

*dossier “philosophy with children across boundaries”*

## **philosophy for children as an educational tool to prevent and combat hate speech**

**a research intervention in an italian school**

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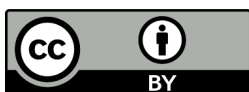
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### **abstract**

This contribution will focus on a research intervention, within a doctoral project carried out at the University of Naples Federico II, conducted in Italy on countering stereotypes and prejudices -which are at the basis of hate speech- in a secondary school with children aged between 12 and 13. Young people are particularly exposed to the consequences and risks of hate speech both because they lack experience and cultural and cognitive tools (Waltman & Mattheis, 2017; Meddaugh & Kay, 2009) and because they are always connected to the web through different devices. (Save the Children, 2023; Rothwell, 2023). In order to counter hate speech, most reference literature suggests educational interventions based on critical reflection and the de-construction of stereotypes starting from younger age groups (Waltman, 2003; 2018; Cohen-Almagor, 2014; Ziccardi, 2016; Commissione Jo Cox, 2017; Meddaugh & Kay, 2009). However, education based purely on critical reflection may not be sufficient



when it comes to fully understanding the suffering and damage caused to people by the language of hatred. It should be accompanied by an education in caring thinking, which enhances the ability to think compassionately and to look at the world from other perspectives, building the ability to make value judgements (Sharp, 2005). The hypothesis of the research presented in this contribution is that Philosophy for Children (P4C) can be a valuable device to help children reflect on and deconstruct the stereotypes and prejudices that form the foundation of hate speech.

**keywords:** hate speech; philosophy for children; research intervention.

**a filosofia para crianças como  
ferramenta educativa para prevenir e  
combater o discurso de ódio**  
uma pesquisa-investigação numa escola  
italiana

#### resumo

Esta contribuição se concentrará em uma investigação-intervenção, dentro de um projeto de doutorado realizado na Universidade de Nápoles Federico II, conduzido na Itália, para combater estereótipos e preconceitos – que estão na base do discurso de ódio –, em uma escola secundária com crianças entre 12 e 13 anos. Os jovens estão particularmente expostos às consequências e aos riscos do discurso de ódio, tanto por não terem experiência e ferramentas culturais e cognitivas (Waltman & Mattheis, 2017; Meddaugh & Kay, 2009) quanto por estarem sempre conectados à web por meio de diferentes dispositivos (Save the Children, 2023; Rothwell, 2023). Para combater o discurso de ódio, a maior parte da literatura de referência sugere intervenções educacionais baseadas na reflexão crítica e na desconstrução de estereótipos a partir de grupos etários mais jovens (Waltman, 2003; 2018; Cohen-Almagor, 2014; Ziccardi, 2016;

Commissione Jo Cox, 2017; Meddaugh & Kay, 2009). Entretanto, a educação baseada puramente na reflexão crítica pode não ser suficiente quando trata de compreender plenamente o sofrimento e os danos causados às pessoas pela linguagem do ódio. Ela deve ser acompanhada de uma educação para o pensamento cuidadoso, que aprimora a capacidade de pensar com compaixão e de olhar o mundo a partir de outras perspectivas, desenvolvendo a capacidade de fazer julgamentos de valor (Sharp, 2005). A hipótese da investigação apresentada nesta contribuição é que a Filosofia para Crianças (FpC) pode ser um dispositivo valioso para ajudar as crianças a refletir e desconstruir os estereótipos e preconceitos que formam a base do discurso de ódio.

**palavras-chave:** discurso de ódio; filosofia para crianças; pesquisa-intervenção.

**la filosofía para niños como  
herramienta educativa para prevenir y  
combatir el discurso de odio**  
una investigación-intervención en una  
escuela italiana

#### resumen

Esta contribución se centrará en una investigación-intervención, dentro de un proyecto de doctorado llevado a cabo en la Universidad de Nápoles Federico II, realizado en Italia sobre la lucha contra los estereotipos y prejuicios -que están en la base del discurso de odio- en una escuela secundaria con niños de entre 12 y 13 años. Los jóvenes están especialmente expuestos a las consecuencias y riesgos del discurso de odio tanto por su falta de experiencia y herramientas culturales y cognitivas (Waltman & Mattheis, 2017; Meddaugh & Kay, 2009) como por estar siempre conectados a la red a través de diferentes dispositivos. (Save the Children, 2023; Rothwell, 2023). Para contrarrestar el discurso de odio, la mayoría de la literatura de referencia sugiere intervenciones educativas basadas en la

reflexión crítica y la deconstrucción de estereotipos comenzando por los más jóvenes (Waltman, 2003; 2018; Cohen-Almagor, 2014; Ziccardi, 2016; Commissione Jo Cox, 2017; Meddaugh & Kay, 2009). Sin embargo, la educación basada puramente en la reflexión crítica puede no ser suficiente cuando se trata de comprender plenamente el sufrimiento y el daño causado a las personas por el lenguaje del odio. Debe ir acompañada de una educación en el pensamiento cuidadoso, que potencie la capacidad de pensar compasivamente y de mirar el mundo desde otras perspectivas, construyendo la capacidad de emitir juicios de valor (Sharp, 2005). La hipótesis de la investigación presentada en esta contribución es que la Philosophy for Children (P4C) puede ser un valioso dispositivo para ayudar a los niños a reflexionar y deconstruir los estereotipos y prejuicios que constituyen la base del discurso del odio.

**palabras clave:** discurso de odio; philosophy for children; investigación-intervención.

# philosophy for children as an educational tool to prevent and combat hate speech

## a research intervention in an italian school

### *introduction: the hate speech phenomenon.*

On a post of one of the many social networks we use on a daily basis, an American man writes:

Mexicans come from an uncivilized, backward society. They are filthy criminals, molesting innocent American women and menacing entire neighbourhoods. For the sake of our safety, they should be beaten up and rot in jail forever. We need to protect ourselves.

In Italy, in reference to the riots that broke out following the killing of a boy of Egyptian origin by the Carabinieri<sup>1</sup> during a chase through the streets of Milan, the director of a newspaper and regional councillor of the Italian party currently in government stated in an interview with a TV channel:

I don't frequent the suburbs, I don't like them. They are chaotic, ugly and above all full of non-EU immigrants whom I can't stand. Just look at them, see what they get up to here in Milan, how can you love them? I would shoot them in the mouth. I am not at all ashamed to consider Muslims inferior races.

The interview made the rounds on social networks amidst applause and controversy.

The statements just mentioned are examples of a well-known phenomenon called hate speech<sup>2</sup>. Hate speech is a type of discourse aimed at denigrating, humiliating, debasing people who are the object of hatred, often considered inferior, not worthy of living (second example) or as a threat to the lives of people who instead rightfully hold that right (first example) because they are considered legitimate inhabitants of a place (such as the United States or Europe) threatened by the invasion of people from outside their own reference group who risk undermining its purity, culture, religion and resources.

The two examples refer to immigrant people in particular. However, messages like these can vary in content (but not in essence) if the target-group of the hatred consists in another category. Moreover, also individuals can be reached

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<sup>1</sup> One of the police forces in Italy.

<sup>2</sup> For the most recent definition of the term hate speech, I refer to the *Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)16[1] of the Committee of Ministers to member States* which relates also to the online phenomenon.

by hate speech for the most diverse reasons, giving rise to phenomenon such as bullying or cyberbullying.

It is the result of an eternal contrast between the feeling of belonging to a meritorious and important social group (the ingroup), represented as naturally superior in race, culture and civilisation, as opposed to an outgroup (usually composed of people of colour, members of the LGBTQ+ community, women, migrants, and so on). The latter is often portrayed with non-human characteristics and cultural stereotypes and is believed to pose a serious threat to the ingroup both in terms of values and resources and, by extension, to the entire civilisation (where civilisation is of course understood to be that constituted by the values of the ingroup). This is how Mexicans are portrayed by the American man in the first example and those who are called Muslims in the second. They are people whose lives are not regarded in the same way as those of the group the two speakers belong to, thus defining a degree of right to existence. The dehumanisation of the “different”, the “outsider” and her/his “monstrification” can justify all kinds of violence (Emcke, 2019; Pasta, 2018).

In recent years, the rise of nationalist right-wing ideologies in the Western world has led to a surge in the spread of xenophobic hate speech. In the United States, a survey by the Southern Poverty Law Center found, in the period between 2014 and 2018, an exponential growth in the number of US hate groups on the Internet (784 in 2014, 954 in 2017 and finally 1,020 in 2018), 30% of which coincided with Donald Trump’s election campaign. In Italy, the Italian Observatory on Rights Vox, which periodically detects hate on social media, found, through an analysis of 200,000 tweets posted by Italians between March and May 2019 (the period in which the penultimate European elections took place), 50,000 tweets against migrants (more than 15.1% compared to the previous year), 39,000 against women, 22,000 against Muslims, 17,000 against disabled people, 15,000 against Jews and 8,000 against homosexuals.

The anti-migrant rhetoric expressed in the two examples mentioned at the start, however, comes from two different positions: the first is the discursive representation of the common man, the second is the speech of a journalist and politician, a fact which reveals the transversality of hate speech. What is more, it also makes us ask a question: how much does public discourse, whether acted out

by television, newspapers or political discourse, influence that of ordinary people? Perhaps it is a vicious circle that is self-perpetuating, travelling indifferently from one discourse to another with the complicity of the instruments of mass communication?

