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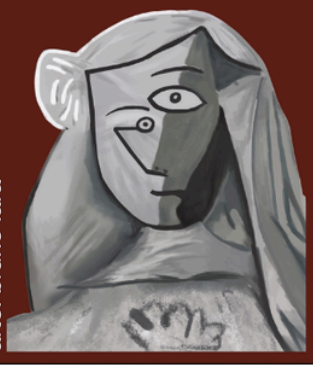

arte: bruno lara

dossier racism, colonialism and philosophy for/with children: praxis in non-ideal contexts

can the center speak for the subaltern?

moving across the borders to decolonize philosophy for children (p4c)

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abstract

This article offers a postcolonial critique of Philosophy for Children (P4C), arguing that despite its democratic aspirations, the program risks reproducing epistemic violence and colonial hierarchies in racial, colonial, and Indigenous contexts. Drawing on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Can the subaltern speak?", it examines how P4C's universalist and Eurocentric foundations structurally silence subaltern voices by privileging the norms of Anglo-American analytic philosophy and marginalizing alternative epistemologies. Spivak's concept of "epistemic violence" shows that even well-intentioned attempts at inclusion can reinforce subaltern invisibility when their speech remains unintelligible within dominant knowledge systems. In response to the impossibility that Spivak identifies, which closes off the possibility of authentic subaltern speech, I engage with Henry Giroux's concept of "border pedagogy" to explore ways of decolonizing P4C. Giroux reimagines educational spaces as sites of critical negotiation where dominant and subaltern knowledge systems meet, encouraging border crossing practices that question claims to epistemic

neutrality. Border pedagogy supports contextualized and pluralistic inquiry that values oral, narrative, and affective modes of reasoning alongside canonical traditions. The article proposes considerations and strategies for implementing a decolonial P4C praxis, including the use of ethnographic listening, the integration (and interrogation) of popular culture and Indigenous knowledge systems. By synthesizing Spivak's diagnostic critique with Giroux's practical considerations, this article's effort is to reposition P4C as a potential site for epistemic justice, pluralistic dialogue, and transformative education accountable to history, difference, and power.

keywords: p4c; subaltern postcoloniality; decolonization; subaltern; border pedagogy.

¿puede el centro hablar por los subalternos? moviéndose a través de las fronteras para descolonizar la filosofía para niños (fpn)

resumen

Este artículo ofrece una crítica poscolonial de Filosofía para Niños (FPN), argumentando que, a pesar de sus aspiraciones democráticas, el programa corre el riesgo de reproducir la violencia epistémica y las jerarquías coloniales en contextos raciales, coloniales e indígenas. Basándose en ¿Puede hablar el subalterno? de Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, examina cómo los fundamentos universalistas y eurocéntricos de la FPN silencian estructuralmente las voces subalternas al privilegiar las normas de la filosofía analítica angloamericana y marginar las epistemologías alternativas. El concepto de "violencia epistémica" de Spivak muestra que incluso los intentos bienintencionados de inclusión pueden reforzar la invisibilidad de los subalternos cuando su discurso permanece ininteligible dentro de los sistemas de conocimiento dominantes. En respuesta a la imposibilidad que Spivak identifica, que cierra la posibilidad de un discurso subalterno auténtico, abordo el concepto de "pedagogía fronteriza" de Henry Giroux para explorar maneras de descolonizar la FpN. Giroux reimagina los espacios educativos como espacios de negociación crítica donde convergen los sistemas de conocimiento dominantes y subalternos, fomentando prácticas transfronterizas que cuestionan las reivindicaciones de neutralidad epistémica. La pedagogía fronteriza promueve la indagación contextualizada y pluralista que valora los modos de razonamiento oral, narrativo y afectivo, junto con las tradiciones canónicas. El artículo propone consideraciones y estrategias para implementar una praxis descolonial de FpN, incluyendo el uso de la escucha etnográfica, la integración (e interrogación) de la cultura popular y los sistemas de conocimiento indígenas. Al sintetizar la crítica diagnóstica de Spivak con las consideraciones prácticas de Giroux, este artículo busca reposicionar la FpN como un espacio potencial para la justicia epistémica, el diálogo pluralista y la educación transformadora, responsable ante la historia, la diferencia y el poder.

palabras clave: fpn; poscolonialidad subalterna; decolonización; pedagogía de frontera.

pode o centro falar pelos subalternos? movendo-se pelas fronteiras para decolonializar a filosofia para crianças (fpc)

resumo

Esse artigo apresenta uma crítica pós-colonial da Filosofia para Crianças (FpC), apontando que, apesar de suas aspirações democráticas, o programa corre o risco de reproduzir a violência epistêmica e as hierarquias coloniais em contextos raciais, coloniais e indígenas. A partir de "Pode o subalterno falar?", de Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, o artigo analisa como os fundamentos universalistas e eurocêntricos da FpC silenciam estruturalmente as vozes subalternas, na medida em que privilegiam as normas da filosofia

analítica anglo-americana e marginalizam epistemologias alternativas. O conceito de "violência epistêmica" de Spivak mostra que até mesmo as tentativas bem-intencionadas de inclusão podem reforçar a invisibilidade dos subalternos quando seus discursos permanecem incompreensíveis dentro dos sistemas de conhecimento dominantes. Em resposta à impossibilidade que Spivak identifica, que encerra a possibilidade de um discurso subalterno autêntico, abordamos o conceito de "pedagogia fronteiriça", de Henry Giroux, para explorar maneiras de decolonializar a FpC. Giroux reimagina os espaços educativos como lugares de negociação crítica, onde os sistemas de conhecimento dominantes e subalternos convergem, fomentando práticas transfronteiriças que questionam as reivindicações de neutralidade epistêmica. A pedagogia fronteiriça promove a indagação contextualizada e pluralista que valoriza os modos de raciocínio oral, narrativo e afetivo, junto com as tradições canônicas. O artigo propõe considerações e estratégias para a implementação de uma práxis decolonial da FpC, incluindo o uso da escuta etnográfica, a integração (e interrogação) da cultura popular e os sistemas de conhecimento indígenas. Ao sintetizar a crítica diagnóstica de Spivak com as considerações práticas de Giroux, esse artigo busca reposicionar a FpC como um potencial espaço para a justiça epistêmica, o diálogo pluralista e a educação transformadora, responsável perante a história, a diferença e o poder.

