

The Importance of Philosophy for Children

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Abstract: *Philosophy for Children (P4C) is a student-centered pedagogy created by Matthew Lipman that uses dialogic teaching and Community of Inquiry (CoI) as an essential teaching and learning method. In P4C classrooms, children and teachers freely talk about a concept, a phenomenon, a law of a matter, a piece of song, a painting, etc. There are no unified answers, which inspires students' thinking skills, autonomy, creativity and imagination, dialectic language development, open-mindedness, and multi-abilities. Moreover, confidence and courage are simultaneously developed and maintained. In P4C it is important for teachers to have growth mindsets and behave as facilitators. This enables students to discover their best selves. Socratic dialogue is widely used in P4C. Socrates never assumed the role of information giver. Instead, he was a good listener, questioner, and guide; he was someone who explored the interlocutor's inner potential and innate wisdom. In this thesis, I explain and analyze P4C, its importance, and its possible practical application in kindergarten classrooms, particularly in my home of China. I believe there is endless wisdom within each child and that a school based on Philosophy for Children (P4C) would encourage students to explore these reservoirs of wisdom.*

Keywords: *P4C, CoI, kindergarten, student-centered, Socratic dialogue, growth mindset*

1. Introduction

1.1 The Ideal Education

“Education is the institution in society that prepares us to be viable, not just to endure or to live but to live well. That’s what eudaimonia means, to live well. Without education, we cannot live well” (Kohan, 2018). This is the response given by Matthew Lipman, the originator of P4C, to the question posed by his doctoral student, Walter Kohan, asking, “What is the role of education in a democracy?” It is ideally a common answer for all educators on the purpose of education.

As John Dewey expresses in his book *Democracy and Education*, “Education, in its broadest sense, is the means of this social continuity of life” (Dewey, 1916, p. 2). Education promotes the continuation and renewal of society. Education is not limited to K-12. Yet, a lot of students stop learning because they think that education is receiving a diploma. This belief stems from the long-term structure of school systems. Strict discipline and stale routines mean students hardly feel happiness, receive an individualized plan, or have a sense of achievement from school. “Schooling experience may therefore be one which fails rather than enables children” (Burman, 2008a). A question that has puzzled generations of students is, “Why learn something that we are not going to need anyway?” Lack of practical value and significance in education are other reasons why people do not want to learn spontaneously.

If the purpose of education is for people to live well and promote better social development, then to reach this goal, I believe teaching and learning methods should be student-centered no matter what country or area they take place in. Learning should not mean forced indoctrination. Instead, it should involve active exploration and habitual self-study. Moreover, teachers would be doing the best service to their students if they prioritized making learning joyful. They should make the feeling of joy in learning a student right. Education should begin with the premise of serving the public.

1.2 Education in Reality

However, as my own experiences demonstrate, reality does not always match this ideal. I grew up in the capital city of Shanxi Province. Shanxi Province is located inland, thus the educational resources and qualities are not as sophisticated as those in the coastal cities of China. In the early 2000s, I attended Xing Hua Li Yi Kindergarten in the WanBaiLin district from the age of three to six. In China, three and four-year-old preschool plus kindergarten is collectively called kindergarten. In kindergarten, my

teachers did not ask what I wanted. Instead, they made all the decisions. For instance, they selected the cartoon we watched and prepared the class depending on the teacher's outline without considering our interests; I just passively listened or watched. I did not see the school as home. Moreover, I did not have fond memories of the playground or the daily routine. I remember sitting in class learning to read and write and doing numeracy.

Later, when I transferred to Gong Yuan Lu primary school, the happiest time of the school day for me was music class and physical education class. PE occurred on the outside playground and music class required that we go to another building. I remember I was the representative of the music class, which meant I led the class to and from the classroom. When midterms and the finals were near, these two classes were replaced by literacy, mathematics, or other main subjects. Besides that, the high student-teacher ratio was memorable. We had 30 kids in the kindergarten classroom and more than 60 students in the primary class. This high student-to-teacher ratio is normal due to China's large population.

Because of these conditions, my parents decided that I should study abroad to gain access to a better education. At age 16, I was sent to Riverside, CA to attend Notre Dame High School. I entered as a high school sophomore. I spent about eight years studying in the United States alongside a large number of international students. Some of the international students had studied abroad since high school because their families wanted them to have better educations. But having been brought up in an authoritarian education system for more than a decade, it was difficult for us to integrate into the comparatively free and democratic learning environment of the American schools. I vividly recall my first presentation in speech class in my American high school. I was nervous and defensive when I took the stage. Although I had worked extra hard with my broken English and Chinese grammar I was sure I was not going to get a good grade, my speech teacher Mrs. Griffey gave me a perfect score afterward. Perhaps she saw that although I was clearly shy and fearful, I had put a great deal of effort into my speech. Even though I was the student who made the commencement speech in front of the school community at the high-school ceremony, public speaking still intimidated me. Even though I had a beautiful voice, singing alone was my way of being heard. The teacher-centered education model had not prepared me to actively present or express myself publicly. As a result, I was unfamiliar with the stage and worried that people would laugh at my awkwardness. I had been accustomed to indoctrination and neutrality. Even after a period of immersion in the student-centered learning environment, it was still difficult for me to be fully enmeshed like the local students because I did not experience this teaching and learning approach at an early age. Before studying abroad, I did not realize that keeping silent and working hard on tests was an unspoken danger for me. Moreover, after experiencing the student-centered classrooms, I wished I had been taught differently from an earlier age. I realized then that we need to change education in the early childhood years to have a positive impact on our next generations.

