

THE THEORETICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL NOVEL AND
PHILOSOPHY FOR/WITH CHILDREN: INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE ON THE
PHILOSOPHICAL NOVEL FOR CHILDREN

Darryl Matthew De Marzio
University of Scranton, USA

Abstract:

In this paper I provide an introduction to the special issue on the Philosophical Novel for Children by pointing to a lacuna in the theoretical field of philosophy for/with children (P4/WC), suggesting that the field is in need of more research on the philosophical novel given its status as the curricular centerpiece of Matthew Lipman's vision of P4/WC. I describe the genesis of the idea for this special issue, emerging as it did first from a series of questions and experiences which I encountered while working with Lipman's philosophical novels as a P4/WC practitioner, then through a scholarly exploration of Lipman's model theory of the philosophical novel for children, and culminating in the presentation of several of the papers published here at a special symposium on the philosophical novel for children at a meeting of the American Philosophical Association. I conclude with a preview of the papers in this special issue, highlighting several shared themes and concerns.

Key Words: Philosophical Novel, Matthew Lipman, Philosophical Curriculum, Narrative

La significatividad teórica y pedagógica de la novela filosófica y de la filosofía para/con niños:
introducción al problema especial de la novela filosófica para niños

Resumen:

En este artículo propongo una introducción para el número especial sobre las novelas filosóficas para niños señalando una laguna en el campo teórico de la filosofía para/con niños. Sugiero la necesidad de más investigación sobre este tema porque constituye una pieza central en el programa de estudios de Filosofía para Niños desde una visión Lipmaniana. Describo la génesis de la idea de este número especial que surgió por primera vez de una serie de preguntas y experiencias que encontré mientras trabajaba con las novelas filosóficas de Lipman, luego a través de la exploración escolar del modelo teórico de las novelas filosóficas para niños de Lipman y culminó con la presentación de varios de los artículos publicados aquí, en un simposio especial sobre la novela filosófica en un encuentro de la Asociación Filosófica de Estados Unidos. Concluyo con un avance de los artículos de este número, destacando una serie de temas y preocupaciones compartidas.

Palabras clave: Novela Filosófica, Matthew Lipman, curriculum de Filosofía, Narrativa

the theoretical and pedagogical significance of the philosophical novel and philosophy for/with children:
introduction to the special issue on the philosophical novel for children

A significatividade teórica e pedagógica da novela filosófica e da filosofia para/com crianças:
introdução ao problema especial da novela filosófica para crianças

Resumo:

Neste artigo proponho uma introdução para o número especial sobre as novelas filosóficas para crianças assinalando uma lacuna no campo teórico da filosofia para/com crianças. Sugiro a necessidade de mais investigação sobre esse tema porque constitui uma peça central no programa de estudos de Filosofia para Crianças desde uma visão lipmaniana. Descrevo a gênese da ideia de este número especial que surgiu pela primeira vez de uma série de perguntas e experiências que encontrei enquanto trabalhava com as novelas filosóficas de Lipman, em seguida a través da exploração escolar do modelo teórico das novelas filosóficas para crianças de Lipman e culminou com a apresentação de vários dos artigos publicados aqui, em um simpósio especial sobre a novela filosófica num encontro da Associação Filosófica dos Estados- Unidos. Concluo com um adiantamento dos artigos desse número, destacando uma série de temas e preocupações compartilhados.

Palavras-chave: Novela filosófica, Matthew Lipman, curriculum de Filosofia, Narrativa



THE THEORETICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL NOVEL AND
PHILOSOPHY FOR/WITH CHILDREN: INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE ON THE
PHILOSOPHICAL NOVEL FOR CHILDREN

Overview

The papers gathered for this special issue of *Childhood & Philosophy*, under the heading, “The Philosophical Novel for Children,” reflect some of the various and often disparate interpretive approaches to the question of the theoretical and pedagogical significance of the philosophical novel and philosophy for/with children (P4/WC). More than merely contributing to a collective statement on a theme, these papers instead represent different entry points to what we envision as both a burgeoning domain of educational theory and practice and a hoped-for project for curriculum development. In other words, this special issue is especially timely in that it affords scholars and practitioners in the P4/WC movement the opportunity to reflect again on the history, theory, and prospects of what can be considered the curricular flagship of P4/WC.

