

2017

## Toward a Critical Philosophy for Children

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### Recommended Citation

Funston, James (2017) "Toward a Critical Philosophy for Children," *PSU McNair Scholars Online Journal*.  
Vol. 11: Iss. 1, Article 4.  
<https://doi.org/10.15760/mcnair.2017.05>

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**Toward a Critical Philosophy for Children**

By

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**Citation:** Funston, J. and Sager, A. Toward a Critical Philosophy for Children. Portland State University McNair Scholars Online Journal, Vol. 11, Year: 2017.

## **Abstract**

I explore the role of Philosophy for Children (P4C) and critical pedagogy in pre-college education--what is the purpose of engaging with children on philosophical questions and how ought teachers ask such questions? This paper examines the current and past approaches of P4C through the work Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, and attempts to situate P4C within the framework of critical pedagogy, resulting in a synthesis I call "critical P4C." Implementing critical P4C has the capacity to create communities of inquiry around questions of agency and freedom that are central to critical pedagogy. Critical P4C offers strategies for engaging students in discussions relevant to social issues and breaks the boundaries between "school life" and the students' everyday life outside the classroom.

*Keywords:* critical pedagogy, philosophy for children, education

## Introduction

Philosophy for Children (P4C), an effort by philosophers and educators to bring philosophy young people, was initiated in part to address concerns about the state of the mainstream education that they felt did not meet the demands of modern democratic society. P4C pioneers such as Matthew Lipman (1973) decided to introduce critical education into the curriculum by having students experience the process of reasoning about philosophical problems, providing them with a tool set that they could apply to new problems (Brandt, 1988; Beyer, 1990). Students would thus be more equipped to make rational choices that take into account the interests of others and themselves. P4C had the goal of introducing more voices of the community in conversation, because this has a greater chance of bringing about “a general and appropriately representative consensus” (Vansieleghem, 2005, p. 20). Children’s voices were particularly important to include in this conversation, in part for their natural capacity for questioning (Vansieleghem, 2005, p. 20) and because they often ask questions that might not occur to adults.

This paper argues for an approach to doing philosophy with young people that combines aspects of the American P4C movement with the tradition of critical pedagogy in the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. Situating P4C within the framework of critical pedagogy can both increase the potential for P4C to improve young people’s reasoning skills and serve as a way to inject critical pedagogy into schools. P4C and critical pedagogy have overlapping goals of enabling students to understand the world around them and similar assumptions about the capacities for reasoning, questioning, and understanding they possess.

One of the justifications of public education is that it provides students with the tools they need to participate in civil society. Along with this, students are socialized into accepting the norms of society. Very rarely is any time spent with students engaging in a dialogue with their peers about the social world they will eventually join. Students aren’t given the chance to engage in social and political conversations in the classroom where an increasing amount of time is devoted to teaching for standardized tests (Kohn, 2000; McNeil, 2000, ch. 7; Aronowitz, 2008).

Furthermore, music, art, literature, and other components of a humanities education are taking a backseat to technical and vocational education (McNeil, 2000, ch. 4). The humanities can help students understand others through their language, culture, and history and how people have attempted to make sense of the world. Learning how to evaluate competing sense-making attempts and how to respond reasonably are paramount if society is to be predicated on a rational consensus arising out of a plurality of ideas (Vansieleghem & Kennedy, 2011, p. 176). Lipman (1973) felt that subjects such as mathematics and reading are crucial to good thinking, though they are not sufficient to develop the kind of thinking students need (p. 2).

The question for Lipman, and critical pedagogists, is not which subjects should or should not be taught but *how* they are taught that is primary; for Lipman the problem is that children are taught to think about a variety of subjects, but not to think about thinking, nor are students stimulated to think independently (p. 7). Correspondingly, educators in the tradition of critical pedagogy have applied their principles to a variety of topics, such as mathematics, attempting to teach the subject “for social justice” (Stinson et al., 2012, p. 79) or to “read the world” using that subject (Gutstein, 2003, p. 44).

In this paper, I will first provide a brief discussion of the P4C movement in the United States, beginning with the work of Matthew Lipman. That will be followed by an examination of critical pedagogy emerging from Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Then I will discuss the similarities and differences between the two pedagogical traditions. I next argue that for P4C to be part a truly emancipatory education, the principles of critical pedagogy need to be taken seriously. However

philosophy lessons can provide an entry point for discussing the political and social issues that are central to critical pedagogy with students. What emerges is a synthesis of these pedagogy traditions that I label "critical P4C." Finally, I develop suggestions for teaching Critical P4C and speculate on possible implications of its practice in the classroom. Implementing critical P4C has the capacity to create communities of inquiry around questions of agency and freedom that are central to critical pedagogy. Critical P4C offers strategies for engaging students in discussions relevant to social issues and breaks the boundaries between "school life" and the students' everyday life outside the classroom.

