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Philosophy for Children as the Wind of Thinking

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In this paper I want to analyse the meaning of education for democracy and thinking as this is generally understood by Philosophy for Children. Although we may be inclined to applaud Philosophy for Children's emphasis on children, critical thinking, autonomy and dialogue, there is reason for scepticism too. Since we are expected as a matter of course to subscribe to the basic assumptions of Philosophy for Children, we seem to become tied, as it were, to the whole package, without reservation. Following ideas of Hannah Arendt, I draw attention to the instrumentalised nature of Philosophy for Children and the loss of originality that this instrumentalisation means. This does not mean that I wish to abandon Philosophy for Children. The point is rather that I want to examine whether or not another kind of philosophy for children is possible.

'The manifestation of the wind of thought is no knowledge; it is the ability to tell right from wrong'—Hannah Arendt (1978).

Philosophy for Children as a concerted programme of education was first established in the 1970s, but over the last decade discussion about it has taken a definite turn. The basic precept of Philosophy for Children is perhaps no longer in question, though the question of how to put this into practice in different contexts remains. While in the 1970s Philosophy for Children more or less aligned itself with the broad principles of progressivism in education, especially in its commitment to the emancipation of the child, attention has turned in recent years towards more practical questions concerning the improvement of the programme and the way it can be implemented in the curriculum. Philosophy for Children aims at a radical change in education—from an approach that emphasises the role of the teacher and is based on knowledge transfer to an approach that puts the child at the centre and emphasises learning by discovery and experiment, and the construction of knowledge. Thus, the hierarchical relation between the adult and the child is erased and the child liberated from determination by the systems of schooling. Ambitious claims are made for its significance for democracy here as Philosophy for Children is especially intended to help children think in an autonomous,

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critical and reasonable way, taking into account the needs and interests of all actors, especially the child herself (see Lipman, Sharp and Oscanyan, 1980; Splitter and Sharp, 1995). It is to realise this that the practice of the 'community of inquiry' is introduced, an approach involving an environment where critical thinking and dialogue can be practised. In consequence, Philosophy for Children should not be seen as a domain of knowledge, but rather as a package of practices and techniques designed to facilitate the attainment of knowledge and to enable participants to take decisions autonomously. In accordance with these principles, many regional centres have been established to develop the materials and to provide the tools and expertise that will enable teachers to bring Philosophy for Children into their educational practice. (See, for example, the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children, ACER, 100, Filoket and INITIA.)

It is a general aim of Philosophy for Children to include the voices of every member of the community on the grounds that the more voices are heard, the greater will be the possibilities of reaching a general and appropriately representative consensus. On this view the input of children is of particular value since it is children who keep asking questions when adults have lost the ability so to do. The capacity to use tools and skills, to adopt strategies and to participate and inquire have become basic presuppositions of a democratic society. So too, Philosophy for Children is based on the proposition that critical thinking and dialogue are the necessary conditions for emancipating children from determination and for transforming them into democratic, free citizens.

The main purpose of this essay is to analyse the meaning of education for democracy and thinking as this is understood by Philosophy for Children. Although one is inclined to applaud Philosophy for Children's emphasis on critical thinking, autonomy, dialogue and participation, there is reason for scepticism too. Since we are expected as a matter of course to subscribe to the basic assumptions of Philosophy for Children, we seem to have tied ourselves to the whole package, as it were, without reservation. We have in effect lost the power to question the concept as a whole. After all, it seems only natural that, in our contemporary highly communicative society, we will look favourably on such ideas as critical thinking, dialogue, autonomy and participation. My fear is that the current consensus over the idea of Philosophy for Children excludes other ways of thinking about education and democracy. My suspicion is that the activity of thinking and dialogue as it is conceived by Philosophy for Children cannot be a basis for democracy and freedom simply because it is determined in advance by a specific kind of thinking and acting in accordance with roles that we are expected to fulfil: namely, being autonomous, critical, creative and communicative citizens. Other possibilities are excluded. It is on the strength of these considerations that I surmise that Philosophy for Children has a political agenda and functions as a vehicle to develop that agenda as well.

