

A conversation with children about children ...

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Abstract

In this paper, I present an experience of philosophical dialogue with small children in a public school in Bari, Italy in the context of the *Philosophia Ludens for Children* project (University of Bari). I present the experience, including the transcripts of six conversations with several groups of children, and then draw some inferences concerning the importance of the relationship between Universities and schools; the philosophical strength of both children's commitment and philosophical ideas and their positive understanding of childhood.

Key words

being a child, childhood, imagination, philosophia ludens for children, school

Introduction

Philosophical work with children takes different forms and shapes all around the world (UNESCO 2007; Kennedy & Vansieleghe 2011). Based in Brazil and more broadly South America, I have been privileged to coordinate a Philosophy in Schools Project at the State University of Rio de Janeiro (Kohan 2013) and be in touch with different practices all over the world for the past twenty years (Kohan 2016). Italy, probably due to its strong philosophical, cultural and educational traditions, is an extraordinary context where all sorts of practices take place—from the more orthodox *Philosophy for Children* followers to creative and diverse practices from very different understandings of philosophy and of the sense of its presence among children in schools (UNESCO 2011; Bevilacqua & Casarin 2016; Cosentino 2016). In the following, I present a philosophical dialogue with children of eight years old at a public school in Bari, Italy, taking part in the project *Philosophia Ludens for Children* based at the University of Bari. *Philosophia ludens* is a practice

of 'hermeneutic philosophy with children' (Caputo 2016a, p. 18)¹. After presenting the experience, I summarise some of the main conversations I had with several groups of children and then draw some inferences concerning the importance of the relationship between Universities and schools; the philosophical strength of both children's commitment and philosophical ideas and their understanding of childhood. It is important to note, though, that the aim of this paper is not to analyse children's concepts of childhood or of philosophy. It is rather to explore the potential of philosophical conversations with children and, more specifically, the importance of listening to children in order to consider the aim and sense of bringing philosophy to schools.

The project

Philosophia Ludens for Children is a program created by Annalisa Caputo in 2004 at the University of Bari (Caputo 2016b, p. 132ff.). It is proposed as a ludic laboratory to encourage students to play with the history of philosophy. Initially it was conceived and practised with high school students (in Italy philosophy is a compulsory discipline at that level) and gradually extended to younger children. Although it does not use an explicit method or a curriculum, it has both a theoretical and an empirical approach, including more than 300 activities/games with children (Caputo 2011). It also has a theoretical justification for why and how to introduce the history of philosophy to children and young people through games, i.e. a playful approach (De Natale, Caputo, Mercante & Baldassarra 2011). This specific approach differs from the way play is usually approached in *Philosophy for Children* (see for example Stanley & Lyle 2017) due to the focus on philosophers of Western thought and the hermeneutical approach taken. The games in this Italian project are divided into eight groups, each with a different focus: (a) problems; (b) abstractions; (c) language; (d) visualisation of concepts; (e) identification with authors; (f) reflection on the present; (g) texts; and finally (h) games which ultimately refer to dynamics of philosophy itself (Caputo 2016b, p. 153). For example, excerpts from Plato's *Apology of Socrates* are read with the

¹ The project, coordinated by Annalisa Caputo, takes place at the University of Bari. It brings Ph.D. Students and Professors to schools to develop philosophical practices with children. The project also produces a newsletter and a journal (cf. www.logoi.ph; Caputo 2016b). There is explicit authorisation to mention the names of all the participants in this project. The study was granted ethical approval by the University of Bari and the team received written consent from parents and their children to include the photograph of the children in this publication.

children and a number of games and playful activities are carried out around Self-definition, Self-portrait and Self-performance. The basic theoretical reference is Gadamer's idea of game as a form of 'mediation' and 'enrichment' (Caputo 2007). Games (playing in the classroom) and artistic exercises (on the border between philosophy and painting, music, cinema, etc.) are considered opportunities for enriching the formative journey of both students and teachers. As hermeneutics is a rather broad and somewhat imprecise term, more specific conceptual references of the *Philosophia Ludens* project are: (a) Nietzschean attention to the metaphorical dimension of language and life; (b) Heidegger's hermeneutics of happening and understanding/comprehension as a fundamental existential; (c) Gadamer's understanding of the search for truth as extra-methodical (with the previously stressed centrality of play and dialogue); (d) Ricoeur's two forms of interpretation: understanding (existential) and explanation (scientific and logical) (Caputo 2016b, p. 147). Caputo has widely presented these theoretical references (see mainly Caputo 2016b, where she offers also other references).

In the academic year 2016-17 the project offered, among other activities, workshops using the *philosophia ludens* approach at several classes of the Elementary School Domenico Cirillo of Bari, run by philosophy graduate students of the University of Bari under the coordination of Annalisa Caputo. It is in this context that I had the opportunity to visit the school and have a philosophical experience with the children of the school and the members of the *Philosophia Ludens* project. In this project they speak about 'children for philosophy', inverting the classical 'philosophy for children'. One main aim of the article is to reflect on this inversion based on this experience and to draw some observations from it concerning the relationship between children (childhood) and philosophy.

