

Importance of Teaching Philosophy and Ethics in the Light of the Challenges of Future Education

Paweł Walczak

Ph.D., Assistant Professor, University of Zielona Góra (Zielona Góra, Poland)

E-mail: p.walczak@ifil.uz.zgora.pl

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8541-0396>

Walczak, Paweł (2020) Importance of Teaching Philosophy and Ethics in the Light of the Challenges of Future Education. *Future Human Image*, Volume 14, 102-107. <https://doi.org/10.29202/fhi/14/12>

The philosophical inquiry method (P4C) can be an appropriate tool to support the development of pupils' competencies that are desirable in education for the future. Compared to other well-known methods of teaching philosophy and ethics, such as historical, doctrinal, or problematic methods, P4C seems to be the method best suited both for the early stages of education and for the needs and abilities of students. The analysis of the goals and tasks facing contemporary education shows that a modern school in order to prepare its students for good functioning in contemporary society should pay more attention to competencies related to critical and creative thinking, the ability to search and select knowledge, creative problem solving and social skills such as cooperation and empathy. Empirical research is also in favour of a wider application of the research method in teaching. The results of the research presented in the article provide evidence that a program of philosophical research with children and young people can be a good tool for shaping and improving skills related to intellectual and social-emotional development.

Keywords: philosophical education, ethics education, philosophical inquiry, Mathew Lipman, philosophy for children, system of education

Received: 15 August 2020 / Accepted: 18 September 2020 / Published: 3 November 2020

Introduction

Methodological reflection is aimed at finding an appropriate teaching method, taking into account the goals of education and the needs and capabilities of the students who are to achieve the skills and knowledge. Therefore, the question about the place of ethics in contemporary education should be posed in the context of the expectations and challenges posed by modern education, trends in the contemporary world, as well as changing teaching conditions. It is now more obvious than ever that the need to revise the knowledge of competencies and skills

that modern schools graduates should be equipped with. Teachers come across more and more resistance from students when their teaching methods and measures are anachronistic, conservative, inadequate to the current knowledge of the psychology of teaching and the contemporary student. A methodology based on a philosophical inquiry program seems to be extremely attractive support for ethical and philosophical education in this context. Both the didactic goals assigned to the philosophical inquiry method and the methodology itself can be perceived as an extremely effective tool, responding to the expectations of modern education and tailored to the specific needs and student's capabilities.

The first part of the article is an analysis of the method of philosophical research in the context of contemporary educational goals. Then I will describe contemporary educational research, indicating the effectiveness of the method of philosophical inquiry.

Purposes of the philosophical inquiry program

Matthew Lipman, the author of the program *Philosophy for Children*, pointed out that the program's main goal is to "help them acquire the ability to think independently" (Lipman et al., 1980: 78). He argued that the education system does not sufficiently support students in developing natural critical and creative thinking skills, not only by failing to teach but also by suppressing children's natural tendency to problematise experience creatively. In his teaching work with students at Columbia University, Lipman concluded that students' logical and communicative skills are very limited. He believed that this was due to negligence and mistakes made at earlier levels of education. The program created by Lipman and his colleagues was to be an important complement and support for the school at all stages of education.

In describing the program's aims, Lipman primarily mentions the development of reasoning skills, which includes all basic logic, argumentation, and communication skills. The development of such skills strengthens students' sense of reason and helps them see the order in a seemingly chaotic experience. Lipman is convinced that when we help children discover in their experience the relationship between the part and the whole, they will be able to find the meaning of each experience. Discovering impartiality, alternatives, consequences, justifications for beliefs, discovering the versatility of situations, relations between the part and the whole — all of this helps the discovery of meaning (Lipman et al., 1980: 6). Moreover, the program also aims to develop a creative attitude, personal and interpersonal development, as well as the development of competence, which Lipman describes as moral thinking. Therefore, the school's task is to develop skills that will enable the student to recognise a problem of a moral nature, define it adequately, make a rational assessment, and make the appropriate decision. Moral thinking is the basis for moral behaviour. Lipman states that it is not a matter of instilling moral principles in children but of familiarising them with what is called the practice of ethical inquiry. It must be made clear that we are trying to help children understand the essence of moral judgment, so we do not force children to make moral choices (Lipman et al., 1980: 95). The point, then, is that moral decisions and actions should not be accidental, but the fruit of reflection, of judgment, based on a logical foundation. According to Lipman, it is precisely the development of this skill that schools do not support, and the task of philosophical and ethical inquiry is to fill this gap.