palavras-chave: fpc; pós-colonialidade subalterna; decolonialidade; pedagogia de fronteira.

introduction

Despite its reputation as a pedagogy of democracy and inclusion, Philosophy for Children (P4C) may risk reproducing the very exclusions it aims to dismantle, particularly in racial, Indigenous, and colonial contexts.[1] Its universalist aspirations (Kohan, 1995; Rainville, 2001; Chetty, 2018), grounding in Western neoliberal values, and disregard for alternative epistemologies (Elicor, 2021; Padilla Rosas, 2023; Wurtz, 2024) often serve to reinforce rather than challenge entrenched hierarchies. This dynamic is especially troubling in communities where colonialism persists, not only as a historical event but as an ongoing structure of domination that erases knowledge systems, epistemic traditions, and collective histories. As Bressler (2007) observes, colonialism entails "being removed from history" (p. 238) and Lipman's framework, with its tendencies toward dehistoricization, risks perpetuating precisely such erasure. Neglecting history is an extension of colonial violence. John Henrik Clarke (1987) reminds us that history functions as both clock and compass, situating us in where we have been, who we are, and where we must go (Clarke, 1987 as cited in Kanu, 2006, p. 203).

This colonial residue is discernible within some of Lipman's own writings too.[2] Discussing implementation of P4C in "developing countries", Lipman asserts:

> Philosophy for Children is a world-class educational program with relatively low maintenance costs. But these advantages are somewhat offset by the need to follow instructions for installing the program. It is precisely among *developing countries* that Philosophy for Children *can make a remarkable difference*. (Lipman, 2017, p. 9, italics added)

[1] Contexts where dominant epistemic hierarchies may be reinforced include, but are not limited to, racialized, colonial, or Indigenous settings. Such hierarchies can also manifest in ostensibly neutral educational spaces, for example, through the privileging of linear, abstract reasoning, which may inadvertently silence neurodivergent students or those with other marginalized identities.

[2] There are clear distinctions between Lipman and Sharp regarding how they conceptualize the scope of the community of inquiry, its potential transformative capacities, and the place of context in philosophical practice. However, given the limited scope of this article, I cannot offer a full delineation of these differences here. Consequently, the critique developed in this piece is directed primarily toward Lipman.

What appears as a gesture of accessibility, when read through the lens of colonial discourse, seems to encode troubling assumptions. The designation of "developing countries" invokes a hierarchical developmentalism in which the Global North is positioned as the innovator while the Global South becomes the passive recipient of correction. The language of installing the program reinforces a technocratic logic of development in which transformation is imagined as the faithful adoption of an imported model. This framing not only ignores the existence of rich philosophical traditions within non-Western societies but also reinscribes epistemic erasure by masking paternalism as accessibility.

This tension calls for the intervention of a postcolonial critique, one of whose significant consequences is the opening of a path toward the decolonization of P4C. Postcolonial studies examines the historical and ongoing effects of colonialism as enduring structures of domination that extend into knowledge production, education, and cultural life (Kanu, 2006, p. 9). Far from being a thing of the past, colonialism continues to shape subjectivities, pedagogies, and epistemic hierarchies, systematically marginalizing local, Indigenous, and alternative knowledge systems. As Leela Gandhi (1998, pp. 3–4) observes, postcolonial critique foregrounds the legacies of occupation alongside the complexities of hybridity, power, and resistance. In parallel, decolonial thought underscores that coloniality "is still the most general form of domination in the world today, once colonialism as an explicit political order was destroyed" (Quijano, 2007, p. 170). These perspectives demonstrate that P4C cannot be treated as epistemically neutral; its universalist orientation and Anglo-American analytic assumptions must be interrogated to expose whose knowledge is legitimized, whose voices are silenced, and how its practices risk reproducing structural inequities

To undertake this task, I draw on two distinct but complementary critical frameworks. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's postcolonial analysis in her seminal article, "Can the subaltern speak?" (1988), which offers a radical lens for examining the structural impossibility of representing subaltern voices within hegemonic educational discourses. However, to move from this necessary critique toward a reconstructive pedagogy, this article draws on Henry Giroux's notion of 'border pedagogy', as articulated in *border crossings* (1992/2005), which complements

Spivak's radical critique by translating postcolonial insights into pedagogical strategies. Giroux emphasizes the need to resist the social structures that marginalize otherness and to interrogate how dominant epistemologies function as imperial appropriation. In Cornel West's terms, this means "trashing the monolithic and homogenous in the name of diversity, multiplicity, and heterogeneity; rejecting the abstract, general, and universal in light of the concrete, specific, and particular; and historicizing, contextualizing, and pluralizing" (West, 1990, p. 93, as cited inGiroux, 2005, p. 12). Border pedagogy thus provides a framework for reimagining P4C classroom practice in ways that foreground diversity, voice, and power.

This article pursues two interrelated objectives. First, it examines whether racial, Indigenous, and colonized voices, understood as subaltern in Spivak's sense, can resonate within the dominant framework of P4C. Second, it draws on Giroux's concept of border pedagogy to propose strategies for reconfiguring P4C as a decolonial praxis. Together, these interventions aim not only to reveal the epistemic exclusions embedded in P4C but also to reimagine its pedagogical possibilities in ways accountable to difference, history, and justice. Situated at the intersection of postcolonial critique and decolonial praxis, the article aspires to bridge a foundational analysis of Lipmanian P4C with the articulation of practical, transformative approaches.

spivak and the question of the subaltern

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, born in 1942 in Calcutta, is a leading Indian scholar, literary theorist, feminist critic, and influential postcolonial thinker. Growing up in postcolonial India, she experienced the enduring effects of colonialism, which shaped her focus on power, representation, and marginality. Her Western academic training exposed her to Eurocentric knowledge systems, inspiring her critique of their marginalization of non-Western subjects. Her engagement with Derrida's deconstruction further enabled her to challenge binary oppositions, such as colonizer and colonized or self and other, that underlie colonial narratives.

