CHILD AND COMMUNITY OF PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY

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Abstract:
It has been asserted in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child that children's voices should have a place in society and that their views and opinions should be taken into account by policy makers and those others in authority. This paper suggests that children need to be empowered and enabled to become active, participative, political agents within society. Within certain countries – in this instance, those constituting Great Britain – Education for Citizenship is on the Governmental agenda. In order for children to be educated for citizenship, it is argued that they are treated as citizens not in the future, but citizens in the present. Additionally, to further enable younger members of society to partake in the role of citizen it is here suggested that the practice of Community of Philosophical Inquiry be utilised to promote the necessary skills for full participation.

Key words: child; citizenship; Community of Philosophical Inquiry

Niño y Comunidad de investigación filosófica

Resumen:
Se ha afirmado en la convención de la O.N.U sobre los Derechos del Niño que las voces de los niños deben tener un lugar en la sociedad y que sus puntos de vista y opiniones deben ser considerados por los hacedores de políticas públicas y otros gestores gubernamentales. Este papel sugiere que los niños necesiten ser empoderados y capacitados para tornarse agentes activos, participativos y políticos dentro de la sociedad. En ciertos países - en este caso, los que constituyen Gran Bretaña - la educación para la ciudadanía está en la agenda gubernamental. Para que los niños sean educados para la ciudadanía, se argumenta que sean tratados como ciudadanos no en el futuro, sino en el presente. Además, para permitir que los miembros más jóvenes de la sociedad participen en el papel de ciudadanos aquí se sugiere que la práctica de la comunidad de investigación filosófica sea utilizada para promover las habilidades necesarias para la participación completa.

Palabras clave: niño, ciudadanía, comunidad de investigación filosófica.

Criança e Comunidade de investigação filosófica

Resumo:
Foi afirmado na Convenção dos Direitos da Criança da ONU que as vozes das crianças devem ter espaço na sociedade, e que suas visões e opiniões devem ser levadas em consideração pelos fazedores de políticas públicas e autoridades de outras instâncias. Esse artigo sugere que as crianças precisam ser empoderadas e capacitadas para se tornarem sujeitos políticos, ativos e participativos na sociedade. Em alguns países – no momento, aqueles constituintes do Reino Unido, a Educação para a Cidadania está na agenda governamental. A fim de que as crianças sejam educadas para a cidadania, argumenta-se que elas não sejam tratadas como cidadãs no futuro, mas cidadãs no presente. Além disso, para favorecer ainda mais a participação dos membros mais novos da sociedade no seu papel de cidadãos, aqui é sugerido que a prática da Comunidade de Investigação Filosófica seja usada para promover as habilidades necessárias para a participação plena.

Palavras-chave: criança; cidadania; Comunidade de Investigação Filosófica

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This paper will consider how the practice of Community of Philosophical Inquiry (COPI) could be used as a tool for the empowerment of children within society. It will be suggested that in encouraging reasoning, citizenship is promoted and that this, in turn, is one way to involve children as active, participative, political beings within society. Indeed, as McCall (1991) holds that,

> Creating conditions which allow for the emergence of both the disposition to inquire and the skills to reason empowers people in a way that simple enfranchisement does not. Enfranchisement alone will not ensure democracy. But the possession of inquiry and reasoning skills empowers by enabling people – adults and children – to seek for and deal with the truth – what is there. (p.38)

And it is here that McCall raises a crucial issue – the empowerment of children. Clearly, if McCall discusses the empowerment of children, then she considers them to be lacking in power or authority within our society; she wishes to promote their 'voices' or give them some kind of participatory role. It is true to say that more and more adults are living their lives without children of their own, but this means, as Qvortrup (1994, p.18) indicates, that a larger "… part of the electorate which has nothing at stake as far as children are concerned is growing" and are therefore making decisions on their behalf. Indeed, children's lives are almost totally directed and controlled by the adult population with little more than a nod in the direction of the individuals such policy making concerns. Prout and James (1997) highlight this anomaly when they say that children and their lives are determined and/or constrained by adults in terms of the politics, educational, legal and administrative processes that affect them. This is exactly where children are discriminated against within our society, they are not considered as equal to other groups within society, that is, adult groups, and thus the notion of children as inferior

members of society is constructed and repeatedly reinforced. Qvortrup (1994) talks of an 'adultist' imagery that isn't conducive to seeing children as anything other than subordinates. If we are to give children a voice socially and politically we must be prepared that we will be challenging the ways in which children are currently viewed by society and we would thus be challenging, in some way, the accepted social order. Children are not treated as equals and as such different things are expected from them than from the adult members of society. However, note that the expectations are set by *adults* within society.

