

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325093248>

# Paulo Freire and Philosophy for Children: A Critical Dialogue

Article in *Studies in Philosophy and Education* · November 2018

DOI: 10.1007/s11217-018-9613-8

---

CITATIONS

25

READS

2,162

1 author:



Walter Omar Kohan

State University of Rio de Janeiro

184 PUBLICATIONS 954 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

# Paulo Freire and Philosophy for Children: A Critical Dialogue

Walter Omar Kohan, <sup>1,2</sup>✉

Phone (1) 778-855-5052

Email wokohan@gmail.com

<sup>1</sup> State University of Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

<sup>2</sup> University of British Columbia, 786 King Edward Ave.  
E, Vancouver, BC, V5V E2E Canada

---

## Abstract

This paper is an attempt to connect the Brazilian Paulo Freire's well known educational thinking with the "philosophy for children" movement. It considers the relationship between the creator of philosophy for children (P4C), Matthew Lipman and Freire through different attempts to establish a relationship between these two educators. The paper shows that the relationship between them is not as close as many supporters of P4C have claimed, especially in Latin America. It also considers the context of Educational Policies in our time and why Freire's understanding of the politics of education makes it impossible to be Freirean and at the same time be neutral or favorable to the actual status quo. Finally, after presenting Lipman's understanding of the relationship between philosophy, education and democracy and their connection to capitalism, it proposes ways to begin the political path of philosophizing with children inspired by Paulo Freire's educational thinking. As a result, a more politically committed path to doing philosophy with children is offered.

AQ1

AQ2

---

## Keywords

Philosophical work with children

Paulo Freire

Matthew Lipman

Politics (of education)

Critique

When we kill the child in us, we are no longer.

P. Freire. In: Horton and Freire (1990: 64)

---

## Introduction

I use questions more than I do anything else.

M. Horton. In: Horton and Freire (1990: 146)

Philosophy for children (P4C) is a worldwide movement created by Matthew Lipman and Ann Margaret Sharp in the late sixties to bring philosophical inquiry to the education of children. Rooted in Dewey's Pragmatism, Lipman and Sharp proposed a Reconstruction of the History of Philosophy in the form of a whole Program (composed of philosophical novels for children and Instructional Manuals for teachers) so that educators from Pre-School to High School could have a tool to create a community of philosophical inquiry (CPI), i.e., a safe educational space where they could share their ideas and questions concerning matters of philosophical interest, like truth, friendship, justice. CPI's would be democratic spaces through which creative, critical and caring thinking skills would be developed by children in order to be formed as the democratic citizens that our societies need. P4C was created at the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC) at Montclair State University (MSU) and was gradually disseminated into more than 40 countries that now have different sorts of philosophical practices with children, more or less close to Lipman and Sharp's model. In countries with rich tradition in education and philosophy, like France and Italy, very different proposals have been created and there are now a vast variety of practices putting together philosophy and children all around the world.

The political impact that P4C has had and, more generally, its potential impact in education is a very contestable issue. Even though Lipman and

Sharp have always stressed its democratic character and the way it could be an educational path to foster and strengthen democratic societies, “democracy” is a contestable concept, and appraising the varieties of democratic practice in different parts of the world call for a more careful consideration of this statement. This is particularly true in regions like Latin America, where a call for urgent social transformation through education has been stressed for over fifty years, and where the implementation of P4C has established a strong and popular foothold. This brings to the fore the following, perhaps urgent question: can we expect P4C to be an educational tool to turn what many view as unfair, exclusive and undemocratic societies into true democratic societies?

The aim of this paper is to analyze this question. The strategy will be to compare the political assumptions and implications of P4C with Paulo Freire, who also had this aim in his educational thought and life. The first section of what is to follow, will analyze the relationship between Matthew Lipman, and Paulo Freire which will suggest that this relationship is not as close as many supporters of P4C might think, especially in Latin America. As well, the diverse attempts by various authors to outline the similarities and differences between these two educators will be noted. The next section will explore both Freire’s and Lipman’s view on education from the viewpoint of contemporary socioeconomic context. The final section will consider ways to begin/originate the political path of philosophizing with children nurtured by Paulo Freire’s educational thinking with the view to shedding some light on the political potential of P4C, especially in regions like Latin America but also wherever neoliberal discourse has infiltrated educational policy. The ultimate message is that both P4C practitioners interested in democracy and those concerned with social justice would benefit from taking to heart Paulo Freire’s message with regard to the political role of the educator.

## The Relationship Between Paulo Freire and Matthew Lipman

it’s really impossible to teach how to think more critically  
by just making a speech about critical thought.

P. Freire. In: Horton and Freire (1990: 173)

in trying to create something inside of history

we have to begin to have some dreams.

P. Freire. In: Horton and Freire (1990: 64)

Some efforts have been made, mainly from Latin American scholars, to show the parallels between Matthew Lipman and Paulo Freire.<sup>1</sup> Among the most enthusiastic supporters of these connections is Marcos Lorieri, former Director of the Brazilian Center of Philosophy for Children (CBFC) and Professor at the Catholic University of São Paulo (PUC-SP), where Paulo Freire taught.<sup>2</sup> Lorieri sees methodological and theoretical affinities, based on the shared idea of dialogue and the common emphasis on the social construction of knowledge.<sup>3</sup> A member of the Secretary of Education of the State of Mato Grosso at Cuiaba, Mabel Weimer (1998) developed a teacher education program that explores the relationship between Lipman and Freire. Wonsowicz (1993) and Giacomassi (2009) also see dialogical teaching as the key point of connection between them.

