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THE STATE OF THE ART OF PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN IN ITALY (2006-2007)

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Abstract:

This contribution presents a research developed in 2007, based on the data gathered during the first Italian meeting of Philosophy for Children which took place in Padua, with the collaboration of the University of Padua. The application forms and the proposals made during the meeting have been used to draw some guide lines of the Italian P4C outline. It is important to underline that this inquiry does not pretend to be complete because some teachers were not able to be present at the meeting and because members of Italian P4C community are increasing every year. For these reasons the portrait presented, even if useful and careful in our opinion, is not complete. The aim of this paper is to describe the different training courses that are present in Italy and that are officially recognized by the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC) and by the International Council for Philosophical Inquiry with Children (ICPIC), and to present a variety of experiences that were realized in Italian regions in 2006/2007.

Key words: Italian training courses; Italian experiences; philosophy for children

El estado de arte la filosofía para niños en Italia (2006-2007)

Resumen:

Este texto presenta una investigación desarrollada en 2007, basada en los datos obtenidos en el Primer Encuentro de Filosofía para Niños que tuvo lugar en Padova, con la colaboración de la Universidad de Padova. Las fichas de inscripción y las propuestas para ese evento fueron utilizadas para trazar algunas líneas interpretativas del cuadro de la filosofía para niños en Italia. Es importante destacar que esta investigación no pretende ser completa porque algunas maestras no pudieran estar presentes en la reunión y porque los miembros de la comunidad italiana de filosofía para niños crecen todos los años. Por estas razones, el retrato presentado, aunque cuidadoso y útil en nuestra opinión, no es completo. El objetivo de este trabajo es describir los diferentes cursos de formación presentes en Italia y que son oficialmente reconocidos por el Instituto para el Desarrollo de la Filosofía para Niños (IAPC) y por el Consejo Internacional para la Investigación Filosófica con Niños (ICPIC) y presentar una variedad de experiencias que fueron realizadas en regiones de Italia en 2006/7.

Palabras clave: Cursos de Formación en Italia; experiencias en Italia; filosofía para niños

O estado da arte da filosofia para crianças na Itália (2006-2007)

Resumo:

Este artigo apresenta uma pesquisa desenvolvida em 2007, baseada nos dados coletados durante o primeiro encontro italiano de Filosofia para Crianças, ocorrido em Pádua, com a colaboração da Universidade de Pádua. Os formulários aplicados e as propostas feitas durante o encontro foram usados para traçar algumas linhas interpretativas da situação da FpC na Itália. É importante ressaltar que essa investigação não pretende ser completa, porque alguns dos professores não puderam estar presentes no encontro e porque o número de membros da comunidade italiana de F4C está crescendo anualmente. Por essas razões, o retrato apresentado, ainda que seja útil e cuidadoso, não é completo. O objetivo deste artigo é descrever os diferentes cursos de formação presentes na Itália, que são oficialmente reconhecidos pelo Instituto para o Desenvolvimento da Filosofia para Crianças (IAPC) e pelo Conselho Internacional para a Investigação Filosófica com Crianças (ICPIC), e apresentar as diversas experiências que são realizadas nas regiões italianas em 2006/2007.

Palavras-chave: Curso de formação na Itália; experiências italianas; filosofia para crianças

THE STATE OF THE ART OF PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN IN ITALY (2006-2007)

Eleonora Zorzi

Introduction

Philosophy for Children is a specific curriculum, with a specific training process, that often is included in the more general “philosophies for children”. It is for this reason that it is important that those who work with this curriculum have not only clear paradigmatic theoretical framework, but also tools, materials and aims that characterize it in order not to confuse its own identity with more general philosophical practices. This educational bet arrived in Italy almost twenty years ago, and every year it spreads more and more inside the scholastic environment but not only. It has been able to overcome all the initial prejudices, that there were within teacher’s category and scientific communities, due to the experimentations in schools, the results’ validity and the creation of an epistemic statute of Philosophy for Children, recognized by universities.

