

EDUCARE ALLA DIVERSITÀ NELLA DIDATTICA COME EDUCAZIONE RIFLESSIVA: IL
PROGETTO REFLECTIONS

Valentina Paola Cesarano
Pegaso University
valentina.cesarano@unipegaso.it



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ABSTRACT

In the European school context, classes are becoming increasingly diverse and bring together students from different cultural identities. Teachers are not always trained to implement appropriate approaches to diversity and find it difficult to keep up with the variety of individual needs within the classroom. Educating for diversity implies education for democracy, inspired and sustained by a cosmopolitan understanding of the world, construed in terms of an inclusive view of the society we live) and of a recognition of the presence of diverse cultural and existential backgrounds and a need for a sustainable approach to the resources we make use of. In the light of this, is presented the European project Reflections- educating for critical thinking, inclusive societies and dynamic engagement - was carried out. The aim of the project is to offer teachers strategies for the implementation of these principles in the classroom.

Nel contesto europeo, le classi stanno diventando sempre più diversificate e riuniscono studenti provenienti da differenti identità culturali. Gli insegnanti non sempre sono formati per implementare approcci appropriati alla diversità e hanno difficoltà a tenere il passo con la varietà e complessità delle esigenze individuali all' interno delle classi. Educare alla diversità implica un'educazione alla democrazia, ispirata e sostenuta da una comprensione cosmopolita del mondo, intesa in termini di una visione inclusiva della società in cui viviamo, e di un riconoscimento della presenza di diversi background culturali ed esistenziali e della necessità di un approccio sostenibile alle risorse di cui facciamo uso. Alla luce di ciò, viene presentato il progetto europeo Reflections – educare al pensiero critico, alle società inclusive e all' impegno dinamico. L' obiettivo del progetto è quello di offrire agli insegnanti strategie per l'implementazione di questi principi in classe.

KEYWORDS

Didactics, cosmopolitanism, philosophy for children inclusion, democracy.

Didattica, cosmopolitismo, philosophy for children, inclusione, democrazia.

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Introduction

In the European school context, classes are becoming increasingly diverse and bring together students from different cultural identities. Teachers are not always trained to implement appropriate approaches to diversity and find it difficult to keep up with the variety of individual needs within the classroom. Educating for diversity implies education for democracy, inspired and sustained by a cosmopolitan understanding of the world, construed in terms of an inclusive view of the society we live) and of a recognition of the presence of diverse cultural and existential backgrounds and a need for a sustainable approach to the resources we make use of. Cosmopolitanism, inclusion and sustainability are not, however, neutral concepts and, while being vehicles of 'immediate' hopes to counter pessimistic and even apocalyptic views of the future, they need a 'complex mediation' to animate the practices of human co-existence. Moreover, this complexity should be inflected in three dimensions (critical, creative and caring), to adopt the vocabulary of Matthew Lipman (2003), an author whose pedagogical project will play a major role in our argumentation. Thus, in order to access and appropriate a different democratic imagery and a 'tool-box' to 'do democracy', we need pedagogical 'mediators' that operationalize, in the actual lived experience of youth, the discourses about democracy. The combination of democracy and education recalls three fundamental concepts theorized by Dewey and often misunderstood. Hickman (Hickman, 1998) examines the concepts of socialization, social control and social efficiency understood as socialization of the mind aimed at making communicative experiences that allow the individual to participate effectively in social activities. Talking about educational processes and models of training necessarily implies talking about education for democracy, social coexistence, interpersonal interactions. The participation of the individual in social life and the construction of an educational ideal, which every age holds, are the fundamental experiences through which every man can be educated, educate himself and educate himself (Bauman, 2010). Education for democracy, on the other hand, involves the category of formation and must be presented as the most urgent pedagogical perspective. Investigating the formative processes means placing the emphasis on the subject in formation who inhabits the time of the global village, of the civilization of communication and of media power. How can a person repeatedly bombarded by an ocean of information and during an information overdose orient himself? (Da Empoli, 2002). The revival of democracy passes through the construction of a "well-made head" that puts citizens in a position to

be able to critically discriminate information, facts, situations. The school must be valued as an instrument for human and social progress. "Education is a fundamental education in democracy, the only system that allows us to create the conditions for a life worth living for ourselves and for others." "The school is a 'laboratory of democracy' because man behaves intelligently and cooperatively in order to understand reality" (Dewey, 1996, p. 95-96).