The experience I: the initial workshop to define childhood

Last February, while I had the opportunity to visit different approaches of philosophical practice with children at different Italian schools and Universities I had the chance to visit Bari and share an activity on the context of the *Philosophia Ludens with Children* project. My visit was announced to the children as a conversation 'with a Philosopher coming from Brazil'. In order to prepare for that conversation they had a workshop—I will present this below—and after the workshop they would present me with their findings and we would consider them together. The workshop involved a group of around 40 children, students at the

Elementary School Convitto Nazionale 'Domenico Cirillo' at Bari Italy. The children, around 8 years old, had been having workshops with Philosophia Ludens during the previous year and this was their first workshop in this academic year. Eleonora Palmentura, a doctoral candidate in philosophy at Bari University, conducted this earlier workshop with some colleagues and offers a thorough description of its aims, methodology and content (a complete transcription of the previous workshop, in Italian, can be read at Palmentura 2017). Because of the connection to our activity, I will summarise its main lines. Initially, the children played some games to renew their memory on what philosophy is about (Palmentura 2017, p. 265), they were asked to give their own definitions and after a passage from Plato's *Apology*, the philosopher of questioning and self-knowledge, they were asked, according to their own definitions, to define childhood themselves, i.e. they would apply their own understanding of definitions to define childhood. This was done with a view to them coming to know themselves. Let's read how Palmentura herself presents these steps of the workshop. She writes:

In the second phase of the activity, as we usually do in our laboratories, we have taken the philosophical reference of our game out of the magic box, that is The *Apology* of Socrates by Plato. Socrates, the philosopher of 'know yourself', the sage of questions at the center of things. To arrive at a definition it is necessary to discern between what is essential (and brings us to the truth of things) and the less important features; the children understood this immediately and in a surprising way they themselves used the term 'essential' (to indicate what should be put in the definition). Once the philosophical foundation was established and the children had offered their conceptions of definition, we asked them for a further effort, that is to try to define childhood: to think about themselves; in short: to define and understand themselves. (Palmentura 2017, p. 266)

The following are some examples of the definitions initially provided by the children in that first workshop:

- Being a child means having more energy than adults;
- Love with the heart itself;
- Have all imagination;
- Have a mother;
- Not be an ET (extraterrestrial);
- Be interested in the essential;

- Have so much imagination and play with friends;
- Going to school and eating candies;
- Do not think about money;
- Be short;
- Have parents;
- Have teachers and study a lot;
- Do not have the driving licence.

Palmentura (2017) describes the dialogue between the children starting from these first definitions and shows that very quickly they realised that some of the proposals are not exclusively for children: adults can study, love, be short and some of them do not have a driving license. She also comments that at this stage the children added some other characteristics like 'having more dreams' or 'to sing or dance'. Then, the children worked together in groups formed by those with similar definitions and each group composed its own shared definition and drawings to illustrate it.

The experience II: Six groups of children share with a foreigner their definitions of childhood

When I entered the classroom, after Annalisa Caputo introduced me to the children, each group that had participated in the previous workshop on Philosophy Ludens with Palmentura and her colleagues came to the front of the classroom, presented me with their definitions and posters and we had a short conversation. The six conversations with the groups took approximately one hour. Each conversation was quite short, less than ten minutes, and while we were having it the rest of the children were grouped in another part of the classroom, preparing for their turn or commenting on what had happened in their group. If the number of characters in the transcripts is a good indicator of the length of the conversations, the third (2609) and the fourth (2346) conversations were the longest, then came the first (2248) and finally the sixth (1942), the fifth (1718) and the second (1637), which was the shortest. The conversations were filmed and later transcribed. Each of the conversations seemed to pass very quickly, probably because I was aware that the children's definitions were extremely rich and we were losing many opportunities to deepen the conversation or hear more children's ideas. But we had a limited time and Annalisa, who coordinated the whole process, had the unfortunate task of interrupting one conversation and inviting the next group in. In the end, after these six initial conversations, I had a short conversation with all of the children in one

large group (A complete transcription of my conversation with the children was published in Italian as Kohan 2017).

Group A

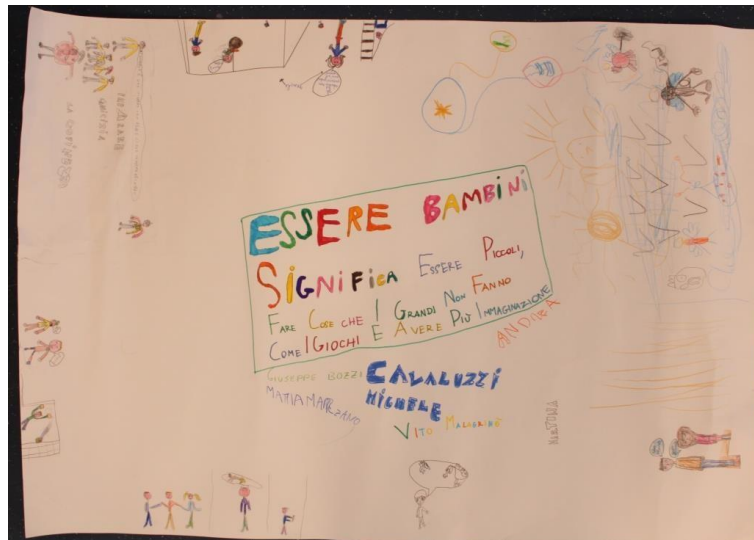


Figure 1. Group A. Definition: ‘being children means being small, making things that adults do not do, like play games and have a bigger imagination’. Drawings include mainly human figures of different sizes and forms having conversations in different groups and some alone talking to themselves. There is also a drawing of the sky and stars and planets.