This paper is meant to be accessible to primary and secondary teachers, particularly those who wish to engage their students in discussions of philosophy, particularly political and social philosophy. Specific background knowledge isn't necessary to facilitate these discussions, rather I will address the orientation the teacher should have toward her students, toward what counts as knowledge, and toward the goals of education. I will be focusing on the early thinkers in both P4C and critical pedagogy--for the former that is mainly Matthew Lipman and Gareth Matthews, for the latter, I will discuss the work of Paulo Freire--to show the principles and goals they share and how their differences can compliment each other.

## **Philosophy for Children**

Proponents of P4C have generally agree on the premise of the movement--bringing philosophy lessons to pre-college students--however, they differ on what these lessons should look like in practice (Vansieleghem, 2005). Nancy Vansieleghem and David Kennedy (2011) divide the history of P4C in the US into two generations that differ both in their methodologies but also their understandings of what it is to be a child and the role that education plays in development. Matthew Lipman and the Institute for the Advancement of the Philosophy of Children spearheaded the first generation, emerging around the late 1960s, followed by the work of Gareth Matthews and others in the 1970s.

The second generation of P4C is marked by the use of philosophy as a "means of reconstructing relations of power and agency in the classroom, and for communicating and reflecting upon personal meanings, with a goal of facilitating the self-actualisation of conscious moral actors" (p. 173). Representatives of this generation, such as David Kennedy, Karin Murriss, Karel Van der Leeuw, and Ann Margaret Sharp, tend to reject many of the assumptions of what counts as "philosophy." In "Can Children Do Philosophy?" Karin Murriss (2000) writes that P4C is partly a criticism of the way of doing philosophy that Lipman compared to "memorising the inscriptions in a graveyard; the memorising of a collection of names and dates" (p. 274).<sup>1</sup> Murriss argues that doing philosophy with children could lead to philosophy becoming more relevant and raises questions about the ideal philosopher; with solitary, independent rationality, P4C adds "dialogue, embodiment and the imagination" (p. 276).

The drive to bring philosophy into the educational curriculum in the United States began with the work of Matthew Lipman. Lipman's (1974) book, *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*, sought to develop methods for creating philosophical dialogues with young people. Soon after, the Institute for the Advancement of the Philosophy of Children (IAPC) was established at Montclair State University; its mission is to develop educational content, create affiliations with organizations whose work is related to P4C, and support research in teaching philosophy ("Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC),"). P4C has been largely situated in a liberal education framework, one that promotes democratic values with the aim of preparing the students for their future

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<sup>1</sup> Murriss (2000) makes a point to use the abbreviation *PwC* instead of *P4C*, the latter she associates with Lipman and the IAPC's work. *PwC*, for her is a broader term, inclusive of educators who do not agree that Lipman's method and the materials of the IAPC are best for doing philosophy with young people (p. 27).

citizenship (Bleazby, 2006) through the creation of a community of inquiry (COI) (Cevallos-Estarellas & Sigurdardottir, 2000) Lipman's understanding of education was influenced largely by the philosophy of American pragmatist John Dewey and psychologists Lev Vygotsky and Jean Piaget (Juuso, 2007).

Juuso (2007) writes, "Matthew Lipman has constructed P4C based on the thinking of the best known advocates of early American pragmatism, Charles Sanders Peirce, John Dewey and George Herbert Mead. Especially the last two of them are the direct pivotal figures behind P4C" (p. 221). In fact, Lipman became fascinated with Dewey's work while serving in the military and enrolled in Columbia University, where Dewey himself taught, to study philosophy. Lipman was impressed with the 'practicality' of Dewey's thinking which convinced him to study philosophy (p. 16).

For Dewey, students excel when they are allowed to experience and interact with their education. In *Experience and Education*, Dewey (1938) makes a distinction between traditional and progressive education. Traditional education, like Lipman's standard paradigm and Freire's banking method, contains a body of information and skills that have been found to be correct, and the work of the teacher is transmitting this to students. Education is also responsible for the moral training of students by promoting habits that conform to previously-developed standards and rules of conduct (p. 17).

Dewey advocated for a new education that reflects the primacy of the role of experience in learning. Education arises through experience but not all experiences have the same educational value. Some experiences, including those that occur in traditional education, can be mis-educative. Dewey judges the quality of experience in two ways. One is the feeling of agreeableness or disagreeableness associated with that experience, but more importantly, is the effect that experience has on fostering or inhibiting future experiences (p. 23-25). Thus new education is "a development within, by, and for experience" (p. 28).

Lipman promoted using stories and narratives with philosophically-interesting content that were appealing to students as a catalyst for discussion. The students are then asked open-ended questions and invited to reflect on the text. The text is not necessary for a P4C discussion; many begin with a group activity, thought experiment, or just introducing a concept, such as *fairness* or *friendship*, that children are familiar with. However Lipman understood that parents and teachers who don't have advanced degrees in philosophy would need some help in engaging philosophical discussions. He wrote *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*, and number of other works, intended to stimulate critical thinking and moral judgment but also to show the importance of reasoning, questioning, and conceptual exploration.

