Philosophy for Children in Moral Education

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Abstract

Morality and moral act are what truly differentiate man from any other living being.

Philosophy for Children (P4C) is a didactic approach widely implemented in schools across the UK. It helps beginner teachers who are hesitant between making decisions about creating extra time for moral education or promoting children's moral education. A P4C program was also adopted by the Frasin Secondary School, from Suceava County, Romania, and its effects were assessed through the Moral Judgment Test, developed by Lind, in 1978. The control group includes the Bucşoaia Secondary School.

The results demonstrated the positive impact of P4C implementation on the development of moral competence among students who benefited from P4C lessons, while the control group did not show such improvements. There were no statistically significant differences regarding the moral education of the preadolescents of 11-12 years in the two groups. But, moral education has been shown to increase progressively following the implementation of P4C among the students from the experimental group, creating the foundation of moral judgment on the concepts of justice. Moral education strengthens the communication skills of students, but also their ability to resolve conflicts in a non-violent way.

Keywords: *philosophy for children, moral education, moral competence, morality.*

Morality and moral acts mean more than disciplined conduct, behavior adapted to the social organization or perspective of institutionally educated comprehension. Moral consciousness is not only a cognitively enhanced through training consciousness, but it represents a sui-generis phenomenon, reshaped in a new form of reality. Without any exaggeration, we can consider moral ability to be what really differentiates man from any other living being.

Philosophy for Children (P4C) is a didactic approach now widely implemented in schools across the UK, which aims are to stimulate discussions on different topics, to improve children's communication skills and their ability to conceive their own philosophical-type questions or arguments. Philosophy for

Children is applied to the whole class with the purpose to stimulate classroom dialogue according to their own philosophical questions about various stories, films or other stimuli. The group sits in a circle, facing each other and the teacher starts an activity or game related to a particular theme, skill or disposition that the teacher wishes to highlight. He presents to the class a video, a story, an image or an artefact. Then, the group discusses about the stimulus, raises a number of questions and, by mutual agreement, chooses one question that is suitable for discussion. For example, "What is kindness?", "It is OK to deprive someone of their freedom?" or "Are people's physical looks more important than their actions?" (Siddiqui, Gorard & See, 2017, p. 5)

After one appropriate question is selected, the main discussion starts. Students share their ideas related to the selected question and give their point of view. The session ends with the last words from all the students. They may have the same opinion as at the beginning of the discussion or they may change it as a result of the dialogue. Students are invited to express their views concisely and discuss how the lesson went. For example, the teacher asks "What went well?", "What could we improve?" or "What should we do next?" Thus, students can develop assessment and thinking skills, as well as planning for the improvement of subsequent sessions. (Siddiqui, Gorard & See, 2017, pp. 13-14)

Every person faces daily moral problems, and the educational process must improve their skills to solve problems. Philosophy for children especially helps beginner teachers, who are hesitant between making decisions about creating extra time for moral education or promoting children's moral education.

Some authors draw attention to the social roles of people. Everyone has certain roles: as a friend, sister, daughter/son or parent. Nel Noddings (2006, p. 44) emphasizes the importance of these roles, common to human beings, which are social roles, and claims that schools largely ignore the improvement and support of these roles. In a broad perspective, the morality of the society is emphasized as a perception composed of the moral perception of each individual, which reflects the common perception of a society. Similarly, Klaus Fichter, assesses moral values as vital criteria and control tool for ensuring peace in social life (Karababa, 2015, pp. 1-18). In daily life, morality has a major effect on the process of making- decisions in routine experiences. Schools are responsible for transferring social values to people, through the hidden use of the curriculum and through the curriculum implemented, and students present humanistic values implementations in their daily life. (Durmuş, 2019, p. 302)

The actions of the teachers lead to permanent changes in the thoughts and actions of the students, and in different studies of the teachers, responsibility has been defined as "being an effective role model". (Lickona, 1997) Beyond being an effective role model, teachers are responsible for honest communication and confidential communication, thus building a learning environment in which everyone shares their opinions without hesitation, while showing respect for the opinions of the others, and not forcing students to accept what the teacher considers to be right, but considering that the responsibility of the teachers is to listen carefully to the students, this constituting a positive and respectful approach towards the students.

A program for the implementation of the Philosophy for Children in schools was also adopted by the Frasin Secondary School, in Suceava County, and its effects were evaluated through the Moral Judgement Test, developed by Georg Lind, in 1978. From September 2018 to June 2019, the students of the 5th and 6th grades of this school participated for one hour a week in activities to stimulate thinking and dialogue with the others. At the end of the sessions, the students reported that they found the intervention interesting and enjoyed participating. The control group includes the students of the Bucşoaia Secondary School, from the same county. During the implementation of the Philosophy for Children at the experimental group, the control group assisted to the usual teaching and learning activities.