Let us consider what is expected of children with respect to their obligations in society. In the *polis* of Athens the job or role of citizen was undertaken seriously; the *polis* was placed primarily before individuals. Faulks (2000, p.16) suggests that in ancient Athens "… from birth, citizens internalised the values of active citizenship, greatly influencing the content and depth of its practice".

Implicit within this is the fact that one was a citizen *at birth*; similarly, it was the case that the child of a slave was born a slave. Rousseau (1948), too, believes we have an obligation within society too induct children into being active members of society, he would suggest that social structures with their values and obligations are taught and learned from infancy, since he held that as individuals our value is dependent upon the society or community to which we belong. Jenks (1996) further asserts that children are seen and treated as subordinates until they pass through a period of being socialised into being an adult competent being.

This notion of the child becoming into acceptable adulthood, 'competent' adulthood, begins early in life in order that we recognise our role – our future adult role, our future adult role as citizen. This is not a new notion, Lyman Jr. (1995) traces this lack of moral ability, this lack of knowing how one should behave back to the early medieval period when it was expected that children had to learn how to be moral. Being moral is an attribute preserved for adulthood, and a citizen is certainly someone of moral worth, but it is important that children are inculcated into the ways of

morality, that they learn what will be expected of them as members of society, and this initiation takes place during one's childhood. Shamgar-Handelman (1994) suggests that childhood is the time that society sets aside for such training for an acceptable adulthood. Children thus learn the acceptable patterns of behaviour and how to regulate these patterns through the adults they encounter who will model what is acceptable, appropriate and adult and will highlight and eradicate behaviours which fail to fit into these categories of acceptableness, appropriateness or adultness.

Rousseau (1955) believes that what we ought to learn as children is what we will need to practise as adults. It appears that the only obligation or duty a child must perform in society is that one must learn – by whatever means – how to conduct oneself in society. Values and cultural norms should be absorbed in order that the prevalent moral code be maintained, it would seem, without question or contradiction. Jenks (1996) echoes this notion when he discusses making sense of the child in terms of its potential. He goes on to suggest we educate the child into compliance. There is currently a large move within the British education sectors – prompted by governmental policy – that citizenship be taught as part of the school curriculum. Again, this suggests that education or schooling is a preparation for adulthood and the moral codes deemed 'valuable' by the acting adult moral majority – children must learn how to behave in the adult world. It appears that citizenship education is masking what may be called moral education, and in moral education, it is to be understood that one is here talking about determining behaviour and dictating what is reasonable and acceptable behaviour. Downie (1971, p.65) maintains that it is important that children are taught – or even trained – that their desires should be "… directed towards socially permissible or desirable ends". Downie's view amounts, in negative terms, to the fact that society wishes to control its future citizens and it does so through education. Lawson (2001) too sees the negative, and somewhat worrying, aspect of training young people in schools – one of the institutions established by the State –

> Rather than relying on the slow process of attitudinal change, or tackling the root causes of social issues such

> as racism or youth disaffection, the government is imposing their set of values on individuals with the caution that, if those individuals do not accept them, they will not be able to claim their rights of citizenship. Implicit within this is the idea that we should not be concerned about reasons for participation and motivations for actions. Rather than attempting a wholesale shift in attitude, it is appearances that matter. (p.168)

Before even formal schooling plays its part in the formation of the child as future participant in society, the family has a key role. It is within the family that we first learn how the social system works. The child is *part* of the system, yet he/she must learn his/her place and what is expected of him/her as a child and, in the future, as an adult. This is more like the training one gives a pet dog – with rewards and punishments we train it to sit, stay, roll over, give a paw or not sit on the furniture – it soon learns its place within the social hierarchy of the household; similarly, so does the child – and in much the same way. James, Jenks and Prout (1998) similarly raise this issue when they discuss the control exerted upon all aspects of children's lives to the point where adults timetable eating, sleeping, washing and even excreting for their children.