In any case, such messages, whether private or public, end up having a propagandist function. This makes them dangerous because voluntarily (in the case of political discourse) or involuntarily (in the case of private discourse) they risk fixing in the collective imagination absolute values, which represent the view which nurtures prejudices and stereotypes. Seeing hate speech as a form of propaganda makes us realise that

hate language not only communicates contempt and hostility against individuals and groups, but also proselytises that contempt and hostility, incites discrimination, hatred and violence. Paradoxically, the first recipient of a verbal attack is often not the victim of the attack – the denigrated individual or the social category to which he or she belongs – but our own group: hate language says more about us than it does about our victims. In other words, racist, homophobic or sexist phrases and expressions are a way of affirming our social, cultural and political identity, of asserting our membership of the dominant faction, of reinforcing the social hierarchy – of turning an insignificant individual into a threatening mass. Homophobia, racism and misogyny are ways of hating in packs; they are, to use an effective expression, forms of hatred “in the first person plural”<sup>3</sup>. (Bianchi, 2021, p. 10)

Although hate speech is not a new phenomenon, it is a fact that it has grown exponentially in recent years and there seems to be no stopping it. It has become in recent years the most serious means of discrimination against weaker people for the most diverse reasons. Racial superiority, supremacism, homophobia, misogyny and ableism are some of the stereotypes spread through the various media tools<sup>4</sup>. The problem has become increasingly urgent mainly because of the emergence and massive dissemination of the Internet and social

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<sup>3</sup> The translations into English are my own.

<sup>4</sup> Mass media of all kinds have played a key role throughout history in the massive dissemination of stereotyping and hatred against victimised groups. Think, for example, of the role the press played in the persecution of the Jews in Nazi Germany, from the dissemination of the *Protocols of the Wise Men of Zion* to the propaganda newspapers on racial supremacy. Or of the role of radio during the genocide in Rwanda: Radio Thousand Hills, also known as Radio Machete, performed a key function in the incitement of hatred by the Hutus against the Tutsis. The power of these mass media was enormous in radicalising prejudice against victimised groups. In recent times this role has been played also by social media such as Facebook. A 2022 report by Amnesty International, for example, denounces the role of Facebook in inciting hatred against the Muslim minority Rohingya population in Myanmar in 2017. The ethnic cleansing took place also thanks to the dissemination of anti-Muslim content and fake news published by Facebook users linked to the army and Myanmar’s ultra-nationalist Buddhist groups in which the Rohingya were accused of being “invaders” and of preparing an Islamist coup d’état.

media, which have expanded the possibility of hate messages (ECRI, 2016. See also Meddaugh & Kay, 2009; Waltman & Mattheis, 2017; Ziccardi, 2016). Hate, in fact, is quickly transmitted online through any channel, from emails to websites, from chats to blogs. These media work as a sort of sounding box, bouncing the hate speech comment or message from one channel to another, making it go viral (Ziccardi, 2016). Research shows that this phenomenon is leading to a marked polarisation of public discourse, seriously endangering democracy (Deb et al., 2017; Olaniran & Williams, 2020).

Some scholars see the web architecture itself as responsible for this polarisation. Algorithms, for instance, responsible for indexing our business choices, also direct our tastes and ideological choices. The purpose of the algorithm, in fact, is to extrapolate data from our online choices to capture our behaviour and predict our preferences in order to advertise products as close as possible to our desires or drive us to visit platforms attracted by content related to our preferences. All this aimed at generating profit. Every click we make, every advertisement we are compelled to view, generates profit for the platforms on which we browse every moment of our day. As a result, we are continuously profiled, or rather controlled, manipulated, used to maximise the profits of Big Tech through a complex system of data mining and deep learning that Shoshana Zuboff (2019) has called “surveillance capitalism”. The trouble is that what attracts the most attention from users is precisely hate content. So, what happens most of the time is that the recommendation algorithms “using other deep learning algorithms specialised in detecting the polarised preferences of users, reward in visibility those contents that get more clicks such as hate messages” (Curcio, 2024, p. 32). Frances Haugen’s<sup>5</sup> revelations to the Wall Street Journal in this regard are eloquent. Haugen recounted that Facebook, when it was still adopting fact checking policies<sup>6</sup> and after the introduction of new algorithms in 2018, overlooked hate content combined with “recommendation algorithms” in order to increase users’ engagement and thus company profits. In this way, Facebook did not care about the mental health of its users, in particular adolescents: “Facebook

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<sup>5</sup> Ex product manager of the Civic Integrity Team of Facebook.

<sup>6</sup> Mark Zuckerberg announced the abandonment of the fact checking policies shortly before Donald Trump became President of the USA.



researchers had found that among teenagers, the rate of ‘problem use’ – the company’s term for platform addiction – rose from 5% among 14 year olds to 8% among 16 year olds” (Haugen, 2023, p. 364).

Besides exposing the user to addiction and hate speech, the algorithmic system traps her or him in a content loop through those customised information ecosystems that are known as “filter bubbles”. In this way, the user has the perception of accessing content perfectly aligned with her or his interests, in a mechanism that is difficult to unhinge. Filter bubbles generate and reinforce the mechanism of “echo chambers”, which are a direct consequence: the user only encounters information -related to any content, from politics to sport, from music to fashion- which is consistent with her or his worldview and finds herself or himself trapped in a system that is impermeable to different ideas, where opinions are solidified through constant reiteration. It is the “likes” indicated by users on social channels that mark their preferences and determine the repetition of content aligned to a worldview that is not the real one. The phenomenon can have serious consequences on the intellectual and cultural sphere of individuals who, not having access to different ideas and information, will not have the opportunity to question their own perspectives and, possibly, change their points of view (Ippolita, 2012; Oliverio, 2016; Pasta, 2018; Santerini, 2019).

Stereotypes thus become more firmly established and risk giving rise to increasingly widespread phenomena of intolerance.

### *the risks of hate speech on children and adolescents.*

If adult users of the world of social networks are exposed to the risks of polarisation and stigmatisation of stereotyped beliefs, imagine what can happen to children and adolescents. Young people, in fact, are particularly exposed to the consequences and risks of hate speech both because they lack experience and cultural and cognitive tools (Waltman & Mattheis, 2017; Meddaugh & Kay, 2009) and because they are always connected to the web through different devices.

According to Gallup, in fact, one of the world’s leading centers of polling and statistical surveys, the most recent data indicate that US teenagers spend around five hours a day on social platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Facebook and X (Rothwell, 2023), not counting other activities related to the use of



smartphones or other devices for study or for connecting on online gaming platforms, which brings the time spent on screens to around nine hours a day.

In Italy, the percentages are similar: according to research carried out by Generazioni Connesse, commissioned by the Ministry of Education, in Italy, in 2021, 1 in 5 teenagers described themselves as practically always connected and 6 in 10 teenagers claimed to be online from 5 to 10 hours a day.

Distance learning implemented during the pandemic period, for example, has significantly lowered the age of children who have access to electronic devices. According to the data reported by Save the Children in the *XIV Atlante dell'infanzia* (2023), if in Italy in the 11–17 age group the daily use of mobile phones has had a relatively low increase from 86.6% in the two-year period 2018–2019 to 89.2% in the period between 2021 and 2022, there was a significant increase in the 6 to 10 age group from 28% to 43%, especially in the South, while in central Italy it rose from 17% to 28% and in the North from 11.5% to 22%.

Furthermore, a 2022 study involving 800 families nationwide with an anonymous questionnaire on online habits and behavior (Gioco responsabile.info, 2024; Società Italiana Pediatria, 2022) found that 26% of parents allow their children to use devices independently between the ages of 0 and 2 years, a percentage that rises to 62% for the 3–5 age group, 82% for the 6–10 age group and 95% between the ages of 11 and 15.

The lower the age of access to devices, the greater the discrepancy between young people and adults in their capacity for interaction with electronic devices. This leads to a generation gap that does not allow adults to have a real awareness of the content used by their children or students nor of how much time they actually spend online (Bernardo & Maisano, 2018; Save the Children, 2023). Moreover, another 2019 Italian poll by Save the Children as part of the “Up-prezzami” campaign shows that among the teenagers surveyed who said they had experienced discrimination among their peers at school, only 1 in 20 chose to turn to teachers, a sign that teenagers have little trust in adult intervention.

All the above elements, combined with the lack of any effective regulation of online hate speech<sup>7</sup>, increasingly exposes the younger generations to hate content on the various platforms on which they surf daily. In this regard, UNICEF is very clear:

Research in Europe has shown that hate messages are the most common form of potentially harmful content that children are exposed to online, followed by violent images [...]. Similarly, European children have also reported that they find violent content among the most harmful to witness [...]. Children can be exposed to online hate and violent content without necessarily being its target or recipient, but the experience can still negatively influence their well-being [...]. For example, with respect to hate messages, such content might create a general culture of hostility and intolerance which will affect children negatively in the longer term, irrespective of whether they are the creators or recipients. (UNICEF, 2023, p. 3)

It is clear, then, how the repeated exposure of young people to hate speech, not accompanied by awareness and a critical reflection, risks, on the one hand, consolidating stereotypes and prejudices against individuals or groups of people and, on the other, degenerating into a trivialization of such content (Waltman & Mattheis, 2017; Pasta, 2018; Waltman, 2018).