Four of the six papers published here were presented initially on December 29, 2013 in Baltimore, Maryland, at a group symposium on the topic of the philosophical novel for children. The symposium was sponsored by the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC) and hosted by the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association (APA). Those papers, authored by Carpentieri, Costello, Dixon, and Turgeon respectively, are published here without substantial modification to the substance and length in which they were originally delivered at the symposium. The additional papers, those authored by Cam and Oliverio, have also been published here in accordance with the editorial guidelines established for the symposium. The effect, we hope, is that of providing to the wider scholarly community a re-presentation and revitalization of what was, to all involved, a special evening and intellectual event at the close of 2013. We also hope that readers of this special issue will take the time to turn to one additional paper that was presented at the symposium,

the theoretical and pedagogical significance of the philosophical novel and philosophy for/with children: introduction to the special issue on the philosophical novel for children

and was published in extended form in this same journal: Natalie Fletcher's brilliant study, "Authoring and Facilitating Affect: The Philosophical Novel as a Liberating Form of Affective Labour."¹

Background

While this special issue has its genesis in the aforementioned IAPC symposium, the idea for the symposium itself came about in early 2011 following the passing of perhaps the three greatest pioneers of the P4/WC movement: Ann Margaret Sharp (2010), Matthew Lipman (2010), and Gareth Matthews (2011). Scholars moved quickly in the months that followed, not only to appraise their work and legacy, but to reorient the P4/WC community of scholars and practitioners toward discernment of those current debates and directions which mark the contemporary landscape of philosophy, education, and childhood. Perhaps the most notable contribution to this effort is the edited collection of essays, *Philosophy for Children in Transition: Problems and Prospects*.² While the editors of this text, Nancy Vansielegem and David Kennedy, specifically recognize in their introduction that Lipman invented a "new genre" of philosophical and literary text—the philosophical novel for children—in a "single stroke" with the publication of *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery* in 1974, the essays in the collection tend instead to focus mainly on the impact Lipman had on educational philosophy and pedagogical theory, while offering scant attention to the considerable effort Lipman devoted to the construction and reconstruction of the philosophical curriculum.³ While this omission is hardly negligible and certainly far from egregious—after all, the contributions made by Lipman to philosophy, education, pedagogy, and the theory of childhood have been monumental—it does point to a lacuna in the field. Why did Lipman invent the philosophical novel for children as the curricular centerpiece of

¹ See, Natalie Fletcher, "Authoring and Facilitating Affect: The Philosophical Novel as a Liberating Form of Affective Labour," *Childhood & Philosophy*, v. 10, no. 20 (2014): 331-355.

² Nancy Vansielegem and David Kennedy, eds., *Philosophy for Children in Transition: Problems and Prospects* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

³ Nancy Vansielegem and David Kennedy, "Introduction: What is Philosophy for Children?" in *Philosophy for Children in Transition*, p. 3.



philosophy for children? How does the philosophical novel for children speak to the relationship of narrative and philosophy, narrative and education? Where do we locate the philosophical novel for children within the history of philosophy? What is the future of the philosophical novel and curriculum in pre-college philosophy?

It were questions such as these that motivated my own reflections on Lipman's legacy shortly after his passing. But far from being merely an attempt at bringing to light the theoretical foundations of the philosophical novel for children as Lipman developed it, my paper, published in *Childhood & Philosophy* in 2011, emerged also out of my own sense of ambiguity working with Lipman's novels, particularly with *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery* in 1997 while teaching in a 5th grade classroom as a Masters student in the Philosophy for Children program at Montclair State University.⁴ In other words, my own scholarly efforts concerning the philosophical novel for children not only sought to fill in the theoretical gaps that I saw in the P4/WC literature, but to address my own experience of a gap as an educator while using the curriculum.