When I became a student at Teachers College, Columbia University I was introduced to the field of philosophy of education. On the main campus of Columbia University, Butler Library is particularly visible. Its facade is inscribed with the names Homer, Herodotus, Sophocles, Plato, Aristotle, Demosthenes, Cicero, Vergil. From left to right, they are great writers, philosophers, and thinkers. Auguste Rodin's masterpiece "The Thinker," on Columbia's campus, left a deep impression on me. Moreover, John Dewey's bust is displayed in the hallway in Teachers College. He watches the teachers and students go by in silence, but he is one of us.

In the 20th century, some of China's great educators and philosophers, such as Feng Youlan, Tao Xingzhi, Chen Heqin, Hu Shi, Jiang Menglin, Ma Yinchu, Wen Yiduo, and Liang Shiqiu, all studied at Columbia University in succession and some of them were deeply influenced by John Dewey. Their study experiences at Columbia University laid a solid foundation for developments in China's education system in the 20th century. Their intangible guidance inspired me, an educator of the 21st century, to follow in their footsteps and build on their knowledge, bringing innovation and progressive educational methods to the children in China. Therefore, my mission is to continue their mission, to make another milestone in China's education system.

1.3 Introduction of Philosophy for Children

Children naturally love to learn, discover, and use their brains. However, with teacher-centered schooling, curiosity and thinking skills slowly disappear with age. This revelation was disclosed by Matthew Lipman, the Father of Philosophy for Children (P4C), who initiated an educational movement to encourage students to embrace philosophy in the 1970s. In 1971, Lipman's philosophical novel, *Harry Stottlemeire's Discovery*, was published, which marked the birth of Philosophy for Children (P4C). Previously, he was a professor in the Department of Philosophy at Columbia University for eighteen

years. During his teaching, Professor Lipman found that college students lacked critical thinking skills. After research and observation, Dr. Matthew Lipman conceived that improving critical thinking skills needs to start in early childhood education through exerting the nature of the child, and it needs to be carried out continuously from bottom to top by teachers of different grade levels.

Dr. Lipman's Philosophy for Children (P4C) "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 participation to take decisions autonomously" (Vansieleghem, 2005). It is a student-centered pedagogy, which is "especially intended to help children think in a critical and reasonable way, taking into account the needs and interests of all actors, especially the child herself" (Lipman, Sharp & Oscanyan, 1980; Splitter & Sharp, 1995). It usually takes the form of dialogic teaching, "A dialogue based on child participation in shared reasoning and argument evaluation promotes authentic experience, increasing critical autonomous thinking and preventing indoctrination" (Young, 1992). Students and the teacher sit in a circle and start with a topic designed to get them to express their opinions by connecting with their personal experiences. This approach avoids teachers' one-mouth teaching all the time. Multiple viewpoints make the class interesting and invigorating.

1.4 Children as Philosophers

The Philosophy for Children (P4C) model acknowledges the power of young children as thinkers and questioners. As the research shows, "the first critical phase of the growth of the brain begins around age 2 and ends around age 7" (Sriram, 2020). Also, developmental psychologist Alison Gopnik has proven that babies' brains are actually more highly connected than adult brains, meaning more neural pathways are available to babies than adults. They have very different, though equally complex and powerful, minds, brains, and forms of consciousness, designed to serve different evolutionary functions" (Gopnik, 2009). Babies' brains are even faster than adults' but their abilities are often underestimated and overlooked. Young-age children's quick reactions and novel insights generate tons of questions especially during the ages of three to six years old. They love to ask why and begin to ask about things they sense and experience. This occurs for two reasons. One is to cooperate with cerebral growth. The other is because "the child is surrounded by a world that is problematic through and through, a world in which everything invites inquiry and reflective questioning, a world as provocative of thought as it is of wonder and action" (Lipman, 2003). Besides physiological drive, innate courage and curiosity accompany their vibrant world, igniting children's enthusiasm for questioning. There is an old saying in China to describe the early age of children. It is "Newborn calves are not afraid of tigers." In other words, young people are fearless. Although this trait is valuable, it makes children vulnerable. This fearlessness should be carefully cultivated by parents, teachers, and the environment; it can positively drive learners to construct new knowledge about their surroundings.

One of the pioneers of P4C, Gareth B. Matthews believes that all children are natural philosophers and that philosophical ideas are accessible to young children. Where there are children, there is philosophy because philosophy is the product of the human brain. Children are thinkers with different ideas, questions, standpoints, backgrounds, experiences, etc. Wisdom is innate but it needs to be exploited if it is to be embraced. According to Plato, "learning is a recollection of previously known forms" (Matthews & Amy, 2020). René Descartes states, "a clear and distinct knowledge of the world can be constructed from resources innate to the human mind" (Descartes, 1985). Both great philosophers believe that truth and wisdom are innate in the minds of human beings. Thus, student-centered learning methods, like those in P4C, are the keys to enlightening the wisdom of children.

My educational experience, brain science, and Matthews' beliefs about P4C make me wonder "What does the literature say about P4C? Mainly, what do I need to understand to implement P4C in early childhood education programs?" This paper will examine what the literature says about these questions and then apply the answers to a proposal for a P4C kindergarten school in China.

