



## Teaching philosophy to children, an effective step in excellence of today's education and training

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**ABSTRACT:** One of the most important goals of education and training in any educational system is to nurture individuals with high power of contemplation and reasoning who have the capability of proper dealing with their surrounding problems and issues.

The research method is a descriptive-analytical one. In the "conclusion" section it has been explained that teaching philosophy to the children results in nurturing and growth of the power of thinking in children and students. Training and nurturing such skills through appropriate applicable methods and programs requires that the families plan and prepare the appropriate programs at the time of their children's birth in order that their children gain the required capability and preparation for the "philosophy for children" program at the age of kindergarten and elementary school; besides, culture-creation needs a comprehensive program through which the parents and teachers can get acquainted with different practical methods in the process of education.

**Keywords:** philosophy for children (teaching philosophy to children), training and education, thinking, Mathew Lipmann, training skills of thinking.

### INTRODUCTION

In 1969 professor Mathew Lipmann in University of Colombia introduced a theory that if we involve the children's minds with philosophical discussions and relate their curiosity with philosophy, we will be able to make thinkers out of them who are more critical, flexible, and effective than ever before. On this basis, the "philosophy for children" program was introduced by him. Currently, while theoretical and philosophical discussions about this program are under investigation in scientific societies and associations, many countries around the world have implemented and executed it. Thus in recent years, the interest and tendency for reinforcing the philosophical skills and improving the level of learning and literacy in the world's educational systems has increasingly prevailed and consequently, since 1970s, numerous educational movements such as creative thinking education, critical thinking education, contemplative curriculum, problem-solving skills education, and philosophy for children program have propagated all around the world (Costa, 2006:63; Adey, 2006:49).

Therefore, due to the acceleration of the rhythm of changes in the human life during recent years, the new lifestyle shows that the society has changed and also indicates that the previously useful skills are no longer able to equip the modern man for life. So our juveniles and children may encounter with an unpredictable world in future and thus they inevitably need to learn the philosophical skills in order to dominate the life as much as possible. But it has become very hard to predict the real knowledge which can account for the

life requirements; this requires that the educational system focuses on training the skills needed for receiving, organizing, and applying the information (Fischer, 1382:11).

If we want to prepare the children for future challenges, we must teach them special skills based on which they can dominate their life and learning because no end-point should be presupposed for learning. They need knowledge but the more important point is that they need the capability of acquiring and learning the new knowledge. They need a knowledge acquired by themselves, a knowledge that they, themselves, have produced or reproduced it (Fischer, 1386:11).

So what should we do if we want to have children with high power of reasoning? What are the skills needed for equipping our children if we want to have children with capability of correct judgment and children who can succeed in future with regard to the variable socio-economic conditions? If children are trained and nurtured through an appropriate method by their parents since the age of kindergarten and elementary school, we can be assured that they will have a glorious future full of successes and, consequently, many of the difficulties and problems of the youths and society will be resolved, because learning and acquiring different logical and philosophical skills is the key to solve the problems; this makes heavier the task and duty of the families and the educational system.

The present research is aimed to investigate the question that how much is the importance of teaching philosophy to children and what are the practical solutions for such education?

*Research questions*

What is philosophy for children and how important is it?

What are the practical educational solutions and methods for philosophy for children?

**RESEARCH METHOD**

The method of the present research is of descriptive-analytical type and is categorized under the qualitative researches group.

*Theory and background**Philosophy for children*

Lipmann, as a professor of philosophy, encountered the problem of shortage or lack of the reasoning, discrimination, and judgment ability in his students, so he performed systematic studies on the analysis, discrimination, and problem-solving area in 1960 to 1970. He found out that the main reason of such condition is the weakness of the philosophical skills and the looseness and indolence of the critical and creative thinking which is rooted and originated in the childhood trainings and thus it can be prevented and treated by changing the educational styles and methods (Gharamaleki, 1384). He thought that reinforcing the reasoning and judgment skills must be done in childhood because this period is not only the best but also the only opportunity for teaching and training these skills.

Hence during recent years, we have seen the primary activities of some great movements called "the movement of philosophy for children". This program is aimed to pave the ground for improving the philosophical skills through some mentally motivating stories.

Philosophy for children is a program for teaching the philosophical thought to the children, of course not by complicated and ponderous philosophical terms and expressions but in form of some questions and answers by which the children can discover and perceive the philosophical concepts (Lipmann, 1998).

Some of the obtained results indicate that teaching philosophy to the students can lead to nurturing some skills. For example, the results obtained by Shabani (1380), in a study performed in form of a team-work on critical thinking and academic achievement of elementary school grade4 students in Tehran, show that problem-solving through group-activity method can significantly influence nurturing the critical thinking skills. In this study the effect of learning based on group problem-solving on the learners' critical thinking was investigated. Besides, the results of another study performed by Badri and Fat'hi Azar (1386) showed that tendency toward critical thinking (including components such as being disciplined and systematic in

research and having exploratory and erudite judgment) in a group trained by method of learning based on group problem-solving was higher than the group trained by the traditional and classic method.