Lipman incorporated the community of inquiry concept from Peirce and Dewey. Peirce intended the community of inquiry as a model of scientific inquiry; Dewey expanded the concept and applied it to education. In a community of inquiry, knowledge is within a social context and agreement between the inquirers is necessary for legitimization of that knowledge, unlike traditional models of inquiry that tend to be individual and solitary quests to know a static, unchanging world. Peirce (1992/1998), and other pragmatist philosophers, questioned the individualist idea of inquiry, that the solitary thinker can begin with doubt and end with only certainty. Peirce questioned this account for a number, instead modeling inquiry on science in which no individual is the ultimate judge of certainty. In science the question of certainty is put aside once scientists come to agree on a theory (vol.1 p. 29). Dewey (1897) believed that the challenges of social spaces were necessary for learning. The demands of social life cause children to conceive of themselves as a member of a group, and to understand what their actions mean in social terms (p. 77). To Dewey the individual educational inquiry was necessarily situated in a community.

For Lipman (2003), a community of inquiry occurs in what he termed a *reflective paradigm* where teachers guide students in a reasonable and judicious manner with education as the goal. He contrasts this with the *standard paradigm*. In the standard paradigm, knowledge is transmitted to the student in discrete, unambiguous units from the teacher who stands as authority on what is or isn't legitimate knowledge (p. 18-19). By giving students the chance to think about the world, the reflective paradigm creates a space for a community of inquiry to form.

In the community of inquiry, students are provided a stimulus, such as a story, picture book, or a philosophical paradox, and are then asked to develop questions about aspects of the stimulus they find puzzling, problematic, false, or ambiguous. Following that, the students engage in discussion with each other to put forth ideas, respond to others' ideas, and ask new questions based on the ideas of their co-inquirers. Over the course of the discussion, the questions become more thoughtful and reflective, and ideally, the discussion would continue until all participants are satisfied with the answer. The role of the teacher is to ask guided questions and work to inspire students to think about the world in a way that builds on their ideas and those of their peers (Fisher, 2001, p. 71; Lipman, 2003, ch. 4).

Following Lipman, other philosophers and educators took philosophy with young people in new directions. Questions about the developmental process as it relates to philosophy were explored, and this led to different views children and philosophy. For Lipman, the child is a young philosopher who can benefit from doing philosophy. Lipman's approach was controversial in the sense that many think that subjects like philosophy should be avoided until students are a certain age.

In *Philosophy and the Young Child*, Gareth Matthews (1980) questions assumptions about children's cognitive capacity and development, particularly view that children master concepts progressively. The idea Matthews rejects is that children, as they develop, become more mature in their thinking process and that at certain ages children are unable to grasp certain concepts until their thinking has sufficiently progressed. The standard account of childhood development as understood by psychologists raises problems for doing philosophy with children. Psychologists might be skeptical about the capacity for children to understand philosophical ideas. Matthews responds by arguing that this misconstrues the activity of philosophy--it is hard to say what counts as "progress" in philosophy. Also, philosophical progress is not normally part of the standard development of people of any age group. Furthermore, when doing philosophy, children engage in conceptual explorations that many psychologists would deem childish or irrational since the goal is not to have more concrete views on the world that are consistent with one's peers, but rather to question the standard "conviction." Matthews writes, "... it is the deviant response that is most likely to be philosophically interesting" (p. 38).

Matthews, instead of doing philosophy *with* or *for* children, developed what he called "dialogues with children." Matthews and those of the P4C movement following Lipman, broke from earlier thinking by emphasizing the difference in the way children think and philosophize rather than working for analytic uniformity in reasoning. Children's philosophy, for Matthews, was "a form of desire--of the opportunity for children to explore and articulate what they have not said or even thought before," not an opportunity to engage in strictly logical thinking (Vansielegem & Kennedy, 2011, p.176). In *Dialogues with Children*, Matthews (1984) has two aims in mind. One is providing adults with philosophical questions to ask children. Each chapter covers a particular topic from the canon of philosophy using anecdotal conversations between young people, generally aged eight to eleven, with Matthews' reflections. His second aim is to show an example of a relationship with children that is not based on condescension (p. 3).

Matthews (1994) saw children as capable philosophers due to their inherent sense of wonder, and that what they are doing is legitimately philosophy. When children have philosophical dialogues, what they are doing is not "proto-philosophical, or quasi-philosophical, or semi-philosophical, it is

the real thing ...” (p. 34). Matthews writes that it is difficult to categorize philosophical thinking as cognitively ‘mature’ or ‘immature.’

In the first generation of P4C, children are capable of thinking philosophically in a way that resembles adults, and bringing philosophy into the classroom gives them a chance to practice reasoning and develop moral judgment. After Lipman, philosophers working with children began to value children’s thinking because it differs from adult thinking. Matthews (1984) was interested in the ways children think that are not captured by developmental psychology, because they are “primarily concerned with the normal and the standard” (p. 116). There is little agreement on counts as normal and standard thinking in philosophy, so Matthews argues that developmental psychology might have nothing to say about the philosophical capacities of young people (p. 118). It is the unique ways in which children understand and take part in philosophical questioning, that differed from those of adults, that became the crucial factor. Children, because they think differently than adults, have contributions to add to philosophical discussion that “may be quite as valuable as any we adults have to offer” (p. 3).