It is necessary, therefore, to devise educational strategies that cultivate critical thinking and social commitment to counter hate speech, trying to combat the current speed and fragmentation of information, which risk undermining reflectivity and moral judgement, reducing empathetic abilities. Online communications, in fact, are based on speed and depersonalization: the lack of physical contact leads to a loss of the foundation of empathy that is built on “feeling the other”, risking the loss of that face-to-face dialogue which human beings need (Santerini, 2019).

### *what are the educational strategies to counter and prevent hate speech?*

Some pedagogical approaches propose an education aimed at a so called click activism and at counter speech (CE, 2017; Pasta, 2018), a sort of counter-hate narrative, carried out by media campaigns that invite users to counter hate speech with posts, comments or media events; a speech vs speech that highlights the values of tolerance, pluralism, and respect for others.

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<sup>7</sup> It would take too long to deal here with attempts at legal regulation against hate speech on the Internet and the legislative differences between Europe and the United States. Therefore, I refer to Brown, 2017a, 2017b, 2018; Carlson, 2021; Ziccardi, 2016.

However, entrusting the fight against hatred only to words is not enough. Although counter-speech actions are important, they are likely to remain goals in themselves. These initiatives need to be accompanied by educational interventions, such as those in favour of net-citizenship, aimed at developing the citizen's sense of responsibility (Cohen-Almagor, 2014), cultivating critical thinking in an attempt to undermine the contemporary attitude relating to the speed and fragmentation of information and to train responsible speech against hate speech.

Most reference literature suggests educational interventions based on critical reflection and the de-construction of stereotypes starting from younger age groups (including, CE, 2017; Cohen-Almagor, 2014; Commissione "Jo Cox", 2017; Meddaugh & Kay, 2009; Santerini, 2019; Waltman, 2003, 2018; Waltman & Mattheis, 2017; Ziccardi, 2016).

In particular, Michael Waltman (2003) suggests an education in the knowledge of hatred and haters with the intention of warning children as early as primary school about the presence of hatred on the Internet, with the intention of explaining its historical development and describing who the victims are; for Waltman, it is necessary to educate children as early as possible about hatred, haters and the consequences of their actions. Making the texts that produce haters known – instead of avoiding them through normative structures – can function as a kind of "vaccine" (Meddaugh & Kay 2009, p. 264) thanks to which students of all ages develop the skills to criticize the discourse of a multiplicity of sowers of hatred.

On the basis of these intentions, it is interesting to mention a couple of projects, implemented in Italy and Europe, that have had the merit of intelligently merging critical thinking education -focused on reflection and knowledge of human rights- with "click-activism" and counter-narration education through pathways that also include an understanding of the digital environment. One such example is the project *#SilenceHate – Giovani digitali contro il razzismo* (Digital Youth Against Racism) funded by UNAR (the Italian National Anti-Discrimination Office), carried out between 2018 and 2019 by the associations Zaffiria and COSPE, aimed at promoting the conscious use of the Web through a critical approach to the information circulating online. The project involved more than 350 Italian

students through the use of a handbook (Falconi *et al.*, 2018), which can be downloaded from the website [www.silencehate.it](http://www.silencehate.it), where a series of informative and interactive materials can be found.

Another example is the initiative carried out by the No Hate Speech Movement (CE, 2017) to build an educational programme, which involved 45 European countries between 2013 and 2017, during which young people aged between 13 and 30 were trained to become activists against online hate. The programme is supported by two teaching materials manuals, one (CE, 2020) aimed at human rights knowledge and a critical reflection on possible forms of online and offline discrimination through different teaching methodologies; another (CE, 2017) whose aim is education on online activism for the development of counternarratives.

However, education based purely on critical reflection may not be sufficient when it comes to fully understanding the suffering and damage caused to people by the language of hatred. It should be accompanied by a kind of education that enhances both critical thinking and empathy, imagination and creativity, abilities in reasoning and in understanding one's own and others' emotions.

### *why philosophy for children?*

Based on the assumption that critical thinking education alone is not sufficient to understand the suffering of the victims of the hate-mongers, the research hypothesis – included within a doctoral research project in Mind, Gender and Language carried out in Naples (Italy) at University Federico II – has been that of demonstrating that an educational intervention based on philosophical inquiry, on the model of Philosophy for Children (P4C), can be comparatively more effective than other approaches based on educational interventions aimed at media awareness through the promotion of critical thinking.

P4C, in fact, is a way of going beyond critical thinking education, while cultivating creative and caring thinking, what Lipman calls multi-dimensional thinking (Lipman, 2003), in which the three dimensions (critical, creative and caring) are in continuous transaction with each other (Sharp, 2005). The deconstruction of prejudices and stereotypes, in this way, also passes through the ethical dimension. In addition, the Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI) is a

tool through which children build spaces for reflection and habits of thought that can function as a defence against any kind of manipulation (Lipman 2003; Lipman et al., 1977) and, thus, against the brainwashing which can result from hate speech and the loop generated by filter bubbles and echo chambers.

The dangers of the manipulation of television and the induction to consumerism, for example, were very clear to Lipman and Sharp when they stated that “children are becoming increasingly exposed to the subtle, ill-defined, hidden authorities of television. Given this confusing barrage of authoritative claims and direction, what are children to do?” (Lipman et al., 1977, p. 134).

We can better understand Lipman’s and Sharp’s concerns if we compare them with our own.

When designing P4C, in fact, the founders of the program were in a different historical context facing the same challenges we are facing today. Indeed, just as Western societies today are pressured between strong polarizations (due to xenophobia, misogyny and homophobia as well as the escalation of war) and the neoliberal paradigm (which has pushed consumerism to exponential levels), so in the United States of that time the social polarizations (determined by the war in Vietnam as well as by a racism still strongly present in society) and the consumerist drive were factors of concern for Lipman and Sharp.

Lipman and Sharp’s proposal was to give children defence tools against any type of imposed or subtly invasive authority which would enable them to cope with authoritarian impositions through the inquiry abilities improved in the CPI. Children, thanks to philosophical dialogue, would be helped to develop habits of reasonableness rather than only rational thinking.

In order to carry out a proper inquiry, in fact, it is necessary to put in place some fundamental elements that characterise the principles on which the P4C framework is based. Roberto Tibaldeo (2023, p. 44) identifies four distinctive features of dialogic practice which constitute the principles around which the inquiry revolves: self-correction, sensitivity to context, fallibilism and, precisely, reasonableness. The four factors are intertwined and feed off each other, so that reasonableness is exercised in a process that takes into account the praxis-theory-praxis circuit. Inquiry is sensible to context, because it “calls for an act to be appropriate to the situation that evokes it” (Lipman, 2003, p. 54). It

flourishes from the experience, becoming a theory that needs to be verified by dropping it into experience again. However, the awareness that every conclusion is susceptible to revision, i.e. fallible, makes CPI members careful not to trust easy generalisations. Here one has to go back into context, examine the specific situations of one's own and others' experience to validate or not that theory, which presupposes a habit of self-correction.

The emphasis placed on self-correction and sensitivity to context involved an equal stress on "reasonableness", which Lipman defined as "rationality tempered by judgement" (Lipman, 2003, 11). Due to this connection with the faculty of judgement, reasonableness (rather than pure and abstract rationality) could bring the theoretical and practical aspects of reasoning together. In practical terms, for instance, reasonableness entailed focusing "on the vindication of the act rather than on the act itself" (Lipman, 2003, 53). (Tibaldeo, 2023, p. 44)

This means cultivating a style of reasoning that acquires that of "good reasons" as a basic principle, a valid bulwark against any type of indoctrination and/or subjection to authority. Moreover, setting the inquiry in context also means taking into account those factors that are not necessarily linked to formal logic, such as the intuitions, emotions, well-being or discomfort of the individuals who make up the CPI at the time the investigation unfolds. Developing the principle of reasonableness means considering formal and non-formal logic, the bodily dimension and experience, creativity and moral sense in the educational process. This is acted out thanks to the structure itself of the P4C methodology and its tools, which exercise reasonableness through the model of inquiry proposed by the stimulus texts (De Marzio, 2011, 2017) and the facilitator's posture. The facilitator, indeed, is both a model for the CPI (Kennedy, 2004) and an enabler of the personal and collective authenticity of its members (Kizel, 2021). S/he guides the children's dialogue being aware of the embodied aspect of the inquiry, encouraging the CPI members to expose their thoughts helping them "to reach a reasonable philosophical judgment" (Alvarez-Abarejo, 2023), modelling and developing the multidimensional thinking of the CPI in which caring thinking represents "a fusion of emotional and cognitive thinking when it concerns matters of importance" (Sharp, 2007a, p. 248).