As a starting point I shall sketch what I take to be the main assumptions of Philosophy for Children, attempting to show how it interprets the

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concepts of critical thinking, dialogue and democracy. Subsequently, I shall draw attention to the increasingly instrumentalised nature of Philosophy for Children and to the loss of originality that this instrumentalisation means. In order to criticise this instrumentalisation, I shall refer to Hannah Arendt's conception of *natality and thinking*. According to Arendt, freedom resides in natality, and the responsibility to respond to the appearance of something or someone new is what she has called 'thinking'. This kind of thinking cannot be acquired in conventional ways; it is not a capacity for reflexive problem-solving, or a skill or a strategy: rather it is a search for meaning. This does not mean that I wish to abandon thinking skills or strategies, or to deny their importance in education. The point is that I want to examine whether or not another kind of thinking is possible. In other words, I shall examine whether philosophy with children offers other possibilities. This will be the concern of the final part of the paper.

I PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN AND EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY

According to Matthew Lipman, Philosophy for Children should be read as a model that provides strategies and thinking skills to govern the self. By supplying several instruments that enable the individual to question herself and others, philosophy offers the possibility of autonomous thinking. Someone who is able to think for herself can question and doubt her own deepest feelings, values and identity (Lipman, 2003).

In order to fulfil this aim, Philosophy for Children is designed to adapt to children's interests and needs, and it is presented in the form of stories that connect the semantic, logical, aesthetic and ethical experience of daily life. On the one hand, the discussion that follows the story—and, that is to say, the community of inquiry—has the aim of encouraging the children to reflect on the meaning of concepts relevant to ethics and to politics, such as respect, liberty, negotiation, judgement, equality and justice. On the other hand, the community of inquiry also gives the children the opportunity to put these concepts into practice—that is, to acquire habits of reflective thinking, of respect for peers, of co-operation with them, of seeking compromises, of self-correction, of good judgement and so on. The method also involves the development of a number of so-called skills, such as giving good reasons, making good distinctions and connections, making valid inferences, hypothesising, asking good questions, using and recognising criteria, calling for relevance, seeking clarification, offering alternative points of view, building logically on the contributions of others, posing counter-examples, asking for reasons, testing and so on (Lipman, Sharp and Oscanyan, 1980; Sharp, 1993). The teaching of philosophy in this context involves (i) facilitating the development of the skills, strategies and attitudes that the children need and enabling them to put these into practice, and (ii) following very closely what children are thinking and helping them to verbalise and objectify these thoughts by

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asking the right questions. In brief, it can be said that Lipman's programme is orientated towards objectives that are functional for intellectual development, logical thinking and empathy for others, as well as objectives that consist in the formation of participative, autonomous, responsible and respectful citizens (cf. Daniel, Schleifer and Lebouis, 1992). Lipman states that Philosophy for Children, as a form of higher-order thinking, is an initiation into democratic and free life (Lipman, Sharp and Oscanyan, 1980). In line with Dewey, Lipman sees democracy not as a form of government but rather as a form of governing the self and a way of living together. Governing the self refers on this account to a process of seeking increasing control over one's own thinking and action, and over the environment one lives in. To obtain that control it is important to act because it is only by acting and doing, according to Dewey (1916), that we can achieve the results to which our actions are directed. After all, the outcome of acts is judged by the consequences they produce. It is in this respect that Lipman speaks about a 'self-correcting practice': the more questions, the more hypotheses, the more reliable the criteria. According to Laurence Splitter and Ann Sharp,

> [t]hinking for oneself involves a search for more and more reliable criteria so that one's judgements can rest upon a firm and solid foundation. Those who think for themselves are able to formulate arguments and conclusions that support specific points of view. But they are also prepared to come up with new ideas and possibilities (Splitter and Sharp, 1995, pp. 16).

This does not mean, however, that Philosophy for Children makes the assumption that individuals act in completely autonomous ways. Dialogue with others is crucial in the search for a well-considered and balanced answer, because the more alternative voices are brought into the community, the more reliable the conclusion and thus the judgement will be.

Philosophy for Children itself provides strategies and practices through which we can relate to ourselves, to our experiences and to other people. After all, autonomy requires the possession of competencies and skills that are useful in a changing society. These include in particular the competencies and skills that provide the opportunity to analyse and construct knowledge and values, and to share it with others. Mathematical expertise and informal logic are interested in the light of the communication patterns and contextual factors that foster children's learning. In this respect, teachers and students are active constructors of their way of knowing and thinking. Knowing is seen as a matter of being able to participate in mathematical practices in the course of which one can appropriately explain and justify one's experience to others. The community of inquiry directs the attention to the development of shared norms based on an equilibrium and consensus over knowledge and values. The input of others is fundamental in this inquiry process because the more alternative points of view there are, the more chance to reach a

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consensus. In this respect the input of the child is of great importance considering the fact that the child's vision is creative and critical in virtue of its not yet having been affected (so much) by society (cf. Matthews, 1984). With the realisation of these thinking skills, a mutual discussion and, beyond this, a mutual agreement becomes possible. And beyond creative and critical-thinking skills, the inclination or will to ask questions should also be mentioned. According to Lipman, this relates to the very nature of the child (Lipman, Sharp and Oscanyan, 1980).