2. Review of Relevant Literature

2.1 About Philosophy for Children

Philosophy for Children (P4C) originated in the United States in the 1970s and it was established at the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC) at Montclair State University. It was a project initiated by Matthew Lipman (1922-2010) for "helping our children to be more reasonable citizens for a future democracy" (Lipman, 1988). At present, more than 40 countries and areas apply P4C

as the teaching method in school settings.

P4C is a student-centered teaching method. It helps students develop reasoning, make connections, validate inferences, hypothesize, and form inquiries that call for relevance, seek clarification, offer alternative points of view, build logically on the contribution of others, pose counterexamples, and ask for reasons, testing and so on (Lipman, Sharp & Oscanyan, 1980; Sharp, 1993). "It is a general aim of P4C 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" (Vansieleghem, 2005). It is important to hear the voices of every child. Encouraging them to express their points of view will not only increase their class participation and school attendance but also give them a new and novel understanding of learning as they encounter education. They will become more interested in learning and be more confident and appreciative of themselves and their peers. Contemporary young generations need to exhibit their individuality; they need to speak for themselves; they need to tell their story for others; they need to use their minds; they need to take responsibility as world citizens. In this way, they can revitalize society.

2.2 Teaching Content of Philosophy for Children

"Children's philosophical practice may take many forms, notably the causal and spontaneous 'play of ideas', and that 'the playing of games comes very easily to children'" (Lipman & Sharp, 1978). Teachers do not need to encourage children to play, because it comes naturally to children. They can learn things through play, and they also wonder about new things when they play. "Fundamentally, wonder arises in childhood from an awareness of the novelty of being alive in the world, and eventually can lead to pondering such subjects as the meaning of being alive, the complexity of identity, the nature of friendship and love, how to live good lives, and whether we can know anything at all (among other topics)," (Lone & Burroughs, 2016, p.18). So, P4C can easily be taken from children's experiences and lives.

Children express philosophical questions from observation. Encouraging them to converse about what they observe illuminates their philosophies. For instance, a child may reflect, "I found trees are green in summer, but nothing in winter, why is that?" Based on the child's observation, the class can have a discussion about the four seasons, and the surrounding subtopics can be: Why are there four seasons? How do the four seasons change? How do the four seasons affect our lives? Why should we wear sweaters in winter and short sleeves in summer? What if we wear short sleeves in winter and sweaters in summer? Such prompting coaxes children to combine their personal experiences and delve into a topic.

2.3 The Role of Play

"Play consisted of ideas, not just of actions; it became something inside my head, something subjective, something that forever afterward affected my existence in peculiar but positive ways" (Sutton-Smith, 2008, p.82). How children play games reflects how they think. When children start to play, they have imagined the play and all steps are clearly mapped in their minds. "The child, in wishing, carries out his wishes; and in thinking, he acts. Internal and external action are inseparable: imagination, interpretation, and will are internal processes in external action", therefore "playing involving an imaginary situation" (Vygotsky, 1967). As Lev Vygotsky believed, "play is the source of development and creates the zone of proximal development" (ZPD), and "the child moves forward essentially through play activity" (Vygotsky, 1967). "In play, a child is always above his average age, above his daily behavior; in play, it is as though he were a head taller than himself. As in the focus of a magnifying glass, play contains all developmental tendencies in a condensed form; in play, it is as though the child were trying to jump above the level of his normal behavior" (Vygotsky, 1967). According to Lev Vygotsky, play benefits children's growth and development and brings new leaps and possibilities to them. Teachers can identify children's current abilities based on how they play. They can gradually add difficulty in the later game arrangement. Based on ZPD, this will enable them to explore children's potential abilities little by little. Importantly, "without a consideration of the child's needs, inclinations, incentives, and motives to act there will never be any advance from one stage to the next" (Vygotsky, 1967). This implies that it would be beneficial if teachers made developmentally individualized plans for each child.

"In the presence of increasing academic demands for early childhood classrooms, fewer hours are devoted to play" (Bodrova et al., 2019, p. 436). Playtime is being subsumed by academic time, due to the increasing push for immediate success and immediate benefits. The issue that is being overlooked is

that a good education is not only perfect grades and a top-ranking, rather it is a slow but ongoing process to keep children interested in learning throughout their entire lives. Increasing the amount of playtime in educational settings will inspire children to invent, create, and persevere with their learning.

2.4 Underestimated Children

“Children themselves have been cast as what psychologists and sociologists label ‘human becomings’ as opposed to human beings” (Davies, 2021). According to Davies, adults are regarded as human beings, but children are named as “human becomings”. They are evolving, dynamic - not static. They are still developing. Due to their small body size, knowledge reserve is not rich, experience is not enriched, and language is not complete, resulting in this developmental age group being often ignored and putting them in a subordinate position. However, children can be wise. They have an innate love of wisdom. They are not afraid to ask or challenge, and they are open to knowledge. Adulthood is an extenuation of childhood. Adults are considered citizens when they reach the age of 18 and start to exercise their rights and duties. It is a social need, a societal definition. In actuality, the adult is a continuation of the child’s noumena, which means the child and the adult still share the same body and soul. Qualities developed in childhood are apparent in adulthood. An individual who experiences a childhood in which questions were ignored or discouraged can become an adult who habitually ignores the existence of provocative questions and ideas. “Hearers’ prejudices cause them to miss out on knowledge offered by the child, but not heard by the adult” (Murriss, 2013). As a result, a child who is unheard may become an adult who does not hear and, thus, easily loses interest in problem-solving. Adults’ perfunctory responses to problems may be the result of their past educational feedback. Solving these problems will be a challenge for future educators. If society is to combat complex problems like globalism, climate change, and pandemics, it must start cultivating future adults as problem-solvers and active thinkers.