Moreover, the principle of reasonableness constitutes the fundamental basis for democratic discussion. It guarantees openness to a plurality of points of view

and discourages polarized and prejudicial positions. In fact, the fundamental issues on which Lipman and Sharp's project is based are primarily their debt to Dewey, in particular to his *Democracy and Education* (Tibaldeo, 2023), where he "stresses even more strongly the importance of thought in education" (Lipman, 2005, p. 47). Actually, for Lipman "[a] higher-quality democracy is not achieved merely by attracting to it a plurality of individuals capable of higher- order thinking. It must itself engage in the cultivation of such thinking" (Lipman, 1998, p. 277). Furthermore, for Lipman and Sharp a better education meant making the class itself more democratic and, in order to reconstruct the Deweyan democratic ideal, it was necessary to think of a type of school oriented towards the education of active citizenship and participatory democracy as well as the acquisition of civic values. This structure can be very helpful in the fight against prejudices and stereotypes, which are at the basis of hate speech, and prevent the absence of a democratic attitude.

In fact, children, thanks to philosophical dialogue, would be helped to develop habits of thinking and behaviour through actions to prevent hate and manipulation which can be identified by a) the democratization of the class itself which is transformed into a CPI; b) the cultivation of reasonableness rather than mere rational thinking; and c) the idea of the development of caring thinking taking into account, in particular, the view of Ann Margaret Sharp.

If we consider Sharp's perspective on the cultivation of care (Sharp, 1995, 2004, 2005, 2007b), in fact, we can understand that it cannot be separated from that of imagination. Indeed, by building on Dewey's view (Dewey, [1934] 1980) and on Hannah Arendt's metaphor of "go visiting" (Arendt, 1992, p. 43), for Sharp imagination denotes the ability to imagine oneself and others in a possible future, something that goes beyond putting oneself in the other's shoes, where the validity of one's position is evaluated with and through the relationship with the others. It implies an open door to value and creative reflection, because it gives children the possibility to learn to see the world from other perspectives, which means being able to think compassionately and participate both in the suffering and the happiness of others and join their life projects (Sharp, 2005, p. 39). In this way, the combined cultivation of caring thinking and imagination is something which goes beyond education to empathy.



So, P4C can be a useful device to prevent hate speech because, through the philosophical dialogue the community of students enhances:

- critical thinking as a tool to de-construct stereotypes and prejudices and co-construct new meanings within a procedure of self-correction;
- creative thinking as a tool to imagine new perspectives and new ways of being in the world;
- caring thinking as a tool to understand and feel deeply the other, to feel and understand one's own and the other's emotions and to develop the ability to build moral judgments.

Thus, through the exercise of the reflection matured during the P4C sessions, the development of the habits of thought and behaviour practised, acted out and acquired within the class transformed into a CPI can constitute for children and adolescents a valid bulwark against every manipulation coming from stereotyped and prejudiced reasoning.

### *the hypothesis of the research, the research questions and the methodological approach.*

Guided by the latter reflections and theoretical framework and based on the hypothesis that P4C can be a valuable device to help children counter and prevent hate speech, a research intervention was conducted in Italy in a secondary school with children aged between 12 and 13. The school, IC "Don Giustino Russolillo", is situated in the city of Naples in one of the neighbourhoods where there is a high level of social deprivation, where boys and girls are poorly looked after by their parents and find it difficult to follow the school curriculum, often fluctuating between attendance and dropping out. Moreover, the neighbourhood has a large community of migrants who have been the victims of racist incidents in the past.

Together with the research hypothesis, some research questions, deriving from the analysis of the scenario and the state of the art, guided the first part of the research. In fact, the scenario analysis and the evaluation of the state of the art on the topic of hate speech revealed the lack of a systematic study on how and in what forms in Italy adolescents witness online hate speech –and the kind of contents of those messages– together with the absence of comparative testing of educational devices and models that are effective in a long-term perspective. Thus,

before the beginning of the research intervention in the school, it was necessary to understand: a) whether and to what extent Italian teenagers witness online hate speech; b) what the stereotypes and prejudices behind the online hate messages that teenagers witness are; c) which targets are most affected by the online hate speech that teenagers witness.

In order to answer the research questions and validate the investigative hypothesis, an exploratory-sequential research design was chosen (Ponce & Pagán-Maldonado, 2015; Trinchero, 2019), according to a mixed-method research formula (Creswell, 2012; Norgberg et al., 1967; Ponce & Pagán-Maldonado, 2015; Trinchero, 2019) that allowed for a semi-statistical look at the phenomenon that was intended to be explored – in which different analysis and validation tools were used, depending on the stage of the research:

- a) in the first exploratory phase it was decided to use a qualitative-quantitative questionnaire to circumscribe and describe the phenomenon guided by the research questions;
- b) on the basis of the data collected in the exploratory phase the matrix of a research intervention carried out in Naples and involving three classes of a secondary school was outlined, using qualitative monitoring tools with the help of semi-structured questionnaires and focus groups from which responses and discussion threads were generated and contextually analysed;
- c) the third phase of the research focused on the qualitative analysis of the transcripts of the recordings of the P4C meetings carried out with the students during the educational research intervention and of the answers to the questionnaires administered at the beginning and the end of the educational intervention.

#### *the first phase.*

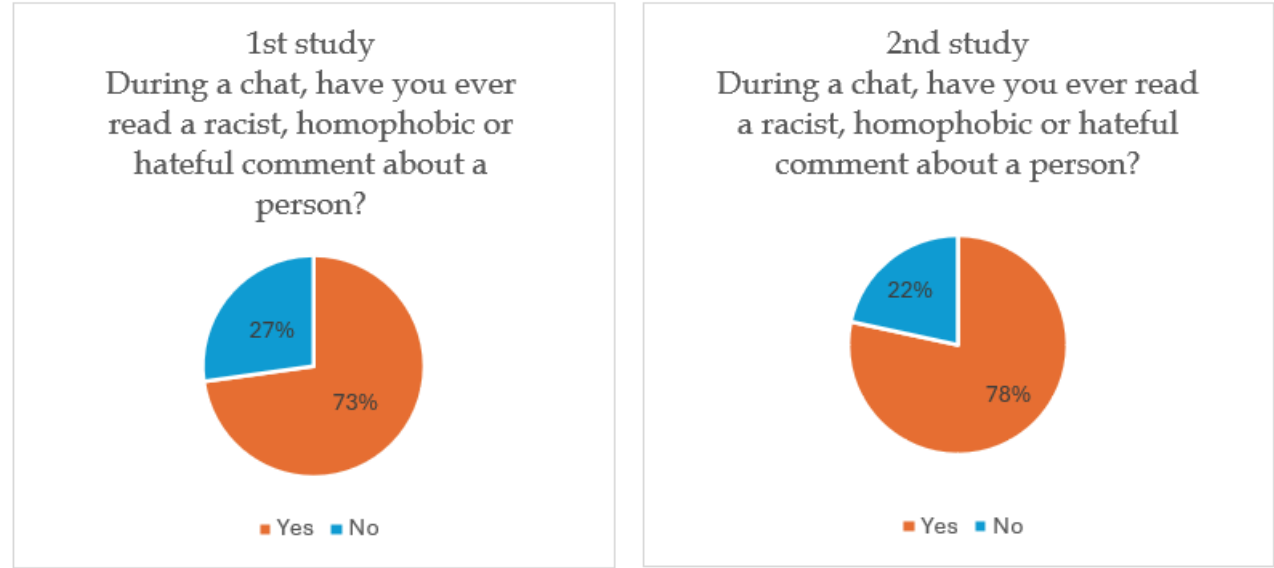
During the first phase of the research, the answers to a quali-quantitative *ad hoc* questionnaire administered to 2,406 children (aged between 11 and 18) across Italy were analysed.

The questionnaire was provided to a sample of secondary schools located throughout Italy on two occasions at the beginning of the research, giving rise to two studies.

The questionnaire was structured with closed and open questions aimed at understanding, among other things, what kind of messages children declared to have witnessed.

The analysis shows, among other results, that 72.8% and 78.4% of the teenagers surveyed in each study have been witnesses of hate speech against a person.

**Table 1.** Children who have witnessed hate speech against a person:  
result of the 11th question from the questionnaire

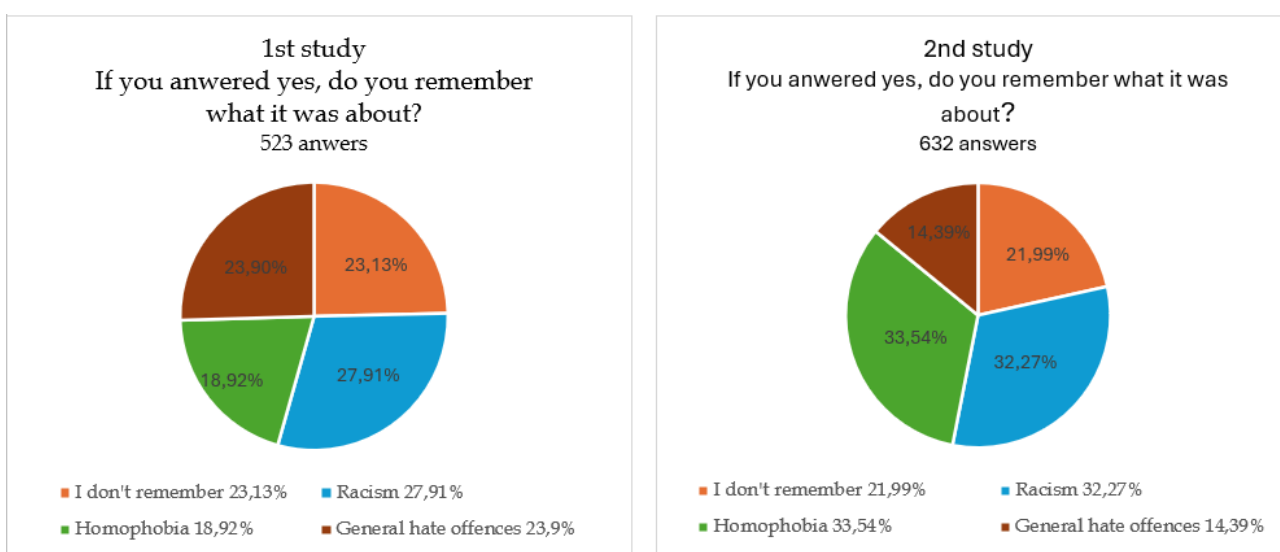


Source: Author

The majority (about 60% in each study) have preferred to ignore any comments.

