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## Early childhood education in Reggio Emilia and philosophy for children

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### Introduction

This paper presents parts of some research I carried out between 1999 and 2002, arising from my long-standing interests in early childhood education practices in Reggio Emilia (Italy) and Matthew Lipman's Philosophy for Children (P4C) (USA). The research is based on my own integral concepts, vision and ideas, prompted my studies of pre-schools in Reggio Emilia since 1985 - I took courses in both the philosophy and methods, and spent six months there in 2002 - and my reading about P4C since 1996 - for three months in autumn 2001 I was at the Institute for the Advancement for Philosophy for Children (IACP) in Montclair, New Jersey, where Professor Lipman is the Director.

### Background

Loris Malaguzzi (1920-1994) was the pioneer and theoretician in the Reggio pre-schools, in which the arts and conversations among children, and between children and adults, are emphasised (Taguchi 1994). The unique quality of these pre-schools has made a deep impression on pre-schools all over the world: since 1994 over 10,000 people from 54 countries have participated in courses in Reggio Emilia about the pre-schools (Gambetti, 2002).

Malaguzzi believed culture and schools tend to separate body and mind: they teach thinking without the body and acting without thought. He claimed an opposition was created between play and work, reality and dream, science and imagination, the internal and the external. Malaguzzi saw education as a communal process; a form of cultural participation through common discoveries, made by children and teachers who hypothesise and discuss together (Edwards *et al.* 1998). He placed emphasis on democracy and on the individual's right to be unique. Every individual is both a part of a network in the school and in the wider community, and each network is related to other networks. The child's right is to be the protagonist about individual, juridical and social rights, and it is the child's right to be accepted as an active participant in the creation of its own identity, autonomy and capacity. This will be achieved in communications with other children, adults, ideas and material (Malaguzzi, 1998). Sergio Spaggiari, Director of the Municipal Department of Education of Reggio Emilia, quotes the author Gianni Rodari to explain his Department's views on the child and education. According to Rodari the child is 'always at work, always asking questions, discovering problems where others find satisfactory answers, completely at ease in those fluid situations which represent only danger to others, capable of autonomous judgement, refusing what is codified, re-manipulating objects and concepts without being inhibited by conformism' (Spaggiari, 1999:8).

The school as a system of communications and interaction between children, teachers and families, and they are integrated into the larger social system of the community. The school mounts guard on the welfare of all the three groups, which share ideas, dialogue and communication - for example about values (Cagliari and Giudici, 2001).

Philosophy for Children (P4C) is a philosophy applied to education (Lipman 1991). It is an attempt to build a better education for children which started in 1969 (Lipman 1992a; Gregory 2000) when Lipman<sup>1</sup> became upset and critical about the educational system in America, believing that the longer children were in school, the less they seemed to like and to value it (Reed and Johnson 1999) and that their levels of competence did not reach acceptable standards.

Lipman began developing a thinking skills programme (Lipman, Sharp and Oscanyan 1979) in which stories were presented for children to grapple with and which also provided an instructional manual to accompany every story. Since the 1960s Lipman has written many stories e.g. *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*, *Elfie*, *Pixie*, *Kio and Gus*, *Lisa*, *Suki* and *Mark*. However P4C as it exists today is no longer the creation of one person; many teachers and academics in the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children are working with Lipman, and P4C is applied by teachers in many different cultures in different countries (c.70) throughout the world ( Gregory and Kennedy 2000).

The methodology of P4C involves collective reading, or reading of a short multi-episode story, using the story as a tool (Bensley 1992) to problematise the concepts found in the text through student-generated questions and a discussion of those questions. The teacher does not directly instruct or indoctrinate: the manuals can be used in a variety of ways.

Lipman (1988; 1996) wants students to think for themselves and to exercise good judgement, not merely to learn what other people have thought. The teacher should genuinely respect each child's opinions: if the children sense that their task is to discover 'right' answers, they are not likely to risk an interpretation or offer an explanation that in any way differs from what is expected (Johnson 1984). In the P4C program the teachers are more like facilitators (Lipman 1996).

Lipman (2001;1996) suggested that it is most important to cultivate critical, creative and caring thinking and the best way to do that is in a community of inquiry. When Lipman (1988a) define the concept critical thinking he makes four points:

1. The outcomes of critical thinking are judgements. When Lipman (1995) defined the concept of judgement he cited Buchler. Buchler (1951) identified acts and statements as products - what we do - and what we make as a judgement. A judgement is a pronouncement, and every product is a commentary. So any product can function as a communication; and a gesture can tell more than verbal explanation. So products and judgements are the same thing; all products are judgements because they offer themselves as product.

Human judgements appear to be of three kinds: assertions, actions and arrangements. Assertion judgements include all products of a certain type of question: Is it true or false? Arrangement judgements include all products which result from the arranging of materials. Action judgements include all instances of conduct to which the term 'action' is applied. It is difficult to draw sharp lines among these classes, which are inter-connected. A judgement is a selection, dissociation, or combination of characters, rendered proceptively available. No product can be more

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<sup>1</sup> Lipman is the Director of the Institute for the Advancement for Philosophy for Children (IACP), and a Professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religion at Montclair State University in Montclair, New Jersey.

of a selection and dissociation of characters than any other, and this is why no one type of judgement is more fundamental than any other. Sharp (1991) suggests that good practical judgement will only be good if one has been educated dialogically in making fine discriminations and learning how to do full justice to particular situations. So the concept of judgement comprises saying, doing and making.

