

Philosophy for Children and Thinking Skills

Sultan AKDEMİR

Necmettin Erbakan University

Definition of Philosophy for Children

Philosophy begins with thought and Dewey defined thought as “everything that passes through our minds”. Although thinking is handled in different ways in the sub-definitions of this general statement, Dewey emphasized reflective/deep thinking, which is a thinking process “based on the causes and consequences of our beliefs”, as a process of questioning/interpretation in his work “How Do We Think? (Dewey, 2022).

When we look at the history of educational philosophy before Dewey’s expression of thinking and teaching/developing thinking skills in education in this way, many philosophers have expressed and practiced ways of developing thinking in different ways. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Herbart and Froebel asked many questions about education and sought ways to develop thinking in different ways (Noddings, 2017). Vygotsky’s thoughts emphasizing the impact of language on children and learning and Bruner’s emphasis on culture as the concept that shapes the human mind and human life have also encouraged educational research based on speech and communication (Lyle, 2008).

As for Philosophy for Children, although the sources generally state that Lipman introduced this concept, as stated, the ways of teaching/developing thinking skills in education have gradually changed since the existence of thought. Lipman’s (1976) concept of ‘reasoning’ refers to effective thinking processes, while Worley’s (2023) concept of ‘hypothetical thinking’ refers to making sense of what a situation that does not actually exist means for us.

Based on these definitions of thinking, we can state that the way of thinking that forms the basis of the philosophy program for children is a process of making sense and forming a habit of thinking, and teaching thinking skills.

Today, the rapid pace of social and technological developments and the unpredictability of what information will be needed require children to be open-minded about their future and to anticipate what information they will need. Early childhood is the most suitable period for the child to develop his/her thinking skills, when his/her mind spontaneously turns to philosophy, his/her curiosity has not yet diminished, he/she asks questions and begins to recognize life. (Fisher, 2022; Matthews, 2000).

Children may have the same cognitive processes as an adult in the process of exploring thinking, but they try to make new sense of the world differently from adults. Adults generally accompany

children's thinking processes as a guide (Fisher, 2022). Therefore, philosophy for children is seen as a process of learning to think (critical thinking, creative thinking, etc.) that provides this guidance within a community, and there is a constant effort to make sense of life due to the transition from concrete thought to abstract thought in early childhood. Children should be given the opportunity to discover themselves as thinking and feeling individuals (Daniel & Auriac, 2011; Fisher, 2022).

The Main Aims of Philosophy for Children

The question of when children begin to reason philosophically can be considered a critical question for the practice of philosophy for children. Considering that not all people engage in philosophical activity, children's asking the question 'why' can be considered as a start (Lipman, Sharp & Oscanyan, 2010). Everyone defines the meaning of life within their own meaning-making system. The most important issue for humanity and indeed for the individual is to develop his/her innate potential in the best way possible. In order to find the meaning of life, the family and society in which the individual lives must see this as a top priority (Cüceloğlu, 2020). Philosophy for Children aims to draw attention to classification, part-whole connections and cause-consequence connections in this life and aims for children to use them in their lives. The fact that philosophy accepts both areas of intelligence as valid and important, unlike science, which emphasizes the cause-consequence connections and art, which emphasizes the part-whole connections, makes it a very important part of educational practices (Lipman et al., 2010).

In this early childhood period, when children start to get acquainted with school, the school is generally the one that reflects the values of the time, does not challenge them and does not propose alternatives, because this is far from the school imposing its will on the child and the community and makes parents feel safer. For children, it's a different story, where education is the worrying part of school and coming together with peers is what makes school attractive. (Lipman, 2003).

Another worrying element for children is talking about life situations or problems that are challenging them. But it is also in childhood that the basic behavioural patterns of our lives are largely formed. Therefore, environments where their peers are present and where problems similar to their own are discussed may be more interesting for them and they may find answers to their own questions (Adler, 2022; Lipman et al., 2010). In addition, such environments encourage the child to learn and be aware with his/her friends and encourage the child to think and question more independently. It has an important role in the development of teacher-student and student-student dialogues (Topping & Trickey, 2007).

Thinking Skills Development and Philosophy for Children

There is a belief that only senses, motor skills and memory develop during infancy. It is as if thinking skills are thought to develop as the child grows older, especially during adolescence. However, the thinking that is active in experiences during infancy and childhood can become an advanced thinking system as it is used and developed. (Dewey, 2022). In the past, it was thought that philosophical thinking could not be encouraged among primary school children, and that

philosophical discussions could take place from middle school onwards. However, the distinctive features of philosophical thinking are already stated to be the ability to understand the value of ideas, logical arguments, conceptual systems and to see part-whole connections in different ways, regardless of age (Lipman & Sharp, 1978).

Philosophy for Children is based on the premise that critical thinking and dialogue are necessary conditions for transforming children into democratic, free citizens, and when discussing the definitions of relevant practices, the ‘community of inquiry’ practices involving critical thinking and dialogue are mentioned (Vansieleghem, 2005). Through this questioning, children develop a perspective on the world, justify and interpret their own beliefs, values and experiences, and understand where their assumptions come from (Lipman & Sharp, 1978).

