adultcentrism and the children's classroom:

if you want to teach them you must know who they are

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abstract

The paper addresses academic adultcentrism from the perspective of the pre-service instruction and practice of philosophy teachers, based on the experience we have gained while leading a Didactic of Philosophy seminar for a Philosophy and Letters academic program where students are engaged in the designing, implementation and evaluation of academic material and class performance for K-12 schools. After giving a brief presentation of the context in which philosophy teaching takes place, and a description of the logic and horizon that set the basis of our seminar, we define and discuss four particular ways in which adultcentrism permeates the preparation and performance of philosophy classes for classrooms with students ranging from 8 to 15 years old: cognitive, epistemic, pedagogical and disciplinary adultcentrism. As well as some of the ways in which, as part of the seminar, the students and the instructor have devised to address and overcome the adultcentrism problems. At the end of the discussion, an auto-critical note is included in order to show the limits of our own practices and base ground, as well as a way to define new necessary approaches and perspectives required to address both the problems we found to be at the bottom of current teaching practices. As well as n our own expectations, methods and ways to deal with those issues with our pre-service young colleagues.

keywords: adultcentrism; didactics of philosophy; teaching philosophy; pre-service teaching.

o adultocentrismo e as salas de aula das crianças:
se você quer ensiná-los, precisa saber quem são

resumo

O artigo aborda o adultocentrismo acadêmico a partir da perspectiva da instrução e da prática de alunos em treinamento para se tornarem professores de filosofia, com base na experiência que adquirimos ao conduzir um seminário sobre a Didática da Filosofia para um programa acadêmico em Filosofia e Letras, no qual os alunos estão envolvidos na concepção, implementação e avaliação do material de aulas acadêmicas para instituições de ensino fundamental e médio. Após uma breve apresentação do contexto em que ocorre o ensino de filosofia e uma descrição da lógica e do horizonte que formam a base de nosso seminário, definimos e discutimos quatro maneiras específicas pelas quais o adultocentrismo permeia a preparação e o desempenho das aulas de filosofia para salas de aula com alunos entre 8 e 15 anos de idade: o adultocentrismo cognitivo, epistêmico, pedagógico e disciplinar, bem como algumas das maneiras que, como parte do seminário, os alunos e o instrutor desenvolveram para abordar e superar os problemas gerados pelo adultocentrismo. Ao final da discussão, uma nota autocrítica é incluída para mostrar os limites de nossas próprias práticas e fundamentos, assim como uma maneira de definir as novas abordagens e perspectivas necessárias para tratar tanto dos problemas que encontramos na base das práticas de ensino atuais, quanto de nossas próprias expectativas,

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métodos e maneiras de lidar com esses problemas junto dos nossos jovens colegas em treinamento.

palavras-chave: adultocentrismo; didática da filosofia; ensino de filosofia; prática de estágio.

el adultocentrismo y el aula infantil:
si quieres enseñarles debes saber quiénes son

resumen
El artículo aborda el adultocentrismo académico desde la perspectiva de la instrucción y la práctica de estudiantes en formación para ser profesores y profesoras de filosofía, basándonos en la experiencia que hemos adquirido al dirigir un seminario de Didáctica de la Filosofía para un programa académico de Filosofía y Letras, en el que los estudiantes participan en el diseño, la implementación y la evaluación de material académico de clases para instituciones educativas de educación básica y media. Después de hacer una breve presentación del contexto en el que tiene lugar la enseñanza de la filosofía, y una descripción de la lógica y el horizonte que sientan las bases de nuestro seminario, definimos y discutimos cuatro formas particulares en las que se ha encontrado que el adultocentrismo permea la preparación y el desempeño de las clases de filosofía para aulas con alumnos de entre 8 y 15 años: adultocentrismo cognitivo, epistémico, pedagógico y disciplinar. Así también algunas de las formas en las que, como parte del seminario, los alumnos y el instructor han desarrollado para abordar y superar los problemas generados por el adultocentrismo. Al final de la discusión, se incluye una nota autocrítica con el fin de mostrar los límites de nuestras propias prácticas y fundamentos, así como una forma de definir los nuevos enfoques y perspectivas necesarios para abordar tanto los problemas que encontramos en el fondo de las prácticas actuales de enseñanza, como de nuestras propias expectativas, métodos y formas de tratar esos problemas con nuestros jóvenes colegas en formación.

palabras-clave: adultocentrismo; didáctica de la filosofía; enseñanza de filosofía; prácticas de enseñanza.

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introduction

When entering a classroom to engage in a philosophy session with children, most students are eager to create academic environments where discussion occurs freely, where children participate in the dialogues and activities that they, as pre-service teachers, have built around the themes and issues considered to be relevant to their students. Didactic material is presented, multimedia support is provided, open space for candid conversations is offered. Then, it comes as a surprise to those same students that things hardly occur as planned and, most of the time unacknowledged by them, things go off track.