As I understood it then, the pedagogical purpose of Lipman's novels was to initiate philosophical inquiry within the classroom community. The text would serve, Lipman would say, as a "springboard", prompting children to generate philosophical questions that would then guide the classroom community of inquiry. The questions generated by the class would be a marker of the students' felt sense of a problematic situation and of their array of interests both in the text and in the philosophical issues at hand. The construction of the class agenda through this student generated response to the novels would serve, therefore, as an "index of what students consider important in the text and as an expression of the group's cognitive needs."⁵ But I wondered, might it be possible to bring my own 5th grade class other texts or text-forms that would achieve the same effects? After all, I concluded, *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery* was, in 1997, well over twenty years old, its colloquialisms outdated, and the response from students in terms of the novel's literary appeal was lukewarm at best. Furthermore, I reminded

⁴ See, Darryl Matthew De Marzio, "What Happens in Philosophical Texts: Matthew Lipman's Theory and Practice of the Philosophical Text as Model," *Childhood & Philosophy*, vol. 7, no. 13 (2011): 29-47.

⁵ Matthew Lipman, *Natasha: Vygotskian Dialogues* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1996), 11.

myself, many of the discussion plans and exercises found in the accompanying teacher's manual to *Harry* could easily be unmoored from the context of the novel and become tied to other texts and still serve their purpose to further the inquiry.

So, I set myself about the task of finding alternative text sources to use as the springboard for philosophical inquiry in my 5th grade classroom. I turned somewhat naturally, though perhaps altogether unreflectively, to the popular television shows of the time and culled for scenes and dialogues that presented in entertaining fashion philosophical dilemmas. Fortuitously, as I embarked on this pedagogical mission, Christina Slade, then professor of Philosophy and Communication at the University of Canberra, was a visiting scholar at the IAPC researching how philosophical reasoning could be applied to the viewing of television. I shared with Dr. Slade my ideas for utilizing video and television in a classroom community of philosophical inquiry, and on one occasion, invited her to observe my implementation of a vignette from a then-popular evening soap opera, *Party of Five*, from which the 5th grade students were prompted to inquire into such moral dilemmas as whether it is ever right for a person to lie, and whether consequences can ever serve as justification for otherwise morally reprehensible actions.⁶ And, not only did the television episode launch the classroom into philosophical inquiry, but students seemed to find the dramatic narrative compelling and were moved to relate to each other their own experiences that resonated with the video at hand. Thus, by the end of my graduate study at the IAPC, I had concluded that my experimentation with television and philosophy with children worked wonderfully well, and that it served essentially the same pedagogical and educational purpose that Lipman's own philosophical novels for children intended.

In addition to working with Dr. Slade, I would also report on my use of video directly to Matthew Lipman, often meeting with him in his office at the IAPC. What stands out for me now about these frequent exchanges with Lipman was his genuine interest in my development as a facilitator of philosophical inquiry through the implementation of these curricular materials. As the Director of the IAPC, Lipman

⁶ For a discussion of this specific classroom session, as well as the integration of visual medial and philosophical inquiry, see, Christina Slade, *The Real Thing: Doing Philosophy with Media* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002)



created an environment for students like myself, and scholars such as Christina Slade, to explore the theory and practice of philosophy for children in ways that emerged directly from the problematic situations arising in their immediate environment. My sense now is that Lipman's tolerance for my substitution of television for *Harry* was more due to the fact that the implementation of this video media was part of my own developing inquiry into the pedagogy of philosophy for children. Throughout this curricular experimentation phase Lipman never once appeared as being overly possessive of his philosophical novels, unwavering in his conviction that it was his philosophical curriculum, and only his curriculum, that could serve as a fruitful genesis for philosophical inquiry with children. Instead, he remained the quintessential teacher-student; carefully mentoring me along in my own development as an educator, and remaining open to learning about the possibilities and development of a philosophical curriculum for children.

These experiences motivated me, almost 15 years later, to take a closer look at Lipman's theory of the philosophical novel, and to consider this theory as perhaps taking up a more central place both in his oeuvre as a philosopher of education and in his development of the philosophy for children program. When considering Lipman's legacy shortly after his passing, I wondered if his apparent openness to my use of alternative text sources indicated an ambivalence on his part concerning the pedagogical value of his philosophical novels for children. I sought to consider the extent to which his philosophical novels might satisfy the criteria of a distinctive curricular form, a form that Lipman himself was keenly aware of when composing his novels, and with which we might now discern the educative value of philosophical texts in general. Finally, I wanted to take up the question of how to situate Lipman's philosophical novels in relation to his own philosophical corpus, and where might we locate these peculiar texts in the history of philosophy.