Spivak challenged the race- and class-blindness of the Western academy with her seminal question, "can the subaltern speak?", which she had first begun

to formulate in the early 1980s, then published in a short article in *Wedge* in 1985, and later developed into its canonical 1988 version in *Marxism and the interpretation of culture*, in an article with the same title. This famous article was written partly in dialogue with Subaltern Studies historians like Ranajit Guha. She valued their attempt to write histories from below and to recover the agency of those excluded from elite nationalist and colonial narratives. She also translated and introduced *Guha's Selected Subaltern Studies* which helped disseminate their work globally. At the same time, Spivak questioned whether the subaltern could ever truly speak within dominant epistemic frameworks, even within Subaltern Studies itself. She warned that attempts to represent the subaltern, even sympathetic ones, risk reproducing the very silencing they sought to undo. For her, the danger lay in romanticizing "voice" or assuming that subaltern consciousness could be easily recovered through archival work or historiography (Spivak & Guha, 1988).

The term "subaltern," as she employed it, derives primarily from the Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci, who used it to describe social classes with little political or cultural power dominated by elites and excluded from historical and political representation. For Gramsci, subalterns are as complex as elites, but their voices and experiences are systematically erased from national histories, leaving them unable to represent themselves. He argued that history is written by and for the powerful, thereby marginalizing subordinated groups. Spivak extended this concept to postcolonial contexts, arguing that subalterns cannot fully speak for themselves because any attempt to represent them is mediated through elite knowledge and power structures. She emphasized that subalterns are heterogeneous and internally divided, and that defining them risks reducing this diversity to a homogenized category. Subalternity, therefore, should not be understood as a fixed identity but as a condition produced within specific power relations, such as colonialism, patriarchy, and nationalism. Spivak highlighted the difficulty of retrieving a pure subaltern voice, showing that subalterns often remain subjects of others' representations (Nayar, 2015, pp. 143–144). Spivak's deliberate choice of subaltern, as opposed to terms like "oppressed," "marginalized," or "proletariat," underscores the conceptual breadth and analytical specificity of her critique. Unlike proletariat, which implies class-based revolutionary potential within capitalist structures, or marginalized, which

suggests a peripheral yet representable position, subaltern emphasizes structural inaccessibility to hegemonic discourse and highlights the impossibility of authentic speech within imperialist and elite frameworks.

Her inquiry raised provocative questions: Can any intellectual legitimately represent subaltern classes? Are some subalterns fundamentally unrepresentable? Spivak ultimately concluded that "the subaltern cannot speak.". By this, she did not mean that subalterns lack speech altogether, but rather that their speech cannot carry authority or be recognized as meaningful within existing power–knowledge structures unless it disrupts the very conditions that define them as subaltern. Even when subalterns have lives, identities, narratives, and ways of understanding the world, their voices are filtered through or suppressed by the norms and authority of dominant groups (Beverley, 2004, p. 29). While Spivak's conclusion to the question has often been taken as definitive, it has also generated a wide range of divergent interpretations. In this regard, Sanders notes that the essay can be understood in two interrelated ways. On one level, it functions as a form of classical irony (eironeia), where Spivak adopts a Socratic mode of feigned ignorance to provoke dominant structures such as law or historiography into declaring that the subaltern can speak, even as these same structures simultaneously enact forms of foreclosure that nullify such speech. On another level, this Socratic irony can be read through a de Manian framework of "permanent parabasis," in which the text disrupts conventional narratives and knowledge production by performing the (im)possible perspective of the subaltern, thereby miming the very impossibility of its representation. From this perspective, the normative imperative that emerges is Spivak's call to identify and engage with points of disruption within systems of value and power, intervening actively at the sites where these structures are destabilized (Sanders, 2006, p. 20).

Spivak employs the term "subaltern" strategically to advance her critique of epistemic violence and representational politics. By emphasizing the subaltern's irretrievable heterogeneity (Spivak, 1988, p. 287) she underscores that these groups, unlike the homogenized Subject of Western knowledge, are not monolithic but complex, stratified "identities-in-differential" (ibid., 284). This conceptualization resists universalizing narratives that might subsume diverse marginalized experiences under a singular framework, whether that of the

Western liberal subject or the indigenous elite. She highlights the situational indeterminacy of groups such as rural gentry or wealthy peasants, who may occupy dominant positions in one context but remain subaltern in another, complicating any fixed taxonomy (ibid., p. 285).

can the subaltern speak in lipman's P4C? The (im)possibilities

Spivak's question, "Can the subaltern speak?", foregrounds the structural impediments that prevent marginalized voices from being recognized as authoritative within dominant circuits of knowledge and power. As Spivak observes, the subaltern occupies the "silent, silenced center" of global structures (Spivak, 1998, p. 283), caught between subject constitution and object formation in ways that render authentic articulation nearly impossible, since institutions such as education and law frequently transform subaltern speech into illegible or illegitimate forms. Applied to P4C, this diagnosis reveals a central limitation. The program's aspiration to empower children presupposes a universal accessibility to philosophical speech, yet children from marginalized racial, ethnic, or colonial contexts often encounter discursive conditions that silence them in advance. Their modes of thought and expression may not align with the rational dialogical norms of Anglo American analytic philosophy that P4C privileges, raising the question of whether they can truly emerge as philosophical subjects or whether their contributions are overwritten by frameworks that reproduce epistemic exclusion. For example, a child from an Indigenous community may offer a story grounded in intergenerational knowledge during a discussion of justice. A facilitator unfamiliar with decolonial pedagogy may dismiss this narrative as an anecdote irrelevant to philosophical inquiry, overlooking the sophisticated ethical reasoning embedded in the narrative form, thus reinforcing a restrictive norm of what counts as philosophical speech.

In this framework, Western attempts to represent or amplify marginalized voices often reinscribe colonial epistemological dominance, leading to "epistemic violence". Drawing on Foucault's notion of the episteme, Spivak identifies it as the process through which knowledge production itself becomes an instrument of colonial power. When Western institutions codify and circulate knowledge about colonized subjects, that knowledge is established as universal truth, consumed

both by the West and by the colonized, while indigenous epistemologies are dismissed as irrational or irrelevant. The colonized subject is thereby produced as an object of inquiry, and through a particular pre-established method of inquiry an "Other" to be spoken for and categorized, rather than as a subject capable of self-representation (Nayar, 2015, p. 65-66). Within Lipman's P4C, a similar dynamic becomes visible. Although the program's inclusive ethos aspires to empower children, it simultaneously tends to reinscribe epistemic violence by recognizing their speech when it conforms to the norms of analytic, critical dialogue. Alternative forms of knowing such as oral traditions, myth, bodily expression, play, or silence are too often deemed non-philosophical. In this way, children from racialized, Indigenous, and colonized communities may be homogenized under a deficit framework, reduced to shadows of philosophical agency rather than acknowledged as producers of knowledge on their own terms.