Questions arise about what is to blame for the unexpected unsuccessful results: was it the way they presented the material, was it the material itself, was it excessive confidence in their ability to convey, engage, even entertain the children? Was it an inadequate pedagogical approach, a too rigid or too loose curricular design? What else could have it been? These questions become one of the greatest opportunities for reflection and self-evaluation that we have encountered during the class term, each term, each year, for the past four years. At what point in the vocational training should these issues have been addressed, is it done at all?

In this paper I will present some of the answers that have arisen to questions like those, most of which are the result of exploring the conflictive issues from the perspective of adultcentrism in the educational context. We have found that while preparing their classes and interacting with their students, our own students consider that philosophy is such a sophisticated way of approaching the word that when presented to children they must minimize it in such a way that it becomes emptied from its proper value. Additionally, there is a tendency to treat children as too infantile, too simpleminded, and barely able to complete any cognitive or epistemic complex task. Even if this kind of troubling approaches can be found in different academic and non-academic contexts (Duarte, 2012; Florio et al. 2022; Lay-Lisboa et al., 2022), the fact that our students are preparing themselves for a professional career as philosophy teachers make adultcentrism a serious issue

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giving that we understand philosophy as a discipline where sincerity, open mindedness, and respect for the ideas, perspectives and situatedness of all the participants in the philosophical dialogues are the expected minimum rules of engagement.

teaching to teach philosophy.

The present paper highlights some of the discussions and results obtained in the academic space of Didactics of philosophy, which I have directed for several consecutive years, and which is part of the mandatory component of teacher training in the program of "Licenciatura in Philosophy and Letters"[2] of the institution where I work. The course focuses on the design and execution of micro-classes, from which theoretical and practical issues of didactic approaches to the teaching of philosophy are discussed.

As an aside remark, it is worth noting that many students come to the course with the idea that didactics refers exclusively, or almost exclusively, to a set of practices that will make the disciplinary contents more digestible, easy, even fun, for elementary and middle school students, so that at the beginning of the course they expect, and are disappointed to see that this is not the case, a repertoire of multiple games, physical, digital and conceptual accessories to make teaching enjoyable and entertaining. Instead, what they receive at the outset is an operational definition, according to which the didactics of a discipline is a perspective that refers to the set of actions that respond to the question of how to construct courses of action that favor the achievement of certain specific objectives based on the combination of disciplinary content, work materials, activities inside and outside the classroom and assessment strategies. Within the framework of specific institutions and, therefore, taking into account the particular context in which the teaching practice is carried out. Once this characterization is established, students recognize that this particular approach to teaching implies not only diversifying actions, texts and materials, but also making the objectives of academic spaces more dynamic and, above all, attending to the environment, in terms of institutions and agents, in which

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[2] In Colombia, according to Law 30 of 1992, "Licenciaturas" are defined as undergraduate academic programs that train professionals specifically in education.

the pedagogical practice will take place. And it is in this context that philosophical teaching for children acquires its meaning in the training of future education professionals.

Although the content of the Didactics of Philosophy course has changed with the passage of time, some elements have remained the same since its first versions. Among the set of issues that have accompanied the course since its inception are debates about what sense it might make to consider children as philosophers, either in potency or in act (Matthews, 1980, 1984, 1994), or whether this approach is exaggerated or even absurd (Hayes, 2015; Haynes, 2008; Kitchener, 1990), the creation and implementation of the Philosophy for Children program (Lipman, 2003; Lipman & Sharp, 1978; Lipman et al., 2002) and the critical review of this program by Walter Kohan with his proposal for Philosophy with Children (Kohan, 2014, 2015; Kohan & Weber, 2020). Thus, the constitution of philosophy for/with children as a field of study has been part of the instructional core of the Didactics of Philosophy course.

On the other hand, among the topics and perspectives that have been included in the most recent versions of the course are the teaching practices of philosophy that have been carried out by various teams and research groups in Latin America, and in Colombia in particular, such as the Philosophical Camps and the activities of Philosophy and Writing (Espinel & Pulido, 2017; Ladino & Castellanos, 2022; Mariño et al., 2016; Suárez & Pulido, 2021) and some discussions around epistemic injustice in the framework of school teaching (Alfano & Sullivan, 2019; Eslava, 2022a, 2022b; Walker, 2019). Focusing attention on the issues that motivate the didactic proposals of various authors, as well as some of the multiple ways of putting them into practice, has led us to identify imaginaries,ideas and preconceptions that would recall some pedagogues, with which students undertake the tasks proper to the academic space and to the teaching of philosophy. It is precisely at this moment that different types of adultcentrism appear permeating the didactic proposals of the students, and those are the pivotal lines of our discussion.

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adultcentrism in the framework of philosophy teaching.

