putting philosophy to the service of schools to give children's voices real value[1]

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abstract
This article explores a modern approach to childhood that goes beyond the traditional view of children in western societies, which is based mainly on their inferiority and vulnerability. The modern approach explored in this paper takes a plural perspective in the conception of children as people who are able to think for themselves and who have the right to participate in the affairs that affect them, from their point of views, as children. This modern approach is related in this study to the free-rangers thesis, in which childhood is interpreted as a *process of maturation* and not as a *stage of life*, which is the conception linked to the traditional percepcion of childhood in the western societies. In the framework of formal education, this modern approach to childhood is related to Freire's *liberating education* and the proposals for the school of philosophy with children in which philosophical practices are encouraged from an early age, thereby stimulating a much more active role for children in schools and giving their voice due recognition. So, this study highlights the importance of promoting *liberating education* in schools with the aim to subvert the traditional roles of both teachers and pupils in formal education to give a more active role to children. In this sense, this paper calls for the activity of philosophy whith children and encourages the idea of putting philosophy at the service of schools to give children's voices greater value.

keywords: Philosophy, philosophy with children, liberating education, childhood, schools.

la filosofía al servicio de las escuelas para revalorizar la voz de las niñas y los niños

resumen
Este artículo explora un enfoque moderno de la infancia que va más allá de la visión tradicional de las niñas y los niños en las sociedades occidentales, la cual se basa, principalmente, en su inferioridad y vulnerabilidad. El enfoque moderno que se analiza en este trabajo adopta una perspectiva plural en la concepción de las niñas y los niños como personas que son capaces de pensar por sí mismas y que tienen el derecho de participar en los asuntos que les afectan desde su posicionamiento como niñas y niños. Este enfoque moderno se relaciona en este estudio con la *free-rangers thesis*, según la que la niñez se interpreta como un *proceso de maduración* y no como una *etapa de la vida*, que es la concepción vinculada a la percepción tradicional de la infancia en las sociedades occidentales. En el marco de la educación formal, este enfoque moderno de la niñez tiene relación con la *educación libertaria* de Freire y con las propuestas de la escuela de filosofía con niñas y niños, en la que se fomenta la práctica filosófica desde una edad temprana, estimulando así un papel mucho más activo de las niñas y los niños en las escuelas y dando un mayor reconocimiento a su voz. Por lo tanto, este estudio enfatiza la

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importancia de promover la *educación libertaria* en las escuelas con el objetivo de subvertir los roles tradicionales de los profesores y los alumnos en la educación formal, y así dar un papel más activo a las y los más pequeños. En este sentido, se hace un llamado a la práctica de la filosofía con niñas y niños y se fomenta la idea de poner la filosofía al servicio de las escuelas para dar un mayor valor a sus voces.

palabras clave: filosofía; filosofía con niñas y niños; educación libertaria; infancia; escuelas.

colocando a filosofia à serviço das escolas para dar às vozes das crianças um valor real

resumo
Este artigo explora uma abordagem moderna da infância, que vai além da tradicional abordagem da criança das sociedades ocidentais; baseada principalmente na sua inferioridade e vulnerabilidade. A abordagem moderna explorada neste artigo toma uma perspectiva pluralista na concepção das crianças como pessoas capazes de pensar por si mesmas e que têm direito de participar nas questões que as afetam, a partir de seus pontos de vista, enquanto crianças. Esta abordagem moderna é relacionada neste estudo à tese "free-rangers", onde a infância é interpretada como um *processo de maturação* e não como um *estágio da vida*, que é a concepção ligada à percepção tradicional da infância nas sociedades ocidentais. Na estrutura de uma educação formal, esta abordagem moderna da infância está relacionada à *educação libertadora* de Freire e às propostas da escola da filosofia com crianças, onde as práticas filosóficas são encorajadas desde uma idade tenra, estimulando assim um papel muito mais ativo às crianças nas escolas e dando às suas vozes o devido reconhecimento. Assim, este estudo destaca a importância da promoção da educação libertadora nas escolas, com o intuito de subverter os papéis tradicionais dos professores e dos alunos na educação formal, dando às crianças um papel mais ativo. Nesse sentido, o artigo clama pela atividade da filosofia com as crianças e encoraja a ideia de se colocar a filosofia à serviço das escolas para dar às vozes das crianças um maior valor.