The amount of control children have over their own lives is extremely limited in a range of spheres within their social lives. Limitations are frequently placed on children and they must learn these limitations in order that they know their place in the hierarchy that is our society. In Britain there is a nine o'clock 'watershed' where programmes with a particular content – a content deemed too 'adult', perhaps because of sex, violence or the use of 'strong' language – are postponed until after the watershed when it is assumed children will be either in bed or parents will not have such programmes on the television because they are aware of the potential content at this time of night. Similarly, cinemas rate films with a particular certificate which is allocated according to age, for example there are films where one must be over twelve, fifteen or eighteen in order to gain admission to the cinema to watch the film. Other such limitations on children are often limits

on their physical freedom, for instance, curfews imposed by parents or the police or the opportunity for females under sixteen to take the contraceptive pill.

Adults possess an inordinate amount of power and control over children and their desire to be 'grown-up', to be adult. Adults determine not only what is acceptable behaviour for an individual, but this is further extended by determining how children will – in future – participate in society, they are shaping *future* citizens. Citizenhood is perceived to be a valuable and desirable thing to possess, yet it is becoming ever more evident that for children, while they are being trained in the ways of being citizens, they are not – as children – permitted to practise their citizening skills. James, Jenks and Prout (1998) recognise the dangers that are inherent in handing over power and decision-making to a 'caretaker' (as Archard (1993) calls these controlling adults), although one should bear in mind that children have not handed over power or authority to adult caretakers, they never had the power to hand over in the first place and these adults act on what they remember as their experience of having been a child.

Rousseau (1955) firmly holds that children should be taught in a manner that will encourage them, in the future, to see the State, society, in a familial way; they should learn that they have a responsibility or duty to the State and the will of the majority – he is keen to stress the obedience that one should demonstrate. The family is perhaps the first model we encounter of a political society and then we move on to school. There are power and authority structures in place in both of these institutions and the child quickly learns how to work within and around them since the child is never one to be in the seat of power or authority in either of these contexts. McGowan Tress (1998) tells us that ancient Athens' *polis* aimed to cultivate human capacity for participation in the city's cultural and political life through its management of children's development. The *polis'* method of 'cultivating' this future participation was through family and school. In discussing Aristotle's view of children, McGowan Tress suggests that children should all be seen as

potential rulers and so there should be a single plan of education dedicated to this end.

Building upon the point that children should be trained for the role they will later undertake one can see that this role playing begins early on in one's life, in the family, school and other social groups. Emmet (1966) gives us the power to ascribe ourselves roles, or at least describe how we are to perform that role. The point about the role of *child* is that it is *given*, as is the expected behaviour and values that go along with it. Very quickly the child learns his or her role through the ways in which people react and respond to him or her, which in turn begins to develop the idea of where one 'fits in' and so begins to shape the self of the child, but the self can only be shaped in relation to one's interactions with others. Even if one does not interact with others, this non-interaction is still a shaping device and will ultimately bear on how one places oneself in the social hierarchy and thus on one's role.

Once the child has begun to assimilate this sense of self as he/she more and more adopts the 'appropriate' role, he/she will then begin to understand what is expected in terms of performance and behaviour and what is not acceptable within the society into which it has been born. So perhaps, then, there are only two duties or obligations that a child is expected to undertake. Firstly, he/she must be 'available', make an effort and be receptive to the training which prepares one for adulthood and citizenship within society, and secondly, that one adopts the role 'child' and conducts oneself in the expected and appropriate manner, especially in relation to others. A relevant example may be when a child is upset with another child and hits out, a nearby adult might suggest that he/she doesn't know any better, he/she 'is only a child'; this behaviour, while expected as part of being a child, is excused for the same reason. However, under the child's obligation to learn how one behaves in one's adult role in society, one will come to learn that hitting out is not acceptable behaviour and therefore not within the role of adult. It may be suggested that in return for fulfilling one's obligations or duties one receives certain privileges in the form of rights.

Privileges in some sense are perhaps contrary to the notion of rights. It may be posited that rights are things we are entitled to by virtue of our existence, yet if we are given citizenhood at birth, we automatically inherit the duties discussed previously. However, merely because one has been born into a society where certain things are expected, an entitlement to rights does not automatically follow. It is therefore, preferable to talk of rights in terms of privileges – made and attributed by humans, much like citizenhood rather than being natural in origin – they would not, and could not, exist without people. Bellamy (1996), the Executive Director of Unicef, advocates a world of rights for children which allows that they have more of a participatory role within society.