The first group offered the following definition: ‘being children means being small, making things that adults do not do, like play games and have a bigger imagination’. One of the children read the definition. After this, the rest of the children wanted to present their individual drawings. One child said that she had drawn a teacher who asks ‘what is philosophy?’. To this, another child responded that philosophy is a lady with books in her hands. Another child had drawn a mother giving birth to a child. One child had drawn an adult who says that he is big and a little girl who says she is small. She explained this shows that children are smaller. She also mentioned that this shows that children are slower. After some of them presented their

drawings we had this conversation². After some of the children presented their drawings we had the following conversation³:

F: I still do not understand what it means to be small. For example, are you small? (Q1)

C: Yes

F: And if we find an ant, which is even smaller? (Q2) So: what is it to be small? (Q3)

C: Having different skills.

F: So being small means being different? (Q4)

C: It means having more imagination ...

F: So how much smaller you are, the more imagination you have? (Q5) ... So an ant has more imagination ...? (Q6)

C: Greatness does not count, it counts to be small. Imagination is something inside.

F: Interesting, but how can imagination that is great be inside someone who is small? (Q7)

C: Imagination is in the mind: where ideas give birth.

C: Being small is having emotions.

F: Are you excited now? (Q8) What do you feel? (Q9)

(The child smiles)

F: I see you are smiling a lot ... So being small means having a lot of emotions? (Q10) You are small and you are excited! Is that right? (Q11) What else? (Q12)

² My interventions are under letter F, Annalisa Caputo's under AC and the children under letter C. From the transcripts, it is not possible to distinguish when a child intervenes more than once in a conversation.

³ My interventions are under letter F, Annalisa Caputo's under AC and the children under letter C. From the transcripts, it is not possible to distinguish when a child intervenes more than once in a conversation.

C: Little ones can do more things than adults because the big ones are slower.

F: What can you do when you are young and what can you do when you are older? (Q13)

C: For example you can go to the park, you can run ...

F: But I am old, and I run ...

C: Go to the seesaws ...

F: So being small is better than being big... you can do more things ... But I would like to go back to what you said about imagination, which is interesting ...

We all have imagination, everyone can imagine what he wants ... For example, you [pointing at a child], is there something you've already imagined? (Q14) Have you ever imagined something that does not exist? (Q15)

C: I have drawn a monkey with wings on the billboard, and I am an angel and I am in the belly of my mother ... That is an example of something from my imagination.

F: Great! One more thing. You said that being a child means being small and I want to know if you can be a child without being small.

C: Children become grown-ups, you have been a child ...

F: So if you grow up you are no longer a child? Or can you still be a child even being a grown-up?

C: Becoming grown-up means forgetting everything about when you were young.

F: So you will forget everything?

C: No. Not cartoons!

C: In my opinion, when you grow up you can always become (remain) small: but only with imagination.

At this point of the conversation, Annalisa said that we had to finish with this group and the next one would come.

Group B



Figure 2. Group B. Definition: 'Being girls and boys means being more imaginative and not wanting to grow too much'. The drawing includes a ship in the sea, some human figures together with fruits on their bodies, some others talking with birds, one woman with a baby on her arms talking to a man, a face crying, and a box with a child and an adult inside and a house on top.

AC thanked the first group and asked the second group to read their definition: 'Being girls and boys means being more imaginative and not wanting to grow too much'.

- F There are different things here. For example, we read: being girls (*bambine*) and boys (*bambini*)⁴. I do not understand Italian well. What does it mean?

⁴ In Italian, the word for *children* is gendered, i.e. there is a masculine and feminine form. Some people now replace the masculine ending with an 'x', while others write both the plural feminine and masculine forms even though this is grammatically unnecessary. This group wrote *bambine e bambini*, and not the usual masculine form *bambini* as all the others did. So, I began the conversation by asking about the difference between *bambine* and *bambini*. The children explained that they wanted to include both boys and girls, but they didn't seem too interested in discussing this issue any further.

Is it not the same thing? What is the difference between bambini (boys) and bambine (girls)?

C: There is a difference between being male and female, between being big and small.

F: But then it's important! Does it mean that children are not all the same? Let's see some details of the drawings. What is this?

C: I have drawn parrots, because I imagined that the children first said they did not want to grow and the parrots repeated it.

C: I have drawn a demi-god who makes a path, then he goes out and becomes a human.

C: I drew a banana man, an apple man and a pineapple man to represent fruit.

F: But are they fruit or are they children?

C: They are fruit children!

F: Can these children be eaten?

C: No!

F: So, let's go back to the definition: being a child is not wanting to grow too much. Why do they not want to grow up?

C: Because being a child means a lot of things ... And then we get older.

C: Because old people cannot dance, they cannot do anything. When we grow old, we have wrinkles on our faces.

F: But can we decide not to grow? Can you do something not to grow?

C: No!

F: And why?

C: Even if someone grows it does not mean that he has no imagination.

F: When you grow your imagination does not grow up with you?

C: It grows ... But your brain is all old ... You forget things ...

