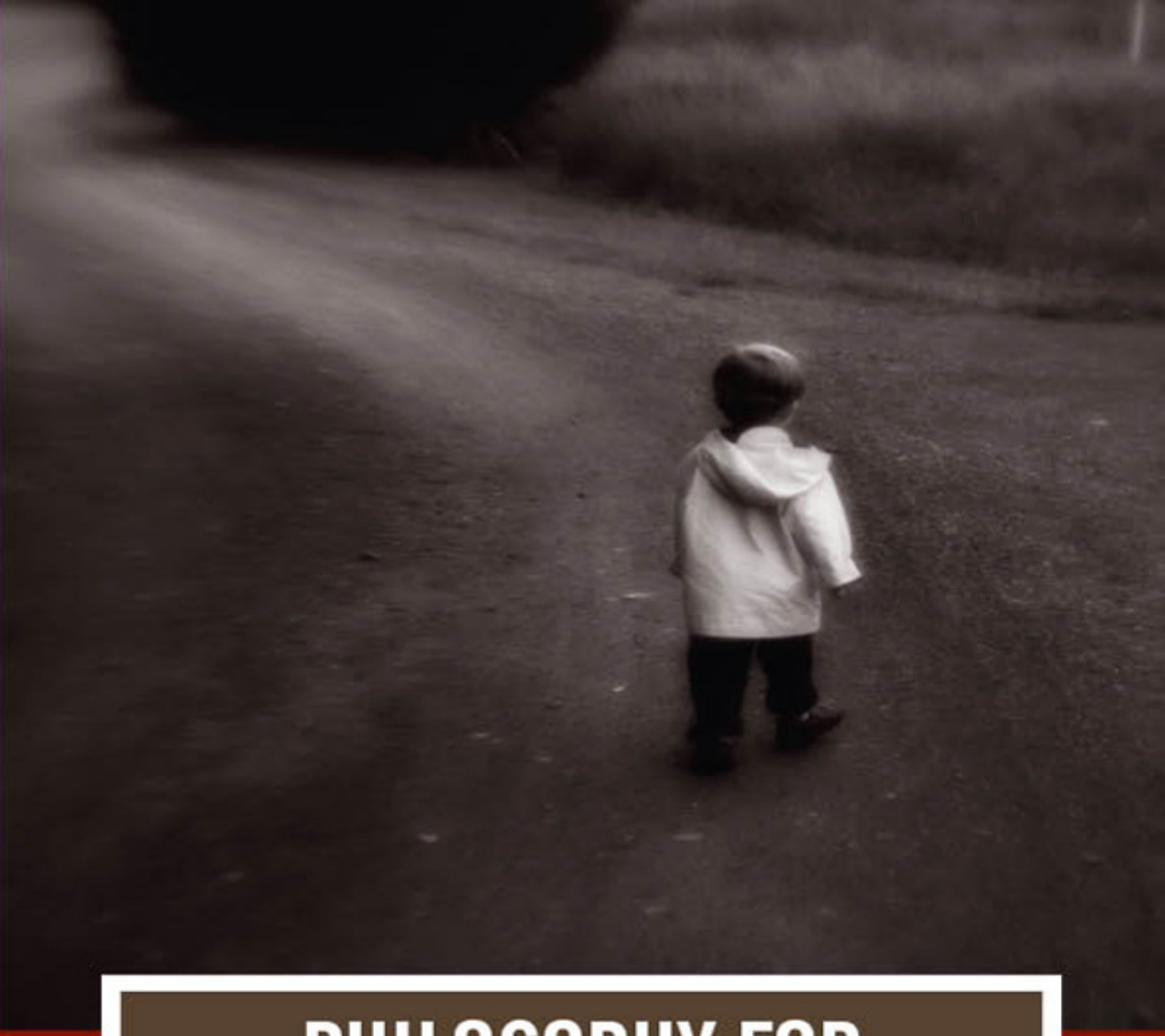

PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN IN TRANSITION

Problems and Prospects

Edited by Nancy Vansieleghem and David Kennedy

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Preface

Inventive geniuses, such as Pestalozzi, Bronson Alcott, Rabindranath Tagore and Socrates himself, have inspired practices of teaching and learning fit for democracy: it is through them that children can become active, creative and curious citizens, capable of resisting authority and peer pressure; and there is, to this end, a contemporary source of practical guidance for teachers in the work that has become known as philosophy for children. This at least is the view expressed by Martha Nussbaum in her recent Not for Profit: Why Education Needs the Humanities (2010, Princeton University Press), a work in which she connects philosophy for children with the progressive tradition, with critical thinking, with Socratic pedagogy and with what she cares about most in the idea of a liberal education. She praises the pioneering insights of Matthew Lipman and Gareth Matthews into the capacity children have for interesting philosophical thought, and she commends the innovative resources in Lipman—s Harry Stottlemeier—s Discovery and its sequels. Not everyone can be an inventive genius, but here we have the methodology and curriculum materials that ordinary teachers need.

It is sad to record that, during the time that this special issue has been in preparation, both Lipman and Matthews have died, respectively on 26 December 2010 and on 17 April 2011. The tributes to them have been legion. Matthews—ground-breaking work in thinking, writing and teaching about philosophy and children was disseminated in particular through three books—Philosophy and the Young Child (1980), Dialogues with Children (1984) and The Philosophy of Childhood (1994), all published by Harvard University Press—and his influence spread world-wide. Lipman—s considerable output and dedication to the cause originated, according to Douglas Martin in the New York Times obituary (14 January 2011), in the contentious years

of the Vietnam War: Lipman had found that many Americans were having trouble presenting their views about the conflict cogently. This distressed him deeply and led him to the view that if the ability to think critically was not established in childhood, it would be unlikely later to flourish. Hence, he hit upon the idea of teaching philosophy to children, and the course that he developed spread, in its original or derivative forms, to more than 4,000 schools in the United States and more than sixty foreign countries, its materials translated into forty languages.