palavras-chave: filosofia; filosofia com crianças; educação libertadora; infância; escolas.

introduction

There is a growing need for reflection on childhood in today's world, which seems to believe that rather than having an important role of their own to play, children should let themselves be guided by adults. The present study begins by examining this view, defined as the classic approach to childhood, and in line with other recent studies, goes on to propose a modern approach in the form of a plural vision of childhood that gives their voices the value they deserve.

Although this article takes into account the importance of all educational spheres, the study focuses particularly on formal education, for which purpose Freire's *liberating education* proposals are presented in dialogue with his criticisms of *banking education*. The aim is to establish a relationship between the modern approach to childhood and *liberating education*, with which to stimulate a much more active role for children in schools[3]. To achieve this objective, and recognise children's voices in doing so, we defend the importance of using philosophy to serve schools, based on the school of philosophy for children, thereby stimulating philosophical practice at an early age.

i. the classical approach. childhood as a stage of life and banking education

References to childhood in western societies today are generally derived from a very specific classical interpretation, according to which children are understood as inferior beings who need continuous support from adults (PAVEZ SOTO, 2012, p. 84). They are regarded as weak, fragile and vulnerable people requiring guidance in their actions from those who, by dint of their age, have gathered life experiences that grant them a privileged position and give their apparent wisdom a voice. As the most traditional sociological approaches point out, this vision arises from a perception of childhood as a *stage of life* (KOHAN, 2011, p. 341) that children pass through before leaving the typical characteristics of childhood behind (PAVEZ SOTO, 2012, p. 83-84) in preparation for adult life (STORME; VLIEGUE, 2011, p. 184). This is a notion that therefore defines the child

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[3] Although this paper takes into account that Freire's work was with adults, his proposals for a *liberating education* are recuperated here due to its possible applicability to children, too.

as "every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier" (HUYNH et al., 2015, p. 10). A so common notion in western societies that also ties in perfectly, for instance, with the definition given in a very important document for this field of study, as it is the *Convention on the rights of the child* (UNITED NATIONS, 1989) in which the age is taken as the main criteria to define children, too.

Some recent studies have equated this classical view of childhood with what has come to be known as the *caretaker thesis* (HUYNH et al., 2015), which, taking a heavily paternalistic stance, holds that "children are physically, psychologically and emotionally vulnerable" (HUYNH et al., 2015, p. 37), and as such they "are not yet capable of making free and sound decisions" (HUYNH et al., 2015, p. 37), since they are "lacking in experience; dependent – lacking in free will; and irrational – lacking in coherent thought" (HUYNH et al., 2015, p. 37). This thesis, therefore, underlines two aspects in particular: children's *innocence* and their *ignorance*. On the former, it claims that "lack of worldly experience means that children cannot make well-informed decisions and therefore should not be held responsible for their actions in the same way as adults" (HUYNH et al., 2015, p. 39); and regarding the latter, their ignorance, they are "impressionable, egocentric, fickle and incapable of planning for the future" (HUYNH et al., 2015, p. 40), concluding that "they are, in effect, childish" (HUYNH et al., 2015, p. 40).

This classical interpretation of childhood therefore frustrates any possibility of children's opinions being taken into account on the issues that affect them (VUCIC, 2014); it prevents them from fully participating in the societies in which they live (PAVEZ SOTO, 2012, p. 82); and it hands over their rights to adults (CORDERO ARCE, 2012), by observing society "in terms of newcomers that stand in need to be taught and the older generation that sees it as one of its most important tasks to lead these newcomers to adulthood" (STORME; VLIEGUE, 2011, p. 184). For the great majority of studies, this classical interpretation was constructed according to very specific values and social practices (HUYNH et al., 2015; PAVEZ SOTO, 2012) and "is based upon the notion that a child is a person

who has yet to develop fully the fundamental features –be they physical, intellectual or social –that are necessary for achieving independent, active and responsible input into a community" (HUYNH et al., 2015, p. 10).