F: In your opinion, what is the best age to live, the most beautiful age? ... If you could choose to live at that age, what age would it be?

C: Eight years

C: Ten.

C: Fifteen.

C: Eighteen.

C: Twenty.

Group C



Figure 3. Group C. Definition: 'Being a child means going through childhood, obeying the big ones, being intelligent when you apply yourself'. The drawings include different buildings (named as school and home) including their interior, such as a couple of benches and people inside talking.

AC: We also thank this group and move on to the third. The definition of this group is: 'Being a child means going through childhood, obeying the big ones, being intelligent when you commit yourself'.

- C: I have drawn the timeline: in 2008 I was born, in 2011 I started attending kindergarten, in 2014 the elementary school, then there is a little speech in which it says that I grow up.
- F: But what does it mean to go through childhood?
- C: It means that you have to go through childhood by playing but also by studying.
- F: But then childhood ends. And you say that one day you will grow up. So childhood ends?
- C: Yes, but with imagination and energy it never ends.
- F: You talked about the time line. What is time? Time is a line?
- C: No. It's also memories, not only material but also mental, with imagination and also enthusiasm you can remember them.
- F: Great! Let's see some other pictures related to this definition.
- C: Since we have written 'to be intelligent when we are committed' I have drawn myself and the teacher Flora who says she gave me a nine [a high grade, in Italy grades go from 1 to 10] because I have committed myself a lot. And then I have drawn me that I remember when I was little, that my mother was taking me in her arms, and finally I have drawn me giving birth to a baby.
- F: You have drawn time like a circle. But is it a circle or a line?
- C: A line. Because I thought first of my future and then I thought about when I was little; because first my future must come and then my past.
- F: Interesting ... why like that? What comes first: the future or the past?
- C: First the future for the imagination and then the past.
- F: Are you sure? Because you said the opposite ...
- C: In the imagination it can be the opposite.

F: So in life is the past first and then the future, but in imagination it is the opposite?

C: First there is the future then the past.

C: No, according to me, first there is the past, then the present and then the future.

F: And so it's all linear ... But, let's try to understand better: where is the future? Where do we put the future and the past? Where are they? Forward or back to us? I'm here: what's behind me: the past or the future?

C: The past because we are first born and then we have to grow up.

F: So where is the future?

C: No, I think the future is behind us. Because we have to think about when we are big and then we have to think about when we were young ...

C: For me the past lies behind and the future is ahead, because every word we say is in the future; instead every word we say before (which we have already said) has come from the past.

F: So the imagination is back?

C: For the imagination, the future is ahead, but imagination also thinks of the past that is behind, because it also thinks about when we were young.

Group D



Figure 4. Group D. Definition: 'Being a child means having more fantasy and dreams, going to school and not thinking about money'. Drawings include natural environments, particularly trees and some humans, one of them walking with an umbrella in the rain.

AC: Let's move on to the fourth group. Let's read their definition: 'Being a child means having more fantasy and dreams, going to school and not thinking about money'. Let's see some details.

C: I have drawn a child who is thinking that money is useless. It is better not to have money, because with money life is ruined.

C: We do not like richness.

C: I have drawn two children who go to school and think about what they should do in the break; one who thinks that he will play at home and the other who will score in a soccer match.

C: I have drawn a child who tells his father not to be rich with money, but thinks he should be rich in imagination, and then we have drawn a garden ... but I do not remember why.

F: Then one can be rich not only in money but also in other things. But, in your opinion, what is the difference between fantasy and imagination?

C: Fantasy is thinking of something, but imagination is creating something with your fantasy.

F: So, we can say that imagination is thought, and fantasy is creativity?⁵

C: Practically your imagination is to think of something you want and you can not have; with fantasy you can 'draw' this thing, you can 'express yourself' by drawing that thing.

F: So imagination is something you cannot find?

C: Yes. You can find it in your mind.

F: Only in your mind?

C: Yes, this is the case for me.

F: Let's go back to the definition. Here I read: 'Being a child is going to school'. Can you be a child without going to school? In Brazil there are many children who do not go to school, but they are children.

C: Going to school is useful to learn many things; and you do not have to think about money.

F: So if you learn so much and go to school, are you more of a child than those who do not go to school?

C: They too are children, and I am sorry if they cannot go to school.

C: Many people are children and many people are adults. Not going to school for me is not normal. I do not go to school for just a few days, if I'm sick ...

F: In Italy it is not possible not to go to school?

C: It is not possible. But for the poor it is possible.

C: My mother told me that here, if a child does not go to school, they take the child away from their parents because there is an obligation to go to school.

C: In my opinion, even poor children can go to school. Do you know why? With the imagination ... They can imagine having a school, a teacher and books.

⁵ I should have asked 'So, we can say that fantasy is thought, and imagination is creativity?' but I reversed the words

C: Perhaps the parents of Rio de Janeiro do not have the money and the children cannot go to school.