1.Educating for critical thinking, inclusive societies and active engagement: the European project Reflections

In the light of this, the European project Reflections- educating for critical thinking, inclusive societies and dynamic engagement - was carried out. The aim of the project is to offer teachers strategies for the implementation of these principles in the classroom. The modules support the development and strengthening of skills, such as critical, creative, and empathic thinking. The purpose of the essay is to present the theoretical and methodological principles that inspired the construction of the materials and teaching modules, with specific reference to the educational methodology of the Philosophy for Children (P4C) (Lipman, Sharp , Oscanyan, 1992; Lipman, 1992; 1996; 2002). Caring thinking, as Matthew Lipman and Ann Sharp call it, is an essential component of 'complex thinking' (Lipman, 2003). It relies upon the dimension of listening (and, thus, it implies the ethical respect for the other) and upon the practice of dialogue (and, thus, it implies the argumentative respect for different positions). In the light of these two implications, a view of P4C as an inclusive and democratic practice might appear as unproblematic. It entails, however, a conceptual and pragmatic step worth being explored in more detail. First, it is to note that caring thinking does not correspond either to the Heideggerian care or to a generally Christian charitableness (resulting in a sort of supportive attitude); it is rather closer to the 'I care' advocated by the Italian priest and educator Don Milani against the selfish individualism and in favor of a community-oriented politics. Caring thinking is a 'concerned' thinking and, accordingly, it is addressed to the otherness in its occurring as possibility, difference, surprise, emergence, distraction, distance, but also hope or utopia. While practicing reasonableness (and reasoning on practices), this thinking preserves the critical and creative components. It is an inclusion-oriented thinking, as it is directed also to any others (to come). The reference to inclusion may be itself problematic because it is such a polysemous word that it risks being destitute of any meaning capable of orienting educational action. In international documents, the term recurs insistently (but also 'opaquely') and it is taken for granted as a

positive value, especially for alleged (and desirable) 'collateral effects'. Miller and Katz (2002: 147) define inclusion as «a sense of belonging: feeling respected, valued for who you are; feeling a level of supportive energy and commitment from others so that you can do your best work». While inclusion does not coincide with belonging, mutuality, and fairness, these are necessary properties of it as a process countering exclusion. In this perspective, inclusion is often presented as an emancipatory process both of single people and communities.

P4C is an educational project born at the end of the 60s of the twentieth century by Matthew Lipman and Ann Margaret Sharp. Lipman and Sharp built the curriculum so that girls and boys would acquire, from kindergarten, the skills necessary to construct complex thinking. Currently spread all over the world and supported by UNESCO's Division of Philosophy since the late 1990s, the project proposes the practice of philosophical research as a cognitive investigation into the various fields of human experience. The didactic-pedagogical purpose is to increase complex cognitive skills, linguistic-expressive skills and the maturation of the affective-emotional, socio-relational and value spheres.

The P4C methodology has its roots in the pragmatist tradition. In fact, it is experience that is central to the curriculum, built to fit children and adolescents through the creation of stories and materials designed specifically for each age group and designed according to a spiral model that follows the different levels of cognitive abilities and complexity from kindergarten to high school. They constitute the pre-texts for the initiation of the questions that act as a "spring" for philosophical discussion (Lipman, 1996). In addition, what we could define as the two pillars, on which the entire curriculum is based, borrowed from the pragmatist tradition, are the Research Community (CoR), the device through which inquiry develops, and the Deweyan system of cognitive investigation which, deeply immersed in experience, is driven by an indeterminate and problematic situation (doubt) in which a resystematization of experience is necessary through research made up of trial and error. aimed at reaching some solution not to be considered definitive, but to be eventually re-evaluated from a fallibilist perspective. The very structure of the method is a re-proposal of Dewey's inquiry as treated in his *Logic*. P4C, in fact, is a Deweyan way of going beyond Dewey. The philosophy of P4C, by placing experience at the center, also appropriates Socratic practice, precisely because it operates in community, the community of students, who question themselves, meeting after meeting, about what concerns their own experience, and learn to reason by constructing meanings and oscillating from the

