

THE TWO DIMENSIONS OF PHILOSOPHY EDUCATION WITH CHILDREN: CURRICULAR AND EXTRA-CURRICULAR PHILOSOPHY ACTIVITIES

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Abstract:

The Twenty-first Century promises to be the age of information, a century in which only those societies that aspire to the production, transmission and marketing of information can achieve success. As such, the individuals of this century must possess, along with the basic skills, the new and significant abilities of problem-solving, creative thinking, decision-making, research skills, and the capacity to assume responsibility for one's own knowledge as active subjects. It is necessary to teach students how to think, and the education of thinking is one function of philosophy. Only an adequate philosophical education can create individuals with the qualifications listed above, and such an education has to be supported by both curricular and extra-curricular activities. This article will review these two dimensions of philosophical education, using recent educational developments in Turkey as an example.

Key words: philosophy education; curricular and extra-curricular philosophy activities; philosophy for children; education of thinking; philosophy clubs.

As duas dimensões de uma educação filosófica: atividades filosóficas curriculares e extracurriculares

Resumo:

O século XXI será a era da informação, um século no qual apenas aquelas sociedades que tenham e produzam informação serão bem sucedidas. Os indivíduos deste século, ademais de suas habilidades básicas terão que alcançar as novas e significativas capacidades de resolver problemas, aprender a pensar, pensar criativamente, tomar decisões, investigar e cuidar com responsabilidade do próprio conhecimento como sujeitos ativos. Por isso, necessitamos ensinar a pensar a nossos estudantes. A educação do pensamento é a educação da filosofia. Para que alguém aprenda a pensar é necessário que tenha sido ensinado em filosofia. Apenas uma adequada educação filosófica pode criar indivíduos com altas qualificações. Uma educação tal tem que ser apoiada por atividades curriculares e extra-curriculares. Este artigo considera essas duas dimensões de uma educação filosófica a partir do exemplo da Turquia e afirma sua contribuição para a educação filosófica.

Palavras-chave: educação filosófica; atividades filosóficas curriculares e extra-curriculares; filosofia para crianças; educação do pensamento; clubes de Filosofia.

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Las dos dimensiones de una educación filosófica: actividades filosóficas curriculares y extracurriculares

Resumen:

El siglo XXI será la era de la información, un siglo en el que sólo aquellas sociedades que tengan y produzcan información podrán alcanzar suceso. Los individuos de este siglo además de sus habilidades básicas deberán alcanzar las nuevas y significativas capacidades de resolver problemas, aprender a pensar, pensar creativamente, tomar decisiones, investigar y asumir responsabilidad por el propio conocimiento como sujetos activos. Por ello, necesitamos enseñar a pensar a nuestros estudiantes. La educación del pensamiento es la educación de la filosofía. Para que alguien aprende a pensar es necesario que le hayan enseñado en filosofía. Sólo una adecuada educación filosófica puede crear individuos con altas calificaciones. Una educación tal tiene que ser apoyada por actividades curriculares y extra-curriculares. Este artículo considera esas dos dimensiones de una educación filosófica a partir del ejemplo de Turquía y afirma su contribución para la educación filosófica.

Palabras clave: educación filosófica; actividades filosóficas curriculares y extra-curriculares; filosofía para niños; educación del pensamiento; clubes de Filosofía.



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21st Century will be composed of critical and creative, conceptualizing, questioning individuals with communication skills. These individuals, who will constitute the age of information, must receive an adequate philosophy education since the philosophy education aims at growing up creative individuals who criticize and question. The philosophy education, one of the basic human rights, must be commenced in childhood. Here what should be questioned are the possibilities of the philosophy education with children. In this study, the curricular and extra-curricular philosophy activities will be reviewed in two separate dimensions and the contribution of these dimensions on the philosophy education will be delineated with emphasis on the example of Turkey.

Before reviewing the curricular and extra-curricular activities, it is necessary to historically overview the high school activities pertaining to philosophy in Turkey. The philosophy education in high schools began first in 1911. After proclamation of the Republic, the importance put on philosophy courses rose. Established on modern and pro-enlightenment motives, the Republic led to major changes in the society. (KUCUK: 2007a) The societal changes naturally had impact on the philosophy education. Despite local adverse changes, philosophy education develops in time. Today, philosophy education is compulsory in all high schools and vocational high schools. The two-hours per week philosophy courses are taught by teachers with pedagogical formation graduated from the Philosophy Departments of universities. There are also selective courses along with philosophy including logic, sociology, psychology, democracy, and human rights.

Nevertheless, regardless of how positive all these developments may seem, the philosophy education in our high schools is actually far from being adequate. The two-hour per week philosophy course in 11th grade with its schedule comprising of information on the history of philosophy more addresses teaching knowledge of philosophy, than doing philosophy. In said structure the philosophy course is transformed into a course to be learned parallel to the educational system. Without a doubt, the learning-based course content is in contrast with the substance of the philosophy education aiming at raising philosophical awareness.