Spivak critiques Western theories of power, such as those offered by Foucault and Deleuze, highlighting their Eurocentric constraints despite their analytical sophistication. While Foucault's localized analyses effectively map relational asymmetries within institutions like prisons, clinics, and universities, they abstract these dynamics from the broader historical and structural processes of global imperialism. His distinction between exploitation as economic subjugation and domination as relational asymmetry aptly captures mechanisms of power within First World liberal democracies but inadequately addresses the structural marginalization characteristic of postcolonial contexts. In these contexts, neocolonial debt, extractive capitalism, and racially codified educational exclusion shape subaltern subjectivities in ways largely invisible unless mediated through Western epistemic frameworks (Spivak, 1988). In Foucault's schema, resistance presupposes visibility and legibility within institutional structures; conditions rarely accessible to colonized or marginalized populations. Spivak's intervention reveals that agency often manifests in non-discursive and opaque forms, such as silence, ritualized critique, or communal practices, which Western theories fail to register, thereby exposing their Eurocentric constraints.

This critique has direct implications for P4C, particularly as some scholars of P4C have found Foucault's ideas especially fruitful for examining power relations, especially given the enduring relevance of coloniality. In this connection,

Kennedy and Kohan (2021) note that while Foucault's critique of biopolitical structures could have illuminated how education regulates and constrains children's voices, Lipman and Sharp firmly rooted in Deweyan pragmatism remained committed to an optimistic and, as Kennedy and Kohan suggest, politically naïve outlook. Their approach omitted any sustained Foucauldian critique, thereby narrowing the political horizon of early P4C (p. 8).[3] However, following Spivak, this appeal to Foucault must be subjected to a rigorous decolonial critique. When critical P4C scholars apply Foucault to critique power in the classroom, they risk replicating what Spivak identifies as the fundamental error: using a theoretical framework developed within and for the analysis of European modernity, without accounting for its complicity in the colonial project that funded that modernity. Thus, the task is not simply to transplant Foucault into P4C as a more critical tool. The Spivakian imperative is to ask: Does this use of Foucault, in its focus on the micro-physics of power in the classroom, inadvertently erase the broader ideological and global economic context that makes the classroom a site of racialized and colonial inequality? To use Foucault responsibly in a decolonial project requires us to constantly confront the limits of his framework, to insist that the biopower managing the child's body is inseparable from the racial biopower forged in the colony. Only then can we avoid the trap Spivak identifies, where the critical intellectual, even with the best intentions, ends up reconsolidating the very epistemic violence they seek to dismantle.

At the heart of Spivak's postcolonial thought is a reconceptualization of this very responsibility: intellectuals must recognize that subaltern agency and consciousness cannot be transparently accessed but persist as traces, indirect signals of resistance or intentionality, rather than coherent speech. Representation, therefore, must not collapse into appropriation or objectification. For P4C, this entails resisting the temptation to translate children's culturally situated expressions (storytelling, relational decision-making, ritualized knowledge, embodied reasoning) into standardized artifacts legible only within dominant

[3] Kennedy and Kohan (2021) assert that both Lipman and Sharp are deeply rooted in Deweyan pragmatism. However, as indicated by Sharp's own earlier work (e.g., Sharp, 1976) and more recent scholarship on her (e.g., Gregory & Laverty, 2018), her commitment to Dewey appears to differ from and in some respects may be less central than Lipman's.

curricula.[4]The intellectual task is thus to create the pedagogical conditions in which marginalized children may articulate themselves without being assimilated into pre-existing norms of analytic/rational intelligibility, while also acknowledging that certain dimensions of subaltern experience remain irretrievable, even resistant, to Western epistemologies.

The diagnostic power of Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" lies in its unwavering conclusion: within the hegemonic structures of knowledge production and representation, the subaltern cannot speak. For P4C, this creates a formidable theoretical impasse. If the program's very epistemological foundations are implicated in a form of epistemic violence that precludes authentic subaltern articulation, then the project of decolonization appears foreclosed at its inception. Merely adding diverse voices or texts risks becoming a superficial gesture. It is precisely at this juncture of impossibility that Spivak's later work, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (2011), performs a conceptual pivot. Here, she moves from diagnosis to a constructive, albeit demanding, pedagogical reconsideration. She argues that the central task of education in a neocolonial world is not to resolve historical and epistemic contradictions, but to train the imagination to inhabit them. She reframes this as learning to live within "double binds"—the irresolvable, contradictory instructions that characterize the postcolonial condition (Spivak, 2011, p. 17-20). A quintessential double bind is the need to "ab-use" the tools of the Western Enlightenment (its reason, critique, and democratic ideals) (p. 18) to dismantle its imperial legacy, all while resisting being re-absorbed by the very logic one seeks to undo. Spivak names this training an "aesthetic education," radically redefining the term away from the appreciation of beauty. For her, it is a disciplined, rigorous practice of learning to learn from the other which involves the patient, humble, and often frustrating work of trying to "enter another's text" (Spivak, 2011, p. 22). This "text" is not merely a written document but the totality of another's cultural, historical, and epistemic being. The goal of this education is not consensus or synthesis, but the cultivation of an epistemological agility, an imagination capable of sustaining the tension of radical

[4]The intellectual task is a specific engagement with Spivak's central argument about the role and responsibility of intellectuals, a category that, in the context of P4C, can include the theorists, curriculum designers, teacher-educators, and even the facilitators who are enacting a philosophical methodology.

difference without resorting to the violence of assimilation or the silence of incommensurability.