According to Fisher (2001) Philosophy for Children provides opportunities for development in many areas; information processing skills, inquiry skills, reasoning skills, creative thinking skills and evaluation skills are among the most important.

There are different views interpreting the relationship between morality and education. These views include those who argue that all education has a moral dimension, those who insist that under no circumstances should educators try to introduce morality into the classroom (because in their view this is inevitably nothing more than indoctrination), and those who argue that quality education system must include a component of moral education. Many of the Philosophy for Children practices include parts that involve ethical questioning. The teacher implementing these practices thinks that teaching children to reason logically, including about moral issues, will help to solve human problems (Lipman et al., 2010).

The Role of School and Teacher in Philosophy for Children Practices

There are few meaning-making opportunities for children to participate in classrooms, and most teachers lack many skills to facilitate effective, learning-based discussion that involves all students (Lyle, 2008). The relationship between teacher and student is a complex, multi-factorial one that also affects factors such as communication and learning. The teacher should know both the individual characteristics and habits of his/her students and the conditions that affect them. In other words, the teacher’s task is not only to follow the mentally designed steps, but also to think about how the teacher himself/herself, his/her peers, the school atmosphere and the school administration affect the student (Dewey, 2022).

In Philosophy for Children practices, the teacher encourages students to think more independently through open-ended Socratic questioning, to create a community of inquiry, and to foster strong teacher-student and student-student communication (Topping & Trickey, 2007).

Haynes (2008) identified nine steps for the process of philosophical enquiry in the classroom;

- Reaching agreement on rules of interaction, starting with a relaxation exercise,
- Sharing a stimulus (story, object, picture, etc.) to prompt enquiry,

- Giving time for reflection and thought on the stimulus,
- The pupils think and ask interesting, surprising and puzzling questions,
- Linking questions, making links between the questions,
- Choosing a question to begin an enquiry,
- Encouragement to develop thoughts about the question, to follow each other's thinking and to open up ways of questioning by the session leader,
- Create a visual to summarize and record the discussion and process creation,
- Summarizing and reflecting the process.

One of the most important points in Philosophy for Children practices is how the teacher, the guide, manages the process. Because one of the situations that will determine the quality of the practices is the competence of the teachers on this issue.

In this study, Çayır (2023) asked teachers about the problems they experienced in the process of Philosophy for Children, the source of these problems and their suggestions for solutions to these problems. As a result of the research, 5 main problem areas were identified. She stated that these problem areas are related to teachers, children, perspectives on Philosophy for Children, facilities, course and school programs.

Looking at the general results of the research;

Teachers' :

- Difficulties in deepening the discussion and asking questions,
- Directing children to the answer they think is right, problems with not being impartial,
- Not having enough experience in philosophy with children, which affects their ability to conduct discussions,
- Choice of stimulant,

related problems come to the forefront.

According to other results;

- Children's egocentric approaches, their underdeveloped listening skills, and their difficulty in understanding abstract concepts make philosophical discussion difficult.
- Teachers stated that Philosophy for Children should be included in the curriculum as a course by the Ministry of National Education and that studies should be carried out to associate it with the curricula of other courses.
- The physical layout of the classrooms and crowded classrooms negatively affected the

process of philosophizing with children.

The Acquisitions of Philosophy for Children

For children;

During philosophical enquiries, learners are encouraged to ask their own questions and raise issues for discussion, explore and refine their ideas, views, and theories, justify their beliefs with clear reasoning, articulate and defend their perspectives to others, actively listen to and consider alternative viewpoints, and ultimately adapt their thinking in response to sound reasons and evidence (Fisher, 2001). Therefore, the most emphasized skills that Philosophy for Children is thought to develop are information processing, questioning, reasoning, creative thinking and evaluation skills (Fisher, 2001). Lipman also emphasized that it would develop reasoning, concept formation, judgment and questioning skills (Lipman, 1995).

Unlike the high-order thinking skills, we have mentioned about the achievements of “Philosophy for Children”, the area related to values and morality, which is not usually mentioned much, can be expressed. Lipman (2011) mentions the concept of caring thinking, which describes sensitivity to values, the ability to understand what is important in the application of theory to practice, and the cognitive role of emotions. The concept of caring thinking includes understanding the difficulties and beauties encountered in life, understanding the part-whole relationship, considering the context of issues, noticing details, and making decisions about moral situations (Lipman, 2011). Philosophy for Children can make children think better and different about everything throughout their lives (Matthews ,2004).

For teachers and parents;

Teachers and parents rediscover situations and events through children’s ideas and gain a new perspective on the world through child-directed discussions. In addition, adults talking with children about deep and important issues is one of the best ways to improve intergenerational relationships (Matthews, 2004)

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About The Author

Sultan AKDEMİR is a research assistant (PhD) at Ahmet Keleşoğlu Faculty of Education, Necmettin Erbakan University. Her research interests include philosophy for children, life sciences teaching, social sciences teaching, values education. She has presented various conference papers and published articles and book chapters in these areas.

E-mail: sultancimenakdemir@gmail.com **ORCID:**.0000-0001-5950-683X

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