Furthermore, the issues most frequently contained in the hate speech messages which the children have experienced are related to racism and homophobia (about 28% and 32% in each study related to racism; about 19% and 33% in each study related to homophobia):

**Table 2.** Issues contained in the hate speech messages:  
result of the 12th question from the questionnaire



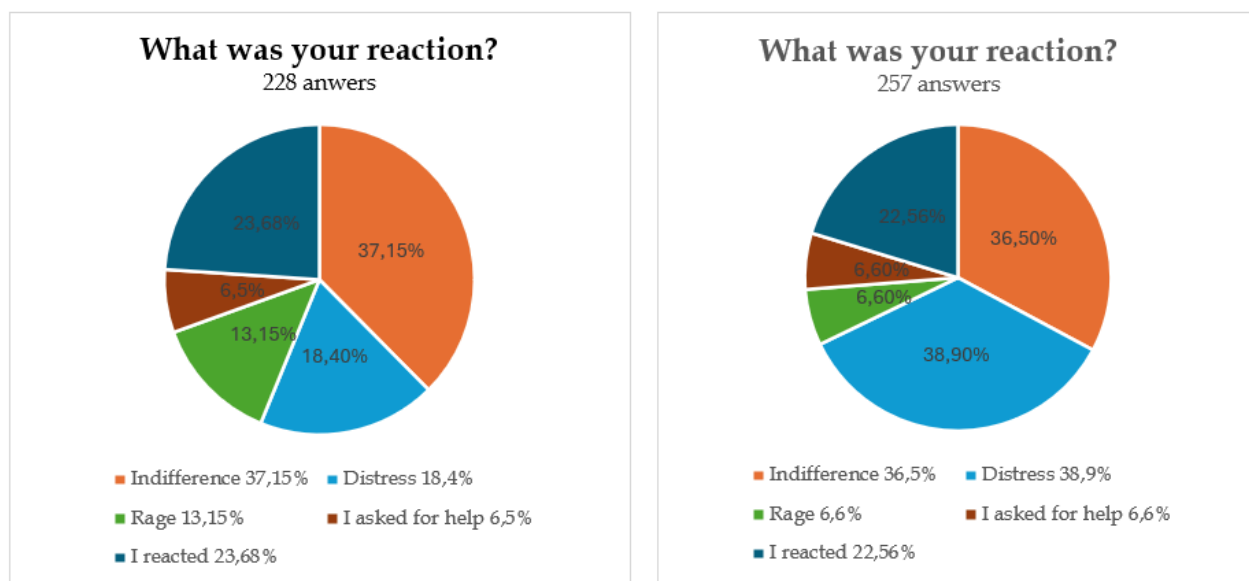
Source: Author

Very similar results have been found in the answers to the question related to a group of people (57.8% in the first study and 63.7% in the second have declared that they have been witnesses to hate speech against a group of people: 28.28% in the first study and 32% in the second have been witnesses to racist messages; 7.85% in the first study and 32.8% in the second have been witnesses to homophobic messages; 9.51% in the first study and 14.2% in the second have been witnesses to general hate offences).

Moreover, 20% declared that they themselves had been the target of hate speech. An open question asked them to describe what their consequent reaction was. In this way the emotions of those children targeted by hate speech messages have been analysed: while most of them (about 20% and 38% in each study) have declared that they have remained indifferent, about 30% in each study have experienced rage or a kind of distress such as fear, shock or sadness.

It is interesting to highlight that only about 6% in each study asked for help. In addition, in the related open answer, only one of them asked an adult for help.

**Table 3.** Reaction of children targeted by hate speech:  
result of the 23th question



Source: Author

The racism and homophobia detected as the issues most often contained in the hate speech messages in the survey mentioned above and the emotions and reactions some children have experienced after receiving hate speech messages have been the inspirational basis on which two philosophical stories in Lipman's style have been built: the first, titled *Tourette*, is a story related to hate speech about race and diversity; the second, titled *Un bacio a tradimento* (*A treacherous kiss*), is focused on homophobia hate speech. The stories have constituted part of the stimulus-texts used in the P4C sessions during the second phase of the research.

### *the second phase.*

The subject of the research at this stage has been to test the pedagogical hypothesis that an educational approach based on reflection and philosophical inquiry on the model of P4C may be comparatively more effective than other types of approach.

To this end, the implementation of a research intervention path – according to the action-research model (Breadbury, 2010; Creswell, 2012; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Orefice, 2006a, 2006b, 2016; Reasons & Breadbury, 2008; Sorzio,

2019) – has been carried out in the school “Don Giustino Russolillo” of Naples, which was interested in the educational intervention.

Bearing in mind the epistemic construct relating to action-research, it was deemed appropriate to set up the research pathway by activating a “community of inquiry” in which the head teacher and the teachers of the classes identified as the context of the intervention were involved. In this way it was possible to operate a sort of “epistemic exchange” between the school and the proposed study by reconciling the hypothesis underlying the research with the requests coming from the school in terms of interventions against hate speech, the implementation of didactics and the sharing of new materials and good educational practices.

In agreement with the headteacher and the teachers of the school, 3 classes of children aged between 12 and 13 (2B, 2D and 3B) were identified.

All the classes were trained with lessons of four hours in total dedicated to setting hate speech in a historical context and to the introduction of some materials taken from critical thinking oriented manuals -such as the *No Hate Speech handbook* (CE, 2020) and *Silence Hate handbook* (Falconi et al., 2018). Later, two of the classes (2B and 2D) were subjected to the P4C educational intervention, once a week for a total of 7 meetings per class, while in the remaining class (3B) one of the teachers involved continued using for the same period the educational materials from those cited manuals and no philosophical inquiry was introduced.

The action-research path was monitored through the use of a questionnaire at the beginning (entry questionnaire) and at the end (exit questionnaire), addressed to all three classes, in order to detect any changes a) in the construction of beliefs; b) in the detection of stereotypes and prejudices; and c) in the ability to make evaluative judgements of the adolescents involved.

The entry and exit questionnaires were constructed *ad hoc* and have a structure consisting of four parts for the entry questionnaire and three for the exit questionnaire:

1. The structure of the first part has been inspired by the construction of belief analysed by Peirce (1877) in *The fixation of belief* and is aimed at understanding how the boys and girls of the three sample classes construct their beliefs. In the questionnaire four statements were included related to which the students were asked to indicate one of two items (I believe/I do

not believe) and one from a subset of four explanatory reasons for each item. These explanatory reasons correspond to Peirce's four methods of belief fixation: a) the tenacity method (Because if I believe it, it is just true/because if I don't believe it, it is just not true); b) the authority method (Because one of my parents – one of my teachers – my best friend(s) thinks so too/doesn't think so either); c) the metaphysical method (Because the reasoning behind the news is/isn't coherent and convincing); and d) the scientific method (Because I have tried to find out whether it is true or not based on my experience and/or by researching sources);

2. The second section is aimed at understanding the ability to recognise the prejudices or stereotypes contained in certain statements through a four-grade scale of agreement (do not agree at all – slightly agree – agree – strongly agree).
3. The third section, which is not present in the exit questionnaire, is aimed at understanding how the adolescents involved construct their online and offline relationships and is constructed according to a yes/no answer system.
4. The fourth section is aimed at identifying how the boys and girls involved in the project construct their moral judgements. It is characterised by open-ended answers to questions inspired by a series of ethical dilemmas<sup>8</sup>.

A focus group, after the first meetings, was addressed only to the two classes that would shortly be involved in the philosophical inquiry educational intervention, in order to understand, at that stage, what was their perception of hate speech and what were their reactions and emotions relating to it.

Every intervention in the classes trained with P4C was recorded on an audio file and monitored through annotations in a logbook.