Throughout the twentieth century and into this new century, the movement towards increased rights for children has gathered impetus. It is perhaps worth noting that the rights afforded children are certainly being legitimised by the State in its legislation, however, the interesting issue is that it is the adult population that is determining what rights should be in place. In fact, this very issue is discussed by Boyden (1997) when she considers how little a role – none in fact – children had in forming the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and equally they have had no input on how best to implement the decisions taken for them and about them since the Convention's inception. So while advocating children's rights the Convention manages to fall foul of its own intentions. However, at least in considering the issue one may argue that a new perspective is being put on the notion of childhood and it is this reconstruction that is of value.

While the point of citizenship is to work for the betterment of society as a whole rather than concentrating one's efforts on specific individuals or groups within society, there is the danger that minority groups – and children fall into this category – may have their behaviour and living conditions dictated by a more powerful group such as adult society, which in turn would lead to a suppression of rights for the minority group. It is wise to be careful in considering the ways and practices that are used to afford children protection. Qvortrup (1997) highlights that some forms of protection may be

negative for children as they protect adults and their social order from the presence of children.

The notion of citizenship and how active one is, or is allowed to be, is an issue of power and, in the context of children and adults, children certainly have the less powerful stance and are thus limited in the contributions they can make because of this powerful 'dominance' adults have over them. So, while adult society is issuing decrees about children's rights and entitlements, adults are still very much in control, driving the issues and agendas of what children's entitlements should be and in what ways they can participate. Children are given rights, but there seems little purpose in providing rights if children cannot avail themselves of the rights involved, or, in point of fact, *if* they want these rights in the first place since they have been instituted by the adult majority group.

We have, however, formulated some rights which this ambiguous group are able to access but what is particularly interesting about the Convention's articles, is that there are no rights there listed that are not also afforded to adults. This is possibly where the confusion lies with this relatively new concept of *child*, that we are coming full circle to a time when there was no notion of *child* and are giving children the opportunity to be adults, or to perform the adult role. Thus, in the vast majority of respects we still want these individuals to be children and the method we have for preserving this state is power. And it is this 'adult' power that acts most effectively by not promoting the younger members of our society within the decision making process, they are given a voice when adults see fit. Interestingly, this appears to be the main thrust of the Convention that has been taken up most strongly within our society and more specifically in the present British Government's push for Citizenship Education. Aristotle (1955) would hold that there is no place for politics in the life of children and no place for children in the life of politics as they don't have enough life experience. Aristotle can relax, for while citizenship education is becoming ever more present in schools, little of its content has to do with the politics of the wider society and even where it does stray into this realm, children are

firmly kept in their place until old enough to participate on the political stage. Newell (1991) would support the claim that children are kept at a distance to the political world that acts on their behalf and suggests that because of their age and status children are discriminated against.

There is much to contend with here, yet, in allowing a space or opportunity for views to be taken account of, the status of children may be improved upon. In being receptive to the views of this group – not even a minority group in the sense of the numbers belonging to it – true representation can be provided. The sticking point is not so much that children be enabled to express their views, it is more that those with power are determining whether or not the views are considered and '*reasonable*'. Newell (1991, p.44) suggests that Article 12 "… is the cornerstone of the Convention's insistence that children must not be treated as silent objects of concern, but as people with their own views and feelings which must be taken seriously". Article 10 states that children have the right to develop their own views, ideas and opinions freely without external interference of this freedom – yet, there are still restrictions in the sense that maturity of reasoning, age, ability to articulate are all heavily cited, yet these are not factors (other than age) that are confined to children. Children's powers of reasoning, argumentation and their ability to listen and take on board alternative ideas are given little emphasis which is perhaps why the adult/child divide persists; it suits the adult power holders that children's views can be expressed, and possibly be taken account of, but that they are much less able to reason than the adults – this is patently not true. Archard (1993) highlights exactly why children are excluded from the adult world of reason and understanding, he says that children lack adult dispositions such as being rational, or autonomous or that they are not conscious of their beliefs and desires and so may not participate in the adult world.

In many ways children are what women once were – and to a certain extent still are – within the power structures of society. Faulks (2000) suggests that women often have to decide whether or not to forego their differences from men and work towards a politics of difference with special rights and

responsibilities. The difference between this picture of women and the situation in which children find themselves – and it is quite a major point – is that women, by virtue of being seen to be adults, have still more power than children to create role or agenda for themselves.