This logic of democracy defines the purposes of teaching Philosophy for Children. At the eighth conference of Philosophy for Children, Christine Gehrett argued:

> As change agents the children who have the ability to think for themselves at their disposal are able to determine, through their own responsible deliberation, the desirable avenues for their own culture to traverse. They can understand the value of taking one course of action over another and can therefore manifest some control over the destiny of the culture themselves, from within. When faced with imperialism or oppression or imposition, children who have learned to critically evaluate will understand the consequences of their actions and will be better able to preserve the culture through both intracultural and intercultural dialogue. The transformation of the society will be possible through these children-as-adults who are open to possibilities and can deliberate well for themselves (Gehrett, 1997, pp. 50–51).

So we can say that the community of inquiry, besides improving children's thinking, has an influence on the whole of their behaviour. Marie-France Daniel speaks in this way about the community of inquiry as an education for life, 'an education of ethical and political life' (Daniel, Schleifer and Lebouis, 1992, pp. 33). So too, as Sharp remarks:

> The community of inquiry reflects democracy and initiates the children into the principles and values of this paradigm, it engages young generations in a process of individual and political growth ... By exercising in school freedom of thought and action, democracy will become their way of living and being when they become active adults within their society (Sharp, 1997, p. 12).

Lipman himself makes the comment: 'An education which promotes philosophical research among children is the guarantee of an adult society which is genuinely democratic' (Lipman, in Daniel, Schleifer and Lebouis, 1992, p. 5). Daniel goes further and states:

> The community of inquiry helps the young take their place within the world, it nurtures good habits and strengthens character, it integrates the personal and the common good, it models while serving itself as a paradigm, in short, the community of inquiry represents a positive socialisation of the child (Daniel, in Daniel, Schleifer and Lebouis, 1992, p. 5).

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The habits of personal reflection, critical thinking and inquiry with others are the key features of the orientation of Philosophy for Children, and they are held to relate to the values of democracy in the manner described by Lipman and the Critical Thinking Movement. Lipman is convinced that autonomous and critical judgement and reasonable behaviour are the necessary preconditions for democracy (Lipman, 1988). As Robert Fisher puts this, 'A fully participative democratic society requires an autonomous citizenry that can think, judge and act for themselves' (Fisher, 1998, p. 10).

II PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN IN THE SERVICE OF THE POLITICAL?

It can be seen, therefore, that Philosophy for Children is based on the assumption that critical thinking and dialogue are the necessary conditions for the transformation of children into democratic, free citizens who can think for themselves. In what follows, I shall call into question the meaning of critical thinking and dialogue in Philosophy for Children. First of all, it is worth acknowledging that debates over critical thinking have been long and vigorous. Criticism has mainly taken the form, however, of an attack on its rationalistic underpinnings and its presumptions of generalisability (cf. Thayer-Bacon, in Burbules and Berk, 1999; Gendron, 2003). It is not my aim to detail these arguments here since it is reasonable to suppose that criticisms are no longer at issue. After all, Gareth Matthews (1994)—one of the pioneers, with Lipman, of Philosophy for Children—has himself argued against psychological development stages that become reified in such a way that children are assumed to be working towards them. According to Matthews, these fixed entities exclude the needs and aims of the children themselves. In the same respect, Harvey Siegel (1997) agrees with Lipman that the generalisable aspect of critical thinking has not so much to do with the reason assessment component but rather with the dispositional component. This means that it is not so much a matter of reaching a general truth, but rather of disposing the spirit to respect the other and to question what has become problematic. Sharon Bailin and Siegel urge also that critical thinking should not be conceived as radically distinct from other kinds of thinking, 'but rather that there are evaluative, analytic, logical aspects to creating new ideas or products and an imaginative, constructive dimension to their assessment' (Bailin and Siegel, 2003, p. 192).