In other Latin American countries, similarities were also found by Accorinti (2002) who sees a common project, basically under the ideas of autonomy, freedom and multidimensional thinking. In the same line of argument, Parra Contreras and Medina Fuenmayor (2007) sees the connection in the common aspiration of the formation of “citizen values” through communities of inquiry (Lipman) inspired by active silence, and the pedagogy of the question (Freire). In Spain, Barrientos (2013) edited a book under the suggestive title of *Philosophy for Children and Freirian Democratic Training* but the collection of essays asserts rather than gives evidence of the similarities between both paradigms.

In the Anglo-Saxon world, two well-known Philosophy for Children scholars, Costello and Morehouse (2012), have seen a “close affinity” between Freire’s problem-posing education, on the one side, and communities of inquiry and developing philosophical thinking in schools inspired by Lipman on the other side. Costello and Morehouse advocate for the teaching of a philosophically inspired “liberating pedagogy” in schools (2012: 7).

In spite of all these attempts, I would suggest that the connections between

Lipman and Freire is not as close and deep as many participants of the Philosophy for Children movement, especially Latin Americans (including myself) would have desired and expected. I am referring not just to their personal relationship, but to the connections between their educational thinking and practice. Let's see why.

The most compelling and nearly unique evidence to support a connection between them emerges from Lipman himself, in the following paragraphs of his autobiography (2008):

While discussing Philosophy for Children within a global context, I'd be remiss if I did not take note of Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, who had developed a global reputation as a result of his having bent his philosophical acumen to the service of the education of children. In particular, he aimed to utilize the skills of philosophical discussion in such ways that they could improve the most humble, but at the same time, most powerful of children's skills: reading and writing. Latin American educators were quick to note the similarities that existed between Freire's educational approach and that of the IAPC's Philosophy for Children and could be found wondering which of the two of us, Paulo Freire or myself, was the primary influence on the other.

In 1988 the Brazilian curriculum developer, Catherine Young Silva, arranged a meeting between myself and Freire, to take place in Freire's home in São Paulo. It was a friendly visit, in which Freire did most of the talking and devoted his remarks to the influence of the history of philosophy on his educational thinking, thereby recognizing that I have done the same, so that our accomplishments ran parallel in many respects.

It was a thoughtful, congenial conversation, and I don't think we discovered any points of sharp glaring difference between us. From Freire's great window, we could see, far off, the skyline of São Paulo, rising above the city and yet focusing our imagination on the road ahead. Freire's last application of his views was to be found in his becoming

Brazil's Secretary of Education, although even in that exalted position, it was doubtful that the Brazilian educational system could be readily turned around. Nevertheless, thanks to Catherine Young Silva and her family, thousands of Brazilian teachers and hundreds of thousands of Brazilian children have been introduced to philosophy. (Lipman 2008: 148)

In spite of Lipman's efforts to fulfill our expectations, the quote speaks for itself: Lipman is imprecise about Freire, who was not Brazil's Secretary of Education but of the city of São Paulo and, more significantly, even though certainly Freire's worries included children, he, in fact, concentrated his efforts not so much in the education of children but in adult's education (Horton and Freire 1990, 47). More specifically, Freire aimed to empower the humblest through developing their reading capacities. For Freire, reading was not mainly a thinking skill, but an existential form of being. His aim was mainly to educate the illiterate "oppressed" not mainly in the reading of words but in the reading of the world. Only such reading can create a path to consciousness [*conscientização*, in Portuguese (Horton and Freire 1990, 31)].

Lipman affirms that there were no "points of sharp glaring difference" in the conversation, but from this quote, the only evident coincidence is a parallel in their accomplishments based mainly on the influences of the history of philosophy in their educational thinking. Though the aesthetic and poetic reference to the skyline of São Paulo may make us consider similar educational goals between them, the quote doesn't enable us to go much further.

There is another reference from Lipman to this same conversation with Freire in an interview given in 1994 to a Brazilian Newspaper (Carvalho 1994). The journalist asks Lipman his opinion about "Paulo Freire's method" and Lipman responds as follows:

We met when I was in Brazil some years ago. He talked to me about the similarities in what we did. His interest in the formation of communities of work in order to arrive to literacy is very close to our interest in forming communities of inquiry to make children arrive to a social solidarity that

might improve their education”.

The reference to the shared conversation is a bit different here, with Lipman seeing a parallel between communities of inquiry and Freire’s reading circles. But again, this addition does not help us to glean much more with regard to the relationship. It even incorporates a rather rare concept in Lipman’s work, i.e., social solidarity, which prompts a desire to understand more of what he intended by this reference.

Apart from this pleasant conversation, there is no real contact between both of them. In fact, Freire does not make a single concrete reference to Lipman or P4C in his entire work and in Lipman’s main books, there is only one reference to *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Lipman et al. 1980). But Freire did not appear even in the bibliography of his other books. So, in spite of our desires, it seems evident that Lipman’s ideas had no obvious influence on Freire nor Freire’s ideas on Lipman. We can only indicate that both of them had some readings in common (like Dewey, Buber or Merleau-Ponty) which may explain some of the similarities many have found in both oeuvres.