Certainly it is adult human beings that set the agenda or contract, yet children are obliged to abide by the contract although they are still not citizens in the sense that at present the voice of children is somewhat tokenistic with inroads only being made in May 2002 with the United Nations Special Session on Children, a consultation with children representatives from around the world. It remains to be seen what influence the children's views have had on the policy makers from the adult community also attending the summit. Further, while not formally accepting a covenant or contract – since their voices and actions are somewhat determined by external forces – children do comply with this covenant or contract as part of their obligations in order that they gain membership to society, strive towards citizenhood and 'grow' into adulthood. Archard (1998) indicates Locke's agreement with this perception of children as growing into adulthood as 'imperfect reasoners'. Again it seems since children are not perceived to be suitably adept reasoners, they cannot be citizens in their own right. Faulks (2000) is clear when he posits that an ethic of participation and active citizenship must be encouraged by considering how one may exercise one's rights and responsibilities. This is as true for our younger members of society as for our more established ones – we must promote an ethos whereby individuals see and understand the need for co-operation and interdependence for the creation of a community. Perhaps there is some realisation – in this new interest in education for citizenship - that everyone acting as an individual to further his/her own gains works against the advancement of society as a whole.

There are, though, some aspects of this movement which may cause concern. Lawson (2001) suggests that it appears that classes in citizenship do not promote opportunities to discuss issues or to challenge the status quo. Lessons on drugs and sex are incorporated within citizenship classes which appear to be lessons on morality more than, as Lawson posits, places where

pupils can raise issues of concern in order to debate and discuss them. Somehow the citizenship classes imply some kind of control, where the accepted moral code is held to be the way forward and the route into adult life and full citizenship. One wonders if it is possible to fail these classes in citizenship and what one would have to do in order to fail.

Indeed, we cannot consider moral issues by simply doing as we are told by the power or authority in charge – this is the case both in schools and the wider world, both for school pupils and those outwith formal education. Lawson (2001) suggests that by encouraging participation in community activities while at school, children will be inclined to be participative within their communities in later life. After all, it is this promotion of community spirit which will, it is hoped, work within a society in order to create and maintain an active community with an effective – and active – citizenry, fulfilling obligations and maintaining the provision for the rights received under the reciprocal relationship formally established by society – or rather, the individuals working together that constitute that society. We should take care not to confuse the idea of 'community spirit' with the controlling of behaviour and moral codes. The notion of community should be concerned with the sharing of ideas and opinions in order to better society as a whole. 'Better' needing to be defined through dialogue, discussion and debate as the members of a society may not – indeed, probably will not – all agree on how they may define the 'betterment' of society.

For Plato (1987) it was important that order and respect for order be learned at an early age; even the games of children should teach these orderly habits and built into these games would be the opportunity for correcting or altering 'flaws' that may exist in a society, so that they may be eradicated over time as the youngsters progress to being fully active citizens. Plato is even more prescriptive regarding the organisation of the young and how they should learn for the betterment of society. Children over the age of ten should be sent away from their parents' influence in order to establish a firm notion of society and all that this should entail for the good of its citizens. The intention is that the children would not have free rein until they had learned

the societal structures and until they had been educated for their future role in life. This, it could be argued, is how Citizenship Education is manifesting itself today in some ways – certainly within Britain. However, Plato was ahead of today's educators or policy makers to some extent – he held firmly that children be encouraged to philosophise which is more closely related to the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child and its assertions that children should have their views heard and acted upon. While the Convention does not overtly advocate children philosophising, this seems a natural way to accommodate hearing children's views and enabling them to have a voice by giving them the necessary tools to listen, discuss, debate and change their views and the views of others. Matthews (1998), in considering Socrates and Socrates' view of children suggests that philosophy for children had its roots in Socratic questioning and claims that Socrates respected children as philosophical discussion partners.

Lipman (1988, p.3) talks of Callicles in the 'Gorgias' insinuating that "… philosophy is for children only: grown-ups had better get on with the serious business of life". This is a move away from the idea that children are non or pre-rational beings, Callicles is certainly affording children some commendation that is often not readily attributed to them, however, he does abstract the child from the 'serious business of life'. All members of society participate to a greater or lesser degree in society and life in general, and younger members of society have much to contribute as they form a large proportion of the physical world of life. Children, it is argued, are as capable and competent of commenting and reflecting upon the 'serious business of life' which ultimately affects their existence and functioning. Philosophising in Community of Philosophical Inquiry (COPI) is perhaps the best method we have for children to participate as citizens within society, even by forming citizens' juries perhaps entirely made up of children and following the COPI model.