particularities of their experiences to the universality of their shared interpretations, in a continuous process of negotiation and self-correctiveness.

Lipman derives from Mead the idea of the research community, to whom he attributes the merit of having understood the pedagogical value of union, already operated, albeit implicitly, by Peirce in the *Fixation of belief* (1877, 1997) of the two notions of "community" and "research" (Lipman, 2005: 98).

But not all communities are research communities. To be such, they must have fundamental characteristics.

First of all, it is important that the setting is circular, with the center free of any encumbrance (tables or benches), so that that space can symbolize the public space, the agora, in which each participant can expose himself in his or her own co-being (Cosentino & Oliverio, 2011: 97). Such an arrangement will allow everyone to have the opportunity to look at each other in the face and thus have a comprehension of the communicative expressions that accompany the speech, thus supporting the practice of what happens within the community and reinforcing the relationship and the willingness to listen. What binds the components together and defines the structure of the CoR is the practice in which the research is conducted. The research is in fact strongly situated, both as it hinges in the space of the setting, and as it is born from, and referred to, practice, that is, from and in the experience of its components. The goal of the research community is to generate a process that has a direction, going as far as the argument takes it. But for this argument to have a philosophical value, it cannot be based on a simple discussion, but on a dialogical process, which is necessarily governed by logic (Lipman, 2005). Dialogue, unlike conversation, has its own direction, which is precisely to deepen the argument, and engages the members of the community to use valid and coherent reasoning. In this way, thought is distributed among all its members, and in the argumentative effort the community acts out the characteristics of critical, creative and caring thinking. Thinking skills are gradually exercised by the members of the community and in the same way the behaviors of respect and mutual listening are introjected by them. During the meetings, the teacher becomes a facilitator, shedding the role of the one who "knows" and imparts the contents. Its function becomes that of a guide that directs, but does not direct, the epistemic flow of the pupils. The task of the facilitator, who has to deal with a number of responsibilities in building the community and conducting the sessions, is not easy. The course is divided into weekly meetings of one hour each. In fact, she accompanies the growth of the CoR through the shaping of norms and procedures, continuously ensures the focus on the object of investigation and

does not allow discussion to abandon the path of philosophical dialogue, but helps the members both to recognize their own epistemic positions and to regulate their interventions, ensuring equal opportunities for expression and democratic participation in the dialogical process. By applying a difficult position of decentralization, the facilitator will not allow his epistemic position on the focus chosen by the CoR to leak out, but rather will try to stimulate the dialogic function through questions and provocations in the manner of the Socratic gadfly. Another task of the facilitator is to ensure the epistemic composability of the dialogue, applying ongoing monitoring systems that guarantee the fluidity and depth of the heuristic path and stimulate the self-correctivity of the CoR members. You can't improvise in this role, it's important that the teacher receives training and is introduced to the curriculum materials.