The purpose of the research was to highlight the impact that Philosophy for Children has on the moral development among the 11-12 years old preadolescents. This goal could be achieved by conducting a test-retest analysis that measured the moral thinking of the pupils of the school where the Philosophy for Children was implemented, compared to the students who performed their usual activities (without participating to the program).

The main hypothesis of the research is the following: *Philosophy for Children contributes to the development of moral judgment skills of 11-12 years old preadolescents.* Starting from this hypothesis, a working hypothesis was formulated: *There are statistically significant differences between the moral judgment of preadolescents from the experimental group and the moral judgment of the preadolescents of the same age, from the control group, in the sense that the experimental group has a higher moral judgment, as a result of the implementation of the Philosophy for Children.* This, in turn, was separated on operational hypotheses, depending on the perspective by which the moral judgment was measured. The operational hypotheses will be presented later.

Regarding the choice of the sample, it was based on the explanations of Jean Piaget, regarding the fact that the thinking of the children becomes capable to solve intellectual and moral-legally problems around the age of 11-12 years. Thus, respondents from the 5th and 6th grades were selected from the two schools mentioned above. In the experimental group are included 31 students in the test stage, of which 17 (54.8%) are boys and 14 (45.2%) are girls. Of these, 18 (58.1%) -9 girls and 9 boys- are 5th grade students and 13 (41.9%) -5 girls and 8 boys- are 6th grade students. During the retest stage, 32 students participated (the same ones from the test plus another student). The control group includes 26 students in the testing phase. Only 23 were present at the retest. Of these, 11 (47.8%) are boys and 12 (52.2%) are girls; 10 (43.5%) -4 girls and 6 boys- are 5th grade students and 13 (56.5%) -8 girls and 5 boys- are 6th grade students.

The instrument that underpinned the research (the Moral Competence Test) is a dedicated research tool, which assesses the competence of moral judgment and moral behavior. The standard version contains two moral dilemmas (*Worker's Dilemma* and *Doctor's Dilemma*) with resolution given by the author (Lind, 2020). Each one presents the story of a person who is caught in a behavioral dilemma: no matter what decision they make, it will conflict with certain rules of conduct. What matters is the "quality" of the decision and not the decision itself, because whether the decision was sustainable or not depends on the reasons behind it. For some, it is very important if someone behaves well because he or she feels this way, it is in concordance with its principles, is waiting for a reward, is forced to do so by outside forces, or because he or she wants to conform to his or her moral consciousness. The respondents have to assess first (on a 7-point Likert scale) how much they reject or agree with the solution given for each dilemma and, after that, they will to evaluate to what extent reject or accept (on a 9-point Likert scale) six different-type arguments in support of the given solution and six different-type arguments in support of rejecting them for the two dilemmas.

So, for each dilemma, the respondent must judge twelve arguments. Therefore, in the standard version there are 24 arguments to evaluate. The respondent will have be evaluated as having a higher level if he or she will evaluate steadily, in the level of acceptance or rejection, the arguments, unrelated with his or her pro or con opinion

In order to test the research hypotheses, on the one hand, the results recorded at the retest will be compared among the pre-adolescents from the two groups (experimental, respectively control group) and, on the other hand, the test and retest results within the same school will be compared, in order to highlight

the impact of Philosophy for Children on moral education. As the sample volume representing the control group is less than 30 and the distribution of the population from which this sample was extracted is not known, a nonparametric statistical test (the Mann-Whitney U test) is required to validate / invalidate the research hypotheses.

In order to assess the level of moral judgment, we can use a series of indexes: the index of moral competence *C-score*, the adjusted index *C+ index* and the index of pros and cons arguments *the PC-Index*. As a result, three operational hypotheses were formulated, one specific to each index, as follows:

1. P4C will cause a statistically significant increase in the index of moral competence C-score.

2. P4C will cause a statistically significant increase in the adjusted index C + index.

3. P4C will determine a statistically significant increase in the index of pro and con arguments PC-Index.

The results of the study will be presented below, in order to create a more accurate image of the impact of Philosophy for Children on moral education among the 11-12 years old preadolescents.

The index of moral competence *C-score* scores the degree to which a person's judgments are determined by moral principles and not by other psychological forces such as the human tendency to create arguments according to someone else's opinion or decision related to a particular problem (Lind, 2013, 2008b; 2020; Lind & Wakenhut, 1985). It ranges from 0 to 100 and can be rated as: very low (1-9), low (10-19), medium (20-29), high (30-39), very high (40-49) and extraordinary high (over 50) (Lind, 2008b). In general, the average value of this index ranges from 10 to 40 (Lind, 2020).