2.5 Overestimated Philosophy

“Philosophy isn’t confined to what goes on in colleges and universities: it predates these institutions, and it’s alive outside of them” (Davies, 2021). Philosophy is generally perceived to be an extremely difficult and esoteric subject that only a few people can understand and immerse themselves in. In China’s public schools, philosophy is taught only in universities, and those at the top of the rankings teach it well. Even in the United States, where P4C originated, public high schools in the U.S. rarely offer philosophy as a subject (Davies, 2021). For both countries, philosophy is primarily taught at the college level. This lack of early exposure makes the topic appear strange and unfamiliar. However, philosophy should not be a far-flung, burdensome topic. Rather, it should be presented as a subject that, because it explores ideas, offers endless possibilities. “Philosophy, though unable to tell us with certainty what is the true answer to the doubts which it raises, is able to suggest many possibilities which enlarge our thoughts and free them from the tyranny of custom. Thus, while diminishing our feeling of certainty as to what things are, it greatly increases our knowledge as to what they may be; it removes the somewhat arrogant dogmatism of those who have never traveled into the region of liberating doubt, and it keeps alive our sense of wonder by showing familiar things in an unfamiliar aspect” (Lone & Burroughs, 2016, p.3).

2.6 Community of Inquiry

Community of Inquiry (CoI) is an important method for Philosophy for Children (P4C). “P4C highlights the role that public and shared dialogue in Community of Inquiry could play in teaching the critical, creative and caring dimensions of complex thinking, thus offering the opportunity for autonomous thinking” (Santi & Di Masi, 2014). “CoI is seen as a given historical and cultural context, in which children learn through peer-to-peer and child-to-adult communication” (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1995, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). In order to maximize students’ benefits on P4C learning, “circles and small groups are good places to start discussions with leading statements, object lessons, or even jokes” (Kennedy, 2020). A comfortable atmosphere makes students willing to share, talk, and listen. “Piaget and others have shown that reasoning occurs in a children’s group as an argument intended processes and internal developmental processes” (Vygotsky, 1978). Such a learning structure can foster listening and encourage the acceptance of new ideas. Rationality, therefore, accompanies students’ brain thinking, which “includes critical thinking, formal and informal logic, with its inquiry, concept formation, translation and reasoning skills” (2003), as defined by Matthew Lipman. Again, this thinking is a crucial component of adult thinking, which itself is necessary in an increasingly complex world.

2.7 The Role of the Teacher

“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 that are heard, the greater will be the possibilities of reaching a general and appropriately representative consensus” (Vansieleghem, 2005). More voices make the class more diversified and colorful. “Different kinds of learners learn in different ways. Individuals learn and demonstrate what they know in different ways, at different rates, and from the vantage point of their different experiences” (Falk, 2000, p.32). Inviting and welcoming multiple opinions and perspectives fosters mutual learning and respect. Therefore, in the process of CoI, the symmetrical teacher-student relationship is formulated. This eliminates a classroom situation in which the same voice repeats itself again and again. Instead, multiple voices animate the classroom invigorating the lesson.

“When the learners learn through a dialogical process, the teacher also learns from them and they also teach the teacher” (Kohan, 2018). Such a scene is difficult to imagine in a modern classroom in which the accepted hierarchy is that the teachers are preeminent, endowed with enriched experiences and considered ‘the repositories of wisdom’. But, in fact, teachers and students are equal. Adults do not act as experts. There are some strengths that adults do not even have. For example, it is difficult for adult teachers to be naive, pure, thoughtful, and good at asking questions. Teachers need to go forward and make progress for themselves because learning is endless. While teachers have more learning and experience than students, a system in which both students and teachers share and explore ideas may be more beneficial for all parties involved than the current pedagogy. Teachers can find inspiration from children. “When thinking with children, adults need to give their mind to what there is to think about, which is only possible when adults are open-minded, have epistemic modesty, epistemic trust and are committed to epistemic equality” (Murriss, 2013). Such a process encourages students not only to share ideas but also to respect the ideas of others. Moreover, “teaching and learning is not a one-way process in which culture is transferred from one organism to another organism, but as a co-constructive process, a process in which both participating organisms play an active role and in which meaning is not transferred but produced” (Biesta, 1994). Meaning is generated and contoured by all learning people.

It is important for teachers to have a growth mindset. Traditional teachers used a fixed mindset when teaching students, which resulted in one voice echoing from front to back. At present, most countries have strict requirements for kindergarten teachers: some require a bachelor's degree, some require a graduate diploma, but in the field of P4C, degree level is not the most critical factor. The most important element that teachers must have is a growth mindset. “Growth mindset is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts, your strategies, and help from others. Although people may differ in every which way—in their initial talents and aptitudes, interests, or temperaments—everyone can change and grow through application and experience” (Dweck, 2006, p.13). When teachers adopt a growth mindset it benefits both themselves and their students. Children exposed to teachers who subscribe to a growth mindset style of teaching experience prolonged childhoods enriched by curiosity, courage, and innocence.