On the other hand, there is no philosophy course in the primary education. But, the

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Ministry of National Education launched a new course first in the 2006-2007 education and training year:

“Education of Thinking Course”. Ministry of National Education decided to put said course in the 6th, 7th and 8th grade schedules. The objective is to lay the foundation for the philosophy courses in the primary education level; and teach them to think accurately.

“The Education of Thinking Course” aims at growing individuals who think on the act of thinking, recognize one’s own ways of thinking, improve one’s thinking skills, show respect to other thoughts, use language accurately and caringly, question oneself, the world, and knowledge, and have the culture of debate. “The Education of Thinking Course” was inspired from the “Philosophy for Children” field developed by Matthew Lipman, which aims at developing the social skills, logical skills, and personal development skills of children. The basics of “Philosophy for Children,” i.e. “creative thinking,” “critical thinking,” and “caring thinking” are also the objectives of this course. The involvement of such concepts as discretely contained in the program as the value, skills, and concepts is a step ahead to the “Know Thyself!” approach of Socrates. This approach was based on the skills of critical thinking, creative thinking, and caring thinking. These three skills are applied simultaneously and in a complementary fashion. This course aims to transform the class into a community of questioning. The teachers asking questions in the traditional classes are replaced by students asking questions. In such classes, children can define the general concepts more clearly, learn to ask questions, reason, and make the act of thinking a field of examination. Furthermore they also learn to formulate their arguments and defend the same. (KUCUK: 2007c)

“The Education of Thinking Course” schedule not only improve the thinking skills of the students, but also enable them to realize the meaning and cause of one’s existence within the life conditions, and determine one’s own future. The students, in a rapidly changing world, are surrounded not only by their cultural environment but also with media, virtual universe, and the globalized world. Restricting or otherwise banning this encirclement may increase the level of interest thereto rather than resolving the problem. Therefore the students must be provided with a mental practice that would enable them to question the world they live in and make healthy evaluations. This can be achieved through the thinking education.(TTKB: 2007)

In Turkey another dimension of philosophy with children is the extra-curricular philosophy activities. The first of said activities is the Philosophy Olympiads. The Philosophy Olympiads strengthen the universal dimension of philosophy education as well as enable the exchange of intercultural philosophy awareness.(<http://www.philosophiad.org>) The Philosophy Olympiads paved the way for the Philosophy Platform activity which is very important for the philosophy for children field in Turkey. Nuran Direk, Head of Philosophy for Children Unit, recognizing that the philosophy courses were insufficient in the phase of preparations for the Philosophy Olympiads, took the first step to establish philosophy clubs, which will be an extracurricular educational branch.(DIREK: 2006) The philosophy clubs established as an activity clubs aiming at work in the field of philosophy are very important since they provide a



different dimension to the philosophy education taught compulsorily under the central system in Turkish high schools.

The establishment of the first philosophy club, followed by philosophy clubs in other schools and the number of which reached to more than 40 throughout Istanbul. The next step had been establishment of the Platform, bringing together students and teachers from different schools. Featuring the culture of solidarity and a non-hierarchical structure the “Istanbul High Schools Philosophy Platform” (ILFKP) brought the students and teachers together on the basis of voluntariness. (KUCUK: 2007d,90) It is a major aim of ILFKP to develop a culture of solidarity, instead of a culture of competition. The voluntary students and teachers gather around the same topic, work in solidarity and exchange information, and make their presentations in various schools. The friendships that flourish among these groups are also a corollary benefit of the Platform. There is no “hierarchy” in this Platform, which can be described as a jointly led student and teacher initiative. Every teacher and student of this initiative has equal rights and the power to speak and make decisions. (KUCUK: 2007e,52-53)

The Platform established in Istanbul has been an example and followed by similar organizations in the different provinces of Turkey. On the other hand this structure enabled to overcome the artificial obstacles then existed between the university and high schools, and made feedbacks available. The philosophy teachers in the Platform that wanted to improve their background of information needed in-service training, and these requirements were met by the collaboration with the universities. Thus, in this way the high school teachers can refresh their knowledge and the support and interaction between the high schools and university is enabled.

The extracurricular activities under philosophy clubs, along with the philosophy and education of thinking courses in the schools in Turkey ensured important steps taken in the philosophy education. Each day the level of importance put on the activities in this field rises. And new activities add to the existing ones.

As a consequence, we can say that a new era has begun, in which the individual can find the opportunity to liberate oneself in a free and democratic way. In the path from national to universal, the philosophy will continue to contribute in realization of a democratic and free society via curricular and extra-curricular activities. Sustaining philosophy with these two dimensions will lead to individuals, who are free, respectful for human rights, feeling responsibility before one’s society, and are creative and constructive.

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