2. Critical thinking relies upon criteria.
3. Critical thinking is self-corrective thinking. In this part of his definition Lipman cited Peirce, who said that inquiry is self-correcting. Peirce (1935) points out three ways of self-criticisms someone may apply to reviewing her/his ideals, which are (a) the contemplation of conduct in the light of its aesthetic quality; (b) the endeavour to shape the ideals in question so they are consistent with each other; and (c) the imagining of the consequences of the ideals - what would be the aesthetic quality of those consequences?
4. Critical thinking displays sensitivity to context; it involves recognition of (a) exceptional or irregular circumstances and conditions; (b) special limitations, contingencies or constraints; (c) overall configurations; (d) the possibility that evidence is atypical; and (e) the possibility that some meanings do not translate from one context or domain to another.

### **Caring thinking.**

Lipman (2001) suggested that caring thinking involves a double meaning, for on the one hand it means to think solicitously about that which is the subject-matter of our thought, and on the other hand it is to be concerned about one's manner of thinking. For example, I care for my daughter because she matters, and my care is the judgement that she does. One type of caring interlaces with others, and in one act there can be many types of caring. Lipman divided caring thinking into five types; appreciative, affective, active, normative and empathetic thinking.

Arguably we have feelings about our judgements and emotions connected to our thinking, so it is impossible to separate the, although we might say that emotion is choice while decision is judgement. Such thinking is caring thinking when it is connected to something which matters.

### **Creative thinking.**

Lipman (1991) defined creative thinking as thinking conducive to judgement, guided by context, self-transcending, and sensitive to criteria. Creative thinking is fresh, intelligible, defiant and amplificative; it defies and thereby generates wonder (Lipman 2001). Lipman (1991) deals with creative thinking, by which he means the process, not the product. He said, 'When we work, our hands enter into dialogue with one other.' Imagination is playful thinking, and play is imagining action and creativity as a kind of embodied imagination. He identified the importance of making room for cognitive play, like philosophy, in a community of inquiry.

### **Community of inquiry**

This is a 'whole' pedagogy, a congruence of personal and social systems, and the identity-in-difference of thought and feeling, self and other, and individual and group; each

member is a sort of hologram of the larger self of the community (Kennedy 1996). Kennedy (1991) clarifies a community of inquiry as having characteristics which are developmental, environmental, individualistic, dialogical, and interactive.

1. The community of inquiry is developmental in that it is epigenetic- i.e., a new state is emerging from an earlier one: it cannot emerge without the earlier one, but is not reducible to the earlier one.
2. The community of inquiry is environmental in that it represents an environment of discourse which represents a multiplicity of perspectives, and which for the individual has the character of unity.
3. The community of inquiry is individualised because each individual listens and speaks from within her own 'proximal zone of development' (ZPD).
4. The community of inquiry is cognitively and socially dialogical; each individual knows himself through his transformative interaction with the community, and is both 'they' in the community of inquiry and 'they' in the context of the horizon of meaning. This means a great deal to the character of the individual's self-knowledge.
5. The community of inquiry is interactive; it consists of the interactions of persons - individual with individual, and individual with group.

Sharp declares the community of inquiry is a dialogue fashioned collaboratively from the reasoned contribution of all participants. In such a community the teacher monitors the logical procedures but also philosophically becomes one of the community. As Sharp puts it

... the students learn to object to weak reasoning, build on strong reasoning, accept the responsibility of making their contributions within the context of others, accept their dependence upon others, follow the inquiry where it leads, respect the perspective of others, collaboratively engage in self-correction when necessary and take pride in the accomplishments of the group as well as oneself. Further, in the process, they practice the art of making good judgements within the context of dialogue and communal inquiry (Sharp 1991:31).

The nature of a community of inquiry is cognitive, social, psychological, moral and political. Dialogue implies a certain capacity for intellectual flexibility, self-correction and growth, it does not mean that the particular belief can be justified as absolute truth. This is not akin to working out an argument but is more like playing in an orchestra in which each instrument has an important role to perform in the production of the music. The student can enter the dialogue when he will; individuals in a community of inquiry must be able to hear and respond to the meaning of the dialogue itself. Such meaning comes from two sources; the participants' willingness to be involved in the inquiry, and the subject under discussion, in the light of the intellectual tradition of which we are all heirs. It blocks inquiry if the individuals

- engage in monologues
- make assumptions about what the other is going to say before the other has the opportunity to say it,
- engage in image-making when another is speaking.

If they take it upon themselves to speak for others out of fear or insecurity, individuals destroy the trust essential to dialogical inquiry. The community of inquiry is the starting point of inquiry, not the end result (Sharp 1991).

### **My research question**

Is it possible to detect a resonance between Lipman's philosophy with children on the one hand and early childhood education in Reggio Emilia on the other?

### **Research method**

The research was based on interviews, field notes and text analyses.

### **Conclusions**

My research showed a large resonance between P4C and the Reggio Emilia approach to how a child is viewed and to teaching methodology. Influences from theories about education, such as pragmatism, were also detected. In both methods there are emphases on:

- the significance of the children's motivation to make inquiry - the child is the protagonist, active in her/his own education. Dialogues are considered one of many methods of learning;
- the significance of the teachers having sufficient insight to see a child's capacity and give indirect guidance.

The teachers keep records in order to understand how children learn. In Reggio the records are more common than in P4C. The philosophers at IAPC in Montclair think that children from 18 months of age can delegate in P4C, but with children that young other teaching methods like play and art are required.

I think it is important for the pre-school teachers and philosophers using P4C methods to develop together methods to practice with young children. I believe that a good place to start is Reggio Emilia would be to use conversation and creative work systematically, and that Lipman's ideas do give a deeper understanding of children's philosophy as practised in Reggio Emilia.

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