The legacy of this work is surely plain enough to see, in the various pedagogical movements that have sought to address philosophical questions with children, and in the increasing extent to which policy-makers are turning to this work to explore its potential enhancement of mainstream education. Part of the appeal is perhaps what Nussbaum finds in Lipman's writings and pedagogical style—its familiarity and gentle humour. Indeed the success of the movement in promoting its work has come in part from its understandable exploitation of this image, as is captured perhaps in its displacing of the cumbersome word 'philosophy' with the text-style, child-friendly 'P4C'.

But the legacy has not been without its ideological disputes, with leading proponents zealously defending their preferred methodology and practice, and it has not been without its critics. What is it, then, it is sometimes asked, that philosophy for children does that is different from what good teachers have always done? Does the movement depend upon contrasting itself with a picture of traditional, supposedly uncritical teaching and learning that is little more than caricature? Why does it tend to insist upon its particular procedural protocols? Thus, to what extent does it end up, in spite of itself as it were, being overly directive? And how far, in its preoccupation with the procedures of thinking, does it hide the importance of attention to the

objects of study? Finally, a classic criticism of the progressive educator, does friendliness become sentimentality? These are the kinds of questions that are not really entertained in Nussbaum's somewhat bland, eulogistic remarks and in the connections she too quickly draws.

Paul Standish

Introduction: What is Philosophy for *Children, What is Philosophy* with *Children—After Matthew Lipman?*

NANCY VANSIELEGHEM AND DAVID KENNEDY

Philosophy for Children[1] arose in the 1970s in the US as an educational programme, initiated by Matthew Lipman (1922–2010), which was devoted to exploring the relationship between the notions 'philosophy' and 'childhood', with the implicit practical goal of establishing philosophy as a full-fledged 'content area' in US public schools—a goal that has, with time, become an increasingly distant one. This is not so much the case in the UK, Europe and Latin America, however, where the theory and practice of doing philosophy for or with school age children appears to be of growing both interest and concern in the field of education and, by implication, in society as a whole. Examples of this emergent interest can be found not only in the growing number of curriculum materials published in this area, but in the many workshops and teacher training courses devoted to practical philosophy that are organised for educational practitioners, managers and teacher trainers.