In this pedagogical paradigm, teachers are still teachers, but they no longer control the classroom, rather they act as facilitators to help students better embrace knowledge through mutual learning, communication, and cooperation. “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 verbalize and objectify these thoughts by asking the right questions” (Vansieleghem, 2005). Moreover, “teachers are, in effect, creating a ‘zone of proximal development’ (Vygotsky, 1978) for children. Questions and children’s responses become particularly important in gaining an understanding of a child’s current level of development and moving the child to the next level of cognitive challenge” (Walsh & Hodge, 2016). In addition to getting prepared when facing students’ philosophical questions, “it certainly helps to have read or to be reading some philosophy oneself, in order to be able to recognize when children are raising classic philosophical issues and arguments” (Kennedy, 2004).

It is helpful if teachers respect all children without bias, like Socrates. Socrates is not a discriminating speaker. He speaks to: the enslaved person, the judge, the child, the woman, or the old man. In his eyes, all beings are equal, and he believes that their wisdom is innate and can become a reality if developed. Socrates does not think of himself as a teacher, nor is he patronizing. Socrates’ method of promoting knowledge has not been diminished by time. It is important to honor and understand the educational approaches of our ancestors. In China, we have great philosophers: Confucius, Lao Zi/Lao-Tzu, Wang YangMing. These individuals put their life wisdom into a series of classics for the world’s people.

Socrates and Plato in the West and Confucius, Lao Tzu, and Wang Yangming in the East all advocate teaching without discrimination. These thinkers believe there is unlimited wisdom within every human being. This unseen wisdom needs the right teaching method to make it tangible.

2.8 The Role of the School

Schools serve as the official training institution for the citizens, “providing spaces and places for discussions and increasing argumentative and reasoning skills that would lead to better deliberation” (Di Masi & Santi, 2015). Time spent away from academics is crucial in order for children to be able to think freely. P4C is the result of both internal and external factors; school is included as an external factor. Children are actively engaged in learning and a seed that will grow into further learning is planted. In the research paper *Doing Philosophy with Young Children: theory, practice, and resources*, the author David Kennedy showed the reader the benefits of Philosophy for Children, “there is steadily growing research evidence that the skills which children use in doing philosophy are fundamental to academic skills and that exercising them leads directly to scholastic gains.” (2020).

Moreover, in the child-centered education model, the subject is the child. Therefore, children actively participate in the mechanisms of their learning rather than obeying the school blindly. “Children would need to be included in decisions about what is worthwhile in school: curriculum content, choice of pedagogy, design of the school and playground, policies and staff recruitment. This would account to real participation, not mere consultation” (Haynes, 2009). Giving students a chance to design and paint the campus and make decisions about school affairs can give them a sense of what it means to be a member of a democratic society. Of course, the final decision is still held by the trustee. But inviting children to participate in their learning gives them a sense of self-worth and investiture. Thus, children can venture out into the world as confident, courageous, and vibrant participants.

2.9 Socratic Dialogue and Philosophy for Children

“Children are precisely the sorts of people who have the most need for and can profit by approaching what philosophers consider the important questions” (Reed, 1983). P4C is inspired by Socrates (Murriss, 2008). In Plato’s *The Republic*, the dialogue between Socrates and Glaucon disclosed the character of children. Socrates said to Glaucon, “You must have noticed how young men, after their first taste of argument, are always contradicting people just for the fun of it; they imitate those whom they hear cross-examining each other, and themselves cross-examine other people, like puppies who love to pull and tear at anything within reach” (1974). On the surface, children seem to play with adult dialogue, when in actuality they are learning and growing by questioning and contradicting. Such play and experimentation reveal their courage and curiosity. Socratic dialogue encourages combining people’s interests, love of wisdom and pursuit of truth throughout the dialogue. Therefore, Socratic dialogue is an effective way for students to unearth truths and explore ideas and should be one of the P4C methods introduced to the students and teachers.

The wisdom of Socrates can be found in his dialogues. “Ever since the time of Socrates the search for wisdom has meant dialogue” (Fisher, 1990). The themes of Socrates' dialogues are relatively deep, such as: what is truth, what is justice, and what is the connection between the soul and the body, etc. These complex and esoteric questions are thought-provoking, because for Socrates, “the unexamined life is not worth living” (Smith, 2011).

Those classic dialogues arose from people’s daily lives. Many Socratic dialogues take place in the market or other areas where people convene, and the interlocutors use their life experiences to lay out the central topic introduced by them or by Socrates. Through Socrates’ effective guidance and the depth of the dialogue, the problems become complicated. One of the distinctive features of Socratic dialogue is that there is never a standard answer until the end. In the process of the dialogue, Socrates constantly facilitates his interlocutors’ to think and helps to awaken their innate wisdom; where his interlocutors wind up with their thoughts is based on their individual experiences and levels of cognitive abilities.