Group E

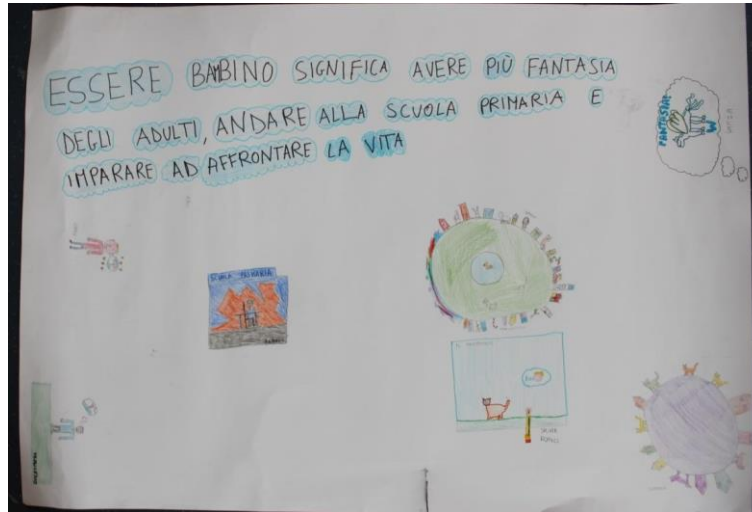


Figure 5. Group E. Definition: 'Being a child means having more fantasies than adults, going to elementary school and learning to face life'. Drawings include a couple of circles with animals, flowers and humans, a school and some other animals. One of the circles has water and an animal in the centre.

AC: Let's see the next group. Definition: 'Being a child means having more fantasies than adults, going to elementary school and learning to face life'. Let's see some details ...

C: I have drawn a world made entirely of fantasy, all the fantasies we find.

F: You have drawn sweets, flowers ... But here, at the center of the world what is there?

C: A little duck.

F: And where is the duck?

C: In a lake.

F: So there's a lake in the middle of the world! And this other design what does it represent?

C: It represents a child who is thinking about what to draw; and she draws a fox cat using her imagination.

F: Why the fox cat? Does it exist?

C: No. It's all imaginary.

F: Good! This group has written something new so far. That being a child means learning to face life. How do you face life?

C: By becoming adult.

F: We all become adults. So learning to face life also means learning how to become adult. What is important to grow up and learn about life?

C: To face life you need to go to school to learn some things.

F: What are the most important things we need to learn at school?

C: Subjects. For example, Italian, mathematics.

F: And why is it important to learn mathematics or Italian?

C: Because tomorrow we will need to do the calculations and add.

F: But the other group said that earning money is not important, so maybe maths is not that important?

C: For me it is a bit important.

C: At school you go to learn the discipline of study.

F: Why?

C: When we become adults, this discipline will be useful.

F: Why useful?

C: Because [without it] you could not live at some point. Because you would be alone, without mom.

- C: Because when we grow up we will need maths to face life.
- C: Mathematics is used to count how old you have lived ... In fact, I have lived for 8 years two months and 7 days
- C: Mathematics also serves to do the shopping ... to know how much you need at home ...

Group F

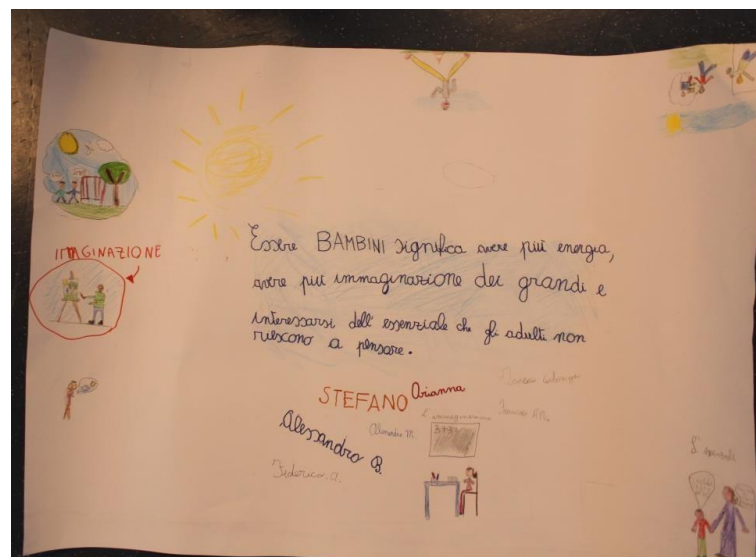


Figure 6. Group F. Definition: 'Being a child means having more energy than adults, having more imagination than adults and thinking about the essentials that adults cannot think about.' Drawings include a square, a sun, a teacher and couple of human figures.

- AC: Let's go to the next group. 'Being a child means having more energy than adults, having more imagination than adults and thinking about the essentials that adults cannot think about'.
- F: What are the essentials?
- C: Love, fantasy, play and many other things. They are the most important things.

C: When you asked us for a way not to grow ... In order not to grow, we would have to become Peter Pan.

C: We have written that being children means having more energy surely ... having more imagination than the adults ... and taking an interest in the essential ... love, play, wonder

F: What is wonder?

C: Wonder is when you wonder about something ...

C: While love is when you feel a very strong feeling for another person.

F: And when you're older, do you not feel it?

C: Yes, we can also feel it, but ...

F: But not so strongly?

C: Mmm ... yes.

F: So you love more when you're a child than when you're an adult!?

C: Both things.

F: And what did you design as essential?

C: I have drawn a child who paints a picture with his imagination.

F: Is he an adult or a child?

C: A child

C: I have drawn a child who loves his mother.

F: And what is the essential for you?

