

dossier “philosophy with children across boundaries”

a response to ecclestone and hayes’ critique of therapeutic education using the community of inquiry to bridge the divide between the therapeutic and the educational

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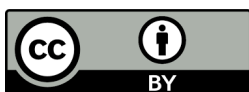
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abstract

This paper argues against Ecclestone and Hayes’ claims (2009) that children and young people are more anxious and less resilient because of ‘therapeutic education’. We propose that they present a partial view of education premised on the concept of ‘the diminished self’. We suggest that using the community of inquiry approach as devised by Lipman and Sharp (Lipman, 2003; Sharp, 2018; Lipman, et al., 1980), far from creating anxious learners, introduces them to the relational challenges of interpersonal communication, the uncertainties of philosophical engagement and in doing so, offers them space within which to develop their independent and collaborative thinking and reasoning, thus becoming more confident and more resilient learners who are capable of engaging with the uncertainties that surround them. The key to these enhanced capacities is an increased emphasis on ‘agonistic inquiry’ where conflict and agonistic relations are not avoided, where the affectual is integral to inquiry, and where a safe consensus over ends and means is less valued as a feature of inquiry.

keywords: agonistic; diminished-self; pwc; community of inquiry; therapeutic education; therapeutic groupwork.

uma resposta às críticas de Ecclestone e Hayes à educação terapêutica, utilizando a comunidade de investigação para colmatar o fosso entre o terapêutico e o educativo

resumo

Este artigo argumenta contra as alegações de Ecclestone e Hayes (The Dangerous Rise of Therapeutic Education, 2009) de que crianças e jovens são mais ansiosos e menos resilientes devido à “educação terapêutica”. Propomos que eles apresentem uma visão parcial da educação baseada no conceito de “eu diminuído”. Sugerimos que o uso da abordagem da comunidade de investigação, conforme concebida por Lipman e Sharp (Lipman, 2003; Sharp, 2018c; Lipman et al., 1980), longe de criar aprendizes ansiosos, os introduz aos desafios relacionais da comunicação interpessoal, às incertezas do engajamento filosófico e, ao fazê-lo, oferece-lhes espaço para desenvolver seu pensamento e raciocínio independentes e colaborativos, tornando-se, assim, aprendizes mais confiantes e resilientes, capazes de se envolver com as incertezas que os cercam. A chave para essas capacidades aprimoradas é uma ênfase maior na “investigação agonística”, em que o conflito e as relações agonísticas não são evitados; o afetivo é parte integrante da investigação; e um consenso seguro sobre fins e meios é menos valorizado como uma característica da investigação.

palavras-chave: agonístico; eu-diminuído; filosofia com crianças (FcC); comunidade de investigação;

educação terapêutica; trabalho terapêutico em grupo.

una respuesta a la crítica de Ecclestone y Hayes sobre la educación terapéutica utilizando la comunidad de investigación para salvar la brecha entre lo terapéutico y lo educativo.

resumen

Este artículo refuta las afirmaciones de Ecclestone y Hayes (2009) de que los niños y los jóvenes son más ansiosos y menos resilientes debido a la «educación terapéutica». Proponemos que presenten una visión parcial de la educación basada en el concepto del «yo disminuido». Sugerimos que el uso del enfoque de la comunidad de investigación ideado por Lipman y Sharp (Lipman, 2003; Sharp, 2018; Lipman, et al., 1980), lejos de crear alumnos ansiosos, les introduce en los retos relacionales de la comunicación interpersonal, las incertidumbres del compromiso filosófico y, al hacerlo, les ofrece un espacio en el que desarrollar su pensamiento y razonamiento independientes y colaborativos, convirtiéndose así en alumnos más seguros y resilientes, capaces de enfrentarse a las incertidumbres que les rodean. La clave de estas capacidades mejoradas es un mayor énfasis en la «investigación agonística», en la que no se evitan los conflictos y las relaciones agonísticas, en la que lo afectivo es parte integrante de la investigación y en la que un consenso seguro sobre los fines y los medios se valora menos como característica de la investigación.

palabras clave: agonista; autoestima disminuida; filosofía con niños; comunidad de investigación; educación terapéutica; trabajo terapéutico en grupo.