McCall (1991) asserts that in order to engage in *philosophical* inquiry one need not have a vast range of empirical knowledge. Notions such as beauty, truth, justice or reality can be reasoned about while having little experience of

the world. Very often Communities of Philosophical Inquiry involving eight or nine year old participants will raise the same questions, issues and arguments as a community of participants in their forties, fifties or sixties. The vocabulary, or the availability of extensive examples upon which to draw, are the only differences between these age groups, although, when asked for an example, younger community members are able to provide a very adequate one from their realm of experiences. Further, having a broad ranging vocabulary does not preclude one from finding it difficult to say what one wants to say or say what one means. As McCall (1991) correctly highlights, there is a traditional image of the child as non-rational or pre-rational and that they are able to think neither logically nor abstractly. She adds that this view, perpetuated by developmental psychology, relies on criteria drawn from formal logic for its definition of rationality. It should be noted that many adults would not be considered rationally or logically capable under such terms. Indeed, many children discuss topics in philosophical terms that raise issues considered by recognised philosophers. The whole notion of stage maturation theory has disallowed pre-adolescents from being acknowledged as having reasoning powers. On the contrary, from an early age humans are able and competent reasoners and it is through one's usage of these skills that one becomes more able to reason, reflect and analyse. Mill (1985, p.122) acknowledges that "The mental and the moral, like the muscular, powers are improved only by being used". And this is vital in considering how children are perceived and in what ways they are permitted to be part of society.

Anyone, of whatever age, will develop their reasoning skills with practise – arguments and reasoning will become more complex and 'mature' with practise, not necessarily as a result of the reasoner being older. Certainly the majority of younger individuals have less experience of living in the world than the majority of older individuals, however, it is not necessarily the case that more practical worldly experience will make one a clear and more effective reasoner; in fact, one's thinking may be obscured because one is entrenched and comfortable in the assumptions upon which one's life has become founded. These young people are open to possibilities and should be

encouraged to challenge and question the world around them if they are to be effective citizens working to promote community. The practice of COPI facilitates this type of reasoning in the participants – whatever their age. Indeed, McCall (1991) points out that the structure of agreement and disagreement with supporting argument, explaining to others and the adding to the ideas of others act as counter-evidence that children are egocentric.

Children are, like their older counterparts, empowered by participating in a COPI. While they may not, at present, be in the position to directly influence policy making, they will – through COPI – develop the necessary skills to inquire, think, reason and participate effectively as citizens in the wider community. Individually children can learn how to listen to alternative viewpoints, how to posit alternative viewpoints – even alternatives to what they currently hold – how to build upon previous arguments and develop them whereby they can demonstrate their application in the wider world. Not only will these areas be developed, participants will grow in their social interactions; they will become more aware of how different individuals can be, but at the same time, learn how to work with these different individuals for a common cause. Warnock (1992) advocates philosophy, or a philosophical approach, being included within the school curriculum, or rather more as a way of life within the school in an endeavour to prepare children to face the challenges they will encounter throughout their lives. Warnock, however, fails to see that the skills acquired during such times as when children are encouraged and aided in their reasoning will be of benefit to them in the here and now and not simply when they become adults.

Personalities often diminish within a COPI and a loyalty to the dialogue emerges – it is the discussion that becomes important, but how it could affect people at a group or individual level is often countenanced. Further, within the inquiry, topics arise for consideration that may be felt not to be suitable or accessible for children; in COPI children are free to discuss subjects usually held onto by the 'adult world' so that they, children, are not 'distressed' by the ideas emerging. There is evidence of Philosophical Inquiry with primary and early secondary school-aged participants discussing topics

such as death, love, marriage, the existence (or not) of God, terrorism, bigotry, prejudice, truth and justice. Similarly, in adult groups, these subjects have also emerged and often the self same issues emerge in the inquiries, but the children are less inclined to try to stick to a line of reasoning in order to persuade than some adults. They (the children) seem to be more willing to engage fully without the distraction of what they 'know' about how the world external to the COPI functions.[1]