This volume focuses on the emergence of this 'philosophy/child' relation, and more precisely, on the horizon against which it has been born and has taken shape. We attempt to locate the arguments that make it reasonable to think through the relationship between philosophy and the child, and that clarify its significance for teaching and learning today. Our aim is twofold: first, to become familiar

with an actual educational practice that is not at all well known in the field of academic philosophy itself; and second, to offer an invitation to rethink the relationship between philosophy and the child ‘after Lipman’. In this article, and as a means of contextualising the different contributions to this issue, we provide an introduction to some of the main arguments and ideas that have given shape to the idea of philosophy for children in recent decades. In doing so, we follow Ronald Reed and Tony Johnson (1999) in subdividing the history of the movement into a first and a second generation. Characteristic of the first generation was its emphasis on a strategic uniformity of approach, given its ambitions for a place in public schooling, while the second broke with this mode of thinking, and welcomed difference as a principle of growth. This in fact fits our own purposes, in that we are interested in envisaging philosophy for children not so much as a totality, but rather as an assemblage of moving elements that forms a particular horizon—and thus as ‘some-thing’ that is in movement and can turn toward thought (cf. Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 38). Hence, in what follows we focus not on one particular author or on one ideological or methodological subgroup within the movement, but rather attempt, first, to map the epistemological and pedagogical discourses within which this set of discourses emerged.

ON PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN: A FIRST GENERATION

In *Modelle und Perspektiven der Kinderphilosophie* (1997) Stephan Englhart refers to three different horizons through which philosophy for children became a matter of

educational interest in the 1970s. We begin with Matthew Lipman, whose arguments for the need for such a programme were based on a notion of critical thinking that was strongly influenced by the pragmatic philosophy of John Dewey. Enabled by Lipman's initiative, but migrating into a different but related discourse, Gareth Matthews approached the issue more from a philosopher's than an educator's point of view, and introduced a notion of philosophical dialogue with children that was grounded in the adult appreciation of a child's inherent sense of wonder. Matthews (1980) emphasised the need to rethink the child, not as an ignorant being, but as a rational agent who already has the capacity to reason philosophically, and he thereby opened a space for the emergent field of what is now known as philosophy of childhood (Matthews, 1994; Kennedy, 1992). This moment of confluence was clearly marked by a symposium held at the Eastern Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association in 1980, in which both Matthews and Lipman presented papers,[2] which were addressed by three respondents. These were published in 1981 in a double issue of Lipman's journal *Thinking: The Journal of Philosophy for Children* (2, 3 and 4), accompanied by a rich literary compendium of childhood memoir, poetry, and philosophical and psychoanalytic reflection. Finally, following on these two related approaches, another emerged that understood philosophy for children as a means for reconstructing relations of power and agency in the classroom, and for communicating and reflecting upon personal meanings, with a goal of facilitating the self-actualisation of conscious moral actors. In what follows we offer a brief overview of these different lines of argument.

P4C AS A MEANS OF DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS IN AN EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

The growing interest in critical thinking that emerged at the end of the 1970s was based on the conviction that an emphasis on reasoning was a necessary element of any deep-structural educational reform, and that the introduction of philosophy into the content of schooling represented the one best curricular and pedagogical hope for bringing that element forth in the culture and practice of schooling. The most important representative of this approach at this time was Matthew Lipman, who developed the philosophical novel *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery* (1974), which, whatever its literary merits, established a new genre—the philosophical novel for children—with a single stroke. *Harry* represents the attempt to construct a pedagogical tool that functions as a model for critical thinking by describing 'real life' children engaged in critical dialogue about philosophical issues, with the goal of stimulating the same sort of dialogue among groups of students. At the same moment, several approaches—a revival of Leonard Nelson's Socratic Method, in particular—emerged that shared Lipman's assumption that the stimulation of communal critical thinking led to an improvement of thinking in the individual. Beyond that similarity, however, Nelson (1882–1927) and Lipman differed in their epistemic assumptions.