In this classical conception of childhood, therefore, adult power over children clearly predominates in every sphere of their lives, particularly adult sovereignty in the family and at school. So much is this the case that both these institutions (the family and the school) are the main agents of socialisation through which children, like sponges, soak up and internalise the meaning of everything around them (PAVEZ SOTO, 2012). Given the focus of this study on formal education through the school, it is pertinent to note that this classical view of childhood could be related to a particular pedagogical system based on what Freire referred to as *banking education* (FREIRE, 1972; 1994; 2004). According to which, teachers are understood as the main sources of knowledge, which has to be deposited in passive students, whose function is to listen and assimilate the teacher's message. In this vein, to carry out their work successfully teachers mainly use the technique of narration, as explained in the following quote:

> [narration] leads the students to memorize mechanically the narrated content. Worse still, it turns them into 'containers', into receptacles to be filled by the teacher. The more completely he fills the receptacles, the better a teacher he is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are (FREIRE, 1972, p. 45).

Bearing in mind these characteristics, in this article we argue that most schools continue to reproduce this classical approach to childhood in which children's voices are secondary, children are receptacles for education, and they have practically no opportunity to participate in decisions on issues that affect them either directly or indirectly[4]. Bourdieu and Passeron (1967, p. 71), for instance, express the same ideas in pointing to the infrequency with which teachers, sometimes; ask children what they need and/or what they would like to

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[4] Although we recognise that, each time, there are more progressive and child-centered schools projects which make a big effort to get a more active children rol. We argue that others continue basing its practices on a prioritary teachers rol, leaving children's voices in a secondary position. This is the reason why this text, eventhough recognising the important labour of all teachers and schools, wants to reflect about the need to expand the practice of those child-centered pedagogical systems in which children's voices are given a real value.

do. Indeed, these authors argue that teachers, in most cases, control the entire teaching-learning process through the transmission and inculcation of specific contents, thus affirming that often it is the teacher who decides what has to be done, how it has to be done and what takes priority, an attitude that effectively turns them into a "statutory authority" (BOURDIEU; PASSERON, 1990, p. 109). This authority is heavily favoured by the peculiar arrangement of chairs and desks generally found in the classroom, which makes "the professor, remote and intangible, shrouded in vague and terrifying rumour, is condemned to theatrical monologue and virtuoso exhibition by a necessity of position far more coercive than the most imperious regulations" (BOURDIEU; PASSERON, 1990, p. 109).

It should be remembered that *banking education* is not a new phenomenon, but has a very long history. Indeed, several studies identify its possible origins in Plato's (1994) *Republic*, in which the philosopher is entirely concerned with what children can become once they have been trained by a person external to them. In this Platonic dialogue the image of the child as a simple passive recipient stands out in that "children represent adults' opportunity to carry out their ideals, and education is considered an appropriate instrument for such an end" (KOHAN, 2011, p. 340). Plato's *Republic* therefore shows that this classical vision of childhood has been reproduced since the times of Ancient Greece, continuing nowadays universalised and, in general, radically overriding any other possible interpretation.

ii. the modern approach. childhood as a process of maturation and liberating education

Recent studies attempt to go beyond this classical interpretation of children, subverting this perception of childhood with the idea that wrapping children in cotton wool "is debilitating to both adults and children" (HUYNH et al., 2015, p. 43). Such studies argue that children are not easily moulded and, by themselves, they "can and do exert agency" (HUYNH et al., 2015, p. 49); they "can and do create their own meaningful worlds […], and that in doing so they can teach adults a thing or two about their worlds" (HUYNH et al., 2015, p. 44).