There is, though, an inherent equality within a COPI; value of participation is not determined by the number of times an individual contributes to the dialogue. One may be silent throughout the majority of an inquiry or, indeed, throughout a series of inquiries, but that participant is thinking and following the argument and will ultimately take away what was said to his/her life outside the community and he/she has the potential to change in some way as a result of the inquiry or reflection upon it after the session has ended. Not only has the individual the potential to change as a result of the inquiry, he/she has the potential to change the environment, institutions and other individuals around him/her – all this regardless of age. Morrison and McCulloch (2000) suggest that politicians should look to new ways of engaging with young people to facilitate debate, participation and decision making within society and COPI may just be the way to provide for this. It should be said, though, that this cannot be tokenistic, action must be taken based upon the young people's input. It is important that young people are not only encouraged to inquire and inquire in depth, but that this be facilitated for them in order that they can challenge received wisdom and develop their own beliefs and thinking. This is precisely why a practice such as COPI is useful for all members of our society, individuals should be aware that everything is open to question.

While it is vital that society members question and inquire through the sharing of ideas and opinions in a Community of Philosophical Inquiry, the only issue here may be, if one wishes to use the dialogue as a means for change in the society and the community, that it is difficult (if not impossible)

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[1] The facilitator of these COPI sessions was the author of this paper.

to ascertain exactly how the individual feels, or what he/she personally holds as it is the case within COPI that he/she is able to offer ideas not as personally held beliefs which will be contributions to the dialogue and also bearing in mind that the inquiry does not seek a consensus or conclusion. However, the COPI could be the place where citizens – of whatever age – are trained and practised in their reasoning skills to allow that they may participate in society, whereby decisions or individual conclusions may be reached in order that action may be taken – having been informed through the argumentation skills inherited from the COPI. Additionally, the COPI is a useful place to air as many views as possible in order that individuals have perspectives to consider in formulating their personal standpoints in order to generate action. It is therefore not simply the promotion of a young individual's right to have his/her opinions or views heard – which is indeed a shift in the running of society – but all members of that society should be treated as citizens and should have an equal voice. The equality that exists in the COPI is one from which society could borrow; where *all* participants, of whatever age, are encouraged to reason, reflect and inquire. Siegel (1988) reinforces the idea that we desire for our community critical thinkers, individuals who are adept reasoners and who are receptive to the reasoning of others – this is what will shift society towards community, and this is what Community of Philosophical Inquiry aims to promote. Siegel sees critical thinking as an ability to reason and use such reasoning skills to justify one's beliefs, claims and actions. It is this reasoning that makes one a critical thinker. Siegel's definition of a critical thinker does not preclude children.

This takes us back to the medieval period when children were not set apart from adults and were privy to all conversations and activities – with the notable exception of decision making, however, the ordinary 'man/woman on the street' was not at that time involved in the decision making process either. Being a child is, it seems, that time when decisions are taken for us because it is believed that we cannot contribute as citizens. Yet, there are older society members for whom this is also the case, for instance, those suffering from a mental illness, or even prisoners in criminal institutions are

not permitted to play a part in the decision making process, and although they are not called children, it is often acknowledged that they are treated *like* children. What is the implication, then, for children or younger members of our society?

Perhaps the question of citizenhood is an issue here, for that is what allows one to participate in society, and as yet children are not perceived of or treated as citizens. A voice is now being given to them, but not in any formal manner on a regular basis and this opportunity to raise ideas or opinions appears still to be seen as a *preparation* for citizenhood when one is an adult. It should also be noted that we talk of 'giving' children a voice. It is important that we are wary of *giving* children a voice; they should be able to speak out for themselves, a forum and means should be created for such a thing to happen to avoid an adult mouthpiece stating children's opinions under his/her own interpretation. A much more inclusive society – a community perhaps – is needed where all individuals have a platform to speak from and be heard in order that their views may influence policy and practice. deWinter (1997) advocates encouraging children in participation in community development as this allows them to help shape their living environment and will, in turn, strengthen their commitment to society.

Children, then, appear to be constrained by their social status. This highlights the need to redefine the boundaries of childhood. Yes, children should be afforded protection from harm by the State, but then, so should all individuals. Yes, children's voices should be taken account of in decision and policy making, but then, so should the voices of all individuals who are citizens. Yes, children should have rights, but they too are bound by obligations like the older members of our society; and not all adult obligations are the same or equal, since not everyone lives in the same environment or under the same set of circumstances. Likewise, the obligations that younger individuals take on need not be the same as each other or those belonging to the older members of society.

