosophic communities of inquiry can be framed in six dimensions that enable and encourage self-determined learning within and outside schools. Philosophy with Children is based on a pedagogy of searching, in particular the search for meaning espoused by Matthew Lipman. Shaking free of the pedagogy of fear and recognizing children's questions demands a fundamental conceptual change within education. Adults frequently view the move to replace the existential certainty they claim within the existing education system with existential questions as subversive. It demands a return to starting points and a willingness to provide children with a free and safe educational space in which they can sound out fertile preliminary questions about themselves, their lives, their environment, and, most of all, the changing world they discover with their innate forms of originality. It thus calls for an abandonment of adult colonization in favour of childlike immaturity and an acknowledgement of an innocence that promotes a philosophic sensitivity imbued with hope that the questions asked will facilitate and sanction discovery and growth.

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Note
1. www.apa.org/releases/positivepsy.html.

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