### *the third phase.*

#### *the analysis of the questionnaires.*

The analysis of the questionnaires administered at the beginning and at the end of the intervention showed a clear difference between the classes in which

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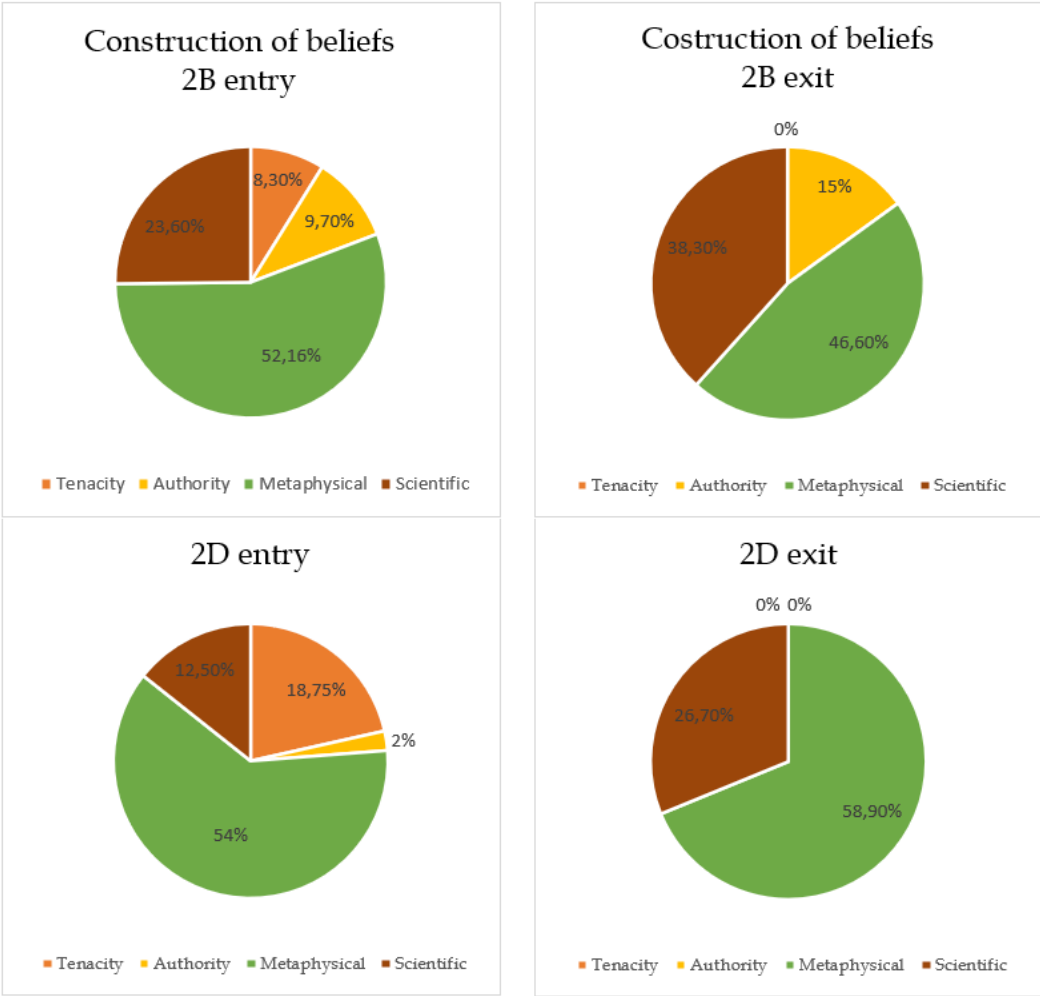
<sup>8</sup> Retrived October 22, 2023 from <https://www.slideshare.net/spazioeticomail/i-dilemmi-etici-a-scuola-spazioetico>; CE, 2016, p. 95.



P4C was introduced and those in which no philosophical inquiry was used. The students of the first group, in fact, are revealed to be, at the end of the intervention, more aware of prejudices and stereotypes than the other students and to have changed their way of constructing their beliefs. Furthermore, the questionnaire reveals a change in the argumentative abilities of the students who participated in the philosophical intervention.

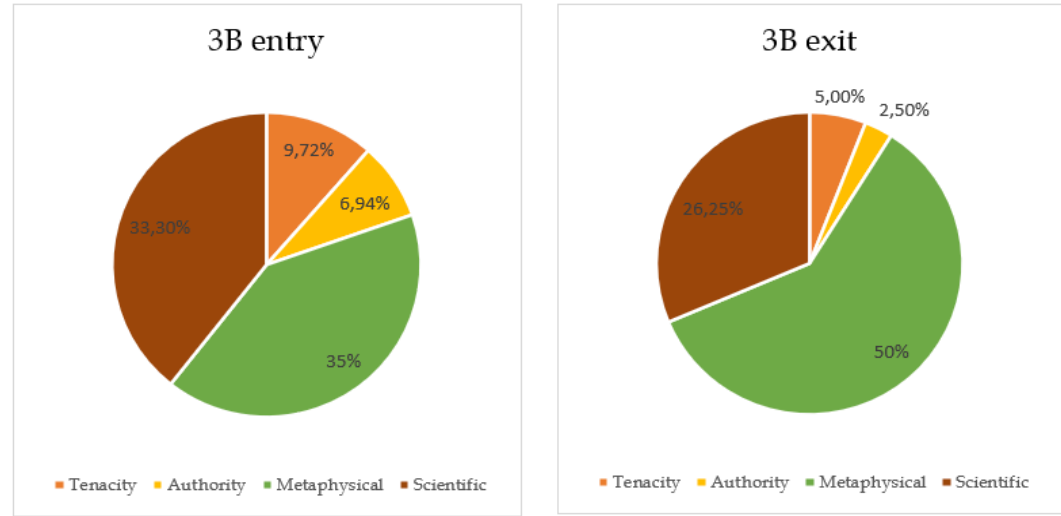
Here is the graphic representation of the outcomes:

**Table 4.** 1st questionnaire section (construction of beliefs) – classes trained with P4C:  
2B and 2D construction of beliefs before and after p4c training



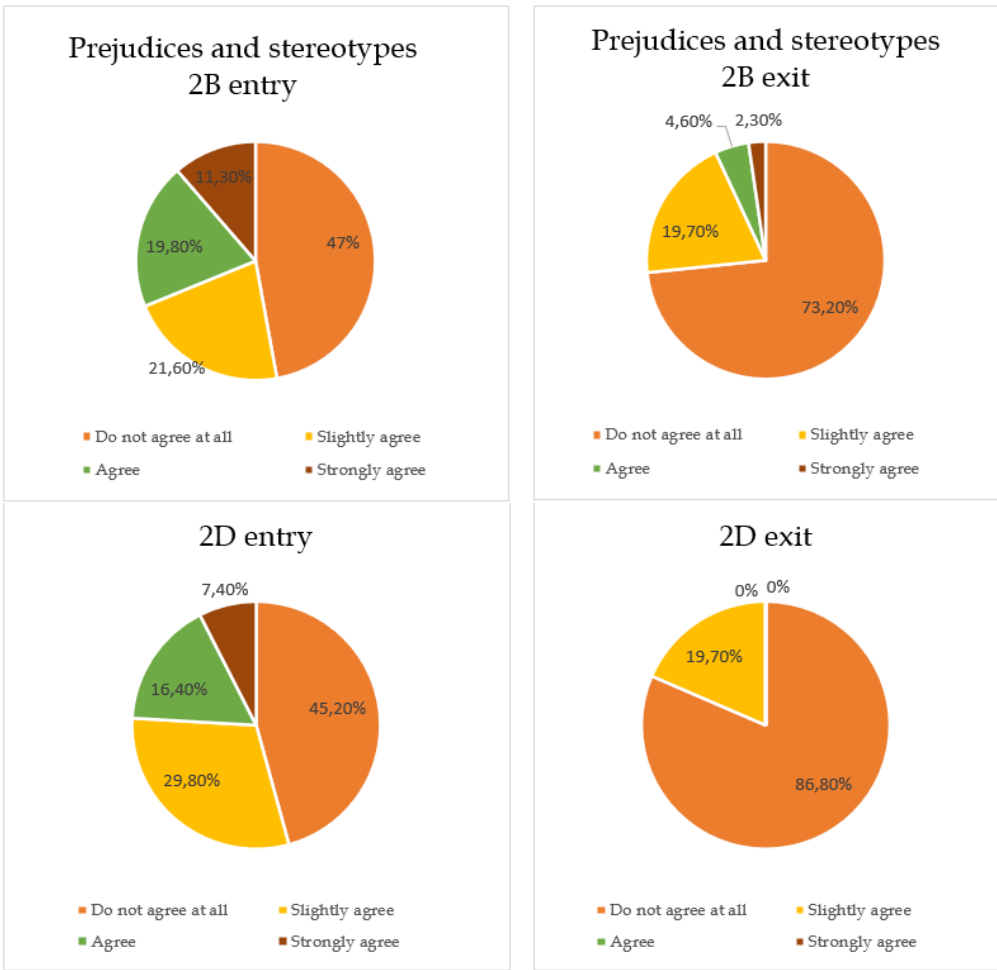
Source: Author

**Table 5.** 1st questionnaire section (construction of beliefs) – class without any philosophical training: 3B construction of beliefs before and after media literacy training