In the first application of the Moral Compence Test, the C-score values vary between 1.10 and 39.74 among students in the experimental group, respectively between 0.53 and 40.52 among students in the control group. In the second application of the test, the index fluctuates in the range 3.44 - 61.25 among the students in the experimental group, respectively in the range 1.22 - 37.29 among the students in the control group.

Even if the calculation of the C-score is independent of the opinion ratings, there are other indices that take into account the participants' opinion on each particular dilemma or the pros and cons of the two issues exposed: for example, *the C+ index* and *the PC-Index*. (McDaniel, 2007, p. 19) They take values between 0 and 1. The adjusted C+ index has the role of correcting the tendency of persons

with high moral judgment competence to appreciate less counter-arguments than supporting arguments, which would lead to the inability to obtain maximum C-score of 100 (Lind, 2020). The correlation between the C + index and the initial C-score is very high (r> 0.95) and, for this reason, the adjusted index is rarely used (Lind, 2020). The PC-Index follows whether the participant responds in the same way to the pros and cons, if he approves relatively the same arguments for the same stage of moral orientation, even if they are contrary arguments. In other words, respondents' reactions to pro arguments indicate the preferred level of moral judgment to find a solution to the dilemma, but their reactions to counter arguments, which contradict the solution they choose, indicate the ability to use a certain level of moral judgment in a consistent way when judging the opinions, arguments and behavior of others (Lind, 2000). Therefore, an individual will be classified as having a high moral competence only if he shows consistency in the degree of acceptance or rejection of the arguments, whether they are for or against the solution found by him. Instead, he will be evaluated as having a low level of moral competence if the personal opinion regarding the solution he considers "correct" for a dilemma and the affective involvement in his support influence the degree of acceptance or rejection of the counter-arguments, ignoring their moral quality (Faiciuc, 2016, p. 88), consistency in supporting and protecting their own position in the face of criticism, sometimes indicating moral rigidity (Lind, 2000).

In this study, these optional indexes were also calculated, in order to test the effect that P4C had on the cognitive reasoning of the students in the experimental group. After the application of the moral judgment test in the test stage, there were obtained C+ index values between 0.01 and 0.41 among the students in the experimental group, respectively between 0.01 and 0.43 among the students in the control group. After the second application of the test, values were obtained in the range 0.04 - 0.63 among students in the experimental group, respectively in the range 0.01 - 0.39 among students in the control group. Regarding the pros and cons arguments, values ranging from 0 to 0.85 were obtained among the students in the experimental group, respectively between 0.01 and 0.91 among the students in the control group, during the testing stage. In the second application of the test, the index PC-Index takes values in the range 0 - 0.86 among the students in the experimental group, respectively in the range 0 - 0.52 among the students in the control group. The index of pros and cons has slightly evolved from one stage to another, in the case of the experimental group and has dropped quite a lot in the case of the control group.

Following the test of the working hypothesis, the Mann-Whitney U test shows that *the C-score* was not statistically significantly different between the experimental group (M_{retest} = 21.36; Mean Rank = 30.06) and the control group (M_{retest} = 17.07; Mean Rank = 25.13), U = 302, z = -1.126, p = 0.260; likewise, in the case of *the C+ index,* similar results were obtained after comparing the experimental group (Mean Rank = 30.19) with the control group (Mean Rank = 24.96), U = 298, z = -1.194, p = 0.232; same result was observed in terms of *the PC-Index* values registered in the experimental group (Mean Rank = 27.44) and the control group (Mean Rank = 28.78), U = 350, z = -0.307, p = 0.759. Hence, *there were no statistically significant differences (p > 0.05 for all indices of moral judgment competence) regarding the moral judgment of preadolescents from the experimental group and the moral judgment of the preadolescents of the same age, from the control group.* Therefore, this is not confirmed; so, it can be said that P4C program did not have a statistically significant influence on the competence of the moral judgment and the moral behavior of the students in the 5th and 6th grades. For this reason, the program could be resumed and run for a longer period of time, and the new results should be analyzed later.

Analyzing the first operational hypothesis, using the same Mann-Whitney U test, it can be observed that the average index of moral competence increased from one stage to another, in the case of both participating schools, but differently, under the influence that P4C exerted on the moral development of the students from experimental group. In the case of these students, a higher, but statistically insignificant increase of the C-score *value from the test stage (M_{test} = 17.43; Mean Rank = 29.29) to the retest stage (M_{retest} = 21.36; Mean Rank = 34.63), U = 412, z = -1.155, p = 0.248,* was observed, after P4C was implemented. Even among the students in the control group, there were no significant differences regarding the moral competence measured in the retest stage (M_{retest} = 17.07; Mean Rank = 25.35) compared to the test stage (M_{test} = 16.17; Mean Rank = 24.69), U = 291, z = -0.160, p = 0.873.