2. Teaching materials and the Eduskills plus Reflections portal

On the basis of Lipman's theoretical and methodological substrate, ad hoc materials have been built to promote educating for critical thinking, inclusive societies and dynamic engagement in the European school context. Experts from Slovakia participated in the project. Germany, Austria, Poland, Slovenia and Italy, the latter represented by the chair of General and Social Pedagogy of the Department of Humanities of the Federico II University of Naples. The project involved the construction of a multilingual portal (<https://reflections.eduskills.plus/>) for teachers and all those who work with children. Here you can find free resources, ideas for activities and ready-made lessons on diversity, global citizenship education and Philosophy for Children. The content can be integrated into a wide range of subjects such as geography, ethics and religion, media education, social and political studies, biology and language. Within the portal there are 16 modules divided into four categories:

- Interconnected word:
 - ✓ Our Products' Journey
 - ✓ Relationship between global and local
 - ✓ Working for climate justice – all around the world
 - ✓ Empathy, My smartphone – a global product
 - ✓ Water – the source of life
 - ✓ Globalisation

- People on the move:
 - ✓ Escape from War and Persecution
- Living together:
 - ✓ Democracy
 - ✓ Sexual diversity and gender identity
 - ✓ Antigypsyism
 - ✓ Human Rights
 - ✓ The workings of anti-Semitism
 - ✓ Islamophobia: what is it and why does it occur)
 - ✓ Climate change and sustainability
 - ✓ Diversity in football
 - ✓ Disability: something you are or something others do to you
 - ✓ Digital Ethics
- Thinking together:
 - ✓ Language and Diversity
 - ✓ Thinking

Below is an excerpt of material produced during the Reflections project and inspired by Philosophy for Children:

Empathy



10-14



12 x 50-60 min.



board/flip chart; copies of exercises; paper; signs;



This module gives teachers and pupils tools for reflection on empathy.



Social Studies/ Civic Education Philosophy Social Learning Psychology Dialogue Diversity Cosmopolitan issues

Ethics/values education

Introduction

Background information and didactical perspective

Philosophy for Children (P4C) is an approach that was developed by Professor Matthew Lipman, who was influenced by educational psychologists and philosophers such as Vygotsky, Piaget, and Dewey as well as by the tradition of Socratic dialogue. P4C builds on higher order thinking (critical, creative, and caring thinking), inquiring, reasoning, listening and dialogical skills.

Children are encouraged to create their own philosophical questions. The facilitator supports children in their own thinking, reasoning and inquiring, as well as in building on each other's ideas in a dialogue. In P4C the facilitator fosters student-led discussions on philosophical questions. The role of the facilitator is crucial to ensuring quality dialogue and progress, as well as integration within the curriculum.

It is well documented that P4C has an impact on children's cognitive, personal, social, and emotional development. P4C encourages children as well as young adults to think for themselves and develop dialogical skills.

Learning outcomes

Competencies

- critical thinking, creative thinking, reflective skills, inquiry, dialogical

Topics / National curriculum

Empathy, putting oneself in another's place, putting oneself in another's shoes, mirroring the actions and emotions of others, friendship, identity/belonging.

Lesson plan

Abbreviations:

A = Activity

D = Discussion

GW = Group work

IW = Individual work

HW = Homework

PW = Partnerwork

PTS = Previous Teacher's Study

PO = Pupils opinions

PP = Pupil's presentations

TP = Teacher's presentation

Lesson No 1: Putting oneself in another's place

Phase	Content	Media, Material
Introduction (5 min.) PPS PP	Previous activity The teacher studies previously M1 (Leading Idea: "Empathy") to have a guide to stimulate reflection in the students during the discussion raised by the exercise. Preparation • Prepare a circle of chairs • Prepare a flip chart • Hand out a copy of each exercise to each student Execution • The teacher hands out a copy of the exercise M2 to each pupil and introduces the subject asking students to think about the questions contained in M2. While the pupils are engaged in the work phase, the teacher writes the questions contained in M2 on the flip chart in order to stimulate the following discussion.]	M1 Leading Idea: "Empathy" M2 Exercise: "Putting oneself in another's place"
Work phase (10 min.) PO	• The students think individually about the questions.	
Discussion (40 min.) B	• The teacher stimulates the discussion among students about the questions contained in M2. The questions should create philosophical dialogue and the teacher should always ask for the reasoning behind students' answer to facilitate critical thinking about the empathy.	

M1 Leading Idea: "Empathy"

Empathy is a complex concept. It is an important ability that involves: understanding

- of the situation,
- communicating this understanding,
- acting on that understanding in a helpful way.