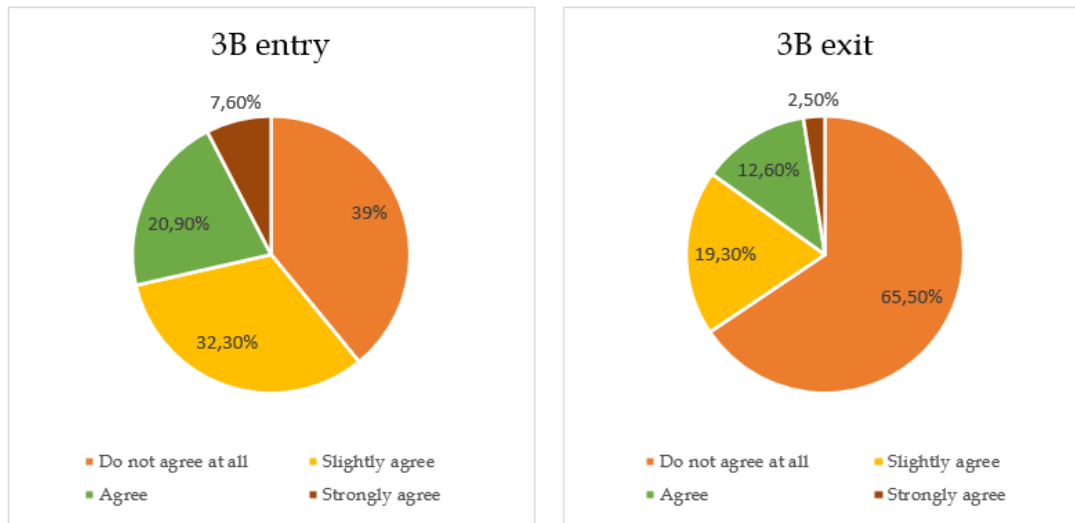
Source: Author

**Table 6.** 2nd questionnaire section (prejudices and stereotypes) – classes trained with P4C: 2B and 2D recognition of stereotypes and prejudices before and after p4c training



Source: Author

**Table 7.** 2nd questionnaire section (prejudices and stereotypes) – class without any philosophical training: 3B recognition of stereotypes and prejudices before and after media literacy training



Source: Author

As we can see from the graphics, in the first section on the construction of beliefs, the classes in which P4C was introduced reveal a shift towards the scientific method: in 2B, the method of tenacity disappears and, while the method of authority increases, the metaphysical method decreases and the scientific method increases. In 2D, the methods of tenacity and authority disappear altogether in favour of a marked growth in the scientific method. In 3B, the class in which P4C was not introduced, changes are noted in terms of a decrease in the tenacity and authority method, but in favour of a marked growth in the metaphysical method. This suggests that the materials introduced in 3B have borne fruit in the direction of a growth in critical thinking, while 2B and 2D show a greater inclination towards a type of reasoning that is more focused on the search for evidence to support one's convictions.

The second section on the recognition of stereotypes and prejudices also shows a marked change in the two classes subjected to the P4C intervention, particularly in the case of 2D, where the total disagreement with the stereotypes and prejudices presented by the questionnaire reaches over 80%. There are also changes in 3B, but these are more nuanced than in the other two classes.

With regard to the third section of the questionnaire, which included open-ended responses relating to certain moral dilemmas, no significant differences were found between the two groups. However, what was evident was that in the group where philosophical inquiry was carried out, the students showed a marked improvement in their argumentative abilities and understanding of the problem posed to them in the questionnaire. In fact, some students in the entry questionnaire stated that they did not understand the problem, while others gave answers inconsistent with the question. In the exit questionnaire, on the other hand, not only did they answer coherently, but there is evidence of greater clarity in their written responses.

*the analysis of the transcription of the p4c dialogues.*

The qualitative analysis of the dialogues that took place in the two classes subjected to the P4C pathway made it possible to verify the progress in the construction of the CPI of the two classes and the abilities to identify the stereotypes and prejudices underlying hate speech through the exercise of dialogue and the habits of thought and behaviour that the philosophical inquiry of P4C puts into practice.

In order to detect this progress, an analysis grid was constructed to monitor whether the students subjected to the educational intervention had transformed linguistic acts, mental acts and states into epistemic movement and thinking abilities (Lipman, 2003) through the development of:

1. critical thinking (analysing and proposing problems; supporting arguments with good reasons; inferring; identifying broad generalisations, etc.);
2. creative thinking (formulating hypotheses, proposing solutions to problems, imaginative abilities) and evaluative thinking (ethical judgements);
3. caring thinking through:
  - a) the ability to put oneself in the other person's shoes;
  - b) relational abilities;
  - c) distributed thinking (co-constructing meanings);

4. abilities in circumscribing, identifying and breaking down stereotypes and/or prejudices.

Here is a representation of how the grid was built:

**Table 8.** The analysis grid: the tool used to analyse students' dialogues

Dialogue	Mental acts and states/language acts	Epistemic movements	Caring thinking	Identification of prejudices and stereotypes <sup>9</sup>
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**Source:** Author

The analysis shows that although the two groups travelled together using the same activities and stimulus texts for most of the journey, the constitutive differences of the two CPIs had become apparent, insofar as each community is different from the other and needs a different time for the construction of the internal relational structure, a necessary condition for the deconstruction and subsequent co-construction of shared meanings.

In fact, 2B was a class with students who tend towards tenacity-based statements, which, however, were blunted during the course of the sessions (as also demonstrated by the results of the questionnaire). Progress in shared thinking and caring ability, together with epistemic movement capabilities (Lipman, 2003), followed a more discrete, rather than continuous, evolution. This group proved to be more inclined to an immediate activation of their analytical abilities, while their epistemic abilities followed a fluctuating trend. However, the analysis of the dialogues showed how the group gradually consolidated and committed its efforts to confrontation and sharing in the group work and to the negotiation of meanings. The dispositions for self-correction and confrontation that led to the construction of shared thinking and caring were repeatedly emphasised. Furthermore, the students demonstrated the ability to identify with the emotions felt by victims of hate speech as well as to detect groups of people victimised due to personal characteristics or because they belong to racialised groups.

<sup>9</sup> To detect children's ability in identifying stereotypes and prejudices, tools from Critical Discourse Analysis (Wodak & Meyer, 2016) were used. This issue will be addressed in a forthcoming article.

Here we can see an example of how Salvatore, one of the children of the class, realized during one of the dialogues how a person targeted by racial hate speech can feel:

I mean, for example, now we talk about being racist...because if we put ourselves in the shoes of those with black skin, how do we feel? That is, we also feel, in short, like shit. I can give an example: William or somebody else has black skin and I say "nigger, you suck", things like this. But what if I was the one with black skin and I heard the same words that I was saying?

Finally, the group was able to recognise the stereotypical reasoning and ideological structure of prejudices, together with the contexts in which they are formed. The community often identified and deconstructed the prejudice by proposing their own solution alternatives. Representative of this ability were the last two meetings during which the students recognised racism as one of the main causes of online hatred. This theme informed the discussion in the last session in which the CPI questioned, among other things, possible solutions to neutralise it: punishing those guilty of racism or using words to explain that being racist is not ethically correct? In their words:

Francesco – In my opinion, even with the punishment you remain racist. But, with your mother, with the one who punished you, you pretend not to be, but, in my opinion, you remain racist if your mother is in front of you. You think the same. In my opinion, even if your mother punishes you, you still remain racist but you pretend not to be racist with your mother, that is, you think the same that black people are ... that is racist ... you always remain racist.

Andrea – sometimes racism even comes out of families ...

Rebecca – whoever is born into a racist family, as Andrea said, they instill racism in you. He doesn't come out of it. His parents don't tell him that he is wrong.

As we can see in this part of the dialogue, the children are questioning the validity of punishing racist people. At the beginning of the dialogue, most of them were convinced that we need to punish racist people with jail to make them understand that they are wrong. Later, however, they ask themselves if it can work when someone is convinced of the inferiority of people who are victims of racism. Then, they slowly change their mind, arguing that maybe racism can be solved with words or experience:

Andrea – well, punishment is right but it is not the first choice. For example, take teacher Margherita, she's racist ... I can be older than the teacher, younger than the teacher, I go to the teacher and explain so and so and make her understand that racism is not a good thing. So, one can give a chance to her and after the third chance one can give her a punishment. But the first chance

is to talk... For me it's better to talk because you make them understand something. Believe me, punishment is not necessary.  
Simona – For me, the punishment can be taken out of it, it's just unnecessary. It can be removed. I said that one can also remove the punishment precisely because one can also reflect alone without making any trouble, because I found myself alone, I did not speak with anyone ... I thought: I don't have to judge by her appearance, so I go to meet her, I talk to her<sup>10</sup>.

It is interesting to note how the intervention of Andrea deconstructs the stereotype relating to age. For him, in fact, also a young boy like him can explain to an adult what is wrong in being racist.

The examples denote how the reflection carried out during the P4C sessions helped the students to reflect spontaneously on the phenomenon of hate speech, finding and freely proposing topics to be addressed without the imposition of pre-packaged pathways.

In 2D, the progress followed a more linear course characterised by a gradual development of thinking abilities.