Similar results were reported for the second operational hypothesis. The average adjusted index registered a more pronounced increase in the case of the students in the experimental group, where we can see the positive effect that the classes of Philosophy for Children have on the development of the social and moral competence of the students of the 5th and 6th grade students. In the case of the students in the control group, we can observe some constancy regarding morality. From a statistical point of view, an insignificant increase of the adjusted index C+ index was observed for both the students in the experimental group (*p* =

0.226> 0.05), after the implementation of P4C program, from the test stage (M_{test} = 0.18; Mean Rank = 29.16) to the retest stage (M_{retest} = 0.22; Mean Rank = 34.75), U = 408, z = -1.210, p = 0.226, as well as for the students in the control group, among which similar values were recorded between the test run (M_{test} = 0.17; Mean Rank = 24.73) and retest (M_{retest} = 0.18; Mean Rank = 25.30), U = 292, z = -0.140, p = 0.888. However, moral competence increased more among the 5th and 6th grade students in the experimental group, after the implementation of P4C, compared to the situation among the students in the control group, who attended only regular courses, without special educational programs.

Analyzing the third operational hypothesis, it was shown that, in the first application of the Moral Competence Test, the PC-Index values ranged from 0 to 0.85 among students in the experimental group (M_{test} = 0.18), respectively between 0.01 and 0.91 among students in the control group (M_{test} = 0.25). In the second application of the test, the index takes values in the range 0 - 0.86 among students in the experimental group (M_{retest} = 0.19), respectively in the range 0 - 0.52 among students in the control group (M_{retest} = 0.16). The index of pros and cons has slightly evolved from one stage to another, in the case of the experimental group and has dropped quite a lot in the case of the control group. From a statistical point of view, there was an insignificant increase of the index of the pros and cons arguments from the test stage (M_{test} = 0.18; Mean Rank = 33.65) to the retest stage (M_{retest} = 0.19; Mean Rank = 30.41), U = 445, z = -0.701, p = 0.483, in the case of the students in the experimental group, who received P4C. In contrast, among the students in the control group, there was a statistically insignificant decrease in the moral competence from the perspective of the pros and cons measured in the retest stage (M_{retest} = 0.16; Mean Rank = 21.30) versus the test stage (M_{test} = 0.25; Mean Rank = 28.27), U = 214, z = -1.703, p = 0.089.

In conclusion, the moral competence increased to a greater, but modest, extent among the 5th and 6th grade students included in the experimental group, after the implementation of the Philosophy for Children lessons, compared to the situation registered among the 5th and 6th grade students from the control group, who only benefited from the class hours, without participating in any special educational programs. Based on these results, it can be stated that the main hypothesis of the research is moderately confirmed; in other words, *Philosophy for Children contributes to the development of moral judgment skills of 11-12 years old preadolescents.* This increase could become statistically significant if the philosophy lessons would run for a longer period of time.

Another important result relates to the stages of moral development. In this study it has been shown that moral development progressively increases following the implementation of P4C among students in the experimental group, creating the foundation of moral judgment on the concepts of justice. After the implementation of the Philosophy for Children, with the increase of the moral competences, the students accept to a greater extent the moral orientations of highest type and reject the orientations in which the facts are judged only by consequences (either punishment or reward). In case of the students in the control group, there are observed oscillations in the passage from one stage to another, being difficult to outline an image of their moral judgment. For example, in the testing phase there are negative correlations between moral competence and a moral thinking coordinated by moral principles, on the one hand, and positive correlations between moral competence and preconventional morality, on the other. In other words, among students who have low moral competence, the basic criterion in the analysis of moral acts is the critical report to the norm, while the students who have high moral competence are those who obey the moral rules to avoid punishment or to get personal rewards. At the retest, the situation changes, oscillations of the correlation coefficient appear at the transition from one stage of moral development to another and we cannot speak about affective-cognitive parallelism. However, these results are predicted by the theory, due the young age of the participants.

Lind argues that Jean Piaget's affective-cognitive parallelism could organize the educational system, and without affective and emotional exercise there is little learning and hardly a lasting effect on learning. Moreover, if we do not take into account the cognitive aspects of moral disorders, there is no moral evolution from the level of black and white moral thinking (which is associated with a high probability of resorting to violence as a way to "promote" what is right) to a level with more integrated and differentiated moral judgment, thus facilitating non-violent ways of conflict resolution. (Lind, 2008a)

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