Children can and do judge their actions and the actions of others and Darling (2000, p.1) recognises that it is *expected* behaviours that are talked

about when considering children's role or status in society and asks an important question, one that does not take account of children having a moral code of their own which society has yet to shape to coincide with the accepted and ruling moral code; he asks "… why murder perpetrated by a child should require an enquiry of a kind seldom triggered by murder by an adult". In answer to his question, he suggests that it is because children are perceived of as innocent – this is their natural condition - and that badness comes through exposure to an imperfect society. There are several points at issue here. In answer to Darling's initial question, an enquiry is possibly held because our current society does not perceive children as being capable of reasoning about an action such as murder, that they may not see it as wrong because their moral code, in such an instance, has not been bent into the accepted shape of the majority. The child murderer may not be fully aware of the consequences incurred in society by perpetrating a murder, unlike his/her adult counterpart who has been fully inducted into the 'acceptable' modes of being in a society which may mean that the young murderer lacks the experience which informs one of the results of such an act that may, in fact, be the deterrent the older potential murderer has. Secondly, childhood is perhaps not so much the period of innocence that Darling suggests, but rather a time when one is coming to terms with one's obligations and is learning the accepted behaviour pattern and experience has not yet demonstrated to the child all that is on offer, thus preserving 'innocence' by not making available vices or opportunities which will later become much more evident. One may add to this that 'badness' is not so much acquired later as *attributed* later – the new member of society must learn what society perceives as being bad or wrong, which may (or may not) conflict with his/her own moral code. Mayo (1986, p.8) asserts that morality is not merely a way of behaving but is, in actual fact, a way of *thinking* about behaving. He says that "Morality necessarily involves moral thinking as well as moral action" (p.8) and this is yet another feature or attribute children are considered not to possess. However, Community of Philosophical Inquiry disproves this as time and time again children within a COPI will discuss – at very deep philosophical

levels – moral issues and dilemmas. Finally, as to Darling's suggestion that it is the 'imperfect society' which alters the innocence of the young; certainly experience of society perhaps alters the child and his/her 'innocence', but the notion of an '*imperfect*' society remains to be defined. Society can only be what its members make it and for it to be perfect implies that everyone is the same, will be the same and will share the same ideas, that it is static – this cannot be the case. Mill (1985) links childhood and old age together in the way that society treats individuals and the way they view them in terms of their rational conduct.

Morgan (1994, p.137) states that "Once the child has learned the meaning of 'why' and 'because', he has become a fully paid up member of the human race". Perhaps adults do not want children to question and reason because in taking account of their views, ideas and opinions they may have to alter their own. Childhood could be seen as a period of indoctrination, the time when young humans become less animal or instinctual and learn how one is expected to be in society. Yet now that Britain's government and society's educators are talking in terms of Citizenship Education and Education for Citizenship, a more participative model of society is required – we are breeding citizens, but this begins when young; individuals have their reasoning skills facilitated and honed in order that they may contribute to the emergent community – once more, as in the Middle Ages, the boundaries of child/adult are becoming blurred. Like the COPI, individuals are important, but individuals *as* individuals, not because they possess a certain age or status. Community of Philosophical Inquiry is a positive model for our society and how the younger members of that society are treated.   It is this issue of how we involve children – or individuals who fall into this category – in our society in a participative manner which is of importance.

It has been suggested that through Community of Philosophical Inquiry children would be promoted in the social sphere and would become more equal members of society and the community created by the sense of common purpose engendered by such a practice. At present children are given a voice within society only in terms of what adults want to relate and

even then it is through the mouths of adults that we come to hear what adults think or interpret the children as saying. The world of the child is one which is closely controlled and monitored, their lives are timetabled and barriers are put in the way of their enjoying the opportunities or experiences afforded to adult members of society. Children are expected to be innocent and receptive individuals – this is the role they are expected to play and while in this role they are trained into the model of the 'acceptable' adult. What is needed, it has been claimed here, is that children are in need of empowerment. Ironically, the empowerment can only be given by adults; children should be encouraged to be citizens, they should be given opportunities to explore the issues that impact upon their lives and the lives of the wider society, they should have their own voices and have a place in society where these voices may be heard and have notice taken of them. The voices of children, and equally those of adults, should not exist in isolation where everyone is free to expound their thoughts and theories, what is important is that a sense of community is created and that what people – adults and children – see as important is that there is dialogue and it is this dialogue that can and will effect change. One way in which change could be facilitated is through providing the tools for effective dialogue where critical reasoning is encouraged and the tools for such reason and reflection are practised - through Community of Philosophical Inquiry.

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