To address the presence of adultcentrism in the academic planning carried out by the students, either expressly or tacitly, we are going to present a series of fictitious dialogues that gather some of the answers we have received at the moment of discussing the tasks assigned during the sessions of the academic space of Didactics of philosophy. In each example, one or several students expose before their classmates the class-design they have prepared to give account of the assigned task on each occasion, followed by a series of comments and questions from their peers.

The first dialogue arises in the context of an assignment in which each student had to prepare a philosophy class for fifth graders (8-10 years old) whose theme is to be an ethical problem, broadly considered.

> **S1:** For my homework, I used theft as a guiding problem, and as a strategy to design the class I used Bloom's taxonomy[3] to define the learning objectives. Since they are young, the students do not have very sophisticated cognitive skills and so what I proposed was to establish a basic vocabulary for them to learn to recognize the differences between various concepts, for example theft, robbery, mugging and assault. I will present each case with a drawing, and the children will have to memorize each word and then repeat it when shown the corresponding image. Philosophically, at the end I will give a brief presentation on why theft is ethically wrong.

> **S2:** For me, the main thing was to define the ethical problem we were going to work in class, but since the children do not have a very developed sense of ethics and morals, what I proposed was a simple case study, in which each one of them tells me what they understand by friendship and how they decide if someone is their friend. During the class we will do a round of answers to the questions and at the end the children will say what they think are the main characteristics of friendship.

> **S3:** I believe that in the news children see many social problems and that if they don't know that there are ethical problems it is only because neither the reporters nor their parents use those names to refer to them. In my case, the issue I designed the class around was euthanasia. I believe that children have the same capacities as adults to understand the issue, so I also set up the class with a question

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[3] Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom et al., 1956) is a model of classification of cognitive learning objectives, frequently used as a reference for academic planning, which organizes mental activities according to their levels of complexity. More contemporary versions (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) have incorporated changes in the original structure, as well as broadened (Simpson, 1972) the scope of the model.

and answers session, in which the children tell us whether they would accept their parents' request for euthanasia, and under what circumstances, and then we discuss whether they think those answers are either defensible or punishable from an ethical perspective.

S1: It seems to me that the S2 class is well thought out and that the children will be able to carry out the proposed actions. I think that the S3 class cannot be carried out with fifth graders because they are very young and the subject they are going to work on is very difficult for them since they do not have the capacity to generalize or take a position on such a dense subject.

S2: I think the S1 class is fine, although it seems to me that in fifth grade memorization is not enough as an objective for an ethics class. On the contrary, I see that the idea of S3 is never going to be achieved because the children are going to stay in each other's examples and do not have the tools to generalize and abstract conclusions from what their classmates say.

S3: For my part, I see that the problems of philosophy are just that, problems, issues to be solved, and that if we think that children can only memorize or narrate things from their personal lives we are forgetting that they, because they belong to a complex society, already come with the capacity to face tasks like the ones I propose, the same, or almost the same, as adults would do.

Two versions of *cognitive adultcentrism* are reflected in this dialogue. According to the first of these, the cognitive abilities of children are considered to be less developed versions of those of adults, and therefore they can only carry out tasks of a low level of complexity and which are far from those that an adult could complete, so a philosophy teacher should adjust actions, tasks, texts and evaluations to the cognitive limitations, understood as such, that characterize children. On the other hand, another form of adultcentrism becomes evident, as in the case of S3, this time according to which children are cognitively equal to adults and therefore carry out their tasks by means of the same processes and in the same way as adults do, with the only limitation that their world is less complex than that of adults, but that treating them as adults will allow them to broaden their world and guarantee a philosophical understanding of the world. The former could be called *negative cognitive adultcentrism*, while the latter could be called *positive cognitive adultcentrism*.

Both the one and the other type of cognitive adultcentrism could be inscribed into the debate about whether children have the functional and epistemic capacities

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to do philosophy, a discussion that has a long tradition and a significant number of both advocates and detractors. Paraphrasing Lone (2019), this negationist stance can be summarized by stating that its proponents argue that children lack the cognitive skills necessary to carry out activities that come close to those that professional philosophers carry out, such as referencing the philosophical tradition in their arguments or attending to established interpretations of that traditional canon.

A very different view on this issue is clearly and directly presented by Lipman in his response to one of the authors mentioned above.