This conceptual shift is not a rejection of her earlier thesis but its logical pedagogical extension. It transforms the subaltern's silence from a dead end into the very starting point for a new educational ethic. The question for P4C thus changes from the unanswerable "How can we make the subaltern speak?" to the practicable, though no less difficult, "How can we train ourselves, and our students, to listen for and ethically engage with a world where such transparent speech is structurally foreclosed?" This project therefore, must operationalize this "training of the imagination" at key pedagogical sites. This entails a fundamental re-visioning of facilitator training to foreground positionality and epistemic humility; a critical curatorial practice in selecting stimuli that emerge from subaltern lifeworlds and can sustain opacity; and facilitation methods that decentralize the analytic idiom to make space for narrative, silence, and embodied reasoning. It is at these concrete sites—of training, stimulus, and facilitation—that the impossibility of transparent representation is negotiated and we can, at least, be hopeful of advancing (albeit temporararily) this goal through the decolonization of P4C by drawing on Henry Giroux's concept of border pedagogy, given its potentials for such a project.

philosophy for children at the border: potentials of giroux's 'border pedagogy' for decolonizing p4c

While Spivak's response to the question of whether subalterns can speak is negative, in the context of P4C this "no" does not foreclose the question. Rather, it compels us to develop approaches that unsettle hegemonic assumptions and cultivate conditions in which children's diverse cultural and epistemic perspectives can be meaningfully voiced and engaged. I align with Reed-Sandoval (2019), Ndofirepi (2011), and other scholars of P4C who, rather than dismissing the program as an inherently colonizing instrument, explicitly endorse the task of reconfiguring it to realize its decolonial potential. From this perspective, the Lipmanian tradition can be critically reimagined at the conceptual and pedagogical borders where multiple knowledge systems intersect, transforming it from a framework of impossibility into one of possibility. By explicitly addressing

historical injustices, structural inequalities, and the embedded assumptions of dominant, Eurocentric epistemologies, P4C can create spaces where students interrogate, contest, and synthesize diverse perspectives.

Henry A Giroux's notion of border pedagogy is particularly instructive in this regard, offering a framework for negotiating tensions between local and global, Indigenous and Western, and marginal and dominant epistemologies. It fosters learning environments in which philosophical inquiry is both culturally resonant and critically transformative. As conceptualized by Giroux, border pedagogy represents a postmodern and anti-racist educational framework that situates pedagogy within broader struggles over power, knowledge, and identity. Giroux (1991) frames border pedagogy as a form of postmodern resistance that challenges totalizing discourses of modernity, particularly Eurocentric ones that marginalize Otherness on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, and class. He emphasizes three key dimensions. The first is the role of both physical and metaphorical borders as sites where difference is produced. The second is pedagogical practices that enable acts of border crossing. The third is attention to the political through examining how power differently inscribes institutions, knowledge, and social relations (Alexander, 2019, p. 52). At the theoretical level, border pedagogy mediates between critical pedagogy rooted in modernist, Marxist, and humanist traditions and postmodern discourses that stress plural forms of difference and oppression, the social construction of identity, the multiplicity of being, and the situated nature of knowledge. Giroux envisions educators and students collectively constructing counter-texts to dominant cultural narratives, a process that requires students to become border-crossers capable of interpreting cultural codes and discerning their limits, including the constraints of their own (Giroux, 2005, pp. 20–21). A key aspect of this pedagogy lies in cultivating a multiaccentual, dialogical language of engagement in which individuals speak with others rather than exclusively for them. (ibid, 21)

The project of decolonizing P4C aligns closely with Giroux's border pedagogy, as both foreground critical engagement with difference, power, and historical context in educational practice. Decolonization demands unsettling the colonial logics embedded in curricula and pedagogical frameworks, challenging the assumed neutrality and universality of Western epistemologies. Border

pedagogy offers a conceptual lens for this work, framing P4C as a space of negotiation, transformation, and dialogue. This reconfiguration manifests in three interdependent domains of practice. First, in facilitator training, it requires moving beyond technical proficiency in questioning techniques toward a critical sociolinguistic and political education, preparing facilitators to become border-crossers themselves. Second, in stimulus selection, it demands a deliberate move beyond the Lipmanian novel to incorporate a pluriversal archive—including Indigenous storytelling, oral histories, protest art, and popular culture—treated not as exotic supplements but as core philosophical texts. Third, in facilitation practice, it necessitates a shift from managing dialogue according to universalist norms to architecting encounters where students co-construct the terms of engagement, thereby redistributing epistemological authority and legitimizing a plurality of expressive modes.

Borders, in Giroux's formulation, are epistemological, cultural, and social, shaping the production of knowledge, identity, and power. In this framework, the inquirers in CPI should be encouraged to question whose voices are included in the texts and ideas under discussion and whose are marginalized or silenced. Philosophical inquiry thus becomes a tool to cultivate critical awareness of historical and structural inequities while legitimizing multiple forms of reasoning and expression, including oral, narrative, relational, or performative modes. Making the borders visible involves mapping how whiteness, colonial curricula, and classed linguistic registers have historically structured the P4C classroom. Inquirers become border-crossers and agents of knowledge production. They are invited to engage their full personhood, their unique historical, cultural, and social location as a valid and essential text within the classroom.

As negotiators of meaning, inquirers are empowered to critically analyze the maps of knowledge presented to them, identify silences and biases, and bring their own inherited and embodied knowledge into the collective dialogue. Their ultimate purpose is to evolve from critics of domination into co-creators of an oppositional cultural politics. This is achieved by participating in the remapping of knowledge, using tools of critique to generate new understandings that challenge hegemonic norms and contribute to the rewriting of a more just and inclusive social imaginary. The pedagogical implications are twofold. First, curricula must

include meta-inquiry, which is explicit reflection on the institutional histories and social conditions that shape classroom norms. Second, structural adjustments such as co-facilitation with community elders, altering turn-taking norms, and expanding recognized rhetorical forms needs to be considered as part of good facilitation.