C: Having a mom, because mothers have always helped us. Dads too.

F: Only children love their mother?

C: No.

C: But loving mom is important. By the way, Daddy cannot cook ... that is, he knows how to cook, but not so well.

C: Our parents when we are sad help us to overcome these moments.

C: We also have parents when we are adults. But when you're younger parents help you more, they make birthday parties ... they buy you what you want ...

C: Yes, they help you when you grow up, but less than when you were young.

F: And why is that?

C: Because as a child they help you, you then learn how to do adult things.

C: Then the mothers when they grow up, become old women and cannot do anything anymore.

C: But they still love us.

F: So the essential remains?

C: Yes.

About these conversations

These conversations are certainly not presented here as models of philosophical dialogue with children, not only because they were too short but because at least a couple of more substantial problematic aspects might be identified in them: (a) there is little interaction between the children; and (b) there is little space for the children to ask their own questions. Still, there is something important that this group (of children and adults) might have learned from this experience: that their horizons might be broadened by having an equal relationship with one another. More specifically, the children were confronted by a philosopher foreigner, who was there to share a philosophical experience with them, basically, asking questions and listening attentively to what they had to think and say. Let's justify and unfold this learning.

How can we evaluate the conversation? There are lots of possibilities: one way would be looking at what children say throughout the interaction. And what did

these Italian children say? There were lots of ideas that could certainly be fostered and submitted to further inquiry. For example, some of the rich variety of themes that appeared included: the relationship between fantasy and imagination (*fantasia* and *immaginazione* in Italian); the capacity of children to have and express emotions; the different capabilities of children and adults; the value and lack of value of a materialistic way of living, language and gender; the relationship between size and age; concepts and representations of time. But as we have already made clear, this paper is not about analysing or interpreting children's thought.

As I have already stated, in these conversations, nearly all of the teacher's interventions were questions and nearly all of the children's interventions were answers to those questions. There is little interaction between the children. This is probably due to the dynamic of this activity, with each group presenting their definitions and their drawings of childhood to the teacher at the beginning. Several purposes can be identified in the teacher's questions. Let's undertake the exercise with the first conversation as an example of the whole conversation, given that the structure of all six conversations is very similar. The questions from the first conversation seem to be searching for at least the following aims:

- (a) to understand more deeply what children have said (*I still do not understand what it means to be small. For example, are you small? Q1*);
- (b) to consider examples that might challenge their definition (*And if we find an ant, which is even smaller? Q2; So an ant has more imagination ...? Q6*);
- (c) to ask for a definition of concepts (small, imagination, etc.) they were using (*what is it to be small Q3*);
- (d) to check whether he understood them or not (*So being small means being different? Q4; So how much smaller you are, the more imagination you have? Q5; Is that right? Q11*);
- (e) to turn the questions back to themselves and help them realise they were feeling what they were saying (*Are you excited now? Q8; What do you feel? Q9; You are small and you are excited! Is that right? Q11*);
- (f) to ask them to unfold their ideas (*what else? Q12*);

(g) to give instances or examples in order to be more specific about what they were saying (*What can you do when you are young and what can you do when you are older?* Q13);

(h) to address one child and ask him to enter the conversation (*Is there something you've already imagined?* Q14; *Have you ever imagined something that does not exist?* Q15).

How can we appreciate the meaning and sense of the questions of a teacher in a philosophical and educational setting? How do we relate to questions in such a setting? These two questions call for another question: what is the role of the teacher in a shared philosophical search? Matthew Lipman has written intensely on this topic (1988; 2001; 2003). The teacher is responsible for unfolding a process of inquiry by posing questions (the tip of the iceberg); and fostering the distributed thinking and the critical skills children need to arrive to the common, central and contestable questions that are 'truly' philosophical. In the above example, they would be invitations to a much more complex inquiry into the way children presented their understanding of childhood and the relationship between childhood and adulthood. This perspective stresses the pedagogical value and effect of the teacher's questions, emphasising their effect in fostering children's skills or tools. What about the philosophical value of those questions? If we apply the well-known criteria in the Philosophy for Children world to distinguish philosophical questions, the three Cs—central, controversial, contestable—as Ann Sharp and Laurance Splitter called them (Sharp & Splitter 1995), we might consider most of the questions in this conversation to be philosophical. In any case, the most important aspect of these questions is that the main aim of them is to listen to children. Let's say it with different words: the highest value, both pedagogical and philosophical, of teachers' questions is the way in which they make it possible to listen to children's childhood.

Let's give some hermeneutical support and enlarge (Weber & Wolff 2017) this claim, which seems appropriate due to the philosophical approach of *Philosophia Ludens for Children* as described above. Weber and Wolff show that, according to Gadamer, there are two conditions for a question to be philosophical, as opposed to the rhetorical and the didactical questions which already entail an answer. The philosophical-open questions should be: (a) of crucial and existential relevance to the person asking the question; (b) suspend the person's beliefs, concepts or opinions (Weber & Wolff 2017, p. 76). These criteria do not seem easy to verify by anyone other than the questioners themselves. But they have one interesting effect when

truly practised: they allow teachers to suspend their existential beliefs in order to listen to children. Another interesting effect is that they can be applied equally to children and teachers, putting both of them at the same level and relation to philosophy. In Gadamerian terms, a philosophical question, or better, a philosophical relationship to questions is one that allows an 'expanding of the horizon' (Gadamer cited in Weber & Wolff 2017, p. 77). And to establish a philosophical relationship to questions it does not matter so much who asks the question but how we relate to our questions and to the questions of the others, which is not easy to appreciate from a position external to the questioner. In this sense, for both, teachers and children, what matters is not so much who asks the questions or the quality of the questions, but if we relate to questions in such a way so to help people, no matter their age, to become aware of their horizons, realizing their limits and encountering other ways of seeing. Questions are roads we take to listen to the other.