> Prof. Kitchener argues that children cannot do the demanding work required of adult philosophers because children lack the cognitive apparatus for doing so. They have a logic, he acknowledges, but not a meta-logic; an epistemics but not a meta-epistemics; cognition but no meta-cognition. They can infer, he tells us, but they lack theories of formal inference; they can cite evidence when necessary, but they lack theories of evidence; indeed, they do not even possess "an understanding of hypothetical possibility." Whether some children, or all children, have or lack this set of skills or that, I simply do not know. But Prof. Kitchener has produced no evidence (let alone a theory of such evidence) to show that the meta skills he is talking about are essential to doing philosophy. He holds up to us, to be sure, Hume on causality, Aristotle on substance and Kant on the Categories of the Understanding, as if to compel us to recognize the presence of the high-powered cognitive apparatus he thinks all real philosophers must possess. But he has not proven that all, or even a large proportion, of this particular group of people possess these meta skills, nor has he shown that philosophy cannot exist in their absence. (Lipman, 1990, p. 432)

Here, on the one hand, the very meaning of "doing philosophy" (to which we will refer later) is considered, while, be this as it may, the issue of the differences between the cognitive capacities of children and adults is deferred, "I just don't know" Lipman states, to give way to a pragmatic perspective according to which the tasks carried out by adults and children make them similar facing the task of philosophical thinking. Some, the children, are the amateurs while others, the adults, are the professionals. Here the difference is one of degree, not of ability.

There are more radical versions than Lipman's, according to which children are not only amateur philosophers but are in fact philosophers in their own right. Matthews (1980), for example, claims that as bearers of candor and spontaneity they can easily be included in the adventures of philosophical thinking, as naturally as would adults with a better command of language but not as eager to participate in

open encounters, while Hershowitz states that, his children being excellent philosophers according to him, "if there was a difference between my kids and others… it was down to the fact that I noticed when they were doing philosophy-and encouraged it"(Hershowitz, 2022).

In either case, what is being defended is that children do philosophy, real philosophy, even attending to the same problems as professional philosophers, with the same depth as some of them do, only that to be understood as such their thoughts, those of children, must be seen for what they are, the conceptual tools with which children count on from the world around them.

In their interventions in the dialogue, our students clearly represent each of these two antagonistic positions. While some understand children as cognitively limited creatures and therefore capable only of basic mental operations, others see them as cognitive peers of adults and therefore do not contemplate the importance of constructing an approach to the problem that considers the developmental stage of their own students. Based on the recognition that both are reflecting an adult-centric view when designing and executing classes, we discuss the way in which they consider it is possible to avoid, or at least minimize, its impact on their teaching practice.

As an initial response, it has been suggested to start from the recognition that childhood is a period characterized, at a cognitive level, by the rapid increase of mental operations, the beginning of the imposition of certain tasks associated with the entry and accommodation to formal school spaces, and by the opening of children to a world that offers new experiences and challenges every day.

Beyond this superficial response, classroom discussions have shown that both undergraduate students and us, their teachers, need to be aware of recent research on child cognition (even if not necessarily convinced by them and engaging it as a contrasting approach to their own views), such as that conducted from the fields of cognitive neuroscience in terms of the neuroplasticity of children's brain and its possible implications in the educational context (Ansari et al., 2017; Fuhrmann et al., 2015), negative influences of mistreatment for the neurological development in young children (Dehaene, 2020; Benito, 2023) and social cognition

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and its implications for neurological and cognitive development (Hackman et al., 2010; Hinton et al., 2019; Hunt et al., 2012; Knoll et al., 2015). A review of recent topics of course exceeds the possibilities for the work of the didactics of philosophy class, leading to the further conclusion that it is necessary to involve teachers of other subjects in the undergraduate curriculum, since not attending to the need to question adultcentrism in the training of future teachers would not only be the responsibility of the students and their preconceptions about childhood, but would become a systemic problem generated in parts by the lack of attention of those of us who are in charge of their training.

Let us now turn to the next example of adultcentrism, resorting to a new dialogue in which students present their class planning as a response to an assignment in which they must propose a "philosophical problem" to his sixth-grade students (9-11 years old), and their classmates ask them questions and make comments about the class he has designed.

> **S1:** The philosophical problem I chose for this class was to infer what beauty is, from a dialogue between peers. During the class the students will represent in a drawing what is beautiful for them, then they will play with the classroom assembling an art gallery with each of the drawings, and each student will go through the gallery looking at each drawing that tries to represent what is beautiful. Then each student will go to the board that she/he liked the most and tell why she/he liked that drawing and why she/he thinks it is related to beauty. Then we will all sit at a round table and each one will give an idea of what is beautiful in view of what each student has said. Finally, depending on the conclusion or approach that has been given in the dialogue regarding what can be beautiful, the reflections of two philosophers will be presented: one that shares the conclusions to the discussion and another with a reflection opposite to it, so that they know how to define what is beautiful and what is not beautiful using philosophical categories, and thus learn to think like philosophers.

> **S2:** The class seems to me to be well structured, with an activity that invites students to participate. However, it seems that as a result the children will understand that they do not see the world well, that their way of understanding beauty is not correct, and that is why they need the examples of philosophers, to see how to discuss this topic properly.

> **S1:** Yes, that is true. We cannot say that children know what is beautiful, neither nor from a philosophical perspective, that is why we must show them examples of thinkers who have dealt with the subject, so children will see how to think philosophically.