a response to ecclestone and hayes' critique of therapeutic education using the community of inquiry to bridge the divide between the therapeutic and the educational

introduction

There is renewed interest in challenging the critique of therapeutic education by taking issue with the conceptualization of 'the diminished self' (Ecclestone & Hayes, 2009; Williams, 2023). In this paper we continue with the work of complexifying and problematizing the characterizations that Ecclestone and Hayes make about education and therapy and so we are in broad agreement with Williams' analysis. We use Ecclestone and Hayes' broad definition of "any activity that focuses on perceived emotional problems" and which aims to make educational content more 'emotionally engaging' as 'therapeutic education'. This definition, as they agree, is not one used by specialists in either psychoanalysis, educational psychology or counselling, and as such remains open for interpretation. In their preface, they refer to a range of assumptions which they claim are of popularist origins, and which focus on ideas associated with emotional vulnerability and the potential for negative outcomes over the longer term. In their analysis, they argue that experience is reframed "as the source of emotional distress", and in doing so, the "populist orthodoxies" associate negative responses to experience with a reduced sense of resilience which diminishes "human potential, denies the intellectual and privileges the emotional" (Ecclestone & Hayes, 2009, pp. X-XI). We make a distinction between therapeutic education and the work undertaken in therapeutic group work contexts, where trained professionals undertake therapeutic work in groups, where the context for the groupwork may exhibit similarities to that of the community of inquiry (Sills et al., 2012). The core of Williams' critique is formed from two elements, first is the concern for 'the diminished self'. Ecclestone and Hayes identify this conceptualization from the discursive practices of therapeutic education but in essence they believe that educational practitioners accept that this diminished self is an educational subject who is seen as fundamentally lacking and disadvantaged; the diminished self is an educational subject who needs healing and who is in

need of restoration. Ecclestone and Hayes take issue with this subject and value an alternative, a caricature of the sovereign Enlightenment self. The second element is a concern that practices of education that ensue as a result of the concern for the diminished self are either inherently non-educational (without educational worth) or serve to diminish a proper educational concern for subject-based knowledge. What matters for us is that their second concern is part of a debate about what constitutes worthwhile educational means and that even if the educational end of tending towards the diminished self does not hold as a premise there is still currency in their concern about the elision of therapeutic processes as educational means. Part of this elision is a fleeting reference to Philosophy with Children (PwC)¹ that is dismissive and uninformed by any reference to literature in the field.

pwc as a philosophical programme

The first element of our rebuttal begins with an older paper from our field that helps us to think about PwC as a philosophical programme. Gazzard (2006) demonstrates that philosophical programmes of instruction in general and PwC programmes specifically do not match Ecclestone & Hayes' characterization. Gazzard identifies three significant aspects of a philosophy that need to be included in a programme - the quest for meaningful living, philosophy as a subject with long history and intellectual progress, and as a place for the cultivation of technical and logical skills. A key conclusion is that there are negative consequences for omitting any one of these elements. Omitting the first increases the risk of alienation, characterising philosophy as mere history and skills development and in doing so, makes philosophy inaccessibly distinct from meaningful life. Omitting the second denies children access to a rich tradition of ideas and meanings about how to understand themselves and the world. Failure to develop the third aspect leaves children unskilled and unable to pursue their inquiries, renders them passive and subject to what others would have them think,

¹ The term philosophy with children PwC is used to include all forms of philosophising with children including the Lipman and Sharp P4C programme. Community of inquiry references the guiding principles of philosophical dialogue with children as elaborated upon by Ann Margaret Sharp (Gregory & Lavery, 2018).

and denies children the pleasure, intrinsic to philosophy, of making warranted judgements in the pursuit of truth.