Within this reconfigured space, the P4C facilitator assumes the role of an architect of the borderland, responsible for designing the pedagogical structures that enable negotiation and rewriting. However, in direct response to Spivak's caution against the mediating role of the intellectual, this authority must be rigorously decentered. The facilitator is not a guardian who holds ethical power but a designer who cultivates a community's capacity for self governance. Their paramount task is to guide a process of remapping by creating conditions where students and facilitators collaboratively explore difference, power, and identity. This involves a deliberate shift from individual oversight to communal responsibility, achieved by architecting encounters that empower students not only to deconstruct colonial logics but also to engage in the politically strategic work of reterritorialization of CPI facilitation in that the community itself becomes the primary agent of border crossing and critical care. To prevent the facilitator's necessary role from collapsing into a hegemonic relationship that risks reinscribing the very silencing Spivak describes, the architecture of the community of inquiry must incorporate systemic, community oriented practices that distribute epistemological authority. This involves implementing structures such as rotating facilitation roles among participants, allowing them to experience and shape the dynamics of inquiry from a position of procedural responsibility. Furthermore, the community should collaboratively generate its own discussion agreements at the outset, defining what constitutes respectful engagement and how silences will be approached, thereby making ethical norms a product of collective commitment rather than facilitator imposition. Most crucially, the process must include periodic meta inquiry sessions where the community collectively reflects on its own conversational patterns interrogating whose voices are heard, what forms of reasoning are privileged, and what silences might mean.

The transformative potential of the facilitator's authority lies in reconfiguring it as an emancipatory practice that creates conditions for dialogue,

recognition, and the co-creation of knowledge. Facilitators cannot speak as, or inhabit, the experiences of those whose identities differ from their own, but they can speak reflexively from their own positionality, critically engaging racism, sexism, class oppression, and other structural inequalities as shared ethical and political concerns. This reflective stance models the P4C ethos of inquiry by demonstrating how to navigate difference thoughtfully, interrogate assumptions, and commit to understanding without appropriating or erasing the other's voice. Border pedagogy calls on facilitators to assert their pedagogical presence while remaining critically aware of the power embedded in their authority. Knowledge and power become intertwined not only in affirming difference but also in interrogating its limits and possibilities, cultivating a community in which student voices are respected and can articulate themselves in relation to their social realities and collective aspirations. Through this practice, facilitators deepen their understanding of the discourses of students whose histories and identities differ from their own, while developing a self-reflective awareness of the partiality and specificity of their own values and pedagogical practices. In this sense, facilitators become border crossers, continually negotiating knowledge and identity in relational and situated ways.

Border pedagogy, when linked to the imperatives of a critical democracy, requires that P4C facilitators possess a sophisticated theoretical understanding of how difference is constructed through representations and practices that legitimize, marginalize, or exclude the voices of subordinate groups. Within this framework, two interrelated considerations are essential. First, the liberal notion of multiculturalism, which often frames difference within a horizon of equality and depoliticized consensus, must be replaced by a radical conception of cultural difference and citizenship, one that acknowledges the essentially contested nature of the symbols, signs, and meanings through which social identities are constructed. In other words, the theoretical task is twofold. The liberal multicultural framing, which treats difference as a matter of superficial equality and seeks to depoliticize diversity in favor of consensus, must be replaced by a radical conception of cultural difference that recognizes the political charge of social identities and the contestation inherent in their construction.

Second, the foundational values of democratic practice, including freedom, equality, liberty, and justice, must serve as guiding principles by which differences are affirmed within, rather than outside, a politics of solidarity cultivated across diverse public spheres. Central to this project is the recognition of culture as a dynamic and heterogeneous site, a space of intersecting and shifting borders where histories, languages, experiences, and voices interact amid complex relations of power and privilege. Within educational borderlands such as P4C, subordinate cultures continually push against and permeate the ostensibly unproblematic boundaries of dominant cultural forms. Facilitators must move beyond merely mapping ideological inscriptions within curriculum, school structures, and teacher-student relations. A fully realized critical pedagogy requires attention to how ideologies are interpreted, contested, and enacted within the lived experiences and contradictory voices of students as they make meaning of their own subject positions, desires, and aspirations.

This pedagogy also calls for a multiaccentual, dispersed language of engagement, in which one speaks with rather than exclusively for others (Giroux, 2005, p. 21). This has direct methodological implications for P4C facilitation and research. In a typical P4C session, facilitators often rely on standard critical thinking moves such as paraphrasing, restating, or translating children's contributions into the dominant analytic idiom, thereby re-authoring those contributions in a hegemonic voice. Although such moves can sometimes support the dynamics of P4C, they may inadvertently replace the children's voices, particularly in racial, colonial, and Indigenous contexts. This occurs especially if facilitators adhere rigidly to universal critical thinking procedures, speaking for rather than with co-inquirers. Border pedagogy critiques these practices and calls for a transformation in facilitation.

Concretely, this entails training facilitators to engage in ethnographic listening, to resist immediate reformulation, to embrace ambiguity and non-conclusive outcomes as legitimate, and to valorize collective narrative production as a form of philosophical labor. Ethnographic listening is an active and interpretive practice that treats conversations not as neutral exchanges of information but as social performances in which interlocutors present particular versions of themselves to a given audience. It is at once ethical and reflexive,

requiring sensitivity to the dynamics of power between researcher and participant in order to ensure safety and free participation, while also acknowledging how these dynamics shape what is spoken and by whom. It also demands reflexivity from the researcher, who must remain attentive to their own expectations and preconceptions, employing practices such as bracketing to listen openly and responsibly (Wardell, 2025, p. 146). In this sense, *ethnographic listening* differs from active listening. Whereas active listening is understood primarily as a communication strategy—paying attention, showing empathy, paraphrasing, asking follow-up questions to ensure understanding—it remains centered on the speaker-listener dynamic in dyadic interaction. Ethnographic listening, by contrast, operates within research practices and cultural contexts; it attends to multiple layers of meaning, power, and relationality; it foregrounds reflexivity regarding the researcher's role; and it values ambiguity, non-conclusiveness, non-verbal communication, and co-constructed knowledges beyond comprehension or emotional rapport. Drawing on Elvis's observation that active listening, understood mainly as an effort to make the speaker feel heard, does not adequately account for the deeper demands placed on participants and facilitators in a community of philosophical inquiry (CPI) (Elvis, 2023, p. 4), one may argue that ethnographic listening offers a more generative orientation. This form of listening, particularly when situated in subaltern contexts, resists reducing listening to a mere interpersonal technique and instead foregrounds its socio-historical and epistemic dimensions. Ethnographic listening attends not only to what is said but also to the conditions, silences, and power relations that shape what can be said, thereby realizing a more authentic and decolonial mode of listening. Within P4C, such a practice may cultivate inquiries that are more responsive to the plurality of voices and the contingencies of context, moving beyond the normative emphasis on recognition toward a listening that is ethically and politically attuned.

