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How do children form philosophical questions and how do such questions evolve when learners reason collectively?

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OBJECTIVE

At school, children are traditionally encouraged to give answers rather than ask questions. Thus they may be interested in knowledge but not in knowing. But questioning, as well as curiosity and astonishment, are important skills in learning. Questions lead us to experience our own thought: reflect, doubt, inquire, arguing about opinions and challenging ideas, and confronting them with peers’ thoughts. Helping children to learn how to think by themselves, through philosophical dialogue, is one of the main aims of an innovative teaching practice called “Philosophy for Children”. Questioning, as a philosophical reflection, includes both an emotional dimension and an intellectual one. We know that questioning is no longer a spontaneous mental act for learners from the third year of primary school (Dewey, 1916, Lipman & al., 1980, Daniel, 2008). But what about astonishment? Is there still present? We would like to understand how learners form and develop their questioning, when thinking together during philosophical discussions.

Collective Reasoning and Philosophical Inquiry in PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN

INTRODUCTION

• What are learners supposed to do in a CPI?
  - think about concepts and discuss the criteria/standards which surround these concepts, in order to distinguish the correct processes of thought from the incorrect one.

• How is this done?
  - learners are given a particular topic or story and then they are encouraged to think about it for themselves, sharing opinions and creating a rich dialogue based on reasoning.

• Why questioning in a philosophical dialogue?
  - Recent research (Sapere, 2014) showed positive effects of using philosophy at school:
    - significant progress in mathematical and reading (primary school) and positive effects in speaking out, self-confidence, capacity of listening and self-respect.
  - Studies about the potential of learners’ questions for initiating collaborative argumentation in science (Chin & Osborne, 2010).

Research about learners’ questioning for initiating conceptual and methodological reflection, have not yet been studied.

Questioning: from Astonishment to Inquiry

METHOD

Conceptual and linguistic analyses of philosophical dialogues between learners, guided by teachers.

Two devices: class; club

Population

• 1 class (size = 24) in primary school (PS), 8/10 years old, in a well-to-do rural zone;
• 2 classes (size = 20 and 22) in middle school (MS), 11/13 years old, in a socio-economic and cultural mix, combined with a weak academic level

CH: « philo club », between 6 and 11 voluntary participants (MS), 12/14 years old

Material

12 videos recorded, transcribed and annotated with ELAN https://ita.mpi.nl/tools/ita-tools/elan/

Learners’ questionnaire (N = 56)

RESULTS

A) What do the children think about asking questions and giving answers at school?

B) Learners’ questioning attitudes in philosophical discussion

C) Observing the acts of asking questions

D) Learners’ questioning evolves in interaction with teacher and peers

CONCLUSION

Children think that school expects them to give answers rather than ask questions and they consider themselves to be more at ease with the first. But when teachers invite them to a philosophical discussion, they are able to ask questions about what they desire to understand. They are also able to question others’ opinions. But in order to raise philosophical questions and problems, a collective reflection with peers and teacher’s interventions seems necessary.

REFERENCES


SAPERE: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evaluation/projects/philosophy-for-children/the-project