The Polish version of the program of philosophical research, which was created by a group of authors by modifying and adapting Lipman's project to Polish education, includes a number of competencies and skills, the development of which is the goal of the program (Elwich et

al., 1999). Among the logical competencies, the improvement of mental and linguistic skills, such as reading comprehension, creative literacy, questioning and solving problems, using criteria, justifying, explaining, classifying, examining assumptions, reasoning, defining, using examples, are emphasised. They are acquiring the ability to make independent and thoughtful judgments, which is born out of developing these skills, meeting the multiplicity and diversity of beliefs and views on the world, criticising and justifying one's own and others' judgments in the process of dialogue in an inquiry community. Among the communication and social skills, the authors mention the development of communication skills, understood as the ability to express oneself clearly, listen to others and respond to their statements, shaping the ability to cooperate in a group, dialogue, tolerance and openness, as well as developing social, moral and aesthetic sensitivity. Important skills shaped by the method of inquiry are those related to the student's self-awareness and self-esteem. Therefore, the task of the inquiry is to develop the student's ability to insight into their own cognitive processes to improve and enrich them, e.g., to identify errors in reasoning and compare different styles of thinking. In addition, the student develops a sense of responsibility for his or her own learning as a result of gaining insight into the cognitive processes and developing the student's personal interests, and integrating subject knowledge from different disciplines (Elwich et al., 1999: 6).

New challenges for education

Ken Robinson, in the book *Creative Schools*, analyses contemporary education systems in the context of cultural and social changes (Robinson & Aronica, 2016). According to Robinson, the transformation of education requires the setting of new educational goals and the identification of new key competencies adapted to today's requirements. He formulates educational goals and related skills, which should be characterised by a person functioning well in the contemporary world. It indicates an economic, cultural, social, and personal goal. Firstly, education should create conditions for students to achieve financial independence and economic responsibility (economic goal). Secondly, education should create conditions for students to understand and appreciate their own culture and to respect the diversity of other cultures (cultural goal). Next — education should create conditions for young people to become active and sensitive citizens (social goal). Finally, education should create conditions for young people to connect with both their inner world and the world around them (personal goal).

These goals set the direction of education, whose primary function should be to support students in the development of certain skills that are fundamental to modern men, such as curiosity, creativity, criticism, communication, cooperation, compassion, peace, and civic attitudes.

According to Robinson, curiosity is the ability to ask questions and discover how the world works and, as such, is the main driver of human achievement and progress. It is present in the childhood pursuit of discovering the world, testing, checking, asking questions about everything that draws their attention. The task of education is to maintain this natural curiosity, nurture it, and skillfully guide it so that it leads students to independent exploration and deeper reflection. A curiosity that goes on with age is a guarantee of human development and, as Robinson says, "one of the greatest gifts that a school can give to its students" (Robinson & Aronica, 2016: 173).

Creativity is the ability to generate new ideas and put them into practice. This is an essential part of human nature; its development and strength allow a man to lead a happy life in which we follow the passions and talents we have discovered in ourselves. Creative thinking and actions in the modern world seem to be essential elements of human functioning in social, personal, and professional life.

On the other hand, criticism is the ability to analyse information and thoughts and formulate justified arguments and assessments. “It involves interpreting intentions, understanding contexts, perceiving hidden values and feelings, recognising motives, detecting biases, and presenting concise conclusions in the most appropriate form.” Communication is understood as the ability to express thoughts and feelings clearly and confidently through various forms, and means is a key competence in the modern world, dominated by means of communication. Being communicative is, on the one hand, the ability to express one’s thoughts clearly, clearly, and effectively, and on the other hand, the ability to listen, receive, understand and interpret the transmission of verbal and non-verbal messages. The ability to cooperate is also important, i.e., the ability to work constructively with others. While until recently, the economic world was dominated by the culture of individualism and competition, current trends are heading towards cooperation and collaboration.