This work wants to try to begin to outline the P4C reality on Italian territory, singling out smaller and bigger experiences that are really spreading this educational movement. The data was gathered during the first national meeting of Philosophy for Children that took place in Padua, in September, 2007. The participants’ enrolment forms provide information about their training level, the training courses they have attended and the experiences that they lead in their own region. Thanks to the cataloguing of these data, it has been possible to draw this provisional portrait, useful to the aim of this inquiry. The perspective for the future would be trying to gain all the different experiences developed in Italy to create a common databank useful to all Italian Philosophy for Children community’s members. It is for this reason that this work cannot be defined as concluded.

This paper has been divided in two different parts: the first part describes the Italian training courses that are officially recognized by the IAPC and the ICPIIC; the second part is dedicated from one side to region realities, with a short presentation of some experiences; and from the other side to the problems, proposals, plans and perspectives presented by the participants during the meeting.

This kind of research could be a stimulus to reflect another time about the importance of gathering the different experiences made not only in Italy but also in the

other nations, so that all the members of P4C world community do not feel isolated but are aware that there is someone on the other side of the world who is also trying to make the same P4C experience in his classroom or with his children.

Part one

Area 1: P4C and Training.

Philosophy for Children underlines first of all, the active nature and constructive learning in the classroom; as the socio-cultural approach, P4C thinks a change in the teacher-learner relationship: the traditional school practice is replaced with the activation of social and communicative dimension of the group by creating a community of inquiry that allows everyone including the teacher to feel constantly in training. Teaching philosophy, not only as a subject, but as a training style can become an answer to a real educational change. This change of perspective brings to the fore the training of teachers that becomes a very delicate and complex moment, because the teacher must abandon the traditional clothes of the transmitter of knowledge in order to wear those of the “facilitator” of meta cognitive processes. As Lipman says (Santi, 2002) teachers really discover philosophy for the first time when they begin to philosophize with children; and on this occasion they have to analyze their positions again, to what previously looked to them as obvious. This is a strong point of Philosophy for Children, to be at the same time a form of deep education for children and adults.

Teacher-facilitator. Teacher training has to go in two directions: from one side it leads to improvement of methodologies that enable the teacher to create a community of inquiry with his classroom, on the other side it leads towards the development of skills which enable him to establish organized discussions functional to the development of thinking, and belonging to philosophical inquiry. A teacher must therefore learn to distinguish problem’s philosophical dimension from the possible others, must rely on solid theoretical basis, and must have skills to manage discussion’s dynamics in class (Pontecorvo, 2005; Pontecorvo, Ajello & Zucchermaglio, 2004; Santi, 1995).

Since facilitator's functions, abilities and roles¹ are the result of a professionalism acquired, P4C training is based on a meta-learning training that oscillates continuously between practice and reflection ("learning by doing"). The training model reflects an international standard that has been progressively defined beginning from Lipman's tips and reflections resulting from the work that has been carried out over the years in IAPC (Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children) by A. Sharp and collaborators. This model includes two parallel aims: the creation of teacher's CoI (community of Inquiry) in which the teachers work and reflect on the texts of the curriculum; and the implementation of P4C in a school classroom.

Training courses. In Italy there are post-graduate courses that aim to improve the pedagogical, philosophical, psychological, educational knowledge in order to prepare in an effective and complete way all the teachers that want to become a P4C Teacher, or a Teacher Educator, or a Teacher Expert. These training courses were qualified by CIREP (Interdisciplinary Center for Educational Research on Thought), and CRIF (Research Center for Philosophical Education) that are the two Italian centers of research that are officially recognized by IAPC and by ICPIIC as qualified to control the quality of national training courses².