In addition, different voices also call to look more cautiously to this relationship. Already in 1999, Gadotti, Freire’s most eminent disciple, and Director of the Freire Institute at São Paulo, participated in a Debate (with Sharp, Kennedy and Lorieri) on the Educational Presuppositions of Philosophy for Children at the IX International Conference of Philosophy for Children, hosted at the University of Brasilia. Though Gadotti saw many common points between Freire and Lipman, he also saw the following differences (Gadotti 1999): (a). Freire emphasizes, much more than Lipman, the ideological issue, even when he refers to ethics; (b) Freire does not give, as Lipman does, such importance to a given method; (c) there appears to be more emphasis on the importance of rationality in P4C; and (d) Freire would not accept the distinction between teachers, and teacher-trainers or specialists (as it would imply a functionalist perspective of teaching). I, too, have made similar points (Author 2000). As well, Sofiste (2010) points out that even though there is a great convergence between the ideas of community of inquiry (Lipman) and dialogue (Freire), there are two main discrepancies: a) even though both consider the main goal of education to achieve a democratic society, the understanding of democracy is very different in both cases; b) Freire’s “critical



consciousness” involves scientific rigor and political engagement, but only the former is present in Lipman educational thought. Magalhães also shows some differences between them and, inspired by both of them, develops philosophical experiences through popular education with street children in the Brazilian State of Alagoas (2008: 104ff.).

Nevertheless, the most critical approach concerning the relationship between Lipman and Freire is offered by Silveira (1998) in the context of his critique of Lipman’s program itself. Based on what in Brazil is known as “Historic and Critical Pedagogy”, a Gramscian approach to education, Silveira called them “opposed pedagogies” (Silveira 1998: 377) in terms of their critique of traditional education, their concept of dialogue, curriculum, their understanding of thinking, common sense, the political function of their projects, cultural values, the role of the teacher, and pedagogical scenarios (Silveira 1998: 377–400). In all these approaches, Silveira identifies opposed perspectives. To take just one example, for those who follow Lipman’s original program, the teacher does not participate in the formulation of the program which is already given with its text, main ideas, discussion plans and exercises. This would be unacceptable to Freire, who believed that the teacher should actively participate in all the domains of their task. Lipman would reduce the task of the teacher to a more practical one whereas, according to Freire’s notion of *praxis*, theory and practice are impossible to separate. The division of labor between the philosopher who thinks and conceives the program and the teacher who applies it is a symptom of an oppressive conception. This same position is taken by Oliveira, who called the role of the teacher the Achilles’ heel of Lipman’s program, given the reproductive and alienated nature of their task in it (Oliveira 2009: 168).

A recent work by Funston (2017) takes a different approach. Presented as an attempt to integrate philosophy for children (P4C) and critical pedagogy, it considers the communities of inquiry capable of working with questions of agency and freedom that are essential to critical pedagogy and specifically to the work of Paulo Freire. Funston perceives the common critique of traditional or banking education as the shared agreement between P4C and Freire, though he also acknowledges differences between the community of inquiry and the cultural circles and their concepts of critical thinking. Funston suggests that a teacher in a community of inquiry has a higher epistemic authority than the coordinator of the cultural circles.

While P4C considers critical thinking as a set of reasoning skills, critical pedagogy goes beyond this, meaning that critical thinking puts into question the unfairness of the *status quo*, i.e., thinking critically means thinking politically (Funston 2017: 10–11). As a result, Funston proposes a synthesis of philosophy for children and Paulo Freire called “critical P4C,” i.e., a more politically committed version of P4C.

AQ3

## Freire and Lipman from a Contemporary Political Context in Education

### Freire, Teaching, Learning, and the Political in Times of Learnification

I have nothing against teaching. But I have many things against teaching in an authoritarian way.

P. Freire. In: Horton and Freire (1990: 193)

An educator should never become an expert.

M. Horton. In: Horton and Freire (1990: 128)

We live in difficult and complex educational times. At the XVIII ICPIC Conference, in Madrid, June 30, 2017, Biesta described the educational present in terms of instrumentalism and measurement (Biesta 2017: 415) and the domain of what he calls *learnification*. Biesta has been working largely with this critique of neoliberal education (2006, 2013, 2015), criticizing the process by which education is reduced and centered on the learner, and the language of education has been replaced by the language of learning (Biesta 2006: 13). He points out that the school has been redefined as a learning environment, where nothing is taught other than the facilitation of learning—a policy supported by national and international policy documents that focus on the concept of learning; and education of adults is now “Lifelong learning.” According to Biesta, there are certainly positive aspects to these shifts, which at least responds to authoritarian and one-side forms of education that affirmed teaching as an act of control (2017: 422). But there are also less positive aspects, mainly the fact that

the language of learning facilitates a description of the educational process as an economic transaction in which the learner is the consumer and the teacher the provider (Biesta 2006: 14). From this perspective, the individual learner might be highlighted as entrepreneur, and values such as competition, merit, and talent might be prized, while others like cooperation, equality and solidarity are absent. Due to this “learnification,” educational discourse has given up the discussion of essential educational issues about content, purposes and relationships. According to Biesta, “the language of learning has taken attention away from these crucial educational concerns”. (Biesta 2017: 422). How do these concerns relate to Freire?

At a first glance this critique seems to apply to anyone who defends a learner centered pedagogy. In spite of this, we need to consider the issue more carefully. For Paulo Freire, teaching and learning are political acts and they cannot be grasped merely with a technical or pedagogical definition. Education cannot be apolitical, politically neutral or aseptic. At this point, he agrees with another great twentieth century educator, Myles Horton, with whom he shared a wonderful spoken book (Horton and Freire 1990). Horton voices what he shares with Freire in the following way: “Neutrality is just following the crowd. Neutrality is just being what the system asks us to be. Neutrality, in other words, is an immoral act” (Horton and Freire 1990: 102). Not recognizing this politicism of education would be taking a political position; the one that contributes to the maintenance of the status quo. This viewpoint can be found in both the early Freire of the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and in the later Freire of *Pedagogy of Hope* and *Pedagogy of Freedom*.