In my paper, "What Happens in Philosophical Texts: Matthew Lipman's Theory and Practice of the Philosophical Text as Model," I give an account of Lipman's theory of the philosophical novel for children, locating the novels in terms of both their

pedagogical function and in the history of philosophical discourse. I highlight several essential features of his theory:

- First, Lipman not only envisioned the philosophical novel serving as a “spring” for philosophical inquiry, but he also understood the philosophical novel serving as a “model” of and for the community of inquiry and philosophical thinking.
- Second, much turns on Lipman’s sense of the term “model”. I argue that Lipman employs the term in two senses—a noun-sense, in which the text is a model of what there is to be learned from it; and, a verb-sense in which the text actively models a mode of thinking. The philosophical novel for children is, according to the noun-sense, a model of the text’s own manner of organization—that is, a model of how the texts are organized schematically according to important philosophical tools, such as relationships, rules of formal and informal logic, criteria for judgments of value, and so on. In this way, what the novels intend to teach is what each text is a model of—those specific tools or skills with which we engage in philosophical thinking. I also argue that Lipman sees the text as being a model (in the noun-sense) of some of the central themes from the history of philosophy rendered into ordinary language, such that the text is a model of the manner of thinking that is typical of this history.
- In the verb-sense of the term model, I argue that Lipman sees the philosophical novel for children as modelling rational and creative thinking within a community of philosophical inquiry. In doing so, I also argue that the text functions “ascetically” in that it attempts to transform, through its modelling, the manner of thinking of its readers. Lipman’s philosophical novels for children are technologies utilized for the exercise of philosophical thinking—a tool *with which* we think philosophically, as opposed to being merely exposed to philosophical thinking.
- In this way, I conclude that Lipman’s philosophical novels for children can be situated alongside those texts in the history of philosophical discourse



(for example, Plato's dialogues) that engage the reading subject so as to work out for him or herself the manner of thinking that is modeled by the text, as opposed to merely being rendered passive by the authorial voice of text.

Thoughtful critics have challenged this model theory of the philosophical novel for children, if not so much for whether it most accurately represents Lipman's thinking on the matter, but for the implication that by virtue of its ascetic function the philosophical novel for children is essentially teacher-proof.⁷ In other words, by modelling a certain manner of philosophical thinking *for* its readers, the philosophical novel for children as conceived and constructed by Lipman renders inconspicuous the philosophical knowledge and pedagogical skill necessary for the classroom facilitator. Such a view, however, strikes a strange note, especially when we consider the degree to which Lipman articulated and advanced throughout his major writings a distinctive set of philosophical competencies surrounding the role of the facilitator of the community of philosophical inquiry. However, this critique becomes more salient if it helps to put into question the sort of relationship the facilitator and the philosophical curriculum are ideally to have. Might the theory of the philosophical text as model extend also to the problem of the pedagogical role of the facilitator of the community of inquiry, so that the philosophical novel for children models not only philosophical thinking but philosophical pedagogy as well?

In addition to the obvious theoretical interest and significance that such critiques provide they also signal to the P4/WC community a renewed interest in the philosophical, pedagogical, and educational stakes of the philosophical novel for children. Forty-years after Lipman's publication of *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery* we are still contending with the foundations, form, and function of this most peculiar text-genre. In this way, in returning to the question of the philosophical novel for children that Lipman's own novels put (back) into play, we ultimately gesture toward the future

⁷ See, especially, Karin Murris, "The Philosophy for Children Curriculum: Resisting 'Teacher Proof' Texts and the Formation of the Ideal Child," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* (2015) (*forthcoming*)

the theoretical and pedagogical significance of the philosophical novel and philosophy for/with children: introduction to the special issue on the philosophical novel for children

of philosophy for and with children. The papers in this special issue of *Childhood & Philosophy* are the thoughtful and critical enactments of such a gesture.

Preview

As mentioned at the outset of this introduction, the six papers published in this special issue of *Childhood & Philosophy* reflect a variety of interpretive approaches to the philosophical novel for children. In this way, each paper reserves a sovereignty that allows it to be read without reference to the other papers, while at the same time offering a unique stance on the topic so as to contribute to the development of the whole. Still, readers are likely to discover family resemblances among these otherwise distinctive papers so that the opportunity for developing a sense of a shared conversation between the authors can be realized.

