

## Italie : Philosophy with children as intercultural education

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Together, they design and lead philosophy-based projects for children and provide educational training for teachers and parents in Verbania and Milan, in northern Italy.

### I. Some theoretical considerations

In her recent book *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, Martha C. Nussbaum proposes Philosophy for Children as a valid resource for teachers who want to teach according to the Socratic method (which of course should only be one part of the general program for a Socratic class). In fact, American philosopher Matthew Lipman's pedagogical project strengthens children's abilities to think logically, enabling them to identify those mistaken assumptions which are dictated by stereotypes and prejudices, which govern human relationships together with logic. The 2011 Unesco report *Teaching philosophy in Europe and North America* notes that in the twelve countries under consideration, the birth of new educational projects have emerged which promote philosophy in elementary schools through a variety of methods and approaches, some of which go beyond Lipman's curriculum.

Our own particular approach, which emphasizes an affinity between philosophy with children and intercultural education, has evolved from 2006 to the present thanks to educational experiences carried out in elementary schools and educational centers in Verbania and Milan. In choosing this approach, we wished to offer intercultural practice to the future generation as a way of life, where foreigner means other than me, regardless of a person's national origins. "Talk with everyone or don't talk at all" is one of the rules which require each person involved in a conversation to take care of that relationship by proposing one's ideas clearly and respectfully, while expecting the same attention from others as well.

Children do not just philosophize with words, but also through the use of multiple intelligences: play, expressiveness, and emotions become multiple tools through which philosophy can express itself at different levels, bringing out what is special in each child and making encounters between children who are different from one another as opportunities to grow. The child's body also philosophizes, when for example children deconstruct the traditional class photo by first posing as individuals and then as a group.

An intercultural approach emerges not only with the method, but also through the content proposed: children listen to the philosophy teacher's appropriately simplified words, which raise questions about such themes as identity, diversity and society. Descartes disturbs us with his doubts about existence, Socrates prods us by asking how one person can be mirrored in another, and Montesquieu excites our curiosity when he pretends he is an Easterner observing Westerners.

Proposing Western philosophy classics is another way to facilitate encounters with diversity. As Salvatore Settis suggests in his *The Future of the Classical*, the classics are both ours and different, because they are "a reservoir of values in which we can still recognize ourselves", and also because they have something which is "irreducibly foreign" since they were produced in a historical time and social context which are different from ours today.

In reviewing our work, Cesare Scurati urged us to follow Socrates' footsteps rather than those of the Sophists, thus encouraging boys and girls not to win but rather to know how to be in the world.

Our philosophical work is fueled precisely by this pedagogical intention: to help each child's potentials and questions emerge, not so that they become logical skills to be used in society's marketplace, but rather tools to help children think and act critically, and take care of others as members - whether near or far - of the same polis.

## II. A practical proposal

This workshop is a good example of our approach to philosophy with children as a form of intercultural education. It was proposed to both children and adults.

### A) Workshop "Debts of gratitude"

The workshop's objective

To answer the following questions:

- which parts of myself can I attribute to others?
- in which sense am I the product of the contribution of others?

Layout of the workshop

- Seminar: chairs in a circle
- Lecture: cushions in a semicircle, one person in front talks, the others listen
- Practical: everybody finds his own place in the room

Materials

- Simplified text taken from *The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius* (pages 7-11)
- Stationery
- Portable stereo with a CD player
- Cushions
- Bag
- Wastepaper basket
- Marcus Aurelius' Cutout
- Photocopies of a man's shape

## Professionals

- Philosopher
- Educator

## B) Workshop's structure

### 1) Introduction (10 minutes)

The educator explains the objectives and the rules of the workshop.

The rules are as follows:

- raise your hand when you want to talk;
- speak to everybody or don't speak at all;
- don't act like a bell (in Italian: "ridondanza"): one must not repeat an idea already given.

### 2) Listen to Marcus Aurelius' lecture (10 minutes)

The educator reads the philosophical text using Marcus Aurelius' Cutout

### 3) First philosophical conversation (10 minutes)

The philosopher asks "who didn't understand the meaning of 'debt of gratitude'?" and adds "can anyone who didn't understand please ask someone who did!"

### 4) Individual practice (40 minutes)

The educator gives a photocopy of a man's shape to every participant. Everybody draws his debts of gratitude including the name of the creditor. A music cd is played throughout the practical. Each one does it on his own.

### 5) Second philosophical conversation (30 minutes)

The philosopher asks "if you take away all your debt of gratitude does anything remain of yourself?". The participants answer first individually by writing (or by speaking), then collectively, a discussion takes place. The leader phrases many questions to ensure participants deepen their hypothesis and are confronted to the consequences and implications of those hypothesis. He can ask questions and objections from other participants.

### 6) Final check (20 minutes)

The workshop ends by asking the participants to write a note about what they will take home from the workshop and write another note about what they will throw away. The participants put the positive feedback in the bag and the negative one in the wastepaper basket.