Course of Specialization - University of Padua; this course is addressed to teachers, educators, trainers, managers and practitioners in education and graduates with interest in the practice of philosophizing in educational contexts. It is divided into 300 hours split among lectures and working sessions held in presence, diversified educational activities on-line, individual study, the preparation of a thesis and a final stage, partially organized and led by the course, directly in the territory of neighbouring schools. This training allows requesting the assignment of the title of "Teacher" and of "Teacher Expert" in P4C by CIREP and CRIF. The program allows the acquisition of knowledge and skills on the P4C curriculum and to become facilitators of CoI. Following the model of learning by doing this course blends reflection moments with operational practice moments.

¹ For a deepening on the topic consult Goodman, Goodman (1992); Santi (1995).

² www.filosofare.org

Course of Specialization - University of Napoli; this course of specialization is a training proposal that unites the course “Philosophy for Children Curriculum: theoretical and methodological aspects” and the “Graphein Laboratory: laboratory of philosophical writing; texts and pretext to philosophize in educational contexts”. This course is officially recognized by IAPC and by ICPIIC; it offers theoretical and methodological coordinates for writing texts (narrative, autobiographical, descriptive, philosophical..), following P4C materials models; these texts can be used with children, adolescences and adults, to activate philosophical inquiry process in educational contexts. This laboratory is divided in 12 presence meetings, diversified educational activities on-line, and training activities that are coached in presence and apart. This training allows requesting the assignment of the title of “Teacher” and of “Teacher Expert” in P4C by CIREP and CRIF.

Course of Specialization - University of Florence; The course is implemented as proposed training for teachers, social and educational operators; it presents and addresses the issues of doing philosophy and of P4C. It is developed through lectures with discussion, operative sessions, individual work, training with practical exercises and on-line forums, always followed by Teacher Expert. At the end of the course after the final exam an attendance certificate (200 hours) is awarded.

Decentralized Course of training in P4C; this training is organized by CRIF in collaboration with the 1st Didactic Circle of Foligno, the school “G. Galilei” by S. Eraclio of Foligno. This course aims at the development of professional skills for the use of P4C curriculum in schools of all levels. The knowledge and skills to be acquired can be summarized in complex thought, democratic practice, autonomy, knowledge and use of curriculum and recognition and use for training of practical philosophy.

Residential summer school in Acuto; organized in collaboration by CRIF and CIREP, the residential workshop in Acuto is the Italian equivalent of the week of intensive workshop on P4C which takes place every year in Mendham³. It is a training course for the exercise of philosophical practice in the “community of inquiry”. It is divided into two branches and two levels: *general branch*, centered on the formation of a thoughtful

³ www.cehs.montclair.edu/academic/iapc

personality and destined for professional men and managers; *scholastic branch*, centered on the use of the curriculum in schools and for scholastic operator and neo-graduates. The levels relate to the training of facilitators: *initial training*, delivers at the end of the trail, the title of “Teacher” in recognition of sufficient skills to foster the establishment of a CoI, to manage the dynamic relationships and to initiate and develop inside the practice of philosophical dialogue. *Advanced training*, is reserved for “Teacher” or “Teacher Expert”; it enables to the modeling of philosophical practice sessions, to the design of training with P4C materials, to supervision sessions, to monitoring and control processes of learning and construction of philosophical knowledge in a group, modeling and scaffolding of the facilitation procedures in P4C session, for the coaching sessions of philosophical practice.

Part two

Area 2: P4C and Italian reality.

P4C curriculum is presented in schools as a laboratory, to be developed in philosophical sessions, once or twice a week, with groups of 15-18 students and a facilitator; but during the years has also been tested in new areas outside the classroom: for example, libraries, festival of philosophy, University of the Third Age. These areas of application show how Lipman’s curriculum is experienced and how many researches are conducted in this area on our territory. It is for this reason that it is useful to create a panoramic skyline of these different realities, to understand in which scholastic grade, in which extra-scholastic contexts P4C curriculum is used. To make this, the data gathered during the national meeting has been used.

Regions involved.