Freire’s philosophical and theological sources have been widely studied (Dale and Hyslop-Margison 2010; Kirylo and Boyd 2017). As Freire points out (1997), the inspiration of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is clearly and explicitly Marxism and Christianity. The book is in fact a social and political critique of Brazilian geopolitics and also of the role of intellectuals in the liberation of people. Educational terms like school, student and curriculum appear relatively few times. Education is understood more as a social liberating force than as a specific institution or system. In that respect, there are two forms of education juxtaposed: banking and problem-posing (Freire 1987). The former (with a transmission model, the teacher depositing knowledge in the mind of the

ignorant student, Freire 1987: 53) serves to perpetuate oppression. The latter (with a dialogical model with everyone teaching and learning to and from each other by the mediation of the world) gives the oppressed (and, eventually, the oppressors) not only the consciousness of their condition, but also the desire to transform it.<sup>4</sup> The banking model is what we have in our actual educational systems, and it can be present even in revolutionary programs, under the most noble ideals.

It is important to notice that the principles, the means and the end of a Freirean education are political: (a) the end: a non-oppressive society, with no oppressed and oppressors; (b) the path, the revolutionary teacher under a problem-posing education and true dialogue as a “radical exigency of every authentic revolution” (Freire 1987: 149); and (c) the principle (which is not explicitly mentioned but underlines the whole *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*): that “any human being can learn to read (words but mainly the world) if provided with the appropriate conditions to do so.”

How does education work as a force in the search for liberation? What’s the secret of problem posing education? “Nobody educates anyone; nobody educates oneself, human beings are educated among themselves, mediated by the world “ (1987: 39). This emblematic phrase of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is extraordinary and complex. It denies that education comes from another subject (the teacher) or from oneself (the student). Where does it come from then? From the dialogical relationship established between educators and students, based on a shared reading of the world that this dialogue offers and which a democratic and non-hierarchical relationship makes possible.

It cannot be implied from this, however, that teaching disappears. Quite the contrary: in this kind of education, the role of teaching and of the teacher remains fundamental even though it is no more a fixed subject but a relative position in the educational relationship. The one who teaches does not provide the knowledge that the learner lacks. This educational tension between the teacher and the student is resolved in such a way that both, teacher and student are knowledgeable and ignorant, and both teach and learn. The teacher, who knows how to dialogue, also occupies the place of learner and creates the conditions for the student to arrive at *conscientização* without being just the provider of such conscience. In a problem-posing education, the knowledge that matters is neither that of the

teacher nor that of the student, but that which is recreated between one and the other through a dialectical engagement of all the subjects in their reading of the world.

This juxtaposition that Freire presents suggests that one side can be described through such concepts as oppression, dehumanization, positivism, authoritarianism, while the other side can be described through such concepts as liberation, humanization, true scientific knowledge, and dialogue, problem-posing education. The pedagogical and political pathway from the former to the latter has two directions. First, the oppressed reveal their condition and become conscious of it through the perception of the “untested feasibility” which they previously didn’t even consider. In the second moment, they search for a way to put it into practice (Freire 1987: 110).<sup>5</sup> Once the oppressive reality is transformed, the contradiction between educator and educated is overcome in a dialogical relationship, and the pedagogy of the oppressed turns into a liberating pedagogy for every human being, oppressed and also oppressors (Freire 1987: 44).

The most delicate point is, though, as Biesta points it out, how can we activate the pedagogical and political pathway from oppression to liberation? (Biesta 2016) This is in a sense, the antinomy of emancipation: it cannot be given (by the teacher) because, in such case, it practices its own negation; but then, without this external “help” how can someone liberate oneself, escaping from the usual and, in a sense, comfortable oppression?

In fact, these ideas that Freire expressed in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* were constantly put into question by Freire himself throughout his pilgrimage around different educational realities during his sixteen years of exile (from 1964 to 1980; see Gadotti 2001), as well as in his return back to Brazil where, among other things, he was Secretary of Education of the city of São Paulo for more than two years and had a very concrete opportunity to put into practice his ideas on a large scale (see Torres 1994). As a result of this self-questioning process, he revisited the ideas of the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1992) in his book *Pedagogy of Hope* with the subtitle “A reencounter with the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1998) and, in 1996, *Pedagogy of Freedom* (1999), the last book published before his death in 1997.<sup>6</sup>

In both books, Freire is much more moderate but still politically clear. Changes appear in the means: revolution has given way to a less radical but still unconditioned commitment to the transformation of the *status quo* through educational praxis: “change is difficult, but not impossible” (Freire 1999: 30ff.). He no longer describes his perspective as revolutionary but as “progressive postmodernism” (Freire 1998: 77). Nevertheless, the principle and the ends, are still there and education is reaffirmed as political. And he reaffirms that teaching is not transmitting knowledge to the student but “creating the possibilities for its production or its construction” (1999: 24). And once again, “Those who teach learn when teaching and those who learn teach when they learn” (1999: 25).

In these later works, though, transmission of knowledge is less stigmatized and there is some positive space for it: teachers must now know what they teach (see also Horton and Freire 1990: 108), but what constitutes them more properly as teachers is placing their knowledge at the disposal of learning: of the learning of the others but also of their own learning. A teacher does not relate to those who learn as those who do not know, but as those with whom, while teaching, it is possible and necessary to learn. According to Freire, learning precedes teaching, not only because historically what was learned makes it possible to teach, but because learning gives legitimacy and meaning, both pedagogical and political, to teaching if learning allows the learners to recreate or redo what has been taught (1996: 26). As in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the teacher does not disappear but is re-signified and finds political legitimacy in a dialogical form of praxis.