Philosophy in the second generation, Vansieleghem and Kennedy write, “appears as a form of communal deliberation that stimulates critical reflection on existing power relations, these being envisaged as historical constructions that are or should be open to reconstruction” (p. 176). Dialogue becomes the core of the educational process with the goal of creating “a free space in which all persons involved in the inquiry have an equal chance to bring their arguments forward in the interest of an emergent, rationally founded consensus” (p. 176). Instead of being presented with the idea of what the philosopher *is* and taught to emulate that, children in dialogues are shown and given a chance to participate in what philosophers *do*. In this generation, children are encouraged to question even the norms of human thinking and action--the dialogue is a space where children are able to ask “why?” such and such is the case.

For example, Matthews (1984) compares a story that he presented to a class of twenty adults to a group of seven children. The story centers on whether or not plants can have desires or wants. One difference between the responses from the two groups is the commitment to a divide between thinking literally and figuratively. Adults could concede that plants figuratively have a desire for water, but not literally. Children, on the other hand, were more free in their use of imagination to believe that plants *could* have desires. Adults might know more about the actual life of plants, such as the biochemistry of photosynthesis, which is important for the question of whether they can desire; but children excel in dialogue by more readily thinking beyond the actual to the possible life of plants (p. 18). With Matthews, children’s insights are valuable in relation to the gap between how they think and how adults think.

The second generation emphasizes the importance of critically engaging with the concept of *thinking* and on the relations of power that underlie these norms (Vansieleghem and Kennedy, 2011, p. 176). Accepting the idea of objective truth that is true for anyone and for all time is not the goal for the new generation of P4C. Instead there is a focus on the varieties of thinking done by people in different contexts. A rational exchange of opinions is still the goal, but, as Vansieleghem and Kennedy (2011) point out, “[t]here is, however, no longer understood to be one best way of reasoning, for collective reason, it is held, is shaped and articulated by the social community in which it operates” (p. 178). So rather than be taught there is one particular method of thinking about a problem, philosophy helps children to reflect on their own views and relate them to others. Educators in this generation of P4C stress the importance of children’s participation in a common reality that is increasingly interconnected and rapidly changing (Van der Leeuw, 2009, p. 113).

This generation of P4C has much in common with the tradition of critical pedagogy, particularly in promoting dialogue and the resistance to an epistemology that sees knowledge as concrete, static,



and unambiguous. In the new P4C, children philosophize about different ways of conceptualizing the common reality that we all share. No one perspective necessarily has the privilege of "truth."

With critical pedagogy the assumption of a stable common reality is questioned, and students and teachers are encouraged to think about how we shape the common social reality. Society is not just a thing that is there, waiting for children to become adults and take part in preordained roles; critical pedagogists draw attention to the subjectivity of people within the public sphere and the forces of oppression and domination that silence some voices but not others. Freirean critical pedagogy has unique contributions to add to the project of P4C but also raises questions about the role of teacher and student in a philosophical dialogue. Using Freire as a "starting point" to move beyond the current generation, critical P4C intends to go further, not just questioning the distinction between *adult* and *child* in philosophical inquiry but also the between *teacher* and *student* in education.

## Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy stems from Paulo Freire's efforts teaching *campesinos* in Brazil. Freire's theory of education is very intricate and touches on nearly every aspect of human existence in the world. Here I will limit myself to considering aspects that are relevant to contemporary educators, and not on, say, issues pertinent to activists, progressives, and others not engaged in teaching-related activities. Freire examined the connection between education and poverty and was led to believe that education held the potential for promoting social justice and transforming society. Education could not be separated from political considerations nor could it be considered neutral.

For Freire, the purpose of education is human liberation and begins from experience. Education has the capacity to reinforce the passivity of students or challenge social forces that limit human liberation (Wallerstein, 1987, p. 33). He calls the dominant non-dialogic style the "banking method" of education. The teacher is the store of knowledge which is "deposited" into the students' minds. The students later show they have learned by repeating that information back to the teacher (Freire, 2005, ch. 2).

This, Freire argues, maintains hierarchical systems of domination and oppression. He advocates for a liberatory teaching that he calls "problem-posing" education that is rejects deposit-making. Instead the focus of education is "the posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world" (p. 79). Problem-posing education sees the essence of thinking as *intentional*, that is about things or pointing to things in the world, and *relational*, connected to others via communication.

The principles of critical pedagogy establish relationships between student-teachers and teacher-students. Knowledge is constructed in the educational interaction, rather than transmitted to students from teachers. Teachers who wish to be progressive ought to be concerned with pedagogy, or their method of teaching. The teacher, to avoid becoming reactionary and reinforcing authoritarian practices, must be aware of how she is teaching.