While Nelson's 'philosophical truth' is located at the foundation of experience, Lipman adopted an evolutionary view of knowledge. Following Kant, Nelson believed that knowledge from observation presupposes the application of categories that are not to be found through empirical inquiry

but are already present in the person and determine experience itself. Thinking, in other words, is not derived purely from our experience; rather, our experience is structured and made possible by thinking. Nelson followed Kant in holding to the categories of *a priori* thinking but differed in his claim that these *a priori* categories cannot be proven. It is substance and causality not just in the external world that are knowable by induction, but in the inner world as well. For Nelson, knowledge of the truth is internal, is traceable in and through the conceptual presuppositions of everyday experience, and is gained by regressive abstraction from those experiences. As such, truth can be brought to light by a 'psychological factum' (Nelson, [1975] 1994), which entails introspection and the painstaking dissection of one's own experience. The search for a common order of things is no longer undertaken on the level of human nature, but is based on the connections that materialise in the experience of the individual person. It is as if the truth is present in everyone but needs to be made transparent through the method of regressive abstraction. Here we are dealing with a specific methodology that shows step-by-step how a person can achieve objective knowledge concerning her own thinking.

In his interpretation of the Socratic method Lipman turned not to Kant but to pragmatism. Although the trunk and branches of Lipman's programme can be identified with G. H. Mead, Lev Vygotsky, C. S. Pierce and Justus Buchler, its roots are clearly in the philosophical writings of Dewey (Lipman, 1996, pp. xi–xv). Lipman began with Dewey's idea that there is no distinction between the mind and the external world and, as a consequence, between philosophical truth and scientific truth (cf. Daniel, 1992; McCall, 2009, p. 102). Influenced by Darwin, Dewey had developed an evolutionary view of knowledge, which implies an ongoing adaptive human response to a changing

environment. As a consequence, and in line with Dewey, knowledge for Lipman is not static, but the emergent product of a ceaseless interaction with the environment. Dewey used the word ‘experience’ to explain this interaction, and understood thinking as reflection on the consequences of this interaction, and thereby on the possibilities of further experience. Dewey wrote: ‘Reflection involves not simply a sequence of ideas, but a consequence —a consecutive ordering in such a way that each determines the next as its proper outcome, while each outcome in turn leans back on, or refers to, its predecessors’ (Dewey, 1933, p. 4).

What this means is that thinking enables persons to become aware of the consequences of their actions and thereby to reconstruct those habits from which actions follow. This does not imply that success is guaranteed; but because we have nothing at our disposal that offers us more certainty than the outcome of reflection, it is incumbent upon us to strengthen the reflective quality of our feelings and our actions, however counterintuitive that may appear to ‘common sense’. While Dewey connected this effort to the ongoing reconstruction of habit through experience, Lipman went further and emphasised the efficacy of formal logic in the formation of judgments and the growth of ‘reasonableness’ (see Daniel, 1992). This is not merely about mapping diverse possibilities that may be realised but about the search for possible incorrect presuppositions in the activity of thinking. Accordingly, for Lipman, critical thinking means being able to determine the facts or issues (including ideas, concepts and theories) that cause a problem in order to make hypotheses about how to solve it. Moreover, the logic of the development of knowledge in a given environment and the application of knowledge for the improvement of the quality of living became the horizon against which Lipman’s Philosophy for Children programme

took shape. Accordingly, the aim of P4C for Lipman ‘is not to turn children into philosophers or decision makers, but to help them become more thoughtful, more reflective, more considerate, and more reasonable individuals. Children who have been helped to become more judicious not only have a better sense of when to act but also of when not to act’ (Lipman *et al.*, 1980, p. 15). Against this background, philosophy is no longer regarded as a theoretical activity separated from the world, but rather as a potential that has to (and can) be developed in order to get a grip on one’s interactions with one’s environment, and to influence change.

PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN AS A MEANS OF CLOSING THE GAP BETWEEN THE ADULT AND THE CHILD

A second line of argument that entered the discourse on philosophy for children at the end of the 1970s focuses on the emergent *topos* of the philosophy of childhood. In these approaches, which are often described as Romantic, the notion of childhood as merely a prelude to adulthood is problematised. These studies, amongst which the work of Gareth Matthews is particularly prominent, criticise traditional education for limiting its focus to the transfer of knowledge and, thus, underrating the voice of the child. ‘Children can help us adults investigate and reflect on interesting and important questions and . . . the children’s contributions may be quite as valuable as any we adults have to offer’ (Matthews, 1984, p. 3). Matthews explicitly strives for a symmetrical relation between the adult and the child, and approaches the child as an equal companion in

thought. Therefore he does not speak about philosophy for or with children, but rather ‘dialogues with children’, and argues that children ask the same questions as philosophers do, although differently formulated.

In his book *Philosophy and the Young Child* (1984), Matthews launched a philosophical critique of Piaget’s claim that young children are ‘pre-logical’ and incapable of what Piaget called ‘formal operations’. In so doing, he was in effect questioning the foundational genetic epistemology of the American educational establishment, whose teachers were (and are) socialised from the start into a naive version of developmental, Piagetian discrete stage theory, which itself has been the object of criticism among cognitive scientists for decades (see Brainerd, 1978). Matthews argued that Piaget’s theory displayed an ‘evolutionary bias’ in assuming that the goal of development is maturity, and that each stage of development represents an advance (Matthews, 1994, p. 17). This does not hold for the development of philosophical intelligence, Matthews suggests, and in fact the opposite may be the case: children are likely to ask more interesting questions than adults. ‘The standard response’, he writes, ‘is, in general an unthinking and un-thought-out product of socialisation, whereas the nonconforming response is much more likely to be the fruit of honest reflection. Yet Piaget would have the nonconforming response discounted and eliminated on methodological grounds’ (Matthews, 1980, p. 38).[3]

Correlatively, Matthews argues that the central mission of the school should be to create spaces in which children can articulate and explore their own interpretations of the world and bring these into dialogue with others. Critical thinking means not so much instrumental problem-solving as the capacity and the disposition to fantasise and to wonder, to entertain profound ideas about the world and to confront problems concerning individual well-being. Logical thinking

skills are not emphasised in this approach, or even the discovery of inconsistencies or contradictions in ideas, but rather philosophy as a form of desire—of the opportunity for children to explore and articulate what they have not said or even thought before. As such, philosophy's boundaries shift under the influence of childhood, and it opens itself to the expression even of what can *not* be said, thus intersecting in its practice with art, psychotherapy and what Pierre Hadot called *askesis*, or 'spiritual exercise' (Hadot, 1995).[4] Thus, the experience of interacting philosophically with children results in a profound critique of the normative adult view of the child and of its expression in the 'science as usual' of developmental psychology, which becomes exposed as a sort of epistemic ideology immersed in a discourse that is unaware of its own philosophical assumptions (see Polakow, 1982). In fact this critique finds its justification in developmental psychology with the arrival in the West, contemporary with Lipman's pioneering innovation, of Vygotskian learning theory, which represents a challenge to Piagetian stage theory that has not yet been internalised by institutionalised education, not surprisingly perhaps, given its structural asymmetry with traditional educational assumptions and practices.

P4C AS A STRATEGY TO RECONSTRUCT MECHANISMS OF POWER AND TO COMMUNICATE AND REFLECT UPON PERSONAL MEANINGS

Although clearly related to the previous lines of reasoning, a third (Englhart, 1997, p. 138) is to be found in the attempt to strive for a more human world—that is, a world that is