Ken Robinson also places compassion and peace on the list of key skills necessary to function well in the world. For him, compassion is the ability to identify with others’ feelings and take appropriate action; it is practicing empathy. The author emphasises that “nurturing compassion is a moral, practical, and spiritual necessity.” On the other hand, Calm is the ability to connect to the inner world of feelings and develop a sense of personal harmony and balance. The education so far focused on learning about the natural world and social reality seemed to neglect the pupil’s inner life sphere.

Meanwhile, the way we function in the world is largely due to how we perceive ourselves and what we feel. Self-awareness, insight into one’s own emotions, ability to cope with stress, silence, and self-affirmation seem important skills for human life today. Therefore they should be included in the educational program.

Broadly understood civic attitudes are the ability to engage constructively in society and to participate in the processes that sustain it. Education is a place of civic training. A young person assimilates knowledge about society and, above all, experiences social norms’ functioning and engages in activities promoting democratic values.

Effectiveness of the philosophical inquiry method

In 2012-2014, a group of scientists from Durham University headed by Professor Steven Gorard carried out a project to research the effectiveness of the philosophical inquiry program (Gorard et al., 2015). The study of Durham University researchers, carried out in cooperation with SAPERE (Society for the Advancement of Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education), has been one of the largest in terms of the number of students covered so far. The main objective was to examine whether annual regular philosophical inquiry classes could lead students at Year 4 (8-9 years) and Year 5 (9-10 years) levels to improve achievement in mathematical, reading and writing skills, as well as in cognitive skills as measured by the CAT (Cognitive Abilities Test). Of the 48 participating schools, 22 schools formed an experimental group, and 26 schools a control group. In total, more than 3000 students participated in the experiment. In the experimental groups, regular P4C classes of 1 hour per week were conducted for 12 months. According to the SAPERE program, the lessons took place, whose structure is modeled on the Lipmann program, with some modifications. Teachers from experimental schools took part in a special two-day training conducted by SAPERE instructors.

Both quantitative and quantitative methods were used in the experiment. Among the quantitative methods, two tests were used to measure the results: the first one is the standard

Key Stage 2 test, which is used to measure students' progress in mathematics, reading, and writing, and the Cognitive Abilities Test (CAT). There are two measurements: a pre-test before class (December 2012) and a post-test after class (January 2014). The qualitative research consisted of an interview with students and teachers and researchers' observations according to a previously prepared questionnaire. The observers were interested in the changes in pupils' attitudes (mutual relations between students, students' relations with the teacher and the school, activity during lessons) and in teachers' attitudes (encouraging students to discuss, dominating the discussion, listening to students, asking questions, etc.). The observations were applied at the beginning and end of the project in selected schools.

The study's general conclusion is that the experiment has shown that pedagogical intervention through regular attendance at classes conducted using the philosophical inquiry method has had a positive impact on better student achievement. The KS2 tests showed that pupils participating in P4C classes were on average, two months ahead of pupils in normal lessons in their progress in reading and mathematics. At the same time, there was no evidence of improvement in writing, which is hardly surprising given these classes' nature. The authors of the study underline that P4C had the greatest positive impact on students' performance from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. In the CAT study, the skills studied are presented in 4 categories: verbal, non-verbal, quantitative, and spatial thinking. Considering the average scores, the experiment revealed a positive impact on verbal skills, while no significant positive changes were observed in the other categories, except for the group of Year 5 (9-10 years old) students, who were observed to have increased achievements in all categories. Surveys and observations showed that P4C had a positive impact on the improvement of many pupils' social and emotional skills, such as increased student attention, more frequent statements revealing their own beliefs, more patience when listening to others, balanced self-esteem. Some teachers also stressed that P4C had a positive impact on the overall engagement of students in the classroom and the tendency to ask more questions in other lessons too.