Calabria: The experience of P4C was carried out in a primary school during the academic year of 2000/2001. The P4C is included within curricular activities and it is performed for one hour per week. The P4C continues to act as a link between the kindergarten and primary school, it is consolidated as a means of horizontal continuity with the territory as a democratic model and as a school of comparative and constructive dialogue.

Campania: P4C has been present in this region since 1996 and many schools of Napoli and province are involved in the experimentation of this curriculum. Every year lots of research-projects are realized and involve public and private schools that experiment and use P4C curriculum overseen by P4C experts. For example, a great project, lasting three years, involved Scampia, a district of Napoli; actors of this project have been Napoli municipality, University of Napoli "Federico II", Philosophy and Literature Faculty and the Department of Relationship Sciences "Gustavo Iacono"; the schools of the 10th didactic circle "Ilaria Alpi" and the 53rd didactic circle have also been involved. The activities that have been promoted and addressed to teachers and scholastic managers are: "*philosophy for continuous training*", a research center has been instituted for the application and the implementation of community of philosophical inquiry's model in educational contexts (formal and informal); "*Philosophy of Community*" which is an initiative to build community of philosophical inquiry for the critical discussion of problems and petitions that emerge from the local communities that is addressed to teachers, parents and adults of the district. "Philosophy to grow in thought" is a proposal to introduce philosophical research laboratories in scholar curricular activities but also in extracurricular activities; it is a proposal addressed to nursery school, primary school, high school students.

Emilia Romagna: In this region, P4C has been present at school since 2004/2005; however, philosophical trials were already active in 2001, involving not only schools and teachers but also research centers such as ex IRRE of the region. The last year the activity of training for teacher (courses sedentary) continued and the trials of the curriculum in new classes were increased: two nursery schools, four primary schools and two high schools were involved, for a total of about five hundred students. Of note is the experience in the library of Rimini, that has been offering in July for the past four years, the possibility to children and parents to approach and experience P4C. It must be stressed, moreover, the participation with P4C at the festival of philosophy in the city of Imola. This experience allowed bringing philosophy out of academic contexts. This last year has also seen the appearance of a new application of P4C, addressed mainly to the training of adults, within the three-year course for training of Shiatsu: P4C can promote the activation

of a philosophical sensibility that stimulates a conscious and mature relationship with their inner world.

Friuli Venezia Giulia: For many years this region has been active in raising awareness of the territory to the “*kinder philosophie*”; taking inspiration directly from Graz’s experience, which took place at the University of Austria, and rearranging it; some teachers have chosen to adapt the training of teachers to Lipman’s curriculum to promote a greater spread of philosophical activities. An important collaboration with regard to disclosure, is the presence on the territory of the magazine “*Edition*” published by SFI Friuli (Italian Philosophical Society). Two training courses (local courses) have been developed for teachers of kindergarten and primary school. The implementation of the curriculum in a kindergarten, has involved children from three to six years; experiences in library have also been developed, with adolescents and in two primary schools. Perhaps it is important to note that for two years, in the Circle of Learning in Cordenons (Pordenone), the activity of P4C has been becoming Circle Project and has been included in the scholastic curriculum with the title: “*Philosophy for Children: Learning to think*”. Additionally during the last year, the activity has been conducted in parallel with adults and children to explore some issues like the crisis of authority, violence and conformism; philosophy through P4C has been seen by members of communities, regardless of age, as a means of sharing a journey of reflection, a channel that allows to exploit the inter-subjective relationship, a method of comparison even in the absence of reference points.

Lazio: In this region local training courses for teachers of kindergarten and primary school and philosophical workshops have been organized. The activity of Philosophy for Children has been organized in a primary school since 1995/1996.