S3: But isn't it very difficult for children to understand what philosophers think, and the only thing we can do in class is to try to make children express their ideas, even if they are simple and without much depth? To believe that they can construct approximations to the beautiful is a bit illusory, isn't it?

S1: Again, yes, it is true. Children do not know what beauty is, nor do they know what it means to ask about beauty from a philosophical point of view. That is why it is important for them to read what the experts say, so that they can learn to know the world of philosophy and then be able to say that they know what those things are, those concepts that philosophers discuss in their theories.

The model of adultcentrism exemplified here, although related to the previous one, differs from it because instead of referring to the cognitive capacities of children, it emphasizes the way in which children construct knowledge and, specifically, the ignorance that characterizes them by the very fact of being children. This *epistemic adultcentrism* assumes that only adults know, only they have the conceptual tools to be able to know, and for this reason adults must make children imitate their knowledge construction processes, thus denying the opportunity for the youngest to participate in the dialogues with their own voice, their affections and their questions, showing their ways of seeing and making sense of the world they inhabit, the strategies with which they make sense of their experiences. The issue is not at all new; Dewey already pointed it out as one of the characteristic problems of traditional teaching:

> Our tendency to take immaturity as mere lack, and growth as something which fills up the gap between the immature and the mature is due to regarding childhood comparatively, instead of intrinsically. (Dewey, 1916, p. 36)

This combination of limited conceptions about children's capacity to generate knowledge about their world and the characterization of ignorance as a condition of childhood can be considered as clear examples of an epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007) towards children. We have discussed the presence of epistemic injustices in the school context elsewhere (Eslava, 2022c, 2022d) but here we can emphasize that in the context of the adultcentrism we are presenting, it could well be a testimonial injustice (Fricker, 2007) (which disbelieves the agency of children for the mere fact of being children) which, by dint of being repeated and naturalized,

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it may end up becoming a hermeneutic injustice (Fricker, 2007) (which systemically permeates educational practices, cutting off the possibilities for children to consider themselves, or to be considered by their teachers, as epistemically relevant agents).

In terms of the dialogue, it can clearly be seen that the student who designed the class considers that children's capacities for knowledge construction are very limited, and that it will only be through the imitation of adult versions of the approach to philosophical problems that they can come to have something close to what we would call philosophical knowledge. This perspective may even, as Ejera (Ejera, 2000) states, be present within programs such as those of philosophy for/with children, where, although the classes are constructed so that children have a central place in the discussions, the community of inquiry could be constrained if it is believed that, in the end, it will be the versions of adults that correspond to "knowledge" or "knowing." While those of children are no more than attempts, approximations, or more dramatically, errors.

In the discussions that have taken place within our classes to overcome this epistemic adult-centeredness, students have proposed as possible strategies to carry out work tables with teachers from different areas and grades so that they can learn from each other how they make use of the strategies of their own disciplinary field to recognize the multiple ways in which children make sense of their world, not limited by the normative approaches of adults. Likewise, it has been suggested to promote academic spaces in which children are the ones who propose, participate, and lead the activities from which new ways of understanding the world are expected to emerge from the interaction among peers, and where the teacher, the adult, rather than imposing or responding to questions in a strict way, learns to "leave the door open" for future inquiries. These answers can be accompanied by Lone's suggestion on the need for teachers to work from an "epistemic openness" according to which

> what an adult might describe as children's ignorance becomes, in philosophical conversations, an imaginative willingness to look with fresh eyes at difficult questions, without assuming they do or should know the answers (Lone, 2019, p. 59).

We will now move on to our next dialogue, which corresponds to the presentation of a task in which students are asked to design a class in which, using

a moral dilemma, seventh grade students (12-13 years old) strengthen their capacity for reflection.

> **S1:** My topic for today's class is obedience. At the beginning of the session I will ask my students two questions: Who of you knows what the words obedience, dilemma and decision mean? Who makes the decisions in your home, you or your parents? After listening to their answers, I will tell them that obedience is important in the path of education. Obeying can free us from many difficult situations to face. For example, when we obey our parents who send us to school, we are building a better future for ourselves. And when we obey our teachers by doing homework we learn new things. Obeying is good as long as it is good for us. We should obey in everything that is good. However, should we obey at all times? There are situations in daily life when we do not know which way to go or what decision to make. For example, in a dilemma many times we do not know what to decide, to obey or to follow our own path. Let us remember that dilemmas invite us to reflect from new points of view looking at what is right or wrong, good, and bad.
>
> The ancient Greeks, devoted to philosophical thinking, created, and used "philosophical paradoxes", which were theoretical problems similar to a dilemma whose solution is difficult to find. Let's look at an example of a dilemma: Johnny and Carlitos are two friends who have known each other since kindergarten, they are already in seventh grade and still maintain their friendship, they love each other like brothers. Johnny tells his friend that if he fails math for the second time, his parents will change his school. Carlitos feels very sad because if they change his friend's school, he will lose their friendship. That day the math teacher left a final term paper. The teacher is very demanding and made it very clear that it is forbidden to lend the work. Juanito forgot to do his work because he was playing. So he asks his friend to pass the work on to him for his copy. What should Johnny do? If he lends the work to his best friend, they run the risk of being discovered and both fail. Besides, he disobeys the teacher, but if he doesn't, he will lose his best friend. How to solve this dilemma?
>
> After presenting the dilemma, I will ask my students to use some words (dilemma, decision, responsibility, obedience, children, parents, and teacher) and make an acrostic with them and then share it with classmates. To end the class, I will make a conclusion: In this class we have reflected on obedience, but many times we do not know what that word means. When we are children, we hear almost daily from mom or dad, you must obey! Teachers, our grandparents, relatives and even care givers tell us you must obey! But they don't tell us how to do it or what it means to obey, they just scold and punish us. That is why today we have learned that obedience is listening carefully to what our educators ask of us and doing what is right and just with responsibility.