Gazzard's characterization of philosophy, chosen just as one example of literature in our field, bears no resemblance to Ecclestone & Hayes's dismissal of PwC as a form of circle-time. Our claim is that, conversely, the pedagogy required for philosophising in a community of inquiry necessitates more than a subject-focused pedagogy and ironically the figure of the child at the centre of PwC programmes that meet Gazzard's criteria would be more recognisable to Ecclestone and Hayes than their depiction of a diminished subject is to us. A consequence of key importance to our paper that derives from Gazzard's (2006) work is her recommendation that teachers using the philosophy for children programme should "foster the requisite behavioural disposition" (p. 9) as part of classroom practice. She elaborates on these dispositions by proposing that it is not sufficient to "know what one must do", asserting that "one must also have a disposition to act in accordance with that way of knowing" (Gazzard, 2006, p. 9). In other words, Gazzard is reminding the educator that inquiry, within a community of inquiry, is a basic requirement of education, offering the students an arena within which to make the connection between the options available to them for action and the dispositions that direct their choice of action. It is not sufficient to 'know what one must do'; a person needs also to understand her reasons for choosing her actions. She must be able to evaluate proposals and their contexts, make an informed judgement about what can be inferred and decide on a best course of action. To clarify, this action may be speech-as-action or may take the form of a plan for future action, based on the deliberations undertaken in the community of inquiry. In either case, a warranted provisional judgement will guide the outcome (Gazzard, 2006). To work in this way assumes that the community of inquiry is already familiar with and practised in respectful engagement, trust between and amongst participants and an open-minded approach to the normative nature of philosophical dialogue. Each of these community of inquiry prerequisites of respect, trust and open-mindedness are foundations for both educational and therapeutic group work and in each case, they provide a necessary minimum level of security within the group or community, to enable participation. This respectful, open-minded environment

then is not a distinguishing factor, but a requirement of each. It is through the dispositional capacities and awarenesses that underpin critical analysis and subsequent evaluation of the most meaningful propositions, and the making of informed judgements, especially those with normative intentions, that we can distinguish the practices of philosophising with children from therapeutic groupwork as being a difference of type. The work undertaken in PwC is philosophical, both in the engagement with philosophical concepts and questions, and in terms of philosophical practice. Students are introduced to reasoning, questioning, connection and distinction-making, analysis, reflection, revision, and evaluation, in relation to a philosophical provocation. This contrasts with the work undertaken in a therapeutic groupwork setting, where establishing and maintaining the group and group dynamics is of central importance and where the substantive content of the group work is of a social or psychological nature.

meaningful education

We maintain that a meaningful education extends beyond the acquisition of knowledge, although this is an important component. Gert Biesta's tripartite model of education calls the knowledge component qualification and adds both socialisation and subjectification as integral. He identifies socialisation as an orientation to history, tradition and culture and subjectification as the way in which students come to exist as thoughtful subjects or selves (Biesta, 2010, pp.19–22). Importantly, we assert that Biesta's model, which requires adherence to all three educational components, is how we characterise meaningful education. PwC embodies that model, placing philosophy as both the intellectual material under consideration and the practice by which it is accessed. Histories, cultures, and traditions are explored in relation to the concept under question. These may be introduced by students who wish for their experiences to contribute to the collective understanding of the community. They may also be introduced by the educator, prompting students to consider their question from other perspectives, be they related to cultural differences, historically relevant examples, as yet unconsidered traditional implications or perhaps hegemonies of power. Each example enriches the practice of inquiry and requires the students to re-consider their previously held argument with reference to the newly introduced context.

This widening of context, coupled with a willingness to listen with openness, engages the students in a shared deliberative practice, which has a communal goal of greater understanding. This understanding will differ between students, depending on how they assess the importance of each criterion. The dispositional aspect of working in a community of inquiry develops over time and through the consideration of many and different philosophical provocations. However, we assert that the shared goal of better understanding guides students towards considering outcomes and consequences of their chosen judgements. In engaging in these actions of reflective judgement, students practise discernment, which we consider to be educationally significant in developing dispositional attributes that go beyond a therapeutic context.