Lombardia: Philosophy for Children activities are conducted in two primary schools and there is also a local training course addressed to primary teachers. The courses of research and training that are developed in this region, draw the most attention. There is a collaboration with CESPEC (Center of Studies on Contemporary Thought) regarding the experience of training in P4C. A training and assisted experimentation program, aimed at teachers of primary and secondary schools, supported by the National Agency for the Development of School’s Autonomy (ex IRRE) Lombardia has been designed and implemented; this project has investigated the efficiency of different training models and

tools useful to describe and evaluate the educational models. A doctorate by Catholic University of Milan studying the Lipman method's validity with adults in order to support inter-generational dialogue was also founded. Curriculum texts have been adapted to the purposes of leading meetings that led to a comparison among teachers, adolescents and parents.

Piemonte: Philosophy for Children activity is developed in five primary schools, one secondary school and in the first two years of a school for professional training; there are also seminars at the University of Torino and there are also researches and training and supervision projects created in Cuneo, by CESPEC. The project titled "Dialoguing, therefore growing up", winner of Gold Practice 2005 and incorporated in the national catalogue of best practices was also brought forward.

Puglia: An advanced course in "P4C and young people" was created some years ago by a professor of philosophy and although it had a short life, it allowed many people to train and embrace this particular philosophical framework. In this region many experiences of Philosophical Coffee conducted by academics have been also carrying out. It must be remembered that the congress of Italian Philosophical Society, dedicated to the practice of philosophy, was held in 2003 in the University of Bari.

Sicilia: There are activities of P4C held in a primary school, in two psycho-educational high schools, and there are also workshops for university students about P4C. The day dedicated at philosophical studies, held in conjunction with three different chairs, was born in Catania by the debate on the philosophical practice: within the high schools, students and teachers experimented with training activities in a CoI; this experiment was considered particularly important for teachers who had led to review their role inside an equal dialogue with students.

Toscana: In this region there are activities of P4C held in primary schools, the creation of a permanent laboratory of P4C, a project for training courses and workshops aimed at the primary and high school teachers, checked by Teacher Educators from other regions. The work that has been done by testing, translating and adapting the Lipman's curriculum materials it is also important.

Trentino Alto Adige: Some sessions of P4C have been made in an institute of Bolzano within six classes of a primary school, a class of secondary school and two classes of a linguistic high school.

Umbria: In this region P4C has been practiced since 1999. The first successful experience was the settled course taught by Antonio Cosentino in Foligno. This course became the decentralized course of training in P4C. In the region there are about twenty teachers that through this course approached Philosophy for Children and experimented it in different areas pursuing also other philosophical practices open to different users. During 2006/2007 six towns, two nursery schools, eleven primary schools and three secondary schools were involved. There is a considerable involvement and a strong interest of adults regarding philosophy, because it is considered as an exercise of thought and democracy. In this region there are also Philosophical Coffee, philosophical sessions conducted at the University of the Third Age, and community of inquiry composed by parents of children involved in P4C. It is important to underline the contribution that "Amica Sophia" (founded by the internal session of the Umbria Italian Philosophical Society) gives in order to spread philosophical practices on the territory.

Veneto: Veneto is a region particularly sharing in P4C's life. In addition to sessions and experiments in schools, Veneto involves the University with an advanced course held in Padua. Sessions and trials have been conducted in five nursery schools, five primary schools and one secondary school. In Verona a project to recover the school dropout problems among adolescents in a high school has been brought forward, and a training course developed on two levels has been implemented at a secondary school and has involved thirty teachers belonging to the three levels of school: kindergarten, primary and secondary school. Rovigo has started a trial in a school involving about forty 5-6 years old children. Padova has tested an initiative of P4C in a project carried out in a primary school; this project has directly involved academic professors in sessions conducted within the classes with children. This experience has allowed an approach and a strong contact between two very distant realities: P4C and the academic philosophy; this experience has been very successful in terms of comparison, both for children and teachers themselves. In the same primary school children have been stimulated not only with the traditional P4C tales but also using artwork to enable children to develop skills of creative and caring

thinking. Another important research has been that concerning the assessment of CoI, which has been carried out within the University of Padova. In Venice a biographical training laboratory representing an attempt to involve the residents of a neighbourhood in the constitution of a Community of Philosophical Inquiry promoting democratic spirit and cultural integration, through the construction of knowledge developed on shared ethical basis has been also implemented.