This modern approach to childhood, the characteristics of which some studies encapsulate in their definition of children as *free-rangers* (HUYNH at al., 2015), challenges two aspects in particular. The first of these is "the universality of the caretaker model of childhood" (HUYNH at al., 2015, p. 44), arguing that rather than there being one single way of understanding childhood, each society forms its own perception, according to what it expects of its youngest members, such that "what a society expects of children, the way that they are perceived, what is seen as good or bad for them and what they are competent or incompetent to perform depends upon the particular concept of childhood that society has constructed" (HUYNH at al., 2015, p. 45). However, rather than stressing the plural notion of childhood one particular conception clearly predominates, namely the paternalistic aspects of the *caretaker thesis*, which according to the modern approach is based on an "ideological project that elevates adult interests by stressing children's vulnerability and incompetence while ignoring their resilience and capabilities" (HUYNH at al., 2015, p. 47), despite the fact that this project does not represent most children, and only reflects a small part of what it means to be a child which, furthermore, occurs above all in western societies (CORDERO ARCE, 2012; 2015).

In addition, defenders of this modern approach to childhood challenge the idea that children should act in the same way as adults (HUYNH at al., 2015), or rather as though they were potential adults whose welfare must be measured according to what their lives will be like in the future, not the present (PAVEZ SOTO, 2012, p. 87). This conception is clearly not possible if we interpret childhood as a *process of maturation*, in which children have their own way of living life (MURRIS, 1999, p. 24), although it is not totally different from that of adults. Hence, adulthood "can include and retain childlike qualities, and correspondingly virtues or disadvantages of adulthood may also be found throughout childhood" (HUYNH et al., 2015, p. 50-51). The possibility for transformation is therefore present not only in childhood but also during adulthood, demonstrating that opportunities for learning and for change arise

throughout the whole life course (PAVEZ SOTO, 2012, p. 88). On these grounds, the modern approach to childhood sets out to eliminate the barriers between children and adults by "exploring and articulating their similarities and differences" (HUYNH et al., 2015, p. 51).

In summary, this alternative view aims to transform the vision of childhood as a deficient, immature *stage of life* (MURRIS, 1999) by understanding it as a *process of maturation*, in which childhood "may here be understood […] as a specific strength, force or intensity that inhabits a qualitative life at any given chronologic time" (KOHAN, 2011, p. 342). By doing so, children's active role can be recognised, while simultaneously they are empowered by giving value to their voice from their prespectives as children, with the result that they are no longer perceived as subjugated groups of society.

> Innocent children, like vulnerable ones, may well be protected from the world, but in the process they are denied any knowledge of it. As a consequence they are isolated from others, denied a voice in their own affairs and even control over their own bodies (HUYNH et al., 2015, p. 48).

Support for the recognition of children's voices can also come from institutions such as the family and school. As mentioned in the previous section, these sources can already provide support for promoting and maintaining paternalism in the form of the *caretaker thesis*. Continuing the pedagogical reflections of the previous pages, the role schools can play in the area of formal education on this issue will be reiterated here. In the same line, authors such as Storme and Vliegue (2011) point out that formal education is one of the main areas where changes to the classical approach to childhood can be fostered. Therefore, for these changes to be effective, alternative pedagogies that are more in harmony with the modern approach to childhood should be expanded. It is with this aim that the present article sets out to redeem Freire's (1972; 1994; 2004) proposal of *liberating education*, starting with the following reflection:

> Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, *or* it becomes 'the practice of freedom', the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to

participate in the transformation of their world (FREIRE, 1972, p. 13).

Liberating education involves a subversion of roles in which the "teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in their turn while being taught also teach" (FREIRE, 1972, p. 53). In this way, this alternative pedagogy fosters a transformation in the traditional classroom roles of both teachers and pupils, shifting the full weight of learning away from the teacher and distributing it among the students (ALBERT, 2015). Hence, in *liberating education* "arguments based on 'authority' are no longer valid" (FREIRE, 1972, p. 53): students become an essential element in their own learning, simultaneously able to educate and be educated because there are far more spaces where they can visualise their own contributions. From this position, children have the opportunity to express their points of view in schools as well as to take a critical position. Therefore, they have a stronger presence: they are no longer left on the sidelines and their own voices are accorded greater recognition. All this, thanks, especially, to the relevance that the *libertarian education* gives to how learning takes place, emphasizing that it can only be materialized in a relationship as, for instance, Dewey (1966) and Vygotsky (1978) already formulated in their writtings, in which the value of the *interaction* was resalted as one of their main focus of attention. A value that has been collected by many others current researchers who intend to continue with the defense of its applicability to the formal education. In this sense and as one of these researchers, Kennedy (2006) talks about a necessary *dialogue* between children and adults in schools through which, as we have already said before, children don't have to be anymore compared to adults (MATTHEWS, 1996), but they have to be understood as subjects able to experience the world from their perspectives of children, not of adults[5], with a particular form of life (MURRIS, 1999) based, above all, on their capacity to fantasize (MURRIS, 2000a, p. 262), their ability to play (SMITH, 2011), their freshness, inventiveness (MATTHEWS, 1996), spontaneity, plasticity,