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> **S2:** The topic is interesting, but why do you have them do an acrostic? How does it relate to the content of the class?
>
> **S1:** The students must do something to retain information and that is why I put them as an activity to do the acrostic, so they can move forward guaranteeing that they know what we are talking about.
>
> **S3:** It seems to me that in the proposed class the students do not have the opportunity to do anything but listen to the teacher. When do they start to reflect on obedience and express their opinions?
>
> **S1:** Since this is the first class on the subject, the students probably know nothing about it, so in my class I give them the guiding words, present the dilemma, and give them the conclusions, so that they learn the things they need to know about obedience.
>
> **S2:** You say in class that obedience is always good and necessary, but you don't let the children present criticisms or give examples different from the one you offer. So, how do you do philosophy?
>
> **S1:** Well, the first approach to philosophy for students who know nothing is to tell them things. Later, let's say in ninth or tenth grade, they will be able to say what they think, when we have taught them what they need to know.
>
> **S3:** But, if philosophy is a discipline of thought, shouldn't we have classes in which children can think for themselves, even if they are not yet clear about the philosophical ideas we are working with?
>
> **S1:** Yes. But thinking for themselves requires first learning how to think, and that is what we do in philosophy classes with children, teaching them to think philosophically about problems.

In this example, it becomes evident that lesson planning assumes that children know nothing about philosophy and that the only way to overcome ignorance is to give them content in the most elementary way possible to fill in their conceptual gaps. And to show them that, despite the fact that various kinds of activities can be executed in class, there is only one way to study and learn philosophy, real philosophy, and that is the one in which teachers have learned it as part of their professional training. This *pedagogical adultcentrism* is precisely the kind of problem that Lipman's Philosophy for Children curriculum attempted to challenge and correct by means of a curricular structure that would allow teachers to use tools that reflect the cognitive capacities of children while advancing in the construction of concrete philosophical content[4].

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[4] A very concise presentation of P4C curriculum can be found in Hoyos (2010).

As shown by the interventions of the other students participating in the dialogue, it is necessary to combat the idea that children only receive content and instruction and that they are not participants in the construction of their own knowledge. This limited vision of the tasks that children can carry out in the classroom reflects one of the most common errors among students, and some teachers who are already in the profession, and that is to believe that the classes for children should be like those that they, the teachers, received in their professional training and not those that their students need in the personal and academic moment they are living. It is worth remembering then that,

> Of course children's arguments are not the same as the discussions of university students. But then neither is a child's eager participation when his or her parents are mending the garage just like the work which that child may do later as an engineering student. In both, what matters is to pick up the general spirit of such activities, to start seeing them as interesting and possible. And if one does not do this as a child, it is much harder to do it later. Philosophy has never been a quarantined enclave for professionals, any more than literature has, and it would die if it were to become so (Midgley, 1996, p. 14, as cited in Lone, 2019, p. 57).

In addition to revising pedagogical strategies so that they are adapted to the needs of the children, the students in our class have proposed as approaches for overcoming this pedagogical anthropocentrism to carry out workshops in which teachers and practitioners (students who are working under the supervision of a teacher in real classrooms) show them what kinds of activities have worked well for them and which have been unsuccessful, This will provide them with a 'bank of activities' that are in line with the objectives pursued in the teaching of philosophy in schools, while at the same time allowing them to exercise their own critical thinking as part of the teaching practice.

Finally, we will move on to our last dialogue, in which the task assigned was to design a class that relates philosophy to everyday life, for eighth grade students (14-15 years old).

> **S1**: The objective of the class is to discuss suicide. At the beginning, we will see a cut of the movie Up (Pete Docter, 2009), which shows moments of the protagonist's life, in particular the contrast between the great happiness that accompanies him from the moment he meets his partner and they build a life together, to the deep sadness that her death causes to him.