It can be said that teaching philosophy to children through fictionalizing and research groups, or in other words the Socrates method, can influence nurturing the thinking skills in the student. For example, in a research Mar'ashi *et al* studied the effect of the research-social method on nurturing the reasoning skills in students. The results showed that executing the research-social method in classrooms influences nurturing the reasoning skills in female students (Mar'ashi *et al*, 1386: 122).

In another study aimed to investigate the effects of the philosophy for children program on children's reasoning skills and behavioral performance, Naji and Ghazinezhad demonstrated that after performing and executing the philosophy for children program the reinforced skills including reasoning, discrimination between similar issues, correct judgment, and critical thinking had become more creative and responsive; furthermore, their self-confidence and problem-solving ability had increased (Naji and Ghazinezhad, 1386: 123).

The research results showed that if teaching philosophy to the children is performed appropriately and correctly it can result in significant growth in their thinking ability. Hence, for the "teaching philosophy to children" program, a motivating rational environment must be provided for children and also the program must be started at the time of their birth by their parents.

Practical programs and methods of teaching philosophy to children

Improvement of nurturing the philosophical skills requires some programs, through which the children can acquire the skills since their birth time in the family environment; besides, preparing the culture needed for these educations must be done by families and the educational system. Some of the practical programs include:

Child's birth: start of training

Entrance of a baby to the family is indeed the starting point of a great education and the house is a valuable school where a highly motivated teacher called mother is ready to teach and train her baby. As Lipmann the innovator of the philosophy for children program believes, children are naturally philosophers because they look at the world with a curiosity and astonishment (Fischer, 2001: 10). They begin philosophy with asking the meaning of the words and using the word "why", so the parents and teachers can be good mental motivators through using appropriate methods for nurturing the philosophical skills.

*Poem-reciting and story-telling*

Hearing stories and tales is crucial and necessary for growth of the philosophical skills in children. Through stories and tales, the child travels to the wonderful and amazing lands and gets acquainted with different people; this can be a starting point for activating and stimulating the child's mind to think and contemplate, especially when it is done in a group form. Also many of the advocates of the philosophy for children program believe that collectively practicing the philosophical conversations and dialogues can nurture and improve the students' judgment and evaluation skills and also can facilitate the growth of the rational discussion. Moreover, literature can help discovering the ethical potentials and increases sympathy among the children (Mathew, 2003: 8). As for this point, Lipmann *et al* expressed that: books, which are supposed as the basis for such program, are those story books in which the personages attempt to discover the principles of reasoning and the successor philosophical attitudes presented in following centuries. The method of discovery for each of the story's children is discussion, argumentation, and contemplation (thinking). The fundamental method learned by the story personages includes discussing with the groups of the same age, teachers, parents, grandparents, and relatives and critically dealing with what is said (1980: 82).

In this program, stories are used as the main and principal instrument of education and training because it is believed that the stories can improve the philosophical skills and the questioning ability. Besides, reciting appropriate poems can favorably influence the child's imagination ability and activation of the child's mind; also it can reinforce the growth of philosophical skills in the students and children.

*Preparing the grounds of conversation for education*

The fast changes in the world are among the reasons due to which Mathew Lipmann introduced the philosophy for children program in order to help the growth of thinking skills in children and prepare them for a better life. Designing and planning the grounds for mother-child or teacher-student conversations and dialogues causes that the child's mind can be enabled from the beginning because understanding is a verbal phenomenon and mutual understanding is achieving a common language. Conversation, too, is a verbal phenomenon which facilitates achieving the mutual understanding. Conversation provides the opportunity that the worlds are expressed in languages and the communicators step forward to achieve a common language through integrating the horizons (Gadamer, 1989: 360).

*Game and communication with others*

Through playing games the children learn, enjoy, and somehow find out how to perform activities together with other ones. Games also provide opportunities for Teaching art and handiworks

children to practice the adulthood roles and learn how to absorb the "cognitive-emotional" system. As for the importance and effectiveness of games, Plato, in his "Republic", states that: by this method you will be able to have a much better recognition of their abilities (Allison, 1383: 44); this is the most important opportunity which can be exploited by the parents and teachers and can influence the children's mental growth and guide them toward nurturing the philosophical skills.