Empathy is an essential skill to connect with people around you and to recognize the emotions that another person is experiencing.

Emotions are important to the quality and the meaning of our experience. Many philosophers like Plato, Descartes, Hobbes, and Hume developed theories about emotions. Also in recent years, emotions have become more and more the focus of philosophical concern. The American philosopher Martha Nussbaum emphasizes, in her work on the importance of emotions in moral philosophy, the central role of storytelling in expanding our empathy. Empathy is a necessary part of a just society, Nussbaum claims.

Sometimes we are able to put ourselves in another's place. It could be an act of silent communication – a shared understanding or we imagine feeling how a certain person. For example, if we read a story or a book, if we see a film – the identification with the victim, the animal, the hero or with any other person or creature in the story, book or film puts us in the place of the Other. So, we are able to take another's perspective. It can be an interesting experience to see things differently. We learn to imagine what other people or creatures might feel in response to certain events - this can help us to cultivate humanity.

How would you feel, if...?

Within the modules inspired by Philosophy for children there are guiding ideas, discussion plans and exercises. Guiding ideas consist of short philosophical explanations that should help teachers better understand the different concepts and philosophical ideas emerging in the activities and exercises that make up the modules. The guiding ideas provide a set of clues so that the teacher can reflect on the topic and explore all the different concepts involved. Philosophical discussion plans generally consist of a list of questions that relate to a specific concept, relationship, or problem. The aim is to explore the different topics and points of view. The questions can form a series whereby each question is constructed from the previous one in such a way as to form a spiral in which each question focuses on the topic from a different point of view. The exercises focus on more specific aspects related to:

1. Concepts: clarifying, defining limits, contexts of use, translations.
2. Competencies and skills: The exercises aim to put into practice specific skills, competencies and procedures.

We must keep in mind that each exercise represents a broad system that allows students to develop each part of philosophical reasoning.

Conclusions

In the last phase of the project, about 100 teachers from the different European countries involved in the project were asked to experiment with a module of their choice in their daily teaching. Teachers then answered a questionnaire designed to gauge their views on the use of the modules. An initial analysis shows that the majority of teachers, i.e. about 80%, particularly appreciated the design of the portal considering it user- friendly in grado to covers important topics. The portal is considered very useful for your work. Most teachers consider the content as very interesting and relevant. The exercises are considered very clear and feasible and the additional materials (worksheets, videos, pictures...) are useful and interesting. All the teachers can imagine to integrate the module (as a whole or parts of it) your classes and most of them think your student would be interested in the topics proposed by european project. This project suggest that the ideas of inclusion and cosmopolitanism – both of which to be understood in a specific way, remote from any shallow o rosy rhetoric as well as from overhasty simplifications – may represent a significant compass to navigate the contemporary scenarios. By endorsing the view that what is important is educating through democracy rather than educating for democracy, the relevant educational question has turned out to

be how to educate through 'educational mediators' which bear the mark of inclusion and cosmopolitanism and what these mediators could be. Or, to put it bluntly, how should we interpret inclusion and cosmopolitanism in order to translate the 20th century project of democratic education into terms which take seriously the challenges of the 21st century and how can we operationalize them within our classrooms? The promotion of abilities of complex thinking according to the P4C tradition may represent a promising option. Indeed, on the one hand, it keeps alive the Deweyan view of democracy as a form of life and of constantly communicated experience; and, on the other, by deploying the resources of philosophizing, understood as a radical way of questioning, it provides us with an educational strategy that can operationalize the inclusive tension and the cosmopolitan openness which should inhabit the democratic ideal in order for it to face new problems and unprecedented situations. Finally, the emphasis of P4C on the dimension of caring thinking (as a necessary integration of the critical and creative components of reflective thinking) draws our educational attention to the idea of the cultivation of caring habits towards oneself, others and the living world which should animate democracy in the new millennium (Santi, Striano, Oliverio, 2019).

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