In practical terms for P4C, creating conditions for decolonized inquiry entails enabling students to speak differently, allowing their narratives to be affirmed, interrogated, and critically engaged alongside the consistencies and contradictions that characterize their experiences. Facilitators need to take seriously the voices of traditionally silenced students while also situating all

contributions within broader historical, social, and relational contexts. Importantly, silence itself is recognized as a meaningful dimension of border pedagogy. Following Reed-Sandoval and Sykes (2016) student's silence (in such contexts) should be understood as a legitimate and valuable mode of philosophical participation in P4C. Although spoken contributions are typically privileged in P4C practice, this emphasis can disadvantage students who feel marginalized or unsafe sharing their ideas verbally. In this regard, they suggest taking positionality seriously and it requires facilitators to attend to, and inquire into, the meanings embedded in student silences. By attending to silence as part of the classroom dialogue, facilitators can more fully appreciate the ways in which marginalized students navigate and negotiate power, language, and knowledge within oppressive structures. Such pedagogical spaces must be safe and nurturing, allowing students to cross ideological and political borders without feeling compelled to continually justify their identities, and encouraging engagement with perspectives and experiences beyond their own. In this way, border pedagogy emphasizes the productive potential of marginality for developing oppositional and transformative consciousness. Those designated as Other are afforded opportunities to reclaim and reconstruct their histories, voices, and visions as part of broader struggles to reshape material and social relations, thereby asserting radical pluralism as a foundation for democratic political community. This approach demands a critical interrogation of the omissions and tensions between hegemonic curricula and the self-representations of subaltern groups, including narratives found in erased or forgotten histories, texts, memories, experiences, and community practices.

A central concern of border pedagogy is to rethink how knowledge is produced by engaging learners with diverse texts and by reconfiguring the interpretive frameworks through which those texts are traditionally understood. At its core, border pedagogy argues that philosophical and educational practices must foreground the historical, political, and sociocultural conditions that shape texts, readers, and the very act of interpretation. From this perspective, texts are not neutral or universal conveyors of meaning but historically situated artifacts shaped by inherited interpretive practices, ideological interests, and material structures. This decentering of textual authority encourages students to examine

how dominant and subordinate texts might be read differently by different audiences, opening possibilities for reading against, within, and beyond established boundaries. Such an approach requires attention not only to what texts say but also to the principles and power structures that underwrite their production—including the racial, colonial, gendered, and class interests informing them; the political economy of publishing; the extra-educational forces that confer legitimacy on certain works; and the state-driven mechanisms of legislation and assessment that privilege particular interpretations.

Within this framework, border pedagogy stands in sharp contrast to traditional Lipmanian P4C. Whereas P4C treats the philosophical novel as a generative prompt for questioning, with communal reading practices reinforcing the procedures of inquiry, border pedagogy insists on situating textual engagement within broader historical and sociopolitical dynamics. Rather than positioning learners as Lipman's "philosophical child" participating in a neutral community of inquiry, texts invite them to become resisting reader subjects—readers who consciously interrogate and read against the text (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003, p. 160), unsettling both narrative authority and the seeming naturalness of reading itself. A decolonial critique is therefore particularly urgent in relation to the foundational materials of P4C, especially Lipman's early novels such as Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery and its companion texts Lisa, Suki, and Mark. As Kohan (1995) notes, "nearly all the novels of the P4C curricula were written in an epoch when the democracy of the United States supported, in Latin America, dictatorial and fascist governments… with the clear intention of protecting its own economic interests" (p. 26). Viewed through border pedagogy, these novels become more than philosophical prompts: they emerge as cultural products embedded in geopolitical power structures whose epistemic, racial, and colonial assumptions require critical scrutiny. By situating P4C texts within the political economy of their production, the mechanisms of curricular legitimation, and the state assessment practices that privilege particular interpretations, educators can better understand how students from diverse social locations encounter these novels. Such an approach not only reveals the limitations of traditional P4C materials but also opens space for more equitable, contextually attuned forms of philosophical inquiry.

One salient dimension of Giroux's border pedagogy (2005) is its sustained engagement with *popular culture*. Within his broader theoretical framework, border pedagogy attends to the shifting cultural and epistemic boundaries through which power and knowledge are continually reconfigured. Popular culture constitutes one of the most consequential of these contemporary borderlands because it is a contact zone in which distinctions between high and low culture, aesthetics and economics, authority and resistance are constantly negotiated. Giroux identifies three reasons for its centrality. First, he stresses the need to understand how meaning is produced through students' affective investments, particularly the ways in which pleasure and desire shape identity formation. Teachers, he argues, must adopt pedagogical frameworks that account for how economies of pleasure and meaning interact to construct students' senses of self and their imagined futures. Second, Giroux calls for a reconsideration of how students are positioned within, and actively negotiate, varying affective economies. The production and regulation of desire, he notes, are central to the ways students interpret, resist, and generate cultural forms and ways of knowing. Recognizing popular culture as a legitimate and influential force in students' everyday lives is essential, since it plays a primary role in shaping the diverse and often contradictory subject positions that students inhabit. Third, Giroux insists that popular culture must be treated as a serious domain of academic inquiry. This can occur either through its development as a dedicated field—such as media studies—or through its strategic use to animate and critically interrogate existing curricular areas. (Giroux, 2005, p. 23). Taking popular culture into account disrupts the boundary between officially sanctioned knowledge and students' lived cultural experiences, enabling a refiguration of the curriculum that opens space for perspectives historically excluded by dominant white, patriarchal, and class-specific narratives.

When examined through decolonial, racial, and Indigenous lenses, popular culture emerges as a critical battleground in struggles over representation and power. It is simultaneously a space where colonial ideologies are reproduced—through stereotypical portrayals of Indigenous communities, racialized youth, or migrant cultures—and a space where subordinated groups articulate resistance and construct counter-hegemonic identities. A P4C program that disregards this terrain inadvertently sustains a colonial hierarchy in which

Western, abstract philosophical knowledge is treated as legitimate while the embodied and culturally situated knowledge embedded in the popular cultural expressions of racialized and Indigenous communities is marginalized. Decolonizing P4C therefore entails recognizing the philosophical significance of the cultural forms that shape students' everyday lives, whether hip hop, protest art, or Indigenous cinema, and engaging them as sites where alternative theories of power, justice, and relationality are articulated from within lived colonial realities.