*Film and theater*

A child's eyes are the door for entering the information into the child's mind. Videos and films can laden the child's mind with knowledge. Film is indeed a new method of thinking and a live language which plays its role with an intensive force, and by changing the speed and light. The films are presented to the world to provide a perspective beyond the viewer's perspective. Films are in fact a set in which "becoming" and "movement" substitute "existence" and the "light" substitutes the "wisdom". These components, together with elements such as time and location, form the set to change the viewpoint. Film can be a process in which reason and brilliance are used to involve us in re-contemplation of thinking. Scenes of a film coincide the sound and expand along the time and the result exerts an internal effect on the viewer and, consequently, a process is formed which moves forward alongside with other events (Fabin, 2005).

Hence, watching a film can be effective on reinforcing the children's philosophical skills because texts, films, and other educational media are similar to the tools and instruments of distributing and legalizing different methods of recognizing the world. "Therefore, critical education and training requires a trend toward educational material which, just like the cultural forms, embrace specific meanings and concepts" (Simon, 1985).

*Painting and its definition*

Painting is part of a child's growth. Piage consider painting as a witness for his theory about demonstration of the world's evolution by the child. In fact, it can be said that painting is a borderline between game (playing) and mental image; and as Piage writes, painting is an attempt to represent the real world (Cycler, 1370: 83). If we want to bring up children who have a different view in future and such difference in view leads to an inclusive growth of philosophical thinking in all aspects of their lives and makes them free and creative individuals to discover the essence of existence, painting is the best instrument for achieving such goal because painting provides them with an opportunity for discussing various images, colors, and forms and this can result in the growth of their philosophical thoughts.

Teaching the art requires using the fundamental philosophical concepts; besides, having a deep perception of the art's values requires recognizing the nature of these values and the nature of the valued issues. So performing a series of philosophical discussions and what is called "philosophical aesthetics" must be supposed as a part of teaching art. On this basis, S. Hagaman (1990) believes that the philosophy for children program is significantly applicable in teaching art to the children and executing this program can result in deeper perception of the artistic values in children.

In addition to the role played by the philosophy for children program in developing the philosophical concepts needed for teaching the art, this program can lead to more concentration and improve and deepen the vision (W. Hamrick, 1989). It must be noted that discovering the beauties and enjoying these beauties is the theme of teaching art and it not only depends on the exterior realities but also on the manner of viewing and conditions of the viewer.

### SUGGESTIONS

1. Creating workshops for parents and teachers (instructors) through the kindergarten;
2. Holding courses on teaching philosophy to children for teachers;
3. Informing and training the parents and teachers through public media in order for them to use the related websites;
4. Supporting the groups and organizations which are active in teaching philosophy to children;
5. Compiling books with a simplified language for use by different segments of the society.

### CONCLUSION

In three last decades Mathew Lipmann, one of the professors of the Mont Color State University in New Jersey (1969 to 1980), and his colleagues, including Ms Margaret Sharp, are the first ones who have formally expressed that teaching the philosophical skills to the children even before entering the elementary school is possible and presented a special program for realizing this goal. They have also written numerous books on their theory.

Lipmann and his colleagues believed that it is possible to involve the students in philosophy such that, despite being very young, the grounds of activation of the God-granted power of philosophical thinking grow with a high speed and also the skills of philosophical thinking are realized. It is said that Lipmann, in introducing the philosophy for children program, has been influenced by individuals such as Socrates, John Dewey, and Charles Piers. (Socrates is assumed as the obstetrician of the thoughts because his specific method has been based on discussion and argumentation and helped the

other individuals to bear their thought through introducing accurate and subtle questions).

Those ones who are involved in the "philosophy and child" program believe that merely transferring the materials, information, and knowledge to the mind of the students and keeping them in their minds is not sufficient, but they should learn to listen well, think accurately, analyze the discussions, easily reason, and regard appropriate criteria and measures in their judgments. All of these factors make the children to be just in different issues and never demonstrate irrational prejudice in their behavior.

Therefore if the children are trained through this method, certainly they will have a glorious future and the problems of the young individuals and the difficulties of the society will be mostly resolved because rational thinking is the key to resolve the problems.

So it is possible to learn most of these skills and to create a tendency to use and apply these skills verbally and also create a "research-society" where the children can discuss and exchange ideas as a collective activity.

Thus this program is aimed to improve the youths and children's philosophical skills in such a way that they can have a reasonable deal with problems in their lives and use their higher level mental skills both in their childhood and adulthood.

So it is expected that the ministry of education professionally accepts this responsibility. Also family and its function can play an important role in better learning the philosophy for children program and can be adapted with the educational system. These programs are aimed to enable the children to apply their skills in encountering with life problems, and use the methods and instruments to achieve their goals. Among these instruments and methods are story, literature, drama, painting, images, and games. Thus appropriate conditions and using the options and elements which are efficient and have sufficient attractiveness pave the ground for children to have active and personal exploration and investigation on the philosophical questions and concepts, and also play important role in helping the children to acquire the philosophical skills.

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