I want to pursue the idea, however, that Philosophy for Children, through its focus on communicative capability and dispositions, reinstates the problem of exclusion. The main goal of reason and dialogue in Philosophy for Children is to produce a greater range of possibilities, for teachers as well as for children. Any democratic society with this orientation purports to be a society where everyone can find her own way of living. Democracy is understood here as a product of the common natural 'will'. Although these ideas may seem noble enough, however,

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they are not merely logical principles into which are inserted the discourses of constructivism and progress. The actual prescription of that goal, when it is understood in this way, is taken not to be a matter of free action but rather of opinion. It does not fall within the ambit of *strategies* of thinking and action, and it is indeed in terms of strategies that such capability is understood.

In fact we can conclude that these dialogical and thinking strategies also produce discourses of exclusion as well as inclusion. The consequences of the stress on these reform strategies are that they exclude other voices, voices that have nothing to do with participation and autonomy (cf. Popkewitz, 1998). Consequently, it is only a deficiency in thinking and communicative skills that will be seen as problematic. Critical thinking and autonomy in an environment open to new ideas, dialogue and responsibility are taken to be the 'necessary' conditions for democracy. This means, in other words, that logic, dialogue and critical thinking are the 'only' organising principles of democracy and freedom. It is on the basis of these considerations that we can conclude that democracy, as stated above, is a rational construction, and it is out of that construction that we make sense of and justify what we do with our lives. In this sense, Philosophy for Children cannot be seen as an experience of freedom because every act, every thinking process is determined by a future goal—namely creating autonomous, self-reflective citizens (cf. Arendt, 1977).

I want to argue that the site of struggle in Philosophy for Children remains within the realm of *determining* the subject. The difference between Philosophy for Children and traditional education is that a relation to knowledge characterised by comprehension or understanding is replaced by one of personal construction. On the strength of this, it might be said that Philosophy for Children has, in one sense, included the child and yet, in another, simultaneously excluded the child from the recognition of the social and historical mooring of that knowledge.

To be clear, the point is not necessarily to reject Philosophy for Children, nor is it to denigrate the important work that has been done on education for democracy. My concern is that the way Philosophy for Children is currently interpreted does not resist the temptation to appropriate the novelty of the new. In fact, Philosophy for Children, with its emphasis on critical thinking and autonomy, is nothing more than the reproduction of an existing discourse. The autonomy that the child gains through Philosophy for Children by critical thinking and dialogue is nothing more that the freedom to occupy a pre-constituted place in that discourse. According to Arendt, freedom has nothing to do with making choices; it is rather to do with the possibility of creating something that did not exist before, neither as thing or image, nor as knowledge itself. It is the possibility of the impossible, the possibility of withdrawing from others and thereby recognising the social and historical chain of our thinking and acting.

In response to the instrumental emphasis of Philosophy for Children I shall make reference in the next section to Arendt's conception of natality. According to Arendt, freedom resides in natality, and the responsibility of

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responding to the appearance of something or someone new is, as we saw, what she has called 'thinking'. With her use of this term, Arendt (1978) has in mind another kind of thinking, one that cannot be acquired in conventional ways: it is not a capacity for reflexive problem solving, or a skill or strategy, but a search for meaning. Let me try to elaborate on this.

III THINKING VERSUS COGNITION

The question that now arises is what, if philosophy for children as education for democracy is not in the service of a political formation, it can possibly be about? Before pursuing this question, however, it is appropriate first to consider Arendt's conception of natality and thinking.

Arendt states that the process of thinking is often misconceived because of the frequent reference to a kind of knowledge that always reaches an end and produces an end-result:

> Thought, therefore, although it inspires the highest worldly productivity of *homo faber* it is by no means his prerogative; it begins to assert itself as his source of inspiration only where he overreaches himself, as it were, and begins to produce useless things, objects which are unrelated to material or intellectual wants, to man's physical needs no less than to his thirst for knowledge. Cognition on the other hand ... like fabrication itself, is a process with a beginning and end, whose usefulness can be tested, and which, if it produces no results, has failed (Arendt, 1958, pp. 171).