Let's consider one example from the conversation with Group C: the questions about time. The children have drawn time as a line and as a circle, which relates to the Greek concepts of *chronos* (time as the numbered sequence of moments) and *aion* (time as the immobile, perfect figure) (Aristotle 2003; Kohan 2014). One of the children presented a diffracted notion of *chronos* (Barad 2014), saying that in our imagination the future can come first and then the past: seeing time in this way shakes our more usual way of thinking about time (Barad, forthcoming). Another child said that the future is behind us 'because before, we had to think about when we'll be big and then we have to think about when we were small'. The Aymara peoples who live in a region between Chile, Bolivia and Peru in South America, also represent the past in front of us because it is what we know and the future behind us because we do not know it (Núñez & Sweetser 2006). This analogy between this group of children's thinking and Indigenous thinking should not be read as it has been historically in colonizing frameworks (Rollo 2018), but as a way to show how children can offer alternative views to the dominant ones on key concepts like time (Murris 2016). All of us who took part in this conversation had the opportunity to expand our understanding of time, to realise the limits of our vision and to incorporate the vision of others.

A larger conversation after smaller conversations

After the first phase, in which I spoke with small groups, one at a time, we passed to a 'plenary' discussion, in which those who wanted to speak raised their hands and took the microphone. After a few interventions I questioned them about their relationship with philosophy. These different understandings of philosophy are not only valuable in themselves but are also important to understand the further development of the conversation. This is how they answered:

F: What do you think of philosophy? Do you like it? Why is it good to do philosophy at school?

C: Because I think philosophy is a world of study.

C: However, mathematics is also important; and money is needed!

C: Philosophy makes us reflect a lot.

C: With philosophy you can learn new things that you did not know.

C: Philosophy serves to open the mind.

C: Some adults ... don't know philosophy.

C: Philosophy is a subject that is practically not like the others. In other subjects we do not play like in philosophy.

C: In my opinion, with philosophy and mathematics combined we can learn. With mathematics we learn one thing, with philosophy, another. If we put them together we can learn more things.

C: Philosophy makes you understand things you've never understood before.

F: But then it is very important!

C: Philosophy is a matter of imagination.

C: Philosophy is important because many things are learned.

C: Philosophy is a scale of questions.

C: Philosophy is very funny

C: Philosophy is the mind.

C: Philosophy means facing life.

C: Some adults say that they do not care about philosophy, that it is useless, but it's not true!

C: Adults sometimes have no imagination, so they do not think much about philosophy.

C: With philosophy we can also meet people we do not know.

C: Philosophy is two things. The first: it is to learn things that we do not know; and the second: it is when we have fun with our imagination and we can do many things.

C: Philosophy can also be studied in the history of philosophy.

F: Great!

C: Last year I was not there, I did not delve into the subjects, I did not do philosophy. But this year I learned that there are many things that are needed.

C: Philosophy would serve more for adults who have no imagination. And philosophy develops imagination. The little ones want to do philosophy, so they always have imagination.

C: Philosophy is a method for having fun and learning at the same time.

The children were really passionate when they expressed what they thought. Most of them were very attentive, even those who were silent were clearly present with the way they watched what was happening. As we had little time and I had been questioning them most of the time, at this point I offered them the opportunity to ask me any questions they would like to ask me. They wanted to know about Brazilian children and schools and they asked a number of questions about the size, subjects and other characteristics of Brazilian schools. Then they asked about the invention of philosophy and I couldn't but give them back the question. This is the short dialogue we had on that topic, to which we'll return in the conclusions:

C: I have another question: who invented philosophy?

F: Mmmmmm ... I would also like to know!

- C: In my opinion, she was a person who wanted to remember having been a child.
- C: In my opinion, God invented philosophy.
- C: A person who wanted to open his mind and wanted to be great has invented it for me.
- C: In my opinion philosophy was invented by a person who wanted to help others and wanted to invent a subject of his own.
- C: For me philosophy has invented that lady with a skirt made of a scale of questions [the lady represented in an image of Cesare Ripa, on which the children had worked the year before].
- C: Philosophy ... I know from what it was created! From mathematics and geometry.
- C: In my opinion, philosophy was invented by someone who wanted to explain things.

After this short interaction I felt I should give them again the opportunity to ask questions and we then talked about a number of things they were curious to know about Brazil. I also told them that Brazil was experiencing political and economic difficulties with public schools and universities having serious financial difficulties. Finally, I thanked them for their hospitality and shared my deep impression of their commitment to philosophy and thinking.

Some tentative conclusions

After more than one hour of intense dialogue with these attentive thinkers, I left the school a little tired physically yet intellectually extremely energised by the children's ideas, and also by their emotional life and joy. Among the number of interesting conclusions that could be taken from this experience I would like just to highlight a few.