For Freire (1987), there is no neutral position; the progressive teacher must have a political and pedagogical understanding of teaching (p. 212). When the goal is to teach students how to learn, instead of just transmitting information that is to be memorized, progressive educators should work toward eroding the dichotomy between teacher and student. This is because the students must "enter into the discourse of the teacher, appropriating for themselves the deepest significance of the subject being taught (p. 213). The teacher has to give up the exclusive authority to name the world," and not think of her student as an "empty vessel to be filled," but as an active participant in learning how to learn (Freire, 2005, p. 79).

Freire's major work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, does not provide a simple plan for teaching, rather the attitude the teacher, or *facilitator*, adopts toward her students and the educational process is the main concern. The role of teacher changes from an authoritative source of truth to a facilitator of learning. The pedagogical roles change in a Freirean project; the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher become teacher-students and student teachers. For Freire, critical pedagogy cannot be imported but must be reinvented anew each time it is practiced. The content of the discussions is based on the world the students find themselves in. The facilitator of the critical pedagogical project doesn't employ prepackaged lesson plans but must investigate her students' environments and lived situations prior to the class session.

Without knowing something about the students' lives, we risk further alienating them from an educator that from their point of view seems disconnected from the real world. Patricia Reynolds (2007) argues that teachers should go even further than this and work to alleviate problems that students face in their lives. The No Child Left Behind Act has caused schools to focus on teaching for standardized tests which tends to exclude certain topics, such as the distribution of power in society, from the curriculum (p. 53). The problems posed in problem-posing education are those that teachers have just as much to learn as students, and, in Freire's view, teachers need to abandon some of their epistemological authority so they can learn along with students in a dialogue.

Dialogue, in Freire's view, is the situation when people come together to name the world they are in. Naming the world is a continuous process--the named world appears again and requires a new name. In a dialogue this process of action and reflection works toward finding the authentic word. Freire calls this work *praxis*. For this dialogue to occur, however, certain conditions must be in place. Dialogue fails when some are denied their right to speak, to do so is to dehumanize them, since Freire views the act of speaking to be fundamental to human beings. Dialogue is impossible when only some members have ability to speak with authority about the world and when others' voices are ignored (p. 88).

Freire also emphasizes the importance of love as a component of dialogue. Love is the courage to be committed to others whose voices have been denied. For the person attempting a dialogue, love of life, the world, and people is essential--"[l]ove is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself" (p. 89). Love, in this context, means listening to and valuing the voice of the oppressed. Dialogue also requires humility, as in the absence of arrogance. The educator who places herself above others or who is worried about being displaced from her position of privilege closes herself off from the dialogue. A lack of humility creates a distance from the people, and prevents her from taking part in the naming of the world. Freire warns against thinking in terms of "utter ignoramus" and "perfect sages" rather "there are only people who are attempting, together, to learn more than they now know" (p. 90). Humility is letting go of the arrogance of being the teacher and the wish to direct the dialogue in directions that silence some voices.

Faith is another requirement for dialogue, however what Freire writes of is a faith in the power of humans to engage in the naming and renaming of the world and faith in the work of all humans to free themselves from oppression, that is "to be more fully human" (p. 90). Freire's work is inspired by his Catholic faith, though the faith in a dialogue is a trust in people, and is not connected to any specific religious tradition. It is a faith in the idea that people want to be free and the way to become so is through dialogue. Love, humility, and faith in others together create trust, another necessary component of dialogue. What the speaker says should match her true intentions; words should not be taken lightly (p. 91). The participants in the dialogue need to trust each other to be speaking honestly in order to create a space that welcomes all voices.

Dialogue cannot occur without hope. There must be a sense that something will come out of the dialogue. Without hope, the dialogue will be “empty and sterile, bureaucratic and tedious (p. 92). Hope prevents people from falling into despair due to their incompleteness. For Freire (1998), hope causes humans to be seekers and explorers as it is “necessary impetus” of the project of becoming more fully human (p. 69). Lastly, a dialogue needs critical thinking; however, Freire’s sense of critical thinking differs from the common use of the term as implying the use of logic and analytical thinking to evaluate evidence. For Freire (2005), critical thinking is the reflecting component of praxis but is never separate from action. To think critically is to see the “indivisible solidarity” that connects people to the world (p. 92). Humans are not outside of a world of static essences, rather reality is dynamic, transforming through the action of people.

Freire reinforced these requirements for dialogue when addressing the coordinators of “cultural circles” in rural Chile. Freire (1971) wrote, “In order to be a good coordinator for a ‘cultural circle,’ you need, above all, to have faith in man, to believe in his possibility to create, to change things. You need to love. You must be convinced that the fundamental effort of education is the liberation of man, and never his ‘domestication’” (p. 61). The cultural circle shouldn’t be thought of like a traditional school. The teacher is not a provider of absolute knowledge to passive ignorant students. In a cultural circle, discussion is lively and creative, where participants have varying levels of knowledge but everyone works together to know more.