In addition, the PwC community of inquiry pedagogy provides conditions for selves to engage in the intellectual work of inquiry, whilst also supporting what Ann Sharp calls “self-correction”, a concept she develops from Charles Peirce (Sharp, 2018b), and which contributes to what we term selves-in-transition. George Herbert Mead’s Theory of Subjectivity revisited by Amy Allen, in *The Politics of Our Selves*, reflects Habermas’ proposal that selves come into being when they are in dialogue with others, where they become a distinctive person, through the self’s relation to and with the others (Allen, 2007, p. 108). Our understanding of this idea is that given the supportive environment of the community of inquiry, coupled with exposure to philosophical challenges in the form of questions, students can experience what it is to be a self, because of the mediation of the group. This self-realisation contributes to the individual’s sense of worth, their will to improve, and to engage in more challenging inquiries, even when the outcome of such experiences causes them to have to re-consider their position and, on reflection, perhaps change their minds. We include this brief summary of meaningful education because it is likely that Ecclestone and Hayes adhere to a more traditional, but not incompatible definition of education which asserts that “if a ‘subject’ is to be educational, it must be based on the intellectual disciplines rather than a fashionable idea, a pressing professional concern or political interference” (Ecclestone & Hayes, 2009, p. 162). Our assertion is that in order that intellectual disciplines are experienced by children in accessible ways, the broader definition of meaningful education expressed by Biesta, is necessary.

self and diminished self

Ecclestone & Hayes's idea of the diminished self at the heart of therapeutic education is built from anecdotes so in this next section we wish to be a little more rigorous about what a diminished self might look like. Given the charge against therapy, we turn to the Freudian psychoanalyst, Christopher Bollas, whose paper *The Fascist State of Mind* is relevant here (Bollas, 2011). Additionally, we need to introduce a distinction core to the work of political theorist Chantal Mouffe (e.g., Mouffe 2013, p. xii) between agonism, which is conflict between adversaries, and antagonism, conflict between enemies. Simply put, agonistic relations allow conflict in groups, and the aim of democratic bodies is to transform antagonism into agonism and to facilitate agonistic confrontation rather than impose authoritarian order (Mouffe, 2013). This relationship to pluralism is used by Bollas who links the fascist state of mind – which he believes is in all of us – to our capacity to entertain plurality (of selves, interests, emotions, thoughts). In a nutshell, Bollas' line of thought is that when parliamentary pluralism of the psyche is overthrown in favour of authoritarian sensibilities through splitting then there is a subsequent devitalization of experience that becomes subordinated to ideological or doctrinaire understanding of the world. This formulation needs some unpacking but in doing so we shall find some interesting points of reflection for our own work on community.

The phrase 'parliamentary pluralism of the psyche' refers to a tenet of psychoanalysis that has developed wider significance in the humanities, that selves are not sovereign and monolithic, indissoluble nor entirely intact with a persistent unified boundary. Such views of the self exist and form a prevalent underpinning idea in certain western philosophies. For this view we owe much to Locke and Enlightenment rationalism (Blake et al., 1998). A considerable amount of western philosophy, psychoanalytic and cultural studies informed scholarship and fashions of thought in the latter half of the twentieth century, and still ongoing, serve to undermine from many directions the confident assertion of the integrated self (Braidotti, 2011; Johnston, 2024; Kristeva, 1988; Rorty, 2009). In philosophy this stance is a rejection of Lockean notions of selves integrated through continuity of reference and location and reflects various 'turns' –

linguistic, relational, ontological. These are fascinating ideas but what matters for us is the insight from Bollas that acts of choosing, in themselves, are not always open to immediate understanding. Like Cavell, must I always mean what I say? We realise ourselves in our acts of uttering, since it is only in the speaking that I know what I mean, and once I understand what I mean I might wish to change my mind. When I curse the driver who cuts in front of me and then chastise myself, not for my words, for reacting thus but for not wanting to be that person who responds to cursing instead of understanding that perhaps my anticipatory driving could have been better and that in some way I helped construct the situation. Or that the act of cursing reinforces pathways where cursing becomes easier when perhaps I might always want to be cultivating the Socratic dictum, better to suffer harm than cause it. Thus, we are not fully transparent to ourselves, language speaks through us as well as we speak it, and our voicings are plural and manifold.

A key concept for Bollas, Kleinian splitting, a concept rooted in Klein's psychoanalytic theory, refers to the mental process by which individuals, particularly young children, divide their perceptions of objects and experiences into extreme categories of 'good' and 'bad'. This defence mechanism arises as a way to manage anxiety and internal conflict. For example, a child might view a caregiver as entirely nurturing and loving when their needs are met, but as wholly neglectful and harmful when their needs are not met. This lack of nuanced understanding prevents the integration of positive and negative aspects of the same object or person, leading to a polarized and fragmented perception of the world. Splitting is an act of violence against the self and Bollas (2011, p. 82) explicitly draws our attention to references to 'killing off' parts of the self and how intrapsychic murder is an ordinary feature of life. Killing off a part of oneself that is loving and dependent is likened to Bakunin's Revolutionary Catechism where all tenderness must be suppressed by a cold passion for the revolutionary cause. As a consequence of splitting the life of the mind is rejected for vital activity.