In other words, what gives meaning, epistemological and political, to teaching is the way in which it cultivates the epistemological curiosity of the learner, their critical capacity, creative force, taste for rebellion, and epistemological vocation to “being more” (1996: 28)—as well as within themselves. A teaching that fosters no creation and rebellion, but conformism and submission, is politically undesirable and questionable.

Thus, although Paulo Freire reaffirmed the predominance of learning over teaching he is far from fostering learnification. His concept of learning shows that Biesta’s critique might be in some sense unspecific: it is not just about giving more importance to teaching or learning but about how both terms are understood. A recovery of teaching could also serve neoliberal

policies and, as we see in the case of Paulo Freire, the priority of learning can also be critical to neoliberalism. There is even a passage of *The Pedagogy of Hope* where Paulo Freire advises against the priority of learning in very close words to Biesta's. He says:

To teach, even from the progressive post-modernist point of view I speak of here, cannot be reduced to merely teaching students to learn through an operation in which the object of knowledge was the act of learning. Teaching to learn is only valid, from this point of view, it must be repeated, when *educandos* learn to learn by learning the *raison d'être* of the object or the content (1998: 77).

Learning cannot be reduced to a technical or instrumental activity, like learning thinking skills or using cognitive tools. Learning means understanding the *raison d'être* of what is learned, i.e., its social and political function, the ethical and aesthetical ideals it serves in the actual social world. In this way, education is political by the way in which teachers teach what they teach. In this sense, the distinction content/form needs to be reexamined: while the content of what is taught is important (it would be naïve to underestimate the importance of content), how it is taught is equally, perhaps even more important. Thus, exposure to transmitters of knowledge, who assume the role of the all-important giver, not only transfers/communicates knowledge to students but also transmits, as an unseen content, a way of seeing themselves, specifically as receivers of charity from their superiors. This charity could be traditional knowledge but also thinking skills. This process, unwittingly, nurtures a paradigm of how humans see one another, i.e., as those who know and those who need others in order to be able to know: a student not only learns knowledge (or thinking skills) but also learns a relationship to knowing (or thinking) and to themselves as someone who needs someone else (the knower, the expert in thinking) in order to know (or think). Paulo Freire denounced this process as oppressing and called teachers to be aware that how they interact with their students is as, or more, important than the content they transmit. This is where dialogical teaching plays an important role. When the learners learn through a dialogical process, the teacher also learns from them and they also teach the teacher. They learn to relate to themselves, their teacher and to their companions as equals, they learn the importance

of learning between equals and not as an inferior learning from a superior: They experience education as an egalitarian, cooperative and democratic form of social life, far from the dominant actual forms/systems of living in our times. In Paulo Freire's terms, they experience an educational practice that strengthens through a dialogical process the epistemological vocation of every human being "to be more".

To conclude, for Freire, education always carries with it a political force; one that can be empowering or debilitating. What is important in education, then, is not the transmission of knowledge or the lack of it, nor the means of communication. Ultimately, what really matters is the kind of interaction that transpires between the teacher and the learner, and between the learners themselves: are these relationships teaching hierarchy (oppression) or equality (liberation)? Are teachers and learners learning through dialogical and equalitarian relationship or are they learning an oppressive exercise of power? These questions suggest that neoliberalism may not be compatible with equality and dialogue between equals, i.e., that neoliberalism is not compatible with Paulo Freire.

## Lipman: Philosophy and the Political

No matter where this kind of educator works, the great difficulty

-or the great adventure! - is how to make education

something which, in being serious, rigorous, methodical,

and having a process, also creates happiness and joy.

P. Freire. In: Horton and Freire (1990: 170)

Let's consider now the political commitments of P4C. While writing my Ph.D. Dissertation, mentored by M. Lipman, I invented a dialogue with J. Dewey on the relationship between education, philosophy and democracy. I took direct quotes from different texts of Dewey and connected them through a series of questions. I showed this dialogue to Lipman, and his reaction was both enthusiastic and surprised (he didn't recognize some quotes as Deweyan). I asked Lipman if we could have a conversation on



the topics of the dialogue.<sup>7</sup> Because of the relevance of his responses to the topic of this paper, I will transcribe some parts and then comment on them:

WOK: How do you see Dewey's connection between philosophy, education and democracy?

ML: Between philosophy, education and democracy, I see inquiry as a common element. I insist in education as inquiry because students should be questioning, should be dealing with what is problematic in the world, attempting to reconstruct the situations and how to deal with them. Philosophy helps them to identify problems. Democracy has to employ inquiry in order to proceed just in an impartial fashion. If it only used political methods, like majority ruling, then it would probably not deal with issues that could deal through inquiry. I am not convinced that democracy is just a political notion.

WOK: Can you explain in what way democracy is a form of inquiry?

ML: When I talk about democracy as inquiry, I am talking about an ideal of democracy. We've got it already in a spotty way. For example, jurisprudence and law introduce rationality into the social process. I am not saying that they are rational institutions because the whole method of advocacy is based on confrontation and persuasion. Nevertheless, there is an effort there to achieve rationality.

[...]

WOK: How far are actual democracies from the ideal of democracy as inquiry?

ML: There is little inquiry going on. And that's not what we are doing in this country. We are not looking to discover the abuses of our democracy. We are looking to conceal them all most of the time (laughs).

WOK: Why is that?

ML: Because in this country we are very confused. We respect the notion and the ideal of democracy but we are afraid to see it in its confrontation to capitalism. There we just shrug and turn away, we don't want to talk about the fact that democracy and capitalism may be incompatible. Because we don't know at this point what other kind of economy we could have, we only have the big corporations. There is such a concentration of military and economic power...

