

The Essentials of Philosophy for Children

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***Abstract:** Today the education scholars considers some philosophical concepts and basic questions in education; they considered this belief that all people have a common natural feature, i.e. thinking. Thinking and contemplation do not require learning, but need to obtain skills. Therefore, thinking skills should be trained to people, and it can be stated since childhood. This research is based on the project “philosophy for children” as a basic medium to develop thinking skill in children. This project aims at teaching children how to think philosophically. This project can develop logical thinking, critical thinking, and ethical values in children through philosophical stories and dialogues. Teacher acts as an advisor and facilitator of education, and at the end, the groups do self-evaluation. In this context, the students respect the other’s thoughts, speech, and behaviors.*

***Key words:** Essentials, Philosophy, Children, Essentials of Philosophy for Children*

Introduction

Philosophy for children is a newly introduced concept, whose birth is not over 4 decades. This is known with different titles as “philosophy for children”, or “philosophy and Child”, etc. “philosophy for children” is a project by which children can form their complex thoughts. In this context, they can develop their reasonable thinking, critical thinking as well as creativity and friendship. This project is systematic and gradual and designed for children 4-18 years old. Considering children’s interests and persuading them, this project is done systematically with some surprising activities. It aims at gaining the highest level of organized thought through questions. This project is established in the societies in which the people work hard to find more things and realize the meaning of word and the society in which they live.

It is said that the American professor Matthew Lipmann founded this field of study for the first time in 1962, and after that established officially the research center of development and progress of philosophy for children in state Mont Clare University. This project did not aim at changing children to professional philosophers, but forming and maintaining thoughts, critical thinking, creativity and friendship in children. In a short time, there emerged some similar projects all over the world, as today 120 countries work on such projects. This descriptive paper aims at studying the project of teaching philosophy, its definition, objectives, content and evaluation.

The definition of “philosophy for children”

The term “philosophy” in this way does not refer to a particular field of study, but a skill; the skill of critical thinking, efficient analysis, criticism, and creativity (Hosseini, 2009). Therefore, logic is the main principles for philosophy for children. In this context, some believe that the common aspects of definition of philosophy for children and philosophy can only be recognized by discussing the metaphysical definitions (Gharamaleki, 2005).

All the scholars of this field agree that philosophy for children is not only a logical-rational activity by which the child is able to learn how to reason correctly, but is a special encounter with the environment, which has advantages among which we may name developing the feeling of self-confidence, self-belief, paying attention to reasons in speech, developing cooperation among children, promoting the level of judgment; these all are not logical issues (Hosseini, 2009).

The designers and many scholars believe that philosophy for children is a project to improve children’s skills of critical thinking, creative thinking in understanding philosophical issues. This project aims at teaching children to think philosophically. The knowledge of teaching, in this project, is done critically; that is the students discuss together and make questions about lessons, and finally find answers. Teacher only supervises them and does not provide the knowledge and information readily to students.

The tests and researches done on this subject confirm that philosophy for children succeeded in achieving some educational goals. For instance, Splitter (1993) showed, by using the test of New Jersey reasoning skills, that the children who passed the project of teaching philosophy in one term or more could be able to develop significantly their skills in reading, thinking, listening, reasoning, creating new ideas, mathematical abilities, interpersonal relations, etc. Lipmann& Birman (1970), Cummings (1988), Burns (1981), Felds (1995), Holder (1992), Sprud (1994), Echebverria (1995), Danel (1998), Malmehester (1999), Montes& Maria (2001), Hymer (2002), Trickey& Topping (2004), Jahani (2001), Ghaedi (2003), and Mara'shi (2006) showed the positive effects of the project of teaching philosophy on reading comprehension, critical thinking, self-confidence, cognitive abilities nad mathematics abilities.

This project aims at reforming education and training for children, in a way that current imitative learning process will turn into a critical approach. Right and accurate administering this project, it will enable the children to show their potential abilities which not only help them succeed in learning, but also affect their whole social lives. The objectives of this project are as follows:

- Motivate children to search for the meanings.
- Creating a good condition in which children can think about the subjects they have never been considered.
- Challenging the others' thoughts
- Concentrating, and paying attention to others' thoughts, challenging them and finding flexibility against different ideas.
- Encourage them to think and try to explore a set of thoughts in order to ask real questions and problems. Reconstructing the philosophical system accessible for students and teachers
- Making intellectual communication
- Considering the way of thinking according to different methods and levels

- Motivate children to think about their mental resources, and making self-belief in children
- Encourage the students to find new thoughts rather than imitating the others' and reflexing their way of thinking. Emphasizing on the advantages of discussions and talking to others.
- Training cognitive skills: logic, metaphysics, thinking skills, etc.
- Making them encouraged to deal with basic questions
- Contemplating more about different ideas
- Encourage them to think more about the others' beliefs (Hosseini, 2009)
- Making the spirit of self-correctness in children

The content of the project

Administers of this project believe that children are naturally philosophers, and the teacher should just help them to express their deep thoughts in their own language. Therefore, the children should be provided by proper and good words by which they are able to increase their understanding; this can be done by listening to them and returning their ideas to them. We should meet children's world, make stories of real life in their language, and then, discuss the ideas and facts in the stories with them.

This project requires experienced teachers as well as good textbooks; therefore, Lipmann and his colleagues tried to provide the teachers' books as a guide for the teachers and some good textbooks for the classed in this project.