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[5] The traits of the discipline and the rigour (Matthews, 1996) are often used to define the points of view with which adults are related to the world.

creativity, imagination and enthusiasm (KENNEDY, 2006). It is, therefore, a dialogue in schools between two points of view (that of children and that of adults), not absolutely opposed, but with some differences, through which the learning between both becomes possible.

According to these ideas, the fact of giving children's voices real value refers in this paper to the opportunity to take them into account from their perspectives as children, not as if they were potential adults or as adults would expect them to act. In this sense, one of our responsibilities as adults is to recognize children in schools as active subjects who give meaning to the world from their positions and who, of course, can influence on adults, showing them other ways of perceiving things and acting, with the effect that a possibility of taking out the child that the adult used to be (KENNEDY, 2006, p. 159) is presented here.

Therefore, as we can see in the previous paragraphs, *dialogue* becomes an essential tool to put in practice the above mentioned *interaction* and to recognize children's voices in schools. With this sense, Freire (1972, p. 53), in the framework of the *liberating education* model, states too that with "dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers". As a result:

> The students – no longer docile listeners – are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher. The teacher presents the material to the students for their consideration, and re-examines his earlier considerations as the students express their own (FREIRE, 1972, p. 54).

This predominance of dialogue therefore establishes a relationship between children and teacher that becomes revolutionary, and at the same time a "revolutionary futurity" to *liberating education* in itself (FREIRE, 1972, p. 57). Above all, this is because of the inevitable empowering effect liberation has on children if we consider that this pedagogy, "as a human and liberating praxis" (FREIRE, 1972, p. 58), makes them aware of their own situation and allows them greater participation, stimulating their capacity for reasoning, argument and critical, ethical and creative thinking. Indeed, for Freire, *liberating education* "bases itself on

creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality, thereby responding to the vocation of men as beings who are authentic only when engaged in inquiry and creative transformation" (FREIRE, 1972, p. 56).

In summary, the very nature of this alternative pedagogical model implies it is much more closely attuned with the modern approach to childhood and gives children a fully active role. It goes without saying that the spread of this pedagogical model and the modern approach to childhood still have a long way to go. For this reason, in the following lines we propose what we understand to be a priority action to encourage, namely, *the practice of philosophising from an early age*.

iii. the practice of philosophy as an activity with children

The debate surrounding philosophy remains very alive today. Do we need to learn philosophy? What is it good for? These constantly repeated questions keep philosophical reflection off the agenda, and prioritise the notion of utility predominant in present-day western societies in which "useful" is understood as something that produces an economically profitable result. But does philosophy fit with this view of utility? As some authors have pointed out, these are precisely some of the arguments the main detractors of philosophy cling to in proclaiming its uselessness. However, in taking this stance, philosophy's detractors do not realise that they are actually undervaluing its true usefulness. Ordine (2013) uses the oxymoron "the usefulness of the useless" to argue that the value of philosophy lies precisely in the way it distances itself from this current vision of utility, and at the same time fosters the practice of argumentation, reasoning and critical, ethical and creative thinking. According to this view, philosophy can be defined as the *activity* of questioning (TURGEON, 2015), which in turn stimulates reflection and dialogue. The sense of philosophy as an activity no longer identifies it as merely a body of knowledge, and it is perceived as a practice, *the practice of philosophising*, that is within everyone's capabilities because "all of us already give answers to philosophical questions, either explicitly, or implicitly through our actions" (MURRIS, 2000a, p. 274). Therefore, as something that comes naturally to all of us, it is essential to stimulate this practice in all social institutions, especially in

schools, since when the practice of philosophy is present, formal education can maintain a much more open attitude to other knowledge that is not exclusively based on numerical data (NODDINGS, 2012); it can provide greater intellectual and emotional space for questions, listening and dialogue (HAYNES; MURRIS, 2009, p. 176); and it can transform educational institutions into centres that, far removed from oppression and subordination, prioritise recognition of the students' voices (GREGORY, 2011, p. 203).

Therefore, the proposal from the framework of *liberating education* and the modern approach to childhood is to stimulate the practice of philosophy, putting it to the service of schools and thereby raising and acknowledging the value of children's voices. This practice must, therefore, be put into effect at an early age, which is one of the initiatives promoted by the school of *philosophy with children*. Before summarizing some of the characteristics of the school of philosophy with children, we consider very important to make a small annotation in order to mention that the relation between both Freire and Lipman has already been studied by different authors. It is, for instance, the case of Gregory (2011), who includes an educational point of view when he makes a revision of some criticisms addressed to the program of philosophy with children, which leads him to explore the connections and tensions between the critical pedagogy and the critical thinking movement. In this article, although taking into account their possible differences, we believe in the possibilitity of relating both Freire and Lipman in pro of a greater recognition of children's voices. This is the reason why we trust on the advantages of promoting the practice of the philosophy with children according to the principles of the *liberating education*, too.

Philosophy with children was first introduced in the 70s by Matthew Lipman (1988; 1993; LIPMAN; SHARP, 1978; VANSIELEGHEM; KENNEDY, 2011) who, taking his inspiration from Socrates (SMITH, 2011) and having observed the scant interest in philosophy among his university students, decided to familiarise children with the practice of philosophising by introducing philosophy into the school curriculum at as early an age as possible. In doing so,
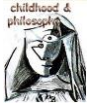
Lipman ensured that children would have a much more active role in the classroom, and through dialogue (JASINSKI; LEWIS, 2016), in what he termed *communities of philosophical enquiry*, rather than mere passive subjects they became the true agents of their learning. Children enjoyed this active role because of the numerous opportunities it opened up for their voices to be heard, a consequence of the new proposed dialogic dynamics that required teachers "to let go of any content-based objectives and to learn how to follow the children's thinking" (HAYNES; MURRIS, 2009, p. 183). To this end, the school worked with new materials and moved away from traditional class structures, "allocating and protecting the necessary regular slot in the timetable" (HAYNES; MURRIS, 2009, p. 183), which spawned real experiences of thought transformation (HAYNES; MURRIS, 2011). In summary, this was "transformative pedagogy" (HAYNES; MURRIS, 2009, p. 183) that still continues today, and whose many followers emphasise how philosophy "can help children and young people to develop skills for thinking critically, reflectively and reasonably" (BIESTA, 2011, p. 306); and how "it prioritises critical, emotional, political and ethical know-how" (GREGORY, 2011, p. 202).

Today, as in Lipman's initial proposals, reflection based on reading stories is one of the main activities used in the practice of philosophy with children. Through these readings the children, sitting in a circle, are stimulated to raise a wide range of questions that are then addressed in the class. Each session is turned into a new adventure for the children since what happens during this space depends entirely on the questions they raise (HAYNES; MURRIS, 2009). In this line, Haynes and Murris (2009, p. 183) identify one of the most important issues as "[putting] effort into opening up the space for children's thinking', which entails encouraging 'pupils to be curious, to puzzle, to be surprised and to formulate questions that will provide the basis of discussion" (MURRIS, 2009, p. 183). Only in this way can children be genuine explorers, motivated by curiosity to learn, capable of listening to other voices and using their own points of view to broaden other perspectives, and strengthening their critical, ethical and creative thought as

well as their capacity for reasoning and argument. In other words, "There is clear evidence that using philosophical enquiry as a teaching strategy increases children's confidence in their ability and power as meaning makers" (HAYNES; MURRIS, 2009, p. 176).

Despite the prestige philosophy with children has acquired over the years, debate has also arisen over issues such as the kind of training teachers should have, and children's capacity to philosophise. On the first of these issues, most studies show that very few philosophy graduates are working in schools, with the result that teachers in general are not very familiar with philosophical reflection (HAYNES; MURRIS, 2011). The same studies find that philosophy with children is challenging for teachers, who should have a minimum philosophical background and some practice in the community of philosophical enquiry to be able to guide the youngest children in dialogue, and also take into account their own experiences in the field of philosophy (MURRIS, 2000b; 2016). However, as Haynes and Murris (2011, p. 290) state, "knowledge of the history of philosophical ideas is not the only matter to be explored in relation to the role of the teacher", but also their ability to listen and establish good dialogue. Their main task as facilitators of dialogue is therefore in "helping the children to build on each other's ideas, resulting in a way of talking we are unfamiliar with, not only in education, but in our society generally" (MURRIS, 2000b, p. 40).

On the second issue, concerning children's capacity to philosophise, studies caution that "Piaget, it is claimed, argued that children cannot do Philosophy (or think philosophically) because of their underlying cognitive limitations" (KITCHENER, 1990, p. 427). Murris (2000a), however, argues that this negative position can only be upheld from a conception of philosophy as no more than a body of knowledge, not as an *activity* that stimulates the *practice of philosophising*. As highlighted earlier in this paper, it is indeed the conception of philosophy as an activity, a practice, that philosophy with children promotes, since rather than focusing on knowledge acquired about specific philosophical theories, this school prioritises children's capacity to argue, reason and think critically, ethically and

creatively. These capacities, as mentioned earlier, are part of human nature and are therefore also innate to children, who have no doubt about their ability to reflect on their own, talk about their own ideas and position them in relation to others' ideas in an organised dialogue (MURRIS, 2000a, p. 262). For Smith (2011, p. 222), moreover, children practice philosophy as though it were a game, observing that "Children's philosophical practice may take many forms" and that "the playing of games comes very easily to children", to the point that "they can easily be encouraged to compare the ways that rules function in a game and the way that they apply to moral conduct" (SMITH, 2011, p. 222). For this very reason, children's and adults' philosophical practice are not comparable, even though challenges to the proposals of this school are frequently grounded on this comparison. In contrast, Murris (2000a, p. 266), for example, propose a symbiosis between children's and adults philosophising, stating that "adult philosophers would be better philosophers if they had more of the natural innocence of a child". Indeed, underlying Murris's observation is also a call for children's voices to be heard.

In summary, and in light of the characteristics considered above, the practice of philosophising undeniably gives children's voices greater value, and greatly enhances the democracy of formal education since by introducing the practice, "it is assumed that schools make space for children to participate as citizens in contexts that are meaningful to them" (HAYNES; MURRIS, 2011, p. 287). At the same time, children are shaping their own identities as more democratic citizens, once again evidencing the advantages of placing philosophy at the service of schools.

conclusions

The main conclusions drawn in this study are outlined below:

1. In today's western societies the classical approach to childhood prevails, along the lines of what has been described in this paper as the *caretaker thesis*, according to which childhood is interpreted as a *stage of life*. This view has universally imposed itself on any other possible perception of childhood.

2. The present study proposes moving away from the traditional ways of perceiving childhood towards the modern approach, which rather than viewing it as a *stage of life*, conceives it as *process of maturation*. The modern approach holds that children are agents whose voice must be recognised from their points of view as children.

3. While the classical approach to childhood could be related to Freire's model of *banking education*, the modern approach coincides with his *liberating education* frame. This study highlights the advantages of promoting *liberating education* in schools with the aim of subverting the traditional roles of both teachers and pupils in formal education. The dialogic methods of *liberating education* allow children to play a much more active role and therefore to be the protagonists of their own learning.

4. In the framework of *liberating education* and the modern approach to childhood, the final section of this paper calls for the activity of philosophy to be encouraged as a practice for philosophising with children. To do so, it redeems the proposals of the school of philosophy with children and encourages the idea of putting philosophy at the service of schools to give children's voices greater value.

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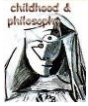
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