At this point, having established the process where thought is marginalised, split off and devalued for vitalism, Bollas' argument in *The Fascist State of Mind* moves into an elaboration of the strongly termed 'Intellectual Genocide.' This phenomenon involves moves such as distorting, decontextualizing, denigrating,

caricature, character assassination, change of name, categorisation of aggregates; actions that all share the same underlying ad hominem character. Were we to work with a community of inquiry that had easier recourse to these antagonistic moves, rather than the solely reasonable ones that we strive towards, then we might need the distinction between antagonistic vs agonistic relations in order to make conflict containable. In characterising the community of inquiry as reasonable, we qualify this in reference to Ann Sharp, who elaborates on reasoning not being sufficient as a stand-alone criterion for decision-making:

Such a community presupposes care: care for the procedures of inquiry, care for one another as persons, care for the tradition that one has inherited, care for the creations of one another. Thus there is an affective component to the development of a classroom community of inquiry that cannot be underestimated. (Sharp, 2018c, p. 45)

And yet, we can learn from Bollas' remedy for the Fascist state of mind through an adaptation of classic Freudian strategy: we must divest the unarticulated of its psychic power by focussing on the here-and-now: the present. In other words, to be able to consider ideas in the here and now is all important in fostering healthy intra- and inter-personal agonistic relationships. Any pedagogical programme or approach that has the potential to address antagonistic conflict ought not to be easily dismissed.

transitioning self

In contrast with the concept of the diminished self, as described by Ecclestone and Hayes, we consider the self to be transitioning during its educational lifetime, from less to more mature, from one encounter to the next, where new experience gives rise to new thinking and where judgements are revised. This concept of self is informed by the work of Lorraine Code, Ann Sharp and Colin Koopman (Code, 1991, 2020; Koopman, 2009; Sharp, 2018b). This transitioning self is both intellectually and somatically sensed, in other words integrated, and does not immediately distinguish between the action of thinking and the somatic sensations, or emotions that accompany this engagement. On arriving at a better justified position collaboratively during an agonistic philosophical inquiry, the accompanying sensations of elation and achievement, a notion of increased self-worth and a felt sense of pride may appear to present as

therapeutic outcomes. However, our proposal is that an integrated, transitioning self makes no cognitive and affective distinction in the moment, when experiencing achievement. This proposal aligns with Nussbaum's theory of emotions as judgements of value, where she refutes the Humean dualism of the mind as the helmsman of the emotions, proposing instead that emotions are deeply associated with value, and that "emotions look at the world from the subject's own viewpoint, mapping events onto the subject's own sense of personal importance or value" (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 33). We see this position upheld by Morehouse's insightful paper on caring thinking, where he cites Sharp's articulation of the relationship between care and the emotions: "Caring thinking is a fusion of emotional and cognitive thinking when it concerns matters of importance" (Morehouse, 2018; Sharp, 2007). What is significant here is that in arriving at a more strongly warranted provisional judgement, the child, in the collaborative community of inquiry, is working with what is important to her. The emotions which are associated with her achievement are thus an example of the fusion that Sharp describes, and which Nussbaum's theory asserts are orienting us to the subject's viewpoint and sense of value. What they are not, is an indication of therapeutic education, because the inquiry is not focused on the emotional problems that Ecclestone and Hayes cite as the basis for therapeutic education, but instead on the shared philosophical challenge which is under consideration by the community of inquiry.

This re-conceptualization offers two significant possibilities: first that the self as outlined above, should not be considered as a fixed condition as inferred by the term diminished self, but rather may be considered as one in transition, and experiencing a revised sense of how they are; a self, engaging in the moment with the intellectual challenge of philosophical inquiry in community with others, whilst experiencing accompanying sensations and emotions. Secondly, if one is to educate persons who are in formation, one requires an environment of care within which to undertake this education because a transitioning self is developing, and development is less likely to occur without support.