For example, both Wendy Turgeon and Philip Cam begin their inquiries with the question of whether and how literature can be philosophy and philosophy literature? They take as their respective starting points the status of the form of the philosophical novel—that is, the status of narrative-as-philosophy—and then go on to explore the relative merits and shortcomings of the philosophical novel for children as a way to initiate philosophical thinking. Turgeon, in her paper, “Taking Stock: The Place of Narratives in Philosophical Education,” argues that narrative is indeed helpful for any inquiry that goes in search of meaning, knowledge, and truth, as the growing recognition of the explanatory power of stories in the humanities and social sciences attests. However, Turgeon cautions that the educative benefit of philosophical stories in the curriculum is still dependent upon a pedagogy that is rooted reflectively in either one or all of these four educational issues: the issue of educational or learning outcomes, the issue of control, the background knowledge of the facilitator, and the utilization of additional curriculum that accompany philosophical stories.

Cam, in his paper, “On the Philosophical Narrative for Children” reminds us of the kinship between the philosophical novel for children and the long-standing use of literary devices in traditional philosophical discourse, such as allegory and



argumentative scenarios. However, this does not mean, Cam suggests, that the forms of the philosophical novel and the philosophical treatise are destined to be compatible. What is required for both forms to be successful is that within each the narrative and philosophical modes of discourse must work in tandem, each taking their distinctive turns in shaping the overall discursive product. Cam offers examples from his own philosophical stories to demonstrate this.

The question of the philosophical novel as a model for philosophical practice is the focal point of the papers by Anna Marie Carpentieri and Beth Dixon. In “Situated Relationship and Philosophical Praxis,” Carpentieri argues that beyond its function as a means to promoting epistemic inquiries into knowledge and meaning, the philosophical novel offers the added value of initiating a form of relational thinking through the novel’s embeddedness in cultural situations. In this way, the philosophical novel dramatizes the relational in philosophical practice and highlights the relational dimensions of philosophical thinking—not only the emotive and ethical relations between persons in the community of inquiry, but also the relational aspects of concepts and judgments in logical inquiry.

Dixon, in her paper, “Ethical Rules and Particular Skills,” also takes note of the philosophical novel’s narrative grounding in situations and specific contexts, but focuses more closely on the consequences that this dimension of the philosophical novel has upon ethical inquiry and action. She concludes that a moral education, which places at its curricular core the philosophical novel, is bound to be suspicious of moral education as ethical rule-following. Dixon argues that the philosophical novel in moral education best lends itself to an epistemic skill model of practical activity, an alternative to the teaching of ethics in settings where the emphasis on rule-following has hitherto prevailed.

The motif of the philosophical novel’s embeddedness in situations is also developed in Stefano Oliverio’s, “Lipman’s Novels or Turning Philosophy Inside-Out”, and Peter Costello’s, “From Confusion to Love: Russell Hoban’s *The Mouse and His Child* as Phenomenological Novel”. For Oliverio, the unique philosophical and educational achievement of the philosophical novel is in how it creates the background situations

the theoretical and pedagogical significance of the philosophical novel and philosophy for/with children:
introduction to the special issue on the philosophical novel for children

from which philosophical meanings emerge and are referenced. These background situations in the novels are themselves philosophical inquiries that get reported through the novels' mobilization of narrative which, Oliverio claims, amounts to a turning inside-out of philosophy – that is, a retranslation and reterritorialization of philosophy's conceptual heritage.

Costello turns to Russell Hoban's *The Mouse and His Child* in order to show how the problem of child-adult relations can become situated in narrative form. Drawing upon the work of Merleau-Ponty, and his concept of intercorporeality, Costello argues that the novel's representation of a child's perception of ambiguity, as well as the child's emotion, language, and desire, are key factors in child-adult relations and as incitements to loving and thoughtful community.

We hope that this special issue of *Childhood & Philosophy* will renew interest in the philosophical novel for children, both in terms of the theoretical topics developed in the six papers published here, and for the future project of curriculum development in philosophy for children. We hope, also, that this special issue will serve as testimony to the legacies of Matthew Lipman, Ann Margaret Sharp, and Gareth Matthews, for their contributions to the invention and development of a unique genre of both literature and philosophy: the philosophical novel for children.

Recebido em 01/03/2015
Aceito em 15/05/2015