Critical pedagogy, and the methods developed within its framework, can help us examine the structure of educational practice and correct for what Freire (2005) calls dehumanization, which “is a distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human” (p. 44); critical pedagogy is intended to be a tool for both the oppressors and the oppressed to become aware of their common dehumanization (p. 48). Freire notes that there are many well-meaning educators who use in the banking method of education but must abandon this method to fully engage in the struggle for liberation.

Education is a key part of this struggle since liberation cannot be given to the oppressed, instead it comes as a result of their own ‘critical consciousness.’ (p. 67). This consciousness, which is normally left untranslated as *conscientização*, is a deep “attitude of awareness” (p. 109). *Conscientização* is the process of learning to see dehumanizing and oppressive elements in the political, social, and economic world and to take action against them (p. 33fn). The first step to a critical consciousness is literacy. Learning to read can be understood in the sense of grasping of letters and symbols, but there is a deeper level of literacy Freire is concerned with. There are those who are “illiterate” in the sense that they can read the words on a page, but do not fully understand the meanings of what they read, such as someone reading about worker layoffs and corporations relocating their factories overseas and not connect these two points. Literacy here means not just reading the newspapers but not being taken in by biases and propaganda. *Conscientização* involves a recognition of how the oppressed have been silenced and taught to internalize a negative image of themselves.

There are a number of conceptual links between Freire’s work and each of the generations of P4C in the United States. Below I will examine these links in an effort to push the P4C movement in a more critical direction; following that, I will point out the major differences of the traditions.

## **Freire and Lipman**

Freire and those within the P4C movement share an antipathy towards the traditional structure of the classroom and its method of knowledge transmission--what Lipman calls *the standard paradigm* and Freire *the banking method*. This classroom is dominated by the teacher who is the source of legitimate knowledge and the judge of what counts as an acceptable topic of study. The

ideal student in this classroom is a passive receptacle of information, skills, and values. Lipman and Freire reject the view of knowledge as static, instead, stressing the importance of dialogue in the construction of knowledge; however, Lipman's critique of schooling is concerned with the authoritarian structure of the teacher-student relationship, and Freire, though he is also a critic of hierarchy in educational projects, emphasizes the importance of including the voices of marginalized and dehumanized people in dialogue.

There are, however, differences between the community of inquiry and Freire's vision of the cultural circle. In a community of inquiry, the teacher plays a role in steering the discussion and in deciding the topic to discuss. The teacher stands apart from the other participants and retains a level of epistemic authority. The coordinator of a cultural circle has a diminishing role; in the dialogue, the hierarchy breaks down and her status as an authority over her students fades--"the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teacher" (Freire, 2005, p. 80).

The idea of critical thinking has different meanings for critical pedagogy and P4C. The latter is firmly within the Western tradition of critical thinking that focuses on a specific set of reasoning skills that are the foundation of the entire curriculum. Students with these skills are able to apply them to the study of any subject. A critical thinking educational project would focus on teaching students to be rational thinkers who are capable of using the reasoning skills they learned to evaluate new evidence. Burbules and Berk (1999) write that the critical thinker "is something like a critical consumer of information; he or she is driven to seek reasons and evidence" (p. 47). The critical thinker in this tradition is ultimately concerned with minimizing false beliefs.

In critical pedagogy, critical thinking goes beyond changing the individual to thinking about relations between teachers and students and power inequalities within institutional structures--"the endeavor to teach others to think critically is less a matter of fostering individual skills and dispositions, and more a consequence of the pedagogical relations, between teachers and students and among students, which promote it; furthermore, the object of thinking critically is not only against demonstrably false beliefs, but also those that are misleading, partisan, or implicated in the preservation of an unjust status quo" (Burbules & Berk, 1999, p. 49). For critical pedagogy, thinking critically means thinking politically as well.

Critical P4C develops critical thinking in both these senses, to provide a set of reasoning skills and dispositions that aid in uncovering injustice within the status quo. We must reject, however, the idea of a static world; the critical thinker is not a detached observer and evaluator. The analysis of evidence in critical thinking happens in the world that is being read. Freire's work was concerned with teaching literacy, both as reading words but also "reading the world" as a first step in naming and renaming the world. Western critical thinking, on the other hand, is most commonly applied to scientific and technical education.

There have been attempts to apply critical pedagogy to other fields, for example mathematics; these question the supposed "value-free" nature of mathematical knowledge and increase mathematical literacy (Frankenstein, 1983; Cohen, 1997; Stinson et al. 2012). Teaching a critical mathematics looks at the ways mathematics and statistics are employed, especially in politics and the media--*what claims are they being used to support, who gets to decide what counts as legitimate mathematical knowledge, and who is excluded from the field mathematical study*. Frankenstein writes that critical mathematics rejects both the "common sense" view that mathematical truths are discovered and not created, and the cynical view that sees statistics as "self-serving lies" (p. 10). Instead a Freirean approach reflects on the roles of subjectivity and objectivity in the creation of mathematical knowledge. In her critical mathematics course she uses examples such as the government making military spending appear less through the manipulation of statistics or how significance tests can be used to make differences, for example between the

intelligence of ethnic groups, appear significant and meaningful, when there is not a strong correlation (p. 10). Critical P4C takes the opposite route of incorporating elements of critical thinking in the Western sense into a critical pedagogy project, that is adopting 'value-free' reasoning skills for a value-laden dialogue.