The importance of a collaborative work between a public University and a public school is clear and desired (Henning 2010; Mohr Lone & Burroughs 2016; Mohr Lone & Israeloff 2012) through projects like *Philosophia Ludens with Children*. It is clear that

in this specific school an intense collaborative relationship takes place between university professors, students and researchers who not only have a very solid background in philosophy but, significantly, they also have a very horizontal and open approach to school (Caputo 2016a). In other words, they do not engage as experts who will teach the children what they know, but as subjects of experience who will learn together with the children through the philosophical work they share; the school is also open to experimentation and dialogue with the outside (Kohan 2013; Caputo 2016a). One point of interrogation concerning this project, though, is the position of the school teachers within it. It seems they do not have any specific role in the project itself. Those who conduct the philosophical experiences in schools are PhD candidates in Philosophy from the University of Bari, and it does not seem to be a project of interest to teacher education.

Another conclusion which seems pretty obvious in light of the conversation presented here is that these children of eight years old have extraordinary philosophical sensitivity and passion; they enact a strong image of the 'philosophical child', as Jana Mohr Lone has widely argued in terms of the philosophical capability and sensitivity of children (Mohr Lone 2012). They were not only extremely enthusiastic and committed to our dialogue, but they also showed deep ideas and perspectives in their thoughts and in their drawings, as David Kennedy has extensively shown in what he calls a hermeneutic of childhood, highlighting care and attention to children's different forms of expression (Kennedy 2010). The Italian children exceeded all forms of expression with their images and words; and they presented them in a musical way (one of the children defined philosophy as a 'scale of questions', cf. Santi 2017); their ideas concerning such complex themes as imagination, fantasy, the relationship between imagination and ideas; their images of time and memory... and their bodily gestures were completely energised, taking part fully in the shared conversation. Clearly, the children were not just playing an intellectual game but 'touched in the soul' (Biesta 2017), i.e., not only carrying a thinking experiment but they were fully and existentially involved in it. More, they seemed to be relating to philosophy not as a path to grown-upness but mainly as a form of living childhood (Cassidy 2017).

How can we relate to what a child says? What's the aim of philosophising with them? There is a usual path in *Philosophy for Children* to respond those questions: to identify 'philosophical progress' and look for its impact in the education of children. This has been the path initiated by Matthew Lipman (1988) and Ann M Sharp (Sharp & Splitter 1995). Stressing the impact of philosophical inquiry on children's better

judgement and more recent developments has provided, for example, 'a framework for understanding epistemic philosophical progress in Philosophy for Children' (see, for example, Golding 2017). Given the shortness of the experience recorded here as part of the *Philosophia Ludens for Children* project, one can only anticipate its stronger philosophical potential if more time had been available. There is, however, another side of the relationship to childhood that probably no-one other than David Kennedy has so clearly posited. Due to what he calls 'children's epistemic privilege' (Kennedy 2010, p. 15), listening to the voice of the child can be an opportunity to rediscover an adult's own childhood in a very different form. In terms of the *Philosophia Ludens for Children* project this would be a movement from 'Philosophy for Children' to 'Children for Philosophy'.

What do we find if we listen to the voices of the children I met? First, we find that the children in the study have a very positive vision of childhood. Even though they did not speak about childhood itself but about 'being a child/children' (some of them with its gender marking in the Italian language), it is quite clear that they see childhood as a very privileged position in human life. They do not want to be grown-ups, but would rather stay as children as long as possible (Cassidy et al. 2017). I felt quite surprised, probably because in an international research project coordinated by Claire Cassidy, *Children's Voices on Childhood*, we did a workshop with children at a public school in Duque de Caxias, State of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, a few weeks earlier, with Vanise Cassia and the results were practically the opposite. The Caxias children had a very negative view of childhood and were all looking forward to being adults soon (Cassidy et al. 2017). The reasons given were diverse but the argument was repeated that one is more free or can do more things as an adult than as a child. These Italian children have such a different perspective from the Brazilian ones. There are certainly social, cultural and economic differences between the two cohorts that can partially explain the difference, but the Italian children were so positive that I only want to put them in touch with the Brazilian children in order that both groups can help each other to question their assumptions and recreate this endless dialogue (Mohr Lone & Burroughs 2016) on the realms of childhood, education and philosophy.

Secondly, and going back to Kennedy's suggestion, listening to the voices of these children we can pay attention to one of their understandings of the invention of philosophy which precisely puts together childhood and philosophy in a very meaningful way. Let's remember how one child answered the question of the other ('who invented philosophy?'): he said that philosophy was invented by someone

who wanted to remember having been a child. This imaginative idea was probably the result of some time spent trying to define first childhood and then philosophy. This is the precise movement from 'philosophy for children' to 'children for philosophy'. Instead of, or before forming children—not necessarily before chronologically as we learned in this experience—the presence of philosophy in schools could be an interesting way of reminding philosophers (and teachers, and indeed anyone) that they have been a child. A child reminded us that we have been a child. This is what this experience shows and this writing has tried to recall: that maybe philosophy in schools is more about children educating philosophy than philosophy educating children. That philosophy, when it listens to children, is about remembering the forces of childhood.

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