Children are synonymous with vivacity and sensibility, “for it is impossible to learn the serious without the comic, or any one of a pair of contraries with the other if one is to be a wise man” (Plato, 1926). “P4C commonly conceives its purpose as less for children to learn about philosophy than to learn to philosophize” (Murriss, 2008). Introducing the practice of Socratic dialogue into the classroom to young children will inspire them to think critically, logically, and autonomously. This method can coax fresh and creative thoughts from the children to the benefit of everyone involved. Like Matthew Lipman has mentioned, “for children to find these matters out for themselves in a community of enquiry setting

is for them to experience afresh the robust exuberance exhibited by Socrates and his companions in their conversations about the nature of the True, the Beautiful and the Good" (1991). The more one talks, the more excitement is produced, which is also a feature of Socratic dialogue. The Socratic process, in which Socrates constantly explores the potential for the interlocutor and the interlocutor progresses under Socrates' guidance and inspiration, encourages all involved to find fun, passion and confidence in this learning method. Socrates always talks with few interlocutors, no more than three, so the ratio is 1:1, 1:2, or 1:3. The current student-teacher ratio, in which one teacher teaches 10 more students, is better than that used by Socrates. Every brain is valued as a think-tank. Once starting the philosophical dialogue, each brain is going to contribute and the mutual power is going to be impressively huge. "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 judgment will be" (Vansieleghem, 2005). Based on that, the new-time model of Socratic dialogue creates more possibilities and alternatives from the participants, and it helps students to be open-minded and sensitive to the critical ideas of the group.

"Adults often put metaphorical sticks in their ears in their educational encounters with children" (Murris, 2013). In real life, prejudice is like a thick wall that blocks the supposed good relationship between teachers and students, adults and children. "The power relations and structural prejudice undermine a child's faith in their own experiences. As a result, the child will lose confidence in her general intellectual abilities, to such an extent that she is genuinely hindered in her educational development" (Murris, 2013). In addition to that, the conventional banking education and teachers' fixed mindset produced a teacher-centered teaching model, which further limited students' possibilities. Teachers' high control prevents students from developing critical thinking, creative thinking, and caring thinking. As a result, students' thoughts are neutralized and lack personal decision-making. "Neutrality is just following the crowd. Neutrality is just being what the system asks us to be. Neutrality, in other words, is an immoral act" (Horton & Freire, 1990). It is difficult to imagine that anyone wishes their children to go to school only to be taught neutrality, which will mold them into silent citizens. Pessimistic education means that people lose the desire to learn, explore and make independent decisions. Proper education can prevent this from occurring.

3. Implementation

3.1 Ambition and Mission

Kindergarten in China differs from America. In America kindergarten is the first grade in elementary school, sharing a common building and playground. In China, kindergarten is a separate school, consisting of three grade levels with children aged three to six years old. In other words, "kindergarten" does not indicate one grade level in China. Instead, it indicates a full early childhood center.

My aspiration to open a kindergarten in China is based on dissatisfaction with my own academic career. From 3 years old to 16 years old, the education I received was a typical teacher-centered teaching model. From 16 years old to 24 years old it was a student-centered learning model. As a student, I could definitely identify which educational paradigm is better for students' development and which should be permanently phased out.

I have been an educational major for 5 years, and I believe education is the foundation of a nation and that early childhood education is the foundation of education. For this reason, early childhood education must be taken seriously. Early education is the springboard for a child's upward mobility and development. In kindergarteners, thinking abilities, language skills, motor development, independence in learning, creativity and imagination are all developing. All of these components are important, and none of them dispensable. Realizing the importance of these key elements, I am committed to bringing them completely to the kindergartens I will teach so the children will find interest in learning knowledge and embrace the unlimited wisdom in their minds. It is my goal to encourage them to make deep thinking habitual. I wish to encourage their self-expression, especially with regard to speaking publicly. I intend for my kindergarten to be named "We Kindergarten," for this will be a space of freedom, learning, respect and equality for both teachers and children. "We are the one, we are the children," is the motto in my head. The mission of We Kindergarten will be to lay a solid foundation for children to become thoughtful, articulate people. Our mission will be to awaken one life by another.

3.2 *Philosophy for Children Curriculum*

I envision a school with “living education,” which is what the great Chinese educator Chen Heqin claimed throughout his life. “Living education” is not a denial of knowledge acquired from books. It is an education that combines knowledge with the experiential knowledge, which children acquire through communication and interactions with nature and society, personal observation, and daily activities. He advocates combining book knowledge with experiential knowledge. My interpretation of his intent is that living education will make knowledge accessible and interesting to children.

The curriculum at We Kindergarten will be based on Philosophy for Children (P4C), which is a representative educational practice of living education. The learning atmosphere will promote communication, questions, ideas, and conflicts. Children will be free to express their points of view. When others are sharing thoughts, the rest of the children will be encouraged to listen and respect their peers. No matter what level or in any subject, teachers will all adopt this method, letting learning be student-centered. The teachers will engage in the children’s “community of inquiry” as participants, facilitators, and supporters. At critical times, the teacher will step in to redirect the situation or start a new conversation.

3.3 *As Teachers*

Socratic dialogue is an important aspect of P4C. The practice takes the form of group dialogue. There is no unified answer, and this helps inspire students’ thinking skills, autonomy, creativity, imagination, dialectic, language development, and open-mindedness. Confidence, curiosity, and courage are therefore being maintained and developed. Socratic dialogue, created by the philosopher Socrates, is considered a great contribution to education. The real brilliance of this method is that there is never a fixed answer. The teacher leads the students to ask questions. For Socrates, the question is more important than the answer. Because questions are signs of thinking. The questions generated are the direct reflection of a person’s cognitive level. Based on this premise, teachers can guide and enlighten the questioner step by step. Socrates does not view the teacher as the giver of information, but rather as a facilitator of inquiry.

