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## Dialogical and reflective activities in classroom to improve moral thinking

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(Article begins on next page)

## Changes in Teachers' Moral Role

### From Passive Observers to Moral and Democratic Leaders

Dorit Alt

*Kinneret College on the Sea of Galilee, Israel*

and

Roni Reingold (Eds.)

*Achva College of Education, Israel*

Education for democratic citizenship encompasses cognitive, as well as moral, characteristics. The responsibility for cultivating these democratic virtues is placed upon the shoulders of educators who are required to create and encourage democratic social life. These characteristics are constantly challenged in present society, in which subject-matter goals and instrumental skills are gaining more importance than socially-valued goals, thus tipping the scales in favour of cognitive skills. Promoting cognitive skills cannot sufficiently influence the formation of a social disposition. Therefore, this situation could ultimately create, in Dewey's words, 'egoistic specialists' who lack the moral and democratic virtues needed for the creation of genuine social life. This book emphasizes the pedagogical task of education in this regard, and strives to pay greater attention to the obligations of education as a moral socializing agent. This book offers four perspectives on which the education system needs to focus its attention in order to enhance democratic and moral values: Teachers' and students' concepts of moral and democratic education; curriculum design; democratic teaching instructional methods; and teacher education. This volume provides a valuable text for a wide audience of students, teachers, policy-makers, curriculum designers and teacher educators to use as an updated reference book for pedagogical and research purposes.

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'*Moral Development and Citizenship Education*' is a book series that focuses on the cultural development of our young people and the pedagogical ideas and educational arrangements to support this development. It includes the social, political and religious domains, as well as cognitive, emotional and action oriented content. The concept of citizenship has extended from being a pure political judgment, to include the social and interpersonal dynamics of people.

Morality has become a multifaceted and highly diversified construct that now includes cultural, developmental, situational and professional aspects. Its theoretical modelling, practical applications and measurements have become central scientific tasks. Citizenship and moral development are connected with the identity constitution of the next generations. A caring and supporting learning environment can help them to participate in society.

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### INTRODUCTION

This research aims to develop and implement a curriculum for citizenship education based on the principle that the rules that govern life in a community are the result of a path that begins with the recognition and respect of one's self and of others. Highlighting the etymology of the term law – relationship, liaison – involves thinking about lawfulness in the context of education for coexistence, giving the educational act its original context: the community. Teaching lawfulness thus becomes civilized coexistence that creates paths for citizenship.

The framework of the research project is given by Children's Municipal Councils, which are popular worldwide as a means and an opportunity for young people to be a part of and experience democratic citizenship.

According to Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child,<sup>1</sup> and to the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life (Council of Europe, 2003),<sup>2</sup> Children's Municipal Councils become instruments that local governments adopt to promote the participation of younger generations in the democratic life of their city.

Our research project<sup>3</sup> wanted to increase the value of these experiences already present in schools and towns in our area (Rovigo, Veneto region) that share our aims of educational research, while providing educational support for their achievement.

Indeed, the establishment of such instruments is not sufficient in itself to ensure the full participation of young people in the deliberative dynamics which constitute the procedural and teleological dimensions.

It is therefore necessary to accompany them with teaching and educational paths that can support them by involving schools and in particular the councillors' classes.

If democracy means participating in a Public Deliberation (Crocker, 2006), supporting a citizenship education project via participation in Children's Municipal Councils means, in this approach, that children develop the skills necessary for public deliberation: argumentative skills (Audigier, 2003; Di Masi, 2010; Santi, 2007).