It is not, on Arendt's account, that cognition in this sense is not important in human life but that when we gather knowledge, we do not really think. If thinking is understood in terms of cognition, it has nothing to do with thinking because it generates nothing other than what already exists. The tendency to think of thinking in these terms lies at the root, according to Arendt, of the modern understanding of thinking as the exemplary way to obtain certain and transparent knowledge. The search for certainty, which has characterised modernity, was focused especially on the future and on the construction of an ideal world. The more investigation and creativity, the more knowledge and possibilities there would be of realising this ideal. When thinking is instrumentalised to such utopian purposes, it loses its meaning as a reflective organ. In consequence, thinking understood as cognition loses its meaning and 'puts man back once more ... into the prison of his own mind, into the limitations of patterns he himself created' (Arendt, 1958, pp. 288). According to Arendt, we need to think beyond the limitations of our construction of the world and to do more with our intellectual abilities than use them as instruments in service of a future aim, especially if this aim is in service of what has become the sacrosanct idea of progress.

Arendt comprehends thinking in another way. Thinking has neither an end nor an aim outside itself, and it does not refer to an ideal that has to be realised. Moreover, it has nothing to do with the appropriation of things.

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Instead of this, thinking has to do with the 'remembrance that one has been spoken to' (Masschelein, 2001, p. 18). This thinking is not a capacity for self-regulation or reflexive problem-solving; it is neither a skill nor something that can be learned or acquired in conventional ways. The specific character of thinking is that it arises out of a 'genuine experience' and that it interrupts all doing, all activities. Here experience is considered not as something that strengthens our possibilities and abilities, something that increases our autonomy, independence and self-sufficiency, but rather as something that *embarrasses* us, that puts us into doubt, that confuses us and causes perplexity. Socrates himself used the metaphor of the wind to explain thinking:

> 'The winds themselves are invisible, yet what they do is manifest to us and we somehow feel their approach' (Xenophon) . . . We find the same metaphor in Sophocles, who counts 'windswift thought' among the dubious 'awe-inspiring' things with which men are blessed or cursed . . . The trouble is that this same wind, whenever it is roused, has the peculiarity of doing away with its own previous manifestations . . . It is in this invisible element's nature to undo, unfreeze, as it were, what language, the medium of thinking, has frozen into thought–words (concepts, sentences, definitions, doctrines) . . . The consequence is that thinking inevitably has a destructive, undermining effect on all established criteria, values, and measurements of good and evil, in short, on those customs and rules of conduct we treat of in morals and ethics. These frozen thoughts, Socrates seems to say, come so handily that you can use them in your sleep; but if the wind of thinking, which I shall now stir in you, has shaken you from your sleep and made you fully awake and alive, then you will see that you have nothing in your grasp but perplexities, and the best we can do with them is share them with each other (Arendt, 1978, pp. 174–175).

The metaphor of the wind refers to something that happens to us, something that we could not expect and that puts us into doubt. Arendt uses the word 'natality' to refer to this 'genuine experience' and its capacity to break into the world. As Walter Kohan puts this, 'The new being, the child with no voice, the *in-fans*, speaks from its own birth; with its birth a doubt arises, puts us in question, breaks a given order, a certain state of things' (Kohan, 2002, p. 8). Being able to initiate a new beginning is, according to Jan Masschelein, the very experience of freedom: 'Freedom is no ''natural'' potential or capacity, but something that is given to me by the address of the other who questions my needs and aims' (Masschelein, 2001, p. 9). Jean-François Lyotard (1991) speaks in this respect of a necessity, an indefinite rest, of 'the inhuman' that offers the occasion to imagine something different, something new from the existing order of things, a hope. This hope, this possibility that might bring something new into the world, has to be associated with the fact that the world does not simply precede us, but effectively constitutes us as particular beings. This means that, although we enter the world as newcomers, we are always belated. If, however, we do not experience this

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belatedness, we will be cut-off from our responsibility for the world and for who we are. Following Arendt, Natasha Levinson (2001) argues that the experience of belatedness has been neutralised by modernity. This does not mean that the occurrence of the experience of belatedness has become impossible, but rather that it has been absorbed and tranquillised by our progress-focused society. After all, modernity can be characterised by a broad cultural desire for progress and for putting the past behind us. In resistance to this assumption, Arendt emphasises the ethical undesirability of this desire and its ultimate impossibility (cf. Levinson, 2001). In order to illuminate Arendt's viewpoint on belatedness, Levinson refers to William Faulkner who states that 'the past is never dead, it is not even past' (Faulkner, in Levinson, 2001, p. 14). In other words, we are responsible for the world we enter, even if we have not built that world. The experience of belatedness will confuse us and put into question our needs and aims, not so that we might refine our aims and clarify our needs, or with a view to our coming to understand the better what something is, but in order to help us to ask what it means for something to be here and now, at this moment in this place. It is on the strength of this that Arendt defines natality as a kind of miracle or wind that generates not knowledge but instead the ability to think. In this sense, thinking is something in every person and not a function of intelligence, and in this, once again, it stands in contrast to cognition or knowledge as construction. Thinking is no prerogative of the few but an ever-present possibility for everyone.