One of the main tools applied in this project is philosophical stories. Splitter and Sharp (1995) believe that since children enjoy stories, it makes it easy to encourage them to think and ask questions, especially when the stories are about the events with competition or deception (2008).

Telling story makes education easy because it is not only interesting to children, but also they can understand it better and easier. The other advantage is this fact that it can help the children to dream that is the first step to think and create (Hosseini, 2009).

This project requires a teacher who is highly educated and acts as person who facilitates teaching. The role of teacher in this project is indirect, i.e. education in this project is not teacher-based. Rather, the teacher should make the students to discuss (Bagheri, 2008). Hence, the method of managing such classes is different from the common methods.

The teacher's books is a kind of educational guidance to create a research community in class. These books are regularly being revised, and expand the teachers' philosophical knowledge. They help the students to recognize a philosophical idea and concentrate on it (Ghaedi, 2004).

The texts are of great importance in designing the project. These texts should be various and meet children's intellectual level as such each part should consist of a main and key philosophical idea which is repeated over in following parts with more consideration and explanation as well as some new ideas. In addition to the subjects, there should be activities and exercises. To develop the texts, we may use audio and video sources (especially for the children who are not able to read and write), films, articles in newspapers and magazines. The content of the resource can be organized as stories. However, as the children get older, some philosophical issues should be included. What is of importance is the teacher's book as a guide that the teacher get as s/he is explained how to use it. In short, there should be formed some research teams. Then, the following stages are followed:

1. The students sit on their chairs as they are able to see each other (forming the circle of students)
2. Each student reads one part of the text.
3. The teacher checks their comprehension by asking some questions that are challenging. The students should be motivated to answer orally. All the questions and the name of the questioner will be written on the board.

4. The questions, then, are classified based on the difficulty level. The questions that are too simple or too difficult or impossible to answer (due to the students' level) are removed.
5. The teacher, in making questions, is only a guider who directs the students toward the goal, not a knowledge resource. Some influential and efficient techniques in this stage are: giving more time to the students to think more, avoiding prejudicial explanation, making conundrum, making thoughtful questions that stimulate students to think.
6. The students discuss, and gradually they are getting used to discuss about any subject. They make thinking as one their main tasks in the class and start to think in any situation. The result of such discussions is what is known as critical thinking. The students, by critical thinking, learn how to explain, and discuss about ideas. Passing this stage, the students are able to think efficiently. Philosophy and critical thinking can improve some criticism features such as curiosity, assuming, exploring the criteria, etc. as well as some capabilities including reasoning, philosophical contents, interpreting, research skills.

The methods used in this paper can be applied to other fields of study as one of the objectives in the project is completing student-centered education and providing a suitable method to achieve the educational goals of that given field of study. However, it's worth noting that it should not be assumed that it is applicable to other fields.

Assessing the project “philosophy for children”

One of the positive and advantageous ways to discuss about philosophy for children is this fact that one group should be under self-assessment. Time and experience should be considered to develop the discussing skills (Mar'ashi, 2008).

Lipmann (1984) assures us that the skill progress is a perceptual process and gradual. Children can realize inconstancy in their thoughts over time. They will learn that they should pay attention to the others' ideas, ask about others' suggestions and recommendations, and suggest solutions

that the others have never thoughts of. They can learn how to listen to others and respect the way they would like to express themselves. In this context, they may help and cooperate with others.

Discussion and Conclusion

One of the tasks of education is informing people of an issue, facing with different ideas, and showing alternative way to deal with such issues. Children can be taught by discussing to think critically, logically, effectively and philosophically. Discussion can help them to change their thoughts, and express their ideas openly. The project of philosophy for children develop the skill of questioning in teachers as well as students. It helps children to improve their skills of communication, recognition, concepts, and develop their comparative and logical reasoning skills. It persuades the students to form new ideas, and can develop their communicative skills through teaching them how to listen carefully and respect the other's ideas.

The research skill that can be developed by this project directs the students to ask good questions, enables them to make and define a hypothesis, predict the results and test the results and modify the hypothesis. They will be also able to evaluate the information, and judge about what they have read, learned, and done. They can select some factors for evaluating their or others' activities and trust their evaluation. The objective is changing children to thoughtful, flexible, and more logical humans. Learning such skills may be possible through language and making a group by which children and students can communicate their ideas.

Achieving these goals, it would be infer that philosophy is very advantageous for children; its advantages is represented not for children, but for all the people in the society. For instance, philosophy for children plays a key role in preventing crimes, and promoting ethics among people in the society.

If the children are not allowed to express themselves and feel responsibility for their acts, they would accept illogical biased ideas. As the children get older, they recognize that the pure theoretical rule they someday accepted are rejected because of the strength of their reasoning.

Learning criticism and thinking about the others' ideas that seem deceitful and immoral help children to change as citizens with moral behavior.

The children who have less abilities and those who have higher level of abilities enjoy (equally) philosophical discussions since whatever their abilities and background is, they tend to do wrong. As philosophical explorations motivate children to ask questions, children are not so impressed by the others, and therefore, are less affected by their peers. When they are taught that they are responsible for their thoughts and acts, they tend to accept this responsibility. Although reflexive thinking and philosophical explorations may cause doubts about the source of knowledge and beliefs, which temporarily result in turbulence, it may expand the educational experiences, knowledge, and agreements and help children to form new concepts and ideas.

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