WOK: Do you see democracy and capitalism as incompatible?

ML: I would say that theoretically there is no compatibility. Capitalism is destroying the environment and it is making human beings dispensable. Capitalism in its blind and powerful way just passes over and destroys, and it has very frightening aspects, but maybe some good things come out of it. Similarly, with democracy, maybe some bad things come out of it. Democracy may be good in some respects and not in others. Capitalism at certain times may have some justification.

WOK: Like which ones?

ML: Well, there are facts of experience that you don't want to deny. It is a fact that philosophy for children survives, that people learn about it. When I introduced P4C to the American Philosophical Association in 1973 they asked me: "What do you think will happen with this?" And I said in the meeting of perhaps 200 philosophers: "They will kill us." It hasn't happened, because democracy today is not a monolithic stone tower. It has all sort of cracks and caves and crevasses where people have a certain amount of freedom and protection. Thus, is not fair, because some people have more than others, and some are very vulnerable, exposed to the brutalities of the system, and some are protected as I am. So, there are many good things that have to be identified, acknowledged and built upon so

that we don't throw the baby out with the bath water when we have finished washing. But I really don't know.

WOK: Let me ask you the last question. What's the role of education in a democracy conceived as inquiry?

ML: Education is the institution in society that prepares us to be viable, not just to endure or to live but to live well, that's what eudaimonia means, to live well. Without education, we cannot live well. So, it is a very important institution and that's why there is so much fighting around it, everyone wants control on it. In an ideal society, it would be a very powerful institution, much more powerful than economic institutions.

In the first part of the conversation, Lipman emphasizes democracy, education and philosophy as forms of inquiry. Philosophy explores, in its educational dimension, the problematic dimension of experience. Democracy employs inquiry to proceed in "an impartial fashion". At the same time, when asked to unfold his conception of democracy as inquiry, Lipman introduces jurisprudence and law as efforts to introduce rationality in the social process. Even though he is not explicit here, it seems that what jurisprudence or law does or rather should do is to practice what in other places Lipman calls reasonableness, i.e., reason tempered by judgment. What concept of reason is underlying Lipman's perspective? Lipman distinguishes between rationality and reasonableness (Lipman 2001). The former is critical thinking, formal and informal logic, with its inquiry, concept formation, translation and reasoning skills. The latter is higher-order thinking: critical plus creative and caring thinking.

Lipman makes it explicit that he is not referring to actual practices but to ideals. According to Lipman, in an ideal educational setting, children should be exploring in a democratic (impartial) and philosophical (problematizing) way. When questioned about actual democracy, Lipman suggests that in USA ("in this country") the abuses of the democracy system are not confronted, but concealed. He suggests a theoretical incompatibility between democracy and capitalism and articulates a clear vision of the destructive forces of capitalism, of its unfairness and brutalities. Nonetheless, he does not consider it irrational: the

incompatibility between democracy and Capitalism seems to be ethical (and political), not logical. Capitalism is rational, logically coherent. It is just ethically (and politically) not acceptable. It is not reasonable.

Capitalism in its present corporate form maintains life, Lipman suggests, because we can't think of other economic alternatives.

So the issue for Lipman turns to be: how can we move from actual democracies to ideal ones. How can we turn our “confused” and “afraid” forms of life into ones based on an impartial inquiry? For this task, Lipman seems to rely on education: it is through the reform of our educational systems that real democratic citizens would be formed. And Philosophy for Children has a special role in the educational reform (Lipman 1988): helping our children to be more reasonable citizens of a future democracy.

The question is: can (or should) Philosophy for Children actually take sides on democracy versus Capitalism? In order to do that, should P4C enable children to realize the destructive forces of Capitalism? If so, then P4C has failed in this regard. Indeed, there are few obvious opportunities that give rise to questioning the ills of Capitalism or the potential clash between Capitalism and Democracy with the possible exception of *Mark*, a late high school program. Given that this is the case, there is the potential danger that P4C facilitators might support the glories of Capitalism, while still believing themselves to be developing the critical, creative and caring thinking skills developed by the Program.

So, even though Lipman and Freire might have similar perspectives concerning the destructive forces of Capitalism, their educational ideas with respect to the issue are very different. While Lipman has defended terms like “neutral”, “impartial” or “self-effaced” to describe the position of the teacher, whom he calls “facilitator”, Freire has been emphatically challenging neutrality and arguing that the teacher should take sides with the oppressed.

## At the End, a New Beginning

I always am in the beginning, as you.

P. Freire. In: Horton and Freire (1990: 56).

We do not need to “throw the baby out with the bath water” as Lipman advises. Then again, if we really believe that educational philosophy can contribute to good life, it cannot be impartial or insensitive to the destructive forces of Capitalism. We need to reconsider the way our philosophical practices affirm education as political and to inhabit a different rationality; one committed to equality and difference, and to justice and freedom. We also need to rethink the politics in education (and philosophy). What approach can we take? There are a number of roads to consider. Freire might be an inspiration for it, as Funston (2017) suggests. But there are other paths to explore Freire’s inspiration other than critical pedagogy.