The role of the teacher as a facilitator and questioner is similar in the P4C model. To facilitate student learning does not only meet the needs of students but also meets the needs of the teachers themselves. This approach assumes that teachers are not omniscient; they need to keep learning as well. “Learning with children could possibly be a life changing transformation for the adults involved” (Murriss, 2013).

Teacher-centered classrooms only cause students’ minds to become narrow. Lack of an animating and challenging environment prohibits critical inquiry. Students who grow up in this mode often feel as I did, that learning is to finish the tasks assigned by teachers. When I was a student, I would finish my homework with a perfunctory attitude. The assignment had no meaning and was, therefore, of little interest. I completed it merely to avoid punishment. This approach, in which the academic task is viewed as a burden by students, can cause students to hate learning. This is the main danger of teacher-centered education. To prevent a deadening of thought in the succeeding generations and to alter students’ attitudes towards learning, teachers should change their mindsets, from fixed to growth mindsets, accept new ideas, and learn alongside their students (Dweck, 2006). The teacher who is equipped with a growth mindset will naturally transform a teacher-centered teaching approach to a student-centered learning approach. Getting involved in the students’ worlds enables teachers to understand their thoughts, experiences, abilities, and many other aspects of their lives. Viewing the world through the lens of a child, teachers can learn with them and understand their ways of thinking and their approach to solving problems. In other words, the secret of being a good teacher is to be a qualified child. For teachers, considering designing a lesson plan from the child’s perspective is the right place to start because it helps establish a healthy teacher-student relationship. Building up a harmonious teacher-student relationship is half the success of education. Examples of P4C in Action

Below are fragments of quoted philosophical dialogue from a kindergarten classroom using P4C. I offer an analysis of the dialogue after. The topics are, respectively, God and Soul.

“Scene One–God

Joana: I seen God.

Penny: We’ve never seen God.

Sara: Where did you see him?

Anna: My mother told me–

Joana: A church.

Teacher: A church.

Joana: And I believe Him.

Teacher: And you believe him.

Joana: Yes. Penny, I don't believe in God.

Penny: No, I do not believe in Him.

Sara: I said every prayer last night and I couldn't.

Joana: And I talk to God and He talks to me.

Teacher: [to Sara] Why?

Sara: I do not know... 'Cause my dog is dead and I like him. It was a her and her name was Hobbit, and she looked so much like Todo.

Teacher: [picking up on Peter's flung comment] And Peter says he doesn't believe in God and it's only a story?

Penny: Yah, it's only a ... it's only a fake!

Peter: It is only a story about God making the earth. It is not true.

Anna: Uh uh uh!

Joana: God did make the earth.

Penny: Yah! It is only a fake!

Teacher: And he says that the earth has been here forever, but–

Anna: It is not a fake!

Joana: He made it!

Sara: David! David! They say if you don't believe in God you go to the uh... Devil.

Nathan: [after a slight pause] Devil not real.

Penny: Devil's not true Sara!

Peter: Yah!

Joana: Yes it is. If the Devil–

Nathan: No it's not man!

Peter: Yah! If the Devil was true, what'd the earth be? Nothing but a smoking crater!

Nathan: If you lied one time you would go down. And I lied one time, and I didn't go down... I had a been dead by now. I would be dead by now." (Kennedy, 1991, p.60)

Opening with a personal experience, Joana initiated this philosophical dialogue. The whole process consisted of six kindergarteners and one teacher. Everyone expressed his/her position or story of whether or not to believe in God and whether or not he exists. These kindergarteners clearly illustrated that they understood the difference between good and bad. For instance, Nathan stated that lying is bad and results in the punishment of going to the devil. But he expressed his logic by saying that the fact that he lied should have made him go to the devil, but he went nowhere, so the devil cannot exist. As this example demonstrates, young children can share freely what they have experienced with their thoughts. The teacher did not comment on each of them. Rather, she prompted and encouraged their discussion, reiterating Joana's comment and repeating Peter's idea. So "it is not the teacher's place to offer opinions on these issues. It is the teacher's place to attempt to help young children clarify their thinking about these issues when they emerge" (Kennedy, 2020). Moreover, the teacher in this case encouraged Sara to say more about her last answer, in order to help others understand her point of view. "Teaching is not transmitting knowledge to the students but" (Kohan, 2018) "creating the possibilities for its production and or its construction" (Freire, 1999). From the above example it can be seen how the teacher's facilitation and the spirit of encouragement can ignite the desire for sharing and talking by students.

Students' curious and courageous ideas were affirmed.

Here is another example,

“Scene Two–Soul

Charles: Well, your soul is like air, except it makes you good.

Teacher: Air... In other words, you can't see it?

Charles: Well it's way in your body.

Michael: And, and everything that... tries to go through it can't go through it.

Charles: And--

Michael: I mean it can't go through you but they can go through your soul. And... and... it's real real little, and--

Fred: No, it's as big as you!

Michael: Oh, and--

Teacher: You mean it's as big as we are? You mean like my soul's as big as me and your soul's as big as you?

Fred: Yeah, and--

Charles: And my soul's as big as me.

Gabriel: And my soul's as big as me.

Michael: I know what your soul is!