IV EDUCATION FOR THINKING MUST PRESERVE NATALITY

Is it at all possible to teach to think in this sense? We do not know if it is possible. If thinking arises from an encounter, it may be that teaching to think has to do with propitiating such encounters. But no encounter of this kind can be anticipated, foreseen or deduced. Thinking arises as the response to the encounter that is not to be anticipated or predicted or even perhaps believed. But if the experience of thinking cannot be transmitted or anticipated, how is it then possible to teach to think, since there can be no formulae, prescriptions or models?

According to Arendt, education has to preserve newness (Arendt, 1977). Our hope always depends on natality, and we must take care that we do not destroy it. As she writes,

> Our hope always hangs on the new which every generation brings; but precisely because we can base our hope only on this, we destroy everything if we so try to control the new that we, the old, can dictate how it will look. Exactly for the sake of what is new and revolutionary in every child, education must be conservative (Arendt, 1977, pp. 192–193).

Although Arendt (1977) speaks of what she calls a 'conservative attitude', this should not be understood as a turn to the past in order to return to a

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previous way of life. It implies instead striving to protect the child against the world and the world against the child. To preserve newness is to teach in such a way that students acquire an understanding of themselves in relation to the world without regarding either the world or their positioning in it as fixed, determined, and unchangeable (Arendt, 1977, p. 193). Levinson emphasises that Arendt's characterisation of education as conservative has to do with the conviction that it is only in relation to their belatedness that children will experience what has to be challenged and reconfigured. Whereas if education is geared towards the way the world has to be, it makes the supposition that the world does not need to be transformed because it is already in a process of transforming; 'progress' and 'development' stand sometimes as proxies for this. Arendt's emphasis on presenting the world as it is does not mean, however, that she seeks to impose a singular reading of the world on children. On the contrary, it is to expose them to other perspectives. As Levinson argues, the point of this exposure to the world as it is, is not to fix the world, but to invent new ideas. Newcomers are constantly being born and are continually in the process of being introduced to one another and to the world. Consequently, natality lends encounters across these different time-frames and different situations in which these newcomers enter the world (Levinson, 2001, p. 28).

It is important in education, therefore, to raise children's awareness of the social positions through which they are related to the world and to one another. After all, the possibility of bringing about new relations and new realities begins with the realisation and recognition of the reality of this necessarily relational position. For us to realise and to recognise this, we need the other who questions our needs and thoughts. So, the challenge for education is to create a space where children can encounter the other and where they can start the quest to find out what this encounter means? A space where the collective search for the question 'What happens to me, why does it happen, and what do I have to do with it?' can start. The answer to this question is not a matter of getting to know myself better or of building my own identity but of looking at my life as if I had not seen it before and of changing it. It is about looking for an answer to something that has confused me and where I, together with others, try to respond. And just because we do not know what has happened to us, we need the other, for it is only in speaking and acting that we can express ourselves to others. The words of Kant are apposite: 'Yet how much and how correctly would we think if we did not think as it were in community with others to whom we communicate our thoughts, and who communicate theirs with us!' (Kant, 1996, p. 16). The relation to the other has to be seen as a kind of obligation to answer the call of the other. It is the appearance to the other that gives a measurement for value and meaning and that transcends the endless chain of ends and means generated by the utilitarianism of *homo faber*.

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V EDUCATION FOR THINKING AND THE COMMUNITY OF INQUIRY

By converting the classroom into a community of inquiry, Philosophy for Children aims to create an environment where dialogue is encouraged. The approach of a community of inquiry is rigid, rational and instrumental, however, and I want now to question the how far it succeeds in enabling dialogue. In the following section I shall investigate whether or not dialogue as understood in Philosophy for Children is sensitive to the call of the other.