free from any preordained orientation to what constitutes human thinking and action. Here philosophy appears as a form of communal deliberation that stimulates critical reflection on existing power relations, these being envisaged as historical constructions that are or should be open to reconstruction. An exploration of these constructs is expected to bring into the light the invisible relationships of power that inform them, thereby neutralising their force. This project calls for a form of education whose fundamental discursive engine is dialogue, which privileges inquiry over instruction and the multilogical rather over the monological. Dialogue as a form of speech inherently resists the reification of ideas or practices and trades instead on clarifying essences, postponing judgements, working with ambiguities and interrogating assumptions, these being achieved through dyadic or group deliberation. Its discursive goal is the installation of a Habermasian ‘ideal speech situation’, a free space in which all persons involved in the inquiry have an equal chance to bring their arguments forward in the interest of a an emergent, rationally founded consensus. Ekkehard Martens (1999), one of the proponents of this approach, writes that children need to learn that there are different orientations possible, that no orientation can be claimed as the only one, and that the practice of philosophical inquiry is necessary in order to learn to think beyond totality, dualism and exclusionary categories.

Martens suggest that two dimensions need to be present in designing a philosophical curriculum and pedagogy for children: on the one hand, motivational content, or what he calls ‘homeric themes as food for their souls to grow’, and, on the other, a critical method of thinking modelled on the dialogical style of Socrates, identified as a ‘philosophical spoilsport’ or ‘gadfly’ (Martens, 1999, p. 138). This approach finds the value of philosophy in its capacity to encourage a historically sensitive, trans-cultural approach to knowledge,

in the interest of refining students' powers of detailed analysis and their ability to reach judgements through communicative action based on collaborative interpretation. This also presumes an emphasis on the cultivation of the art of speaking (rhetoric), questioning (dialectic) and writing (grammar), and the strengthening of casuistic reasoning in service of ethical action. Here thinking for oneself implies that one takes responsibility for one's actions, and it assumes that the capacity for responsible action is an outcome of growth in philosophical knowledge and procedures. Philosophy is then understood as a means of increasing the potential power of children (who are defined as essentially vulnerable) in order to neutralise unequal power relations by strengthening processes of communication and cooperation.

A SECOND GENERATION OF PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN: A 'METHOD' BECOMES 'A MOVEMENT'

Today a second generation of 'P4C-representatives' has emerged within the discourse of philosophy for children—including, among others, Ann Margaret Sharp, David Kennedy, Karin Murris, Walter Kohan, Michel Sasseville, Joanna Haynes, Jen Glaser, Oscar Brenifier, Michel Tozzi, Marina Santi, Barbara Weber and Philip Cam—in whose work received ideas have been called into question and new thinking has taken form. It is characteristic of this generation that these new ideas are not considered an attack on its predecessors but as a necessary step that takes into account the changing circumstances of the global and educational environment and, hence, are understood as

a form of self-correction. Ronald Reed and Tony Johnson write, for example:

> *Given the rise of post modernity, one simply does not do philosophy the way one did it forty years ago. The assumptions about truth, perspective, nature and so on have, at least, been challenged, thereby forcing attempts at justification and explanation that were considered unnecessary in previous days. To the extent that philosophy has an impact on everyday experience, to that extent the debate has had practical consequences (Reed and Johnson, 1999, pp. 64–65).*

The most obvious object of the second generation's critique is Lipman's strong emphasis on analytical reasoning as a guarantee for critical thinking. As Karel Van der Leeuw puts it, 'In the novels, but especially in the accompanying manuals, stress on analytical skills, reasoning, categorizing, ordering, and so on, is pervasive. It is not immediately apparent, however, how improvement of analytical skills is conductive to the discovery of meaning' (Van der Leeuw, 2009, p. 111). In addition, the regressive, instrumentalist structure and discourse of 21st century Western traditional schooling is understood as particularly antithetical to the goals and purposes of philosophy for children. 'Reflection and reasoning', van der Leeuw suggests, 'can't be realized when we only reserve separate hours a week for a collective exploration of philosophical questions' (p. 112). He argues that, in our changing information society,

> *. . . we expect people to be able to reflect rationally on human life, which includes a view of reality, of the place of the individual in society, of values and norms, of the meaning of life and so on. [And] . . . we expect them to be able to communicate these views to others, because we live in a common reality, and this common reality must be the subject of common discourse, and can even*