Lipman's P4C finds itself within a liberal framework of thinking about education, heavily informed by Deweyan principles. Education, in the liberal view, can fix problems by making students that are more rational and more equipped to evaluate evidence. However the demands of the modern school have forced some aspects of Dewey's pedagogy to be sidelined. The school, for Dewey, should be teaching through experiences which beget other experiences, having a transformative effect on the world. Freire's work is a part of the radical tradition of education that examines oppressive structures in the world and seeks a way to change them. Liberal education changes individuals to better navigate their social environment; radical education questions why the environment is structured in a way that dehumanizes some and thinks of alternative ways of organizing people.

### **Critical Philosophy for Children**

Teachers intending to coordinate a dialogue would need to do their research beforehand. Critical P4C should explore questions that face the young people in their day-to-day experience. However the facilitator should not refer only to development psychology research to construct a view of the child, as we saw with Matthews, such accounts miss what makes children's philosophical insights valuable. Also Freire would argue that the "standard and normal" accounts of developmental psychology denies the voices of children who have been silenced by oppression. Freire advises facilitators and coordinators to integrate with the community prior to any educational activity. So prior to beginning the pedagogical process, facilitators must research the students' lives.

There are multiple levels of research that can be done. First is speaking directly to the students. What philosophical questions do they have? How much do they know about philosophy and philosophers? What media do they consume? How aware of politics and social issues are they? What do they want to learn? Second, meet with parents and teachers. What is the social environment of the classroom? What are the social dynamics of the students? What are they talking about? Third, study the community and larger cultural context the students are situated within. To what social classes do the students belong? What are the dynamics of race and class in the students' environment?

Once this has been satisfactorily completed, facilitators and students can begin the lesson, usually sitting together in a circle to emphasize the break from traditional hierarchic roles. The lesson can begin a number of ways, with a reading from text, using art or a picture book as the catalyst, or a warm-up activity. The facilitator should first direct questions to the group as a whole, then to individual participants who may be in need of motivation. These questions should build upon the answers given in the discussion. The facilitator should limit this unless it is absolutely necessary; the goal is to incite enough for the dialogue to sustain itself. At some point, the facilitator is no longer the primary figure in the dialogue, and she becomes a member of the group (Freire, 1971).

This is in many ways an ideal situation. It is unlikely that a dialogue will reach the point where everyone is completely equal; the dialogue exists within a society where adults have authority over children and where people are treated differently based on race, gender, and class. A critical P4C dialogue might never overcome these influences, but this should be the discursive goal that participants are working for. Some might argue that the adult-child relationship adds another complication, that children need positive authority figures in their lives. For critical P4C, adults

should model the kind of thinking the dialogue aims at, that is, retaining the mindset of love, faith, humility, trust, and critical thinking that Freire stressed.

When dealing with children, the adult should see a difference between correcting a child for being wrong about some factual claim and engaging in wrong behavior. The former should be discussed; the latter implies a limit to what dialogue with children can achieve. There are points when the teacher-of-the-students must reappear as a figure of authority, for example, if a student physically assaults another. A dialogue seeks to find a balance between the goals of ideal discussion and the reality of childhood. The point when the adult should step in as an authority figure is unclear. Physical violence or self-destructive acts should be prevented but is there a line of thinking that children shouldn't engage in? There is no easy answer to this question. Freire would urge us to consider why some topics are not up for discussion by children and what effects this might have on silencing children's opinions or questions.

Knowledge, in critical P4C, is socially constructed and legitimized. A dialogue thus should lead to questions of not only the hierarchical structure of the classroom but the larger society as well. Social norms should be a subject of discussion and students should question these norms to uncover their hidden meanings. The dialogue must be a safe space for students to engage with the peers about controversial topics, and, in the spirit of a community of inquiry, build upon each other's ideas.

Remember that *conscientização* is the goal for all participants in the dialogue. The teacher's goal should be to become a student-teacher with teacher-students. Letting go of the authority that comes with the role of teacher can be daunting, and many educators fear that they would lose control of the classroom in the process. Lipman, Matthews, and Freire would respond with an appeal to an inherent desire of students to engage in dialogue, that children and, for Freire, the oppressed want to be respected intellectually. An important consideration is that the shift from authoritarian teacher to co-inquirer doesn't happen immediately; the teacher's authority wanes as the students become used to the new dynamics of their relationship to the teacher.

Freire writes that a component of banking education is the teacher's confusion between their intellectual authority with professional authority (2005, p. 73). In modern public education, students have been socialized to accept this same confusion. Thus students may resist the dismantling of intellectual hierarchy or assume that this also means the end of professional authority of the teacher. Both of these cases pose a problem to creating a dynamic community of inquiry. In the former, students may refuse to contribute to the discussion opinions or arguments that haven't been justified through the banking education that have experienced. In the latter, students may engage in disruptive behavior (cf. Giroux, 1983).