Dialogue as offered in Philosophy for Children is seen as a form of thinking out loud that is problem-focused, self-correcting, egalitarian and based on mutual interests; in other words, it is inquiry-based thinking (see Splitter and Sharp, 1995). Furthermore, Splitter and Sharp state that each of the conditions of dialogue embraces the idea of interweaving different perspectives and viewpoints. 'In a dialogical context, children discover that there are many different ways of thinking about a problem, and defining exactly what the problem is will often be part of the problem' (Splitter and Sharp, 1995, p. 12). They state also that when people are engaged in dialogue with one another they are compelled to reflect, to concentrate, to consider alternatives, to listen closely, to give careful attention to definitions and meanings and to recognise previously un-thought opinions. Among the many skills required for building a community of inquiry, those associated with formulating, asking and responding to questions have a special place. Indeed, the reconstruction of the classroom as a dialogical community of inquiry depends largely on the nature and quality of the questions raised by teachers and students. It is not surprising then that Philosophy for Children emphasises the importance of 'inquiry questions'. These are questions where the questioner seeks something he does not know or have, and where they are construed as an invitation to further inquiry. Whatever response is offered, such questions lead to further questions and responses. These kinds of questions reveal a concern for the questions themselves, and are not meant for gaining information. They are also known as 'Socratic questions', which implies a kind of 'questioning which probes the underlying logic or structure of our thinking, and assists us to make reasonable judgements' (Splitter and Sharp, 1995, p. 56).

The problem with this kind of questioning, which brings out the implications of unexamined opinions, is that it refers to a particular model of teaching to think. Socrates' midwifery becomes self-propelling and free-spinning, and consequently reduces the presentation of real experience. Socrates understood his midwifery in terms of a relation to truth, where asking the right questions was a means of arriving at insight into the world. In a distortion of this, the community of inquiry superimposes its own methodological ideal of procedural rationality. Meaning and truth are merged, and the advent of the newness of birth is foreclosed.

And yet this seems to conflict with the emphasis Philosophy for Children lays on 'beginning' and 'wondering', expressed sometimes as

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doubt, confusion, perplexity, fantasy ... Matthews speaks of wondering 'as the most beautiful gift life can offer' (Matthews, 1989, p. 17), while Lipman talks lyrically of the mysteries that make the world wonderful, mysteries that occur to us from time to time, and to children constantly, and that put us all into a state of doubt. Plato (Arendt, 1978) speaks of wondering as a kind of pathos, as something external that happens to us, but also invisible that forces us to wonder. He describes wondering as the beginning of our thinking. Although the concept 'wondering' seems to refer to what I have called, in connection with Arendt, the appearance of the other, it is not the same. Plato speaks about an admirable wonder, which refers only to beautiful things. This is also what Philosophy for Children has in mind when it speaks of the affective component of wondering, the other component being the cognitive one. So wondering also functions as a means to knowledge. As Ekkehard Martens suggests, it is only this confusion that makes it possible to come to real knowledge (Martens, 1999, p. 122).

VI THE 'EMPTY' SPACE AND THE COMMUNITY OF INQUIRY

If Philosophy for Children wants to play a role in the enhancement of thinking and dialogue, it should not place so much emphasis on the search for methodological and theoretical unity, but should seek instead a space where the question of meaning can arise.

For this to be achieved it would help if dialogue were interpreted in Mikhail Bakhtin's sense, and not dialectically. In Bakhtin's terms, the point of a question-and-answer session would not be that it led to a synthesis or a single conclusion, but rather that it enabled the realisation of the impossibility of a synthesis. According to Bakhtin, dialogue is neither mono-logical nor controlled by the sender of messages: properly undertaken it seeks to do justice to the addressee. To pay attention to the addressee is not simply to attempt to determine the conditions of reception of a discourse. On the contrary, it is to recognise the fact that inscribed in dialogue is the necessity that the addressee may understand another story from the one the sender tells, because the sender can never know how her stories are received (Readings, 1997). So dialogue can never be controlled totally by the sender, and this because language is neither univocal nor transparent. Language, according to Bakhtin, lays on the borderline between oneself (the sender) and the other (the addressee) (Wertsch, 1987). Every word in language is half someone else's. A word becomes one's own only when, as speaker, one appropriates the word and adapts it to one's own semantic and expressive intention. It is not the case that, prior to this moment of appropriation, the word exists in a neutral and impersonal language; it is rather that it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions. It is from there that one must take the word and make it one's own. Bakhtin writes: 'Many words stubbornly resist, others remain alien, sound foreign in the mouth of the one who appropriated them and who now speaks them; they cannot be

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assimilated into his context and fall out of it' (Bakhtin, 1994). Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the sender's intentions; it is populated by the intentions of others. Hence, dialogue is always on the borderline between me and the other. This space 'between' can be controlled neither by the sender nor by the addressee. It is an open space or an empty space, in the sense that language has pre-given meaning within it. As empty, it is a space where the question of meaning can arise, a space of responsibility, a space we could also name a space of thought. Dialogue has always to do with giving the word and accepting the word. While we are giving words, we accept words ourselves. It is in dialogue that we are confronted with ourselves. Although we try, we shall never succeed because our eyes are restricted: we have to borrow the eyes of another; we need the other in order to look at the boundaries of our own thought and to go beyond them.