One is to follow the decolonial turn, opening, for example, a “mestiza rationality” (Anzaldúa 1999), one of the sensual body, “full of feelings, of emotions, of tastes” (Horton and Freire 1990: 23). It needs to be a rationality sensible to different forms of being of the “oppressed” (to use Freirean terms), which would also include LGBT, Indian, Black, and women and children: a rationality sensitive to contradiction and ambiguity. In the P4C world, this path has been carried by Chetty (2017) who has questioned Lipman’s notion of reasonableness in situations constituted by structural inequality, where racially minorities might feel coerced by what he calls (building in Burbules 2000) a “hegemonic reasonableness”. Another possibility involves an undoing of identity: a queering of a number of dualisms like teaching/learning, child/adult, mind/body for which feminist post-humanists might be inspiring. This is a path already exercised by Murriss, who problematizes the figures of the child as substance with essence (2016), and who deterritorialises the human/nonhuman interaction in pedagogical practice beyond the dominant flows of cognitive Capitalism, especially in the case of the language by which we refer to those practices (Murriss and Haynes 2018).

One more option would be interrupting the Capitalist fluxes that inhabit the educational system by affirming a different form of school, inspired by the Greek notion of *scholē* (see Masschelein and Simons 2013) or in Latin American popular education tradition (like Simón Rodríguez (2001), see also Author 2015). Another alternative would be to trouble the already troubled, cloudy and chronological experience of time cultivated by learnification in our educational institutions, and promote the conditions to disturb and diffract (Barad, forthcoming) time and decolonize childhood

(Rollo 2016). In other words, to interrupt the chronological time of colonization and capitalism that has captured our experience of schooling and childhood, and create the conditions to experience other times, which means other forms of social life.

#### AQ4

Of course, all these paths are not exhaustive nor, to some extent, irreconcilable. The paths and the forms to find and walk them are open: we make the road by walking (Horton and Freire 1990). Philosophy and politics are inspirations to walk the road of education as Paulo Freire and Matthew Lipman did. In a depolitized present time, this paper may throw some light on the political potential of P4C. I've tried to show, with the help of Paulo Freire's contribution on the political role of the educator, that P4C's political potentiality is not actualized in P4C program. In other words, if P4C practitioners are interested in democracy and social justice, the program is not enough. What could be done in order to actualize such potentiality? I've suggested a number of options. But as we can also learn from Paulo Freire, each educator should build her own path. There is always time, a non-chronological time, to begin to walk differently.

#### AQ5

## Acknowledgements

The author thanks Susan Gardner and Jason Wozniak for their suggestions and English revision of this paper. The author also thanks xxxx for her tremendous help in making this paper readable in English.

## Funding

This research was funded by National Council of Research of Brazil (CNPq; Grant No. 202447/2017-0) and Foundation Carlos Chagas Filho Research Support of the State of Rio de Janeiro (FAPERJ; Grant No. E26/203042/2015).

## References

Accorinti, Stella. 2002. Matthew Lipman y Paulo Freire: Conceptos para la libertad. *Utopía y Praxis Latinoamericana*. Maracaibo 7(18): 35–56.

Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1999. *Borderlines. La frontera*. San Francisco: Aunt

Lute Books.

Author. 1997.

AQ6

Author. 1999.

Author. 2000.

Author. 2014.

Author. 2015.

Author. 2016.

AQ7

Barad, Karen. forthcoming. Troubling time/s and ecologies of nothingness: on the im/possibilities of living and dying in the void. In *Eco-deconstruction. Derrida and environmental philosophy*, ed. M. Fritsch, P. Lynes, and D. Wood. New York: Fordham U Press.

AQ8

Barrientos, José. 2013. *Filosofía para Niños y Capacitación Democrática Freireana*. Madrid: Liber Factory.

Biesta, Gert. 2017. Touching the soul? Exploring an alternative outlook for philosophical work with children and young people. *Childhood & Philosophy* 13(28): 415–452.

Biesta, Gert, and Barbara Stengel. 2016. Thinking philosophically about teaching. In *Handbook of research on teaching*. 5th ed. D.H. Gittomer, and C.A. Bell, 7–68. Washington, DC: AERA.

Biesta, Gert. 2015. Freeing teaching from learning: Opening up existential possibilities in educational relationships. *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 34(3): 229–243.

Biesta, Gert. 2014. *The beautiful risk of education*. Colorado: Paradigm Publishers.

Biesta, Gert. 2013. Receiving the gift of teaching: From ‘learning from’ to ‘being taught by’. *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 32(5): 449–461.

Biesta, Gert. 2006. *Beyond learning. Democratic education for a human future*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.

Cardoso, Ana Lucilia. 2011. *Educação para o pensar: o lugar do diálogo na teoria e na prática lipmaniana*. Master dissertation. São João del Rei: Universidade Federal de São João del Rei.

Carvalho, Bernardo. 1994. Jogos cotidianos e lições metafísicas. Matthew Lipman fala sobre seu método de ensino. *Folha de São Paulo*. Caderno Mais. 1/5/1994.

Chetty, Daren. 2017. Philosophy for children, learnification and intelligent adaptive systems—A response to Gert Biesta. *Childhood & Philosophy* 13(28): 471–480.

Costello, Patrick, and Richard Morehouse. 2012. Liberation philosophy and the development of communities of inquiry: A critical evaluation. *Analytic Teaching and Philosophical Praxis* 33(2): 1–7.

Cruz, Ana Luisa. 2013. Paulo Freire’s Concept of Conscientização. In *Paulo Freire’s intellectual roots: Toward historicity in praxis*, ed. R. Lake and T. Kress, 169–182. London: Bloomsbury.

Dale, John, and Emery Hyslop-Margison. 2010. *Paulo Freire: Teaching for freedom and transformation. The Philosophical Influences on the Work of Paulo Freire*. New York: Springer.

Freire, Paulo. 1987. *Pedagogia do Oprimido*. São Paulo: Paz e Terra.