In attending to the first point, in contrast to the fundamentally lacking and disadvantaged diminished self, the transitioning self is journeying. This journey involves visiting new knowledge in new engagements. The transitioning self, in its

inexperienced vulnerability, is moving towards but not yet independent. This vulnerability of inexperience contrasts with the vulnerability expressed by Ecclestone and Hayes which they assert arises from “claims that past life experiences have long-term negative emotional effects for everyone, and particularly pernicious effects for an increasing minority” (Ecclestone & Hayes, 2009, p. X). They suggest that this type of vulnerability, as part of the diminished self, diminishes the intellectual whilst privileging the emotional, as if there is a clear method for making this distinction.

In proposing a vulnerability for the transitioning self, we mean something quite different. We acknowledge that the child, as a self, has limited life experience from which to draw in contributing to self-in-transition. (This is also true for many adults, but in this paper, the child is our focus). We view self-in-transition as a site of both development and consolidation, and we assert that given sufficient support within the community of inquiry, selves encounter questions and reasons which enhance the development of the self, whilst engaging in the intellectual philosophical practice of the inquiry. Far from viewing children as diminished selves, the community of inquiry offers intellectual action as the “central nucleus of a truly transformative education” (García Moriyón, 2019, p. 4), whilst acknowledging that reflective persons are transitioning selves. We accept that whilst a clear correlation is evident, between the environment of care as a necessary set of conditions for the educational growth of the transitioning self, and those required for therapeutic groupwork, the term therapeutic education remains questionable. The enhanced environmental conditions of care, which are integral to the community of inquiry, assist in our making distinctions between the diminished self with its inherent reductive inference and the burgeoning potential of the transitioning self within the nurturing environment of the community of care. In viewing the student as a transitioning self, it is possible to reconceptualise the individual as a vulnerable but developing being, with the potential for intellectual growth and growth of the self, given the environment within which to flourish. This environment comprising trust between and amongst participants, respect for persons and for the problem under consideration and an open-minded approach to engaging with a range of competing propositions, is a necessary

condition of therapeutic groupwork and philosophical inquiry but is not sufficient for either.

In 1948 when Lacan visited Bion in post-WWII London, he observed that “[... the] group leader, ‘will undertake to organize the situation so as to force the group to become aware of the difficulties of its existence as a group, and then render it more and more transparent to itself, to the point where each of its members may be able to judge adequately the progress of the whole’” (Phillips 2013, p. 204). This quote might easily have been taken from any of Lipman’s works (Lipman, 1988, 2003), or Splitter and Sharp’s (1995) *Teaching for Better Thinking*, or any introductory text to PwC such as Haynes’ (2008) *Children as Philosophers* except for the inclusion of the word ‘force’. PwC literature would frame this as bringing into question such group challenges, to eliminate the implication of externally imposed epistemic power, which is contrary to the practice. What is striking is the attention paid to individual/group relationships and the agonistic centrality of affectivity. These factors of the group’s existence comprise an inherent component of evaluating epistemological progress. We set out at the start of the paper to continue Williams’ work on complexifying and problematizing the straw men at the heart of Ecclestone & Hayes’s critique of PwC as an aspect of therapeutic education: a form of education in their view that uses the wrong means towards the wrong ends. We show in this initial sketch that in better defining our terms there is a rich dialogue and wealth of conceptualisation to be had between therapy and philosophy and that each may share in a qualitatively similar environment of care. However, although the work undertaken in each discipline may look similar to the casual observer on deeper investigation it is possible to delineate them as complementary practices in terms of the substantive considerations and regarding their aims. It is our assessment that if education were to be better balanced with regard to Biesta’s (2010) model, that the educational goods of PwC undertaken in a community of inquiry would be a good starting point in the re-balancing of the socialising and subjectifying of what we see as a diminished education, which over-prioritises qualification. We disagree with Ecclestone and Hayes’ characterisation of children as more anxious and less resilient as a result of therapeutic education. We propose instead that given adequate exposure to PwC in a community of inquiry, children experience what it

is to be a self-in-transition, as part of acquiring a set of dispositions and philosophical competencies which offer them ways of being which counter these characterisations and prepare them as persons to approach the educational and social challenges to their resilience that life in the 2020s involves.

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