The second interesting research project carried out by researchers from Durham University was a study whose report was published in February 2017 (Siddiqui et al., 2017). This time, the study was entirely devoted to demonstrating the impact of philosophical research on the development of non-cognitive competencies such as social and communication skills, cooperation skills and empathy. The project involved 42 schools from different regions of England, of which 16 schools were an experimental group, 26 schools a control group. A total of 2722 students were surveyed. In the experimental groups, pupils from Years 4 and Years 5 took part in P4C classes of 1 hour per week for 18 months, from January 2014 to June 2016. In control schools, students followed a normal school curriculum. In this project, classes were also conducted according to the program developed by SAPERE. Before the beginning of the intervention, a 'pre-test' was carried out, which was repeated after the end of the intervention. At the same intervals, the tests were repeated in control groups. For the purpose of the test, a special test was constructed to show the level of social and emotional skills, the ability to cooperate and empathy. The test consisted of a list of statements; the students were asked to determine the degree of their agreement with the statement on a ten-stage scale. The test was supplemented by vignettes, in which the students were familiarised with a certain story and were to determine the variants of reactions. This choice was associated with the need to make decisions based on empathy, social responsibility, and understanding of democratic procedures.

The study's overall conclusion is that the intervention provides some evidence of the positive impact of the philosophical inquiry program on the formation of certain social and

emotional skills. The best positive effect of participation in philosophical inquiry classes was observed in the area of communication and social skills and readiness to cooperate. In these competence categories, the effect was statistically significant. Smaller differences were found in relation to the level of empathy. At the same time, the researchers noted a significantly higher increase in the competencies tested in students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Conclusion

The analysis of goals and tasks facing contemporary education, presented by education theorists and philosophers, shows that a modern school in order to prepare its students for good functioning in contemporary society, should pay more attention to competencies related to critical and creative thinking, the ability to search and select knowledge, creative problem solving and social skills such as cooperation and collaboration. An excellent tool supporting the development of these competencies is the method of philosophical inquiry. In comparison with other well-known methods of teaching philosophy and ethics, such as historical, doctrinal, or problematic methods, the inquiry seems to be the method best suited both for the purposes of education at the early stages of education and for the needs and abilities of students. As Maciej Soin notes, “in view of the unattractiveness of teaching philosophy according to the historical model and the anachronism of the doctrinal model in a modernised society, we should not go back to teaching philosophy as an inquiry, including properly understood the criticism. After all, this was the nature of the most important achievements of philosophy when contrary to the doctrinal tendency emphasised the movement of thoughts, showing the complexity of the problems and situations and the underlying assumptions of their treatment” (Soin, 2014: 49).

Empirical research is also in favour of a wider application of the method of inquiry in teaching. The presented research results provide evidence that a program of philosophical research with children and young people can be a good tool for shaping and improving skills related to intellectual and social-emotional development. The philosophical inquiry methodology can be particularly useful in supporting the development of intellectual and moral skills.

References

- Elwich, Beata, Anna Łagodzka, and Beata Pytkowska-Kapulkin (1999) *Filozoficzne dociekania z dziećmi i młodzieżą. Opis programu edukacyjnego*. Warszawa: Phronesis.
- Gorard, Steven, Naomi Siddiqui, and Beng Huat See (2015) *Philosophy for Children. Evaluation report and Executive summary*. Available online: https://v1.educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/uploads/pdf/Philosophy_for_Children.pdf
- Lipman, Mathew, Margaret Sharp Ann, and Frederick Oscanyan (1980) *Philosophy in the classroom*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Robinson, Ken and Aronica Lou (2016) *Creative Schools: The Grassroots Revolution That's Transforming Education*. London: Penguin Books.
- Siddiqui, Naomi, Steven Gorard, and Huat See Beng (2017) *Non-cognitive impacts of Philosophy for Children. Project Report*, School of Education, Durham University 2017. Available online: <http://dro.dur.ac.uk/20880/1/20880.pdf?DDD34+DDD29+czwc58+d700tmt>
- Soin, Maciej (2014) O możliwych kierunkach nauczania filozofii. *Filozofia i Nauka. Studia filozoficzne i interdyscyplinarne*. vol 2/2014: 47-64.