Freire, Paulo. 1997. Última entrevista (PUC São Paulo, São Paulo, 17/4/97). <http://www.paulofreire.ufpb.br/paulofreire/Controle?op=detalheandtipo=Videoandid=622>. Accessed 11 Oct 2017.

Freire, Paulo. 1998. *Pedagogia da Esperança. Um reencontro com a Pedagogia do Oprimido*. São Paulo: Paz e Terra.



Freire, Paulo. 1999. *Pedagogia da autonomia*. São Paulo: Paz e Terra.

Funston, James. 2017. Toward a critical philosophy for children. *PSU McNair Scholars Online Journal*.

<https://doi.org/10.15760/mcnair.2017.05>.

Gadotti, Moacir. 1999. A Filosofia para crianças e jovens e as perspectivas atuais da educação. In *Filosofia para crianças em debate*. ed. Kohan, Walter and Bernardina Leal. Petrópolis: Vozes.

Gadotti, Moacir. 2001. *Paulo Freire. Uma biobibliografia*. Cortez: São Paulo.

Giacomassi, Rejane. 2009. Diálogo e investigação filosófica com crianças. *IX Congresso Nacional de Educação (EDUCERE)*. Curitiba: PUC-Paraná.

Henning, Leoni Maria Padilha. 2005. O pragmatismo em Lipman e sua influência na América Latina. *Childhood & Philosophy* 1(2): 445–471.

Horton, Myles, and Paulo Freire. 1990. *We made the road by walking*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Kirylo, James T., and Drick Boyd. 2017. *Paulo Freire His faith, spirituality, and theology*. Rotterdam: Sense.

Lipman, Matthew. 1988. *Philosophy goes to school*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Lipman, Matthew. 1992. On writing a philosophical novel. In *Studies in philosophy for children. Harry Stottlemeier's discovery*, ed. Sharp, Ann Margaret, and Ronald Reed. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Lipman, Matthew. 2001. *Thinking in education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lipman, Matthew. 2008. *A life teaching thinking. An autobiography*. Montclair: IAPC.

Lipman, Matthew, Ann Margaret Sharp, and Frederick Oscanyan. 1980. *Philosophy in the Classroom*. 2nd ed. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Magalhães, Daniel Alves. 2008. *A filosofia pragmatista na educação popular*. Doctoral dissertation. João Pessoa: Universidade Federal da Paraíba.

Murris, Karin. 2016. *The Posthuman child: Educational transformation through philosophy with picturebooks*. London: Routledge.

Murris, Karin, and Joanna Haynes. 2018. *Literacies, literature and learning*, 2018. London: Routledge.

Oliveira, Marines Barbosa de. 2009. *Professores de Filosofia para crianças: quem são eles? Uma análise crítico-diagnóstica da construção da identidade profissional dos professores que trabalham com o Programa Filosofia para Crianças de Matthew Lipman*. Campinas: UNICAMP.

Parra Contreras, Reyber and Medina Fuenmayor, Jesús. 2007. La comunidad de investigación y la formación de ciudadanos: Consideraciones a partir del pensamiento de Matthew Lipman y Paulo Freire. *Telos*, 9. <http://artificialwww.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=99314566006>. Accessed December 04, 2017.

Rollo, Toby. 2016. Feral children: Settler colonialism, progress, and the figure of the child. *Settler Colonial Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2201473X.2016.1199826>.

Silveira, René José Trentin. 1998. *A Filosofia vai à escola? Estudo do Programa de Filosofia para Crianças de Matthew Lipman*. Doctoral dissertation. Campinas: UNICAMP.

Sofiste, Juarez Gomes. 2010. Freire e Lipman. Possibilidades e limites de uma aproximação. *Revista Ética e Filosofia Política* 12(1): 71–87.

Torres, Carlos. 1994. Paulo Freire as secretary of education in the municipality of São Paulo. *Comparative Education Review* 38: 181–

214.

Weimer, Mabel. Strobel Moreira. 1998. *Uma interlocução entre Paulo Freire e Matthew Lipman na educação pública: educando para o pensar*. Master dissertation. Cuiabá, MT: Universidade Federal de Mato Grosso.

Wonsowicz, Silvio. 1993. A comunidade de investigação e diálogo. Uma incursão em Paulo Freire e na essência do Programa de Filosofia para Crianças. *Philosophy* 1(1): 23–29.

---

<sup>1</sup> On the most general impact of Lipman's ideas in Latin America, see Henning (2005) and Author (2002, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> The CBFC was created in 1985 at São Paulo by Catherine Young Silva. After more than twenty years in existence, it was closed and now the Institute of Philosophy and Education for Thinking continues its work at Curitiba, directed by Darcisio Muraro (<http://www.philosletera.org.br/>). Many other philosophical programs with children are carried on within public and private Universities and schools throughout Brazil.

<sup>3</sup> In private correspondence, Lorieri affirmed that the TV of the Catholic University of São Paulo intended to record another conversation between Lipman and Freire that would take place in the United States in August 1997. Unfortunately, Paulo Freire died some few months before, on May 2, 1997.

<sup>4</sup> Cruz shows the complexity of the concept of *conscientização* and distinguishes several different levels of it, according to Freire: (magical) semi-intransitive; naive transitive and critical transitive (2013: 173).

<sup>5</sup> Unless originally published in English, I am reading Freire's works in the original Portuguese with my translation.

<sup>6</sup> A more literal translation would be *Pedagogy of Autonomy* (*Pedagogia da autonomia*).

<sup>7</sup> Both conversations are included in English as appendix to my Dissertation ("Pensando la filosofía en la educación de los niños" Iberoamericana University, 1996) and are both published in Portuguese (Author 1999) and Spanish (Author 1997) and unpublished in English.