Analysis of the dialogues shows that, from the first to the last, each session added an additional element to the students' argumentative abilities along with broadening their perspectives. In fact, the analysis of the phenomenon of hate speech at the beginning had for them characteristics more related to their own personal sphere. However, already in the second session, a principle of openness to the consideration of the phenomenon as more extended to groups of people was noted, culminating in the dialogue of the last session in which the structure of the stereotype was analysed in depth through the detection of the fallacies of the reasoning behind it. In addition, the students were also able to identify the ideological structure and certain social contexts in which beliefs of a racist nature are established.

The class, thanks in part to the fact that it was smaller in terms of the number of students, appropriated the tools conveyed by the CPI from the very first meeting. Positions that seemed rock-hard gradually softened in the confrontation between classmates, who opened themselves up to attitudes of self-correction and relational exchange, which informed their abilities of caring

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<sup>10</sup> She is referring to an episode in her life during which she encountered a black girl in a non-formal educational program. At the beginning, she didn't want to have any contact with her because she was black. Later, when she entered into a relationship with the girl, she became her best friend.



thinking and behaviour. The group consolidated in the structure of the CPI by acquiring very quickly abilities in analysing agenda questions and in researching and proposing topics of discussion. From a relational point of view, the students also demonstrated their ability to cooperate with each other from the second session onwards.

Finally, it is interesting to note that, despite the differences here reported between the two classes, the methods used to analyse the phenomenon of hate speech both online and offline were similar in each group. Both, in fact, based their inquiry in principle on identifying the phenomenon as being related to cyberbullying (or even bullying in the offline case), which students find easier to deal with because they feel directly involved in it and have had direct or indirect experience of it. Gradually, over the course of the sessions, both groups widened their perspective in considering the phenomenon from a broader sphere extending even to the case of racial prejudice. They demonstrated a greater understanding of the suffering of people affected by hate speech, researching its causes in depth and proposing possible solutions in a circular progression that started from their own experiences, reaching general and shared theorisations. The students were able to identify the prejudices and stereotypes behind the phenomenon of hate speech, breaking down its structure and recognising, each class in its own way, the ideology and cultural configuration handed down by social groups such as, for example, the family group. As proof of this, we can see an extract from a dialogue held in 2D during one of the last sessions:

Anna – For example, when they say black people have taken our jobs, things like that ... that's our country and... things like that.

Serena – in the end I think it's racism because if for example a person comes to Italy and they think they are stealing our jobs, these things so, in the end I think it's like racism.

Aurora – I mean, like, for example, a black guy steals from a lady. After that, some people may think that all black people steal.

Serena –prejudice.

Aurora – eh, prejudice.

Carmela – I think what Aurora said can also be connected for example with the Russians who are making this war and all the Russians think so... I think, eh.

Aurora – even the fact of covid. For example, a Chinese person takes covid and all Chinese are bad.

Serena – or... I hate the Russians because they are Russians, that's because there is Putin who is Russian and wants to make war, for example, and therefore practically all Russians want to make war.

Facilitator – so it's not a physical matter, then?

Bruno – is for where they come from.

Carmela – he is different, so to speak, from our ideals.

Facilitator – so, it is not only a physical diversity but also a diversity...

Carmela – ...of his ideals.

Serena – But prejudice is not just for people who are different for their skin or nationality, that is, prejudice in the end is a belief, that is, something that everyone is convinced of, something that is said. For example it is said that the Neapolitans steal, it is a prejudice, something that is believed, a conviction. It is not only for the color of the skin, it is also for the things that people do, it is not just because that person is like this and then is bad...

Anna – In my opinion, prejudice also arises from what they tell you. For example, it is said that Peruvians are bad... I, for example, said to my mother "in Pianura we are full of Peruvians". Mom said "don't come near them 'cause they're mean" and thus I'm born with a prejudice that I don't go near Peruvians because my mom told me they're mean.

Facilitator – so, you're telling me that prejudice can also be taught?

Serena – by the family.

Aurora – yes but it is not true. In my park there are many Peruvians and some are my friends. And there is a child who is very good.

Anna – It's true, but they say they're traitors.

## ***conclusions***

In conclusion, the research has shown how the educational model of philosophical inquiry is comparatively more effective than other approaches aimed at understanding the phenomenon of hate speech through the promotion of critical thinking.

The analysis of the entry and exit questionnaires, in fact, illustrated that the two classes trained with P4C showed substantial changes with regard to both the construction of beliefs and the detection of stereotypes and prejudices. However, it must be emphasised that also in 3B, the class in which only the media literacy manuals were used, changes were also noted between the beginning and the end of the educational intervention with regard to both an increase in critical thinking and in the propensity to recognise stereotypes and prejudices. Nevertheless, as the graphs show, the changes detected in 2B and 2D are far more profound. Think, for example, about the data on the increase in the scientific method in the section on the construction of beliefs.

However, this is not to say that media literacy approaches are not useful. Nevertheless, the P4C pathway has been an evident tool for in-depth study as well as for the involvement of the students who shared it. What characterises other types of approaches, in fact, is that the activities proposed to the students are often

not based on the direct experience of the students themselves. They, however well-constructed to awaken critical skills, most often present hypothetical situations in their activities that children may not necessarily be able to identify with. Moreover, the activities usually have a clearly determined epistemic and ethical direction implied, which leaves no room for children's creativity. This can be a disadvantage for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and for the sincerely reflective involvement of the whole class.

The research showed, instead, that the CPI device allows for a greater awareness of the phenomenon of hate speech because, starting from the children's own experience, it allows for a broadening of reflection as far as including the experiences of others. Furthermore, it encourages peer-to-peer confrontation by allowing one to "visit" the experiences of others with the necessary attention fostered by the exercise of listening.

The educational practice of P4C, aimed at the development of complex thinking, more strongly supports reflection on the dynamics of hate speech and what structures it in terms of stereotypical reasoning, as it encourages the detection of fallacious reasoning and helps its deconstruction. In addition, it builds a kind of reasoning capable of involving the emotional, empathetic, value and relational spheres as well as the imaginative sphere. It helps in an understanding of the suffering of those who are targeted by hate speech, promotes the ability to imagine the consequences of such language and at the same time identify its causes in order to devise strategies to counter it.

The teachers themselves who participated in the research recognised the differences between the two educational approaches. In fact, after recognising the complexity of the topic, they declared, during an interview at the end of the educational path, that both the frontal teaching and the teaching materials introduced during the first phase of the project had inspired the interest of children, stimulating a reflection on the issues proposed.

However, they also noticed differences in the groups where P4C had been implemented. They stated that the activity had helped those students to reflect more deeply and constructively on issues related to hate speech. They observed, in fact, that the children, after the various meetings, had continued to discuss the issues addressed with each other. Furthermore, they detected that "there has been

more awareness on the hate speech themes that have emerged from the constant guidance and verbally shared reflection”, also because the topics covered were related to adolescence and therefore to the problems of their age. Finally, they noticed a development of their relational skills and of their reflective abilities and an improvement in their learning.

The P4C pedagogical programme, if adopted in educational contexts and, in particular, in schools during the school year, can represent a tool for in-depth awareness-raising on hate speech issues.

It should be noted, however, that it is much easier for teachers and schools wishing to adopt net-citizenship routes to rely on media literacy manuals rather than philosophical inquiry paths. As we know, becoming a CPI facilitator requires specific training that needs time, money and commitment. Unfortunately, there are no ministerial programmes in Italy that guarantee the training of this type of professional figure. Moreover, in order to train teachers capable of facilitating CPIs on the topic of hate speech, it would be appropriate to build an *ad hoc* curriculum, as proposed in the present study with the creation of the two stories used during the project. Such training could also provide teachers with the tools to adapt media literacy materials to problematising activities to be used as stimulus texts for philosophical inquiry sessions. It would be desirable, therefore, for educational policies to strive for the promotion in schools of philosophical inquiry paths aimed at combating hate speech. In this way, P4C could be understood as a particular type of net-citizenship education and could be included in the civic education curriculum.

The P4C approach could thus allow for an overcoming of the educational strategies that Bagnato defines as defensive, i.e. based on the knowledge of the dangers and negative effects of the web in order to merely stay away from it:

Educating children, adolescents and young people is a very important challenge that, however, cannot be limited only to the implementation of defensive strategies aimed at safeguarding them from the negative effects of the Net and technological tools, but must also include strategies capable of providing subjects with those competences and skills that are indispensable to critically and constructively face the numerous languages and technological tools with which one clashes on a daily basis. In other words, one cannot limit oneself to just warning of the dangers, but must also aim at the formation of critical thinking that makes them capable of juggling the various pitfalls of the Net and technology. (Bagnato 2020, pp. 205-206)

This, again, is not to say that those approaches are useless, but that alongside them the implementation of P4C can enable, through the device of inquiry, the development of attitudes to identify hate messages, understand the suffering they cause, and devise tactics to counter them. As Oliverio (2016, p. 122) states “even new technology literacy, which is often invoked, risks being a remedy worse than the evil if it is not introduced into educational contexts through pathways of inquiry”. Pathways of inquiry that will forge habits of thought and behaviour which, exercised, acted upon and acquired within the classroom transformed into a CPI, will form the basis of thought and behaviour for children and adolescents that will then be acted upon outside, in the larger community of the world and in the virtual communities represented by social networks.

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