Fred: Your soul looks just like you too!” (Kennedy, 2020, p.2)

Through this short fragment, we see kindergarteners define a soul, a concept that is difficult even for adults. Within the fourteen lines of dialogue, there are only two lines from the teacher. One is the second line after Charles answers, “Well, your soul is like air, except it makes you good.” The teacher asks, “Air... In other words, you can't see it?” The teacher is prompting, coaxing, encouraging further thoughts about how a soul can be like air. This word, air, illustrates what the soul is for Charles and relates how other children engage in the following discussion. Another appearance is on line nine, when Fred says, “No, it's (the soul) as big as you!” The teacher asks, “You mean it's as big as we are? You mean like my soul's as big as me and your soul's as big as you?” The teacher helps Fred explain his idea more clearly and also helps the other children make sense of his concept. This is an example of how a teacher can question and lead students to answers rather than attempting to answer the questions herself.

In this discussion there are a lot of children's voices. Every comment leads to another. For instance, after Fred expresses his point that the soul is as big as you, his peers Charles and Gabriel say, “And my soul's as big as me” with one voice. This prompts an exchange between Michael and Fred. Although “soul” is hard to define and describe, every child engages with the topic and contributes their understanding in the discussion. In this exchange with children, there is no difficulty, only interest, confidence, imagination, and challenge. I admire the teacher's reaction, not ignoring the confusing expressions of the child, instead paraphrasing and clarifying.

Classes at We Kindergarten will be modeled on examples such as these. Teachers will introduce a topic to children and encourage children to express their thoughts, with the teachers helping and questioning when necessary. In terms of philosophical topics, there are plenty more for children to talk about, such as the meaning of happiness, friendship, freedom, democracy, justice, fairness, beauty, and ugliness. Teachers will be intentional about developing best practices for introducing conversation and designing pedagogy and curriculum using P4C as a teaching and learning tool. For example, teachers can start discussions by reading children's books, viewing a painting, listening to a piece of music, or other activities that involve children's engagement and thinking.

Arts will have a significant place in the We Kindergarten curriculum. For example, teachers might show children a painting to observe in the classroom or take them to a nearby museum for the field trip. After observing, discussion starts. “Many voices are better than one, participants articulate what they are seeing and how they are making sense of what they see. The dialogue involves give and take; everyone, teacher and students, contributors” (Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2011, p.11). Teachers can have a deep dialogue with children about their takeaway, in the process of discussion, which is also to “promote critical and

creative thinking and problem-solving skills” (Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2011, p.83).

Similarly, teachers might introduce pieces of music, encouraging children to generate their own ideas and inspiration in the process of appreciation. Children will not be limited in their expression, including drawing, dancing, or singing. In many schools, “Expressive and aesthetic areas—including the arts—have been marginalized and even silenced” (Osgood, 2017). This is something that I can relate to from my own kindergarten experience. My school gave priority to literacy and numeracy and ignored the cultivation of the arts. As a result, my memory of art classes is nearly zero, although I am a talented singer.

3.4 School Layout

The word kindergarten was originally created by the father of kindergarten, Friedrich Fröbel. He is German and ‘kindergarten’ means the garden of children. He conceived that children are like flowers, teachers are like gardeners, and the development of children is like the growth of plants. I agree. The educational method should follow the planting method, which provides enough time, space and patience for children and cultivates them without expecting immediate change.

Moreover, it is very desirable for children to grow up in a beautiful and natural environment so as to inspire their inspirations and inventions. To achieve all this, We Kindergarten will be in a natural setting, with plantings and flowers as part of the playground. Children will also be encouraged to create and think anytime and anywhere. In order to record their “masterpieces,” the school will have writable boards on the walls designed to accommodate the height of the children, so they can easily hold the chalk and start to draw, write, and make a series of inventions. On the ceiling, we will hang up all the children’s work, which will give them a sense of pride and open their work to interpretation by their peers. Besides that, we will have a “children’s museum” to display their projects and a “children’s theatre” where they can perform. Stages will also be set up in each classroom to let children show themselves confidently and spontaneously. All students will have enough chances to go on to the stage. We will make every effort for our children to express their skills, personalities, ideas, and gifts, because I believe that nothing created should be secret.

These are my thoughts and blueprints about the ideal kindergarten. I am going to integrate what I have learned and experienced without reservation and share this with my students in order to raise a generation who will be equipped to think vibrantly and critically, smile confidently, ask brave questions, and approach life as eternal learners. To accomplish this, I will hire child-like teachers to execute the mission of We Kindergarten, for how far one can go depends on who one travels with.

4. Conclusion

Philosophy for Children (P4C), as an essential teaching methodology, opens a door for children to think freely by drawing upon the wisdom of the ancients and enables them to immerse themselves in happiness. Based on their personal experience, children can express their thoughts and take the initiative to participate in a range of learning activities and proactively ask questions, thus self-confidence and intellectual curiosity can be deeply and naturally rooted in their hearts, and study also becomes a joyful and positive thing; Lifelong learning is the ultimate goal of philosophy of children, and also the basis for the sustainable development and continuous evolution of the society. Besides, teachers who accompany children in their daily life are the key to maximizing the benefits of Philosophy for Children. Instructors shall not only have a growth mindset and a child-centred approach to education but also be able to put these ideas into practice, as this is crucial to the sound development of every child and the advancement of Philosophy for Children. In a nutshell, we educators look forward to popularizing Philosophy for Children and seeing the uplifting life status of our children.

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