Area 3: P4C and Problems, Proposals, Plans and Prospects.

During the meeting, issues and proposals were raised to allow the P4C curriculum to improve, and to allow the various Teachers trained in Italy to express any kind of difficulties encountered along their route. It is possible to resume the different questions in some points:

- 1) *Use and improvement in materials and curriculum*; The difficulty of finding educational material encoded, for example, makes the testing of the curriculum with adult age groups uncertain. The question has been if there is or not the possibility to extend and give variation to the working tools; to create new training texts that allow for teachers useful daily experiences; to use some teachers' potential characteristics by giving them the opportunity to test, writing original tales with new alternative issues.
- 2) *Materials-stimulus*; Many other proposals focused their attention on materials-stimulus different from written texts: for example, the possibility to begin the discussion in the community from the biographical experience of participants; or using a filmic text as stimulus from which the discussion begins; this proposal was criticized by many teachers who believed that the community created, would be different. Also music and expressive body-communication were tested with the younger children to verify if these stimuli could be a greater incentive to facilitate the relationship between community members. However, before using any alternative proposal to begin a P4C session, every teacher has to ask whether the instruments he plans to use maintain the parameters of the original stimuli and whether these kind of stimuli lead to the creation of a CoI.
- 3) *Assessment tools*; Many questions were about how it is possible to evaluate the effectiveness of the training process implemented; and about the possibility to

create assessment tools for P4C, closer to those that are used by other scholastic disciplines.

- 4) *The teacher's role within the Community of Inquiry*; The transition from training to testing seems to be difficult for many teachers; lots of them showed the need for a greater support and increased supervision. It was proposed to create, within each school, a team of teachers with regular appointments that can help every single teacher in case of difficulty. Even the possibility to meet each other at national meetings was perceived as an opportunity for gathering data and documentation that may assist in classroom work.
- 5) *Social issues*; The importance of compliance with rules and respect for others within the P4C, bring the curriculum into the forefront in education for citizenship: to feel himself as an active part in a small community, may make it easier to feel an active and respected part in a large community. Communities of Inquiry that involve adults and children were proposed as a useful solution because they can allow a very strong inter-generational exchange that can become an opportunity to deal with the challenge of the authority's crisis that is present in the school today.
- 6) *Need to deal with difference*; The sense of precariousness that sometimes pervades the individual teacher, seems to be reduced thanks to the horizontal expansion of trade within the same region or between different regions, to the possibility of knowing how other teachers deal with trials, to the possibility of broadening network of information. To feel part of a large community of inquiry motivates the active participation of all its members.
- 7) *Proposals for the future*; The creation of a forum in P4C network dedicated to providing an opportunity to compare different experiences was proposed. An increasing use of new media technology (i.e. the creation of a blog or a weblog to ensure that children who practice P4C can meet each others) was also proposed.
- 8) *Training needs*; A modularization of training courses in P4C to give users the opportunity of deepening their formation in the fields they feel most lacking (i.e. the creation of a didactic module, a psychological and a philosophical one) was proposed as a project for the future.

The hope of all the members of the national community is to be able to improve and enhance the curriculum that, despite the structural rigidity, allows for a flexibility that can fit all the researches and experimentations.

Conclusion: perspectives for the future

To create a more complete research, the only possible perspective is a deepening perspective; the creation of a data-bank in which gathering all the different national experiences, a data-bank that could be consulted and update every year is the aim of the inquiry begun with this work.

The creation of the web-site (www.educazione.unipd.it/p4c) testifies to the wish of a training that could go over the courses and in presence meetings; this web-site is the possibility to answer to the need to give a voice to the national community's members. Knowing each other, knowing you are not alone, comparing with the other P4C community's members through the web, allows to solidify the relationships, but most of all it allows to P4C become a real educational movement.

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