Dialogue is not a form of action through which meaning passes, but an act where the question of meaning arises. For the community of inquiry this means that we do not have to reinforce and develop the co-operative practice of communication but to make real the experience of the presence of the other. Bakhtin uses the metaphor of the carnival to explain his statement. The celebrating mass was an 'open community' where everybody participated and no groups were excluded, where the upper class played the same game as the lower. It was not a kind of performance or theatre where the actor is distinguished from the public. Everybody participated, orientated to the outside, to the other. Besides the mocking and temporary reversal of dominant forces that the carnival represents, it was also a curious situation where people exposed themselves to others (see Simons, 1990). The carnival also both parodied the established rules and offered alternatives. None of this is to imply that we should hope that a new discourse will exist out of all the others: it is rather that the existing discourse is broken open and that a new view of life can arise. Such experience offers the occasion to question our belatedness and the possibility of starting something new: 'Only through this constant mutual release from what they do, can men remain free agents, only by constant willingness to change their minds and start again can they be trusted with so great a power as that to begin something new' (Arendt, 1958, p. 240).

In the light of the possibilities that the carnival represents, the community of inquiry must also be broken open, making exchange with the other possible. The community of inquiry has to be interpreted here as a space where children can present themselves to each other. In accordance with the spirit of carnival, this requires of me the courage to give up the position I hold and to be engaged in an uncomfortable position that is not mine. This act of 'disposition' is freedom, and it cannot exist without the other. The impossibility of relying on and trusting oneself totally is the price we pay for freedom. It is in this way that we have to understand democracy, as the possibility of transforming the self, of putting the self in question. This is in stark contrast with the basic assumption of Philosophy for Children where dialogue is based on criteria in service of an ideal or the creation of a new ideal.

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VII CONCLUSION: PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN AS A GIFT AND AN ACCEPTANCE

Without a doubt, the rise of Philosophy for Children has been a salient development in education, but I have tried to show the ways in which it closes off the search for democracy, when what is needed is that the question be broken open. Ironically, the struggle for the child has hindered the possibility of her birth. And hence Lipman's alertness to democracy, so it seems, has limited the extent to which he is democratic. After all, as long as the community of inquiry is focused on the truth, and even where this is a truth that is held in common, the participants are not related to one another, are not in dialogue with each other. The community I have referred to, the community we need, is a community of people who are exposed to one another. So the content of the inquiry or the nature of the communication skills is not the point: it is the experience of the presence of the other that matters. This experience has nothing to do with making judgements or presenting arguments, but everything to do with exposure to the other.

Yet it is important to be careful with any outright condemnation of Philosophy for Children, for the salience of this in its current form, under this heading, may hide richer possibilities that otherwise might have passed in its name. Is it not possible that the focus on dialogue and critical thinking in function of a future ideal has made us lose sight of ways in which the presence of the other is integral to its practices—that is, that it may have, concealed within it, the practices of a real philosophy for children? After all, does not the community of inquiry always imply thinking *with* the other, facing conflict *with* the other, searching for an answer *with* the other, doubting *with* the other . . .? Do we not always in any case have to deal with and face the other? While the *being-with-the other* conceptualised in Philosophy for Children has always been related to the search for explanation or to engagement in argument or to the achievement of the autonomy of the self, it may also involve, in its shadows, another experience that we seem to forget but that is perhaps more fundamental. This is a matter not so much of an experience of identity but rather of a withdrawal from oneself—an experience of what we have called thinking. Assuming that there is no method for thinking, we can only interpret philosophy for children as a gift, as something exceptional, as something extraordinary. In this condition, Philosophy for Children has no aims to appropriate, no goals, no rules, no pre-conceived ideas. It can only be interpreted as a space between, as something strange that appears to us and that we do not know how to deal with. It is in this moment of ignorance—which, amongst children, often causes agitation—that the experience of thinking or withdrawal from ourselves can occur. The wind 'gives' us a new-born child, raising in us the question of whether we want to 'accept' the philosophy it may bring.

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