This issue is discussed by Freire and other theorists; however, when working specifically with younger children, it takes more prominence. Future work in this area is important for critical P4C. Freire notes that in a dialogue arguments based on authority are invalid and that for it to function, "authority must be *on the side of freedom*" (2005, p. 80). Perhaps adult learners are more apt to accept the distinction between professional and intellectual authority, hence the reason that there is little attention paid to how to convey this to adults. For Freire, 'reading the word and the world' is the human vocation; so people have an innate desire to engage in dialogue and the facilitator's role is to break them out of the banking model. This process is likely to take a different shape when working with children who have a closer engagement with banking education, assuming most of their education thus far has fit that model. How can educators explain this distinction to children to accept authority in some situations--when a parent says not to run with scissors--but not others, such as when a banking-model classroom? Do children need positive authority figures and how can critical P4C facilitators fulfill that role? What are the limits of inquiry with children? Should children

be forced to accept certain ideas without dialogue or debate? Critical P4C practitioners and theorists should carefully consider these questions.

As an example of a P4C course with critical pedagogy in mind, working with Portland State University's Philosophy Department, my colleagues and I engaged 12- to 15-year-old students in a number of philosophy lessons centered on life in a city. For their final project, groups of students designed their own ideal cities. The students' utopias showed a wide range of creativity. Instead of thinking how to take the pre-existing concept of *city* and build on that to make it more efficient, students rethought the the goals and principles of a city. One city was focused on maximizing human enjoyment and combatting boredom, while another attempted to create an egalitarian society without sacrificing productivity. The students demonstrated both lateral and critical thinking. The cities showed the students' capacity to, on one hand, think unconventionally about problems and, on the other, apply rigorous thinking to that problem.

## Conclusion

Why implement a critical philosophy for children? For P4C practitioners and theorists, incorporating critical pedagogies can be helpful for advancing the movement in a direction that is specifically concerned with human freedom. Critical pedagogy is controversial because of its unabashed political nature. Freire and his followers are heavily influenced by thinkers in the Marxist tradition. However, educating is not a politically-neutral occupation; Freire (1987) believed that the neutral teacher, in not being literate of the political nature of her actions, serves the interests of power (p. 212). Applying a Freirean reading to P4C can show us the hidden contradictions that may be present, in a sense being *critical of critical thinking*. Educators that are committed to helping their students become more liberated need to be vigilant to the ways that they might be inadvertently reinforcing dominance and oppression.

Working with children adds some complications to a critical education project. Completely eliminating the teacher-student hierarchy in the classroom is an unachievable ideal. There might even be a necessary distinction that has to be in place. The teacher can play a role in modeling positive types of intellectual behavior. The student sees that the teacher is not equal in some respects. When inequality is seen as essential, that is, there is something internal to the student that makes her less than the teacher, the motivation to want to learn suffers; if the student believes there is some unchangeable flaw in her character, she'll be cynical about the use of education to better herself. In a dialogue the goal should be to question hierarchies based on race, gender, class, and status in society. P4C begins from an authoritarian, top-down model of education and works toward a less hierarchical model. Using a critical pedagogy with children requires us to decide how egalitarian the classroom can be. In public schools, the demands of the curriculum will be more extreme, particularly regarding standardized tests, though alternative schools, particularly those that are student-centered, provide more opportunity to expand education beyond the standard paradigm and the banking method.

Lipman questioned the dichotomy between child and adult; he claimed that children could do philosophy and could employ reasoning if given the chance. Children are able to think like adults think, albeit with less complexity and depth. In Matthews, we see childhood as a state of wonder. The insight is not that children can follow the same line of reasoning as adults, but that children sometimes think in terms that are outside of what normally counts as reasoning. Through dialogue with children, insights develop that can provide philosophically-interesting pathways for adults to explore and "results in a profound critique of the normative adult view of the child and of its expression in the 'science as usual' of developmental psychology" (Vansieleghem & Kennedy, 2011, p. 176).

The second generation of P4C turns to questions of power relations within the context of education, personal meaning, and self-actualization. This generation builds upon the work of its predecessors, adapting their ideas to the new socio-political environment; in a sense advocates of this generation are updating the work of Lipman and Matthews for the contemporary world. However they also criticize aspect of earlier generations, particularly Lipman's emphasis on analytical reasoning which seems to have little connection to the goal of seeking personal meaning. For theorists and educators of the second generation, philosophy can't be confined to the classroom. Reasoned deliberation is necessary in many aspects of life in an information-rich, increasingly-complex world (Van der Leeuw, 2009, p. 111-113). P4C from this approach attempts to provide children with the skills to be rational actors in the world. Critical P4C shares much in common with the second generation, and uses its predecessors as a foundation to rethink prior assumptions about teacher and student.



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