A Community of philosophical Inquiry informed by Giroux's border pedagogy would operate as a public culture of dissent. It would embrace epistemic pluralism by challenging the assumption that philosophical rigor resides solely in the Western canon and by foregrounding knowledges emerging from the margins as indispensable resources. Popular culture becomes a medium through which students interrogate colonial ideologies by unpacking the narratives that construct norms of civilization, heroism, violence, and belonging. This labor of interpretation functions as a form of cultural remapping that reveals the hidden curricula at work in dominant cultural productions. Such a community also foregrounds the politics of location and affect, encouraging participants to reflect on how their positionalities shape interpretation and how their emotional responses illuminate the operations of power and desire within a given text. This emphasis aligns with Giroux's conviction that attention to affect is crucial for understanding how subjectivities are produced and regulated.

Within a decolonizing framework for P4C, border pedagogy demands more than the inclusion of diverse materials; it calls for a critical literacy that treats popular culture as a central object of philosophical and political inquiry. Recognizing that children's intellectual and affective lives are deeply mediated by popular culture, the facilitator guides the community in examining how cultural forms reproduce colonial power relations and how they might also serve as resources for decolonial creativity. Popular culture in racialized and Indigenous contexts is deeply ambivalent: it can perpetuate reductive stereotypes, yet it can equally serve as a site where students remix, reclaim, and reimagine cultural symbols to assert their own voices and epistemologies. Wurtz (2024), drawing on Borja Quichocho Calvo, describes such acts as "decolonial acts of resurgence,"

suggesting that P4C can cultivate them by elevating the epistemic status of Indigenous and marginalized knowledge systems. This requires acknowledging that students' engagements with popular culture are themselves philosophical, offering complex, situated reflections on identity, community, and power that exceed the abstract formulations of canonical philosophy.

For this work to occur, the role of the facilitator needs to shift from neutral moderator to what Giroux terms a "transformative intellectual (Giroux, 2005, p. 71). This role is explicitly ethical and political, beginning with the curation of counter narratives—texts, images, and stories produced by racialized and Indigenous communities that challenge colonial amnesia and offer alternative worldviews. A facilitator informed by border pedagogy does not dismiss references to song lyrics, memes, or television shows as intellectually trivial, nor incorporate them uncritically as mere tokens of relevance. Instead, they frame these texts as contested borderlands and invite students into sustained philosophical engagement with how meaning is produced, how desire is regulated, and how identities are shaped within and against the structures of colonial power. In practice, this involves designing curricula in which Indigenous storytelling, oral histories, hip hop lyrics, visual media, and even animated series are treated as objects of rigorous philosophical inquiry alongside canonical texts, with consistent attention to their ideological formations and their potential for counter narrative.

conclusion

This critical engagement with Lipmanian P4C has demonstrated that the program's universalist claims and pedagogical methods are deeply implicated in the very structures of coloniality it purportedly seeks to overcome. Through a Spivakian lens, I have exposed the epistemological limitations of P4C, illustrating how its adherence to Anglo-American rationalist norms functions as a form of epistemic violence that systematically renders subaltern consciousnesses unintelligible. The subaltern, whether racialized, Indigenous, or colonized children, does not simply remain silent; rather, their modes of expression, often embodied, narrative, or communal, are disqualified by a framework that equates philosophical rationality with specific, culturally contingent forms of dialogue.

Spivak's insistence on the structural impossibility of transparent representation thus serves as a crucial theoretical checkpoint, foreclosing any easy narratives of inclusion and demanding instead a radical re-evaluation of the conditions under which speech becomes recognized as thought. When Spivak's argument is read in relation to P4C, the question of whether the subaltern can speak becomes inseparable from more specific questions: *How are facilitators trained to listen? How are stimuli selected? What forms of expression are treated as philosophical?* These are not peripheral concerns but primary sites where epistemic violence is enacted or resisted. The impossibility Spivak discusses becomes a diagnostic for identifying how these very practices pre-structure who can appear as a philosophical subject in the community of inquiry.

In response to the impossibility that Spivak believes in, Giroux's border pedagogy has the potential to provide a strategic and ethical orientation for reconstituting P4C as a project of decolonial praxis. It shifts the focus from merely 'giving voice' to reconfiguring the entire pedagogical architecture, that is, the borders of knowledge, identity, and authority that govern who is heard and what counts as reason. A decolonial P4C is not achieved through additive inclusion, for instance, by occasionally supplementing the curriculum with culturally diverse materials, but through reconfiguring the pedagogical architecture itself. This requires cultivating facilitators as border crossers through training that centers positionality, ethnographic listening, linguistic plurality, and the ability to recognize non-linear, embodied, and narrative reasoning as philosophically legitimate. It demands stimulus frameworks that emerge from community epistemologies, Indigenous and local knowledge forms, popular culture, and multimodal artefacts rather than relying on canonical materials. It further necessitates facilitation practices that decentralize the analytic idiom, embrace silence and ambiguity, and construct inquiry structures capable of sustaining epistemic plurality without assimilation. Decolonization of P4C requires moving beyond liberal pluralism toward an educational practice that is historically conscious, epistemologically plural, and ethically accountable. This entails embracing discomfort, accepting that subaltern knowledge may remain partially opaque to Western frameworks, and that facilitation involves continuous self-implication and critical reflexivity. By holding Spivak's diagnostic critique in

tension with her constructive pedagogical vision, this article proposes a P4C that embraces its own foundational double bind (Spivak, 2011). It needs to use the tools of rational dialogue while simultaneously dismantling their hegemony; it seeks to create space for subaltern speech while acknowledging its structural opacity. There is no final resolution to this tension. Instead, a decolonized P4C learns to "play" this bind, understanding its practice as a continuous, Spivakian "training of the imagination" for this very ethical and epistemological challenge. The promise of P4C, therefore, lies not in achieving a perfectly inclusive dialogue, but in its capacity to become a sustained practice of preparing for the other, a humble, politically rigorous, and forever unfinished project.

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