The relationship between democracy and argument has been studied widely (Santi, 2007) also from different conceptualizations of the two terms. In this article the concept of democracy is not used to open a critical reflection on the crisis that democracy as a form of government is living in our Western societies, but rather to reflect on what skills are needed to cope with new models of democracy, particularly deliberative democracy, which sees argument as a rational process. Democracy as an 'aggregative model' (Schumpeter, 1947) creates a "system in which people have the opportunity of accepting or rejecting their leaders thanks to a competitive electoral process" (Mouffe, 2000, p. 11). Those who adhere to this school of thought believe that individuals are motivated to act only according to their personal interests; popular participation should therefore be discouraged as a non-functional operating system in which, however, a fundamental role is played by organized structures, such as political parties, which are responsible for representing the plurality of 'groups of interest.' This approach was questioned by Rawls in his book 'A Theory of Justice' and by the model of deliberative democracy (Habermas, 1984), which aims to recover the moral dimension that "it is nevertheless possible to reach a consensus that would be deeper than a 'mere agreement on procedures,' a consensus that could qualify as 'moral' " (Mouffe, 2000).

How can we define consensus as moral? What do we mean for morality? Kohlberg, a pioneer in studies on the development of moral thinking in psychology and education, called 'moral reasoning the conscious process of using ordinary moral language.' His model was therefore based on a cognitive approach: behaviour acquires a moral status only if motivated by an explicit moral judgment. The key role that Kohlberg gives to the reason, inspired by Kant's and Piaget's works, enabled him to develop his theory in response to behaviourism and psychoanalysis. In his view, both approaches failed to explain the development of moral thought. The first reduces human behaviour to a mechanism based on responses and needs from which the rational and cognitive component is excluded, while the latter emphasizes unconscious processes. For Kohlberg, however, moral behaviour is the result of moral judgement, and moral judgement makes a reference to conscious processes.

Kohlberg's most significant contribution, for anyone involved in the education field, was his attempt to provide evidence of his theoretical reflections in order to provide an operational model for school programs. His reflection was widely confirmed, especially in the educational field, where the theory of the six stages of evolution has long been the image of child development. Although his work has inspired much research, it has not passed the test of time. Criticisms were in fact made of his model: On the one hand the same that were directed at Kant and Piaget, on the other the very system of his model was called into question (Aron, 1980; Gilligan, 2003).

The rationality of moral behaviour and the role that moral judgements play on moral behaviour have not found empirical evidence. In making decisions, humans can also be driven by motives that we could not judge rational and very often not conscious.

According to Aron, there are three main criticisms that the educational reality makes of moral formalism (to which Kohlberg himself refers): (1) distinction between metaethics and normative discourse, (2) autonomy of moral discourse as a separate area; (3) the equality of judgements and decisions.

An alternative approach to formalism must be able to integrate mainly formal moral discourse with substantial moral questions; it needs to conceive morality as closely related to other areas of human experience and ultimately to overcome the vision of morality as the result of a judgement by enhancing the decision process. Dewey's contribution offers us the opportunity to go beyond formalism. His work, as Kohlberg himself acknowledges in his book 'Essays on Moral Development,' inspired his thinking, and although these two authors are presented in the literature in positions that might be called 'opposing,' in fact, they both emphasize different aspects, but ones that are important for understanding and educating towards moral thinking.

Kohlberg developed his model by starting first with a clear idea of morality, one that comes from the philosophical field. It is an attempt to seek an answer to the Socratic question 'What is a virtuous man?' that led him to develop the idea of virtue as justice, i.e. equality and mutual respect. His approach – which places him in the current of structuralism – sees the priority of theory. The idea that theory is the basis of practice is reversed by Dewey, who reflects instead on the need to consider theory as a transverse dimension that provides us with knowledge of human behaviour.

Dewey's first contribution is his reflection on the concept of experience. In his opinion, experience, interaction between humans and the environment, is first of all a movement that produces and makes the project of unity, which is the heart of pragmatism, possible. The moral, as well as other human dimensions (the aesthetic, scientific etc.) have the experience level in common.

And it is always the experience that comes from the comparison with issues and practical problems that makes it necessary to reach a conclusion or decision that the Dewey called 'Practical deliberation.' According to Dewey, human beings, in their daily life, act in accordance with the habits and acquired predisposition that they follow without thinking.

Facing up to a problematic situation, our 'common sense' stops playing its role, since the subject can be facing a conflict that involves a choice. The consequence of this temporary suspension of action produces an opportunity for reflection. It is in this space for reflection that the experience takes place, as it promotes the development of meanings generated by the movement and interaction between the elements that constitute the experience: humans and the environment.

#### PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN AND COMMUNITIES OF PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY

The framework for our curricular proposal is based on creating settings that enable and support the practice of philosophy in 'Communities of Inquiry' (CoI) along the lines of Philosophy for Children (P4C), as a method for developing complex

thinking (Lipman, 2003) within which moral thought appears, as "something other than, or something beyond, an analysis of conduct" (Dewey, 2004).

Teaching moral thought, as a function of higher thought, means, among other things, developing by following the argumentation theory approach, i.e. the ability to judge and evaluate the goodness of arguments as they occur in everyday life in a democracy as participation in public debate and deliberation. Citizens must not only be able to identify and construct arguments, but must also be able to evaluate the sound of the argument, in a general and not egocentric way, but in all three of the critical, creative and caring dimensions. In this regard, the Community of Inquiry is a given context historically and culturally, in which the child, but not only, learns through a form of communication that occurs within peers and between children and adults.

The knowledge that is produced within the CoI is the result of an intersubjective process between the parties that compose it, and is the result of interpretation and negotiation of shared meanings during the active dialogue that occurs when dealing with practical and concrete problems. The CoI is a place of experience in which to reflect and co-construct new meanings.

In a Community of Inquiry the child has a dual function. He/She is the learner and at the same time an expression of his/her culture. It is precisely because of this dual position that it is possible to create the imbalance necessary for learning. The CoI is the central objective and method in Philosophy for Children (P4C), a curriculum and educational movement that promotes, through the work of philosophical dialogue conducted in the Community of Inquiry, the development of complex thought in its critical, creative and care dimensions (Lipman, 2003; Santi, 2006); it is the privileged place to facilitate a dialogue based on an interpersonal exchange of thoughts aimed at reaching a consensus and not simply an agreement. The research is based on the assumption that reflexive dialogic activities will be implemented through a curriculum of education to lawfulness and citizenship based on P4C methodology and carried out in the community of philosophical inquiry, which is characterized by the constant practice of shared argumentation, negotiation and deliberation. It fosters on the one hand the acquisition of those skills and capacities needed to improve quality of life and social participation, as well as the cultural and political life of the younger generation; on the other it promotes the development of moral thinking to build cognitive justifications and rational requirements for the construction of consensus.

The purpose of this research process, therefore, is to turn the Children's Municipal Councils into a community of philosophical inquiry and support this experience through coordinated educational activities, also by involving schools and classes of elected councillors.

In this way the school and the city become a real educational community. Transforming the city council and classes in a community of philosophical inquiry, based on critical, creative and value thinking (Lipman, 2003) and on the 'appropriation of argumentative skills' (Santi, 2006), becomes an opportunity to promote frameworks and methodologies that can be used to build reasonable

consensus and to educate citizens who are capable of participating in an authentic way in processes aimed at making the 'right' decision.

#### THE INTERVENTION

The educational intervention has three levels: the Council, Commissions, and Classes of councillors.

##### *The Council*

The Council is composed of 41 children aged between 9 and 13 elected by their classmates. Their mandate lasts two years and the Council meets once every three months to discuss the proposals made by the Commissions. All the school districts of the city of Rovigo are involved.

##### *The Commissions*

Four commissions have been established:

1. Environment and Transport
2. Schools and Partnerships
3. Sports and Music
4. Tourism and Culture

Issues and composition of commissions were defined considering the candidates' programs, the children's interests, the councillor's age and the representativeness of the six school districts. The work of the Commissions (one meeting per month) is also supported by local associations.

The Council and the Commissions are the place of Deliberation (Gregory, 2007; Walton, 1996). The meetings are structured as follows:

1. Seeking and sharing information
2. Identification of problematic situations
3. Elaboration of proposals
4. Discussion of the alternatives
5. Deliberation

##### *Classes*

To give everyone a sense of belonging to their community and to the value that comes from acting on their own responsibility, in addition to the elected Municipal Council of girls and boys, classes of councillors were involved.

In the