As a first activity I will ask the students if, in the case of the protagonist, suicide could be considered as a viable option. This discussion will be mediated by the following authors: Seneca, Kant, and Nietzsche, understanding the different proposals of each one. Seneca, a Roman Stoic philosopher, approached the subject of suicide from a perspective of acceptance of death as a natural part of human existence. Although Seneca did not promote suicide as a solution to suffering, he did argue for a serene and courageous attitude towards death. For Seneca, the individual must learn to accept the inevitability of death and live according to ethical and virtuous principles. He believed that life should be lived with dignity and that suicide would only be justified in exceptional circumstances, such as in cases of extreme suffering or in situations where the individual faces imminent and inevitable death. In the case seen in the film cut, would Seneca approve of suicide? On the other hand, Kant considered suicide a violation of duty to oneself and a denial of human autonomy and dignity. He argued against suicide, even in situations of great suffering, maintaining that the individual has an obligation to preserve his or her own life and to treat it as an end in itself, not as a means to avoid pain. Thus, Kant would recognize the protagonist's pain, but would not justify him in committing an act against his life. Finally, Friedrich Nietzsche, a German philosopher known for his ideas on existentialism and perspectivism, had a more complex and nuanced view about suicide. Nietzsche explored the relationship between suffering, the will to power, and the search for meaning in life. Nietzsche did not promote suicide, but neither did he condemn it as an absolute rule. In his work "Thus Spoke Zarathustra," he mentions the idea that suicide could be considered a valid option in extreme circumstances. However, he also argued that overcoming suffering and finding meaning in life requires an act of will and an affirmation of existence, even amid suffering. If the meaning of life for the protagonist is given by the relationship with his wife, then would he recognize suicide as a worthy act?

To close, we will make a reflection. Suicide is a reality, especially in young people when there is no meaning to life. Perhaps, as some philosophers affirm, life does not have a meaning, while others would find ways such as faith to give meaning to life. But all and all, should we not consider it as a viable option? Do we find ourselves in a situation where suffering or extreme situations make us consider it the only way out? These questions seek to guide and have a space for deep reflection on the subject, not only considering negative moral burdens of society, but to question the problem in depth and without moral misjudgments.

S2: I find the topic very interesting, and the authors are relevant to the discussion. But I see a problem in the class, and that is that all the work is focused on the classical authors, on understanding what they said about suicide, and then they, the authors, are more important in the class than real life, as was required to be the central point of the class.

S3. I think the problem with this class is that the children are not allowed to think for themselves, but rather the activity is focused on learning the history of philosophy.

S4: I liked the class; it is solid and the authors that are worked on are interesting and very relevant. If you are going to teach philosophy to children, it is best that they learn it from great philosophers.

S1: Thank you all for your comments. I believe that problems, like suicide in this case, are only understood philosophically when one has done philosophy. I know that I teach (will teach) philosophy, but that is just a figure of speech, because what children can actually do is only a childish reflection, because they have not yet lived enough and because their academic experience is also very short. We philosophy teachers can only show them some things that philosophers have done. Children will have to wait until they grow up to be able to do those things for real.

This dialogue helps us identify what we have come to call *disciplinary adultcentrism*, according to which philosophy is a task for adults and therefore its specific contents are only suitable for adults. From this perspective, there is no room for believing that philosophy can make sense for children, so the most that a teacher could aspire to in the context of childhood education is to work on the formation of critical thinking, which is necessary but not sufficient for learning to philosophize. As in previous cases, the dialogue corresponds to a frequent debate in which the antagonistic parties maintain either the impossibility or the possibility of being able to speak, even of the existence, of something that could be called philosophy, with children. Here, on the one hand, we meet again an author to whom we have already referred, and according to whom,

> Philosophy as a way of life includes much more than merely being able to think critically: it means, inter alia, thinking about a philosophical issue (e.g., free-will vs. determinism), it means raising philosophical questions and being puzzled by things ordinarily taken for granted, it means assimilating or appropriating the historical tradition of philosophy by reading the great philosophers, it means constructing arguments in support of certain kinds of conclusions, it means engaging in various kinds of conversations about philosophy, it means being bitten by the philosophy bug so that one cannot give up philosophizing, etc. When we ask whether someone outside our way of life is doing philosophy, e.g., a child, the answer is: the more closely they share these various features, the more we are inclined to say they are philosophers. (Kitchener, 1990, p. 425)

adultcentrism and the children's classroom: if you want to teach them you must know who they are

Despite the optimistic tone of the closing of the previous paragraph, Kitchener emphasizes in his critique that, far from being able to say that children are philosophers, the distance that separates the activities carried out with them from those carried out by professional philosophers is unbridgeable. In the case of the dialogue, we can see how S1 class designer, while attempting to strengthen critical analysis in her students, introduces a problem, suicide, and then gives the class to the philosophers she has previously selected, for them to answer the guiding questions. It is them, the canonical thinkers, and not the students, who participate in the class, to whom a voice is given and to whom, holding the teacher´s hand, end up showing that the students are still far away, because they are too young, too immature, too new to the discipline, to face the challenge of thinking philosophically, whatever that may mean.

On the other hand of the debate, it is possible to understand that, although the differences between adults and children are evident,

> We can draw a distinction between professional philosophers and philosophical children, but this distinction should not center on a conception of philosophy as the sole province of (adult) professional philosophers. To be sure, children do not generally write philosophical treatises or present work at conferences, but they certainly do engage in the practice of philosophy for the same reasons that serve as the motivation for most philosophical work. Further, they engage in this practice with a direct interest in the questions themselves, without being restricted by the traditional norms of academic philosophy. Indeed, professional philosophers would do well to emulate children's openness and playful embrace of philosophical questioning that transcends rigid disciplinary boundaries (Lone & Burroughs, 2016, p. 10).

Here again we find one of the reasons that motivated Lipman to formulate his Philosophy for Children program, which despite subsequent critical revisions and alternative proposals remains valid as a horizon for action.

> I do not make the claim that children are "natural philosophers": that was Kohlberg's claim. I merely say that many adults are capable of doing philosophy, and so are many children, that some adults are capable of doing it well and that some children are likewise (Lipman, 1990, p. 432).

In the class discussions about these issues, the students of the Didactics of Philosophy class propose that if the interest is to advance alternative philosophical teaching strategies in the children´s classroom, the determination of objectives, and

from them the rest of the elements that make up the construction of pedagogically sound spaces for philosophical work, we cannot leave aside the question of what philosophy means. Is it, as Smith (2016, p. 3) invites us to understand it, "Philosophia" (capitalized), or is it "philosophy" to which we refer in the classroom? The former refers to the discipline that holds a "genealogical connection between authors, arguments and texts," while the latter refers to "cultural practices" that are not part of the same historical traditions as the former, but still refer to the same, or at least very close, set of questions. Trained as they are in "Philosophia," one would expect that to be the favorite answer, but most students were inclined to set as a default definition of the discipline they teach something closer to the "cultural practice" version of it.

This later issue may have an explanation in terms of the particularities of the academic unit under which the Licenciatura is inscribed. The Facultad de Filosofía y Letras (Philosophy and Letters Department) is home of one undergraduate program, our Licenciatura, and two graduate programs, a Doctorate Program in Philosophy, and a Master's Program in Latin American Philosophy. The master´s program focus on Latin American thought permeates the research and teaching projects of all the department´s members, as it does the set of discussions about, alterity, colonialism and decolonial theories, situated knowledge and multiculturality, among others. Then, it is not surprising that our students are not just aware of what mainstream philosophy, "Philosophia," may consider alternative but that because of their expositions to these various approaches they come to understand philosophy in a much broader sense than more traditional philosophers. From such a stance, the students have proposed that their classes will benefit from a broad interpretation of the discipline, which in turn may well permeate the adult-centric images of philosophy by transforming teaching practices from exclusive to inclusive of the children's voices.

From this, students have concluded that bringing authors, recalling history, making use of questions and answers sanctioned by the centuries is as relevant as is important for the construction of a community of thinkers that feel belonging to the race of the philosophers. Every discipline has its own history, but none exhaust

itself. And philosophy is no exception. Even if professional philosophy uses very specific conceptual tools, establishes detailed relations with other disciplines, acknowledges tradition in its own particular way, none of the above obstacles an approach to its teaching that makes the voices of the children as relevant. In the context of the classroom, as those of the great, and the not so great, philosophers, in order to keep philosophy alive.

In the context of the discussions about the erasure of philosophy studies from the schools because of contemporary policies, local and global, it has been stated that "philosophy´s departure could represent the loss of questions about the conceptual value of testimonies, of life stories told in the first person singular and plural" (Eslava, 2022b, p. 233).

Something on the same lines could be said about the removal of the children's voices, their perspectives and experiences, from the very spaces devoted to the teaching of philosophy.

closing remarks

In this paper we have addressed academic adultcentrism from the perspective of the pre-service instruction and practice of philosophy teachers. We have used their experiences, their ideas and their expectations in order to show that, more than just a casual problem, adultcentrism becomes a real problem in the classrooms if it is not acknowledged and countered during the time while students are consolidating their images of what teaching philosophy means, and themselves as philosophy teachers. Additionally, we have shown that leaving the children without the chance to formulate, struggle and answer the questions sanctioned by tradition as well as their own particular questions, may be one of the best ways to guarantee that they get excluded from philosophizing, from thinking in their own terms. The answers to adultcentrism provided by our own students demonstrates that unveiling and exposing it is not just a possibility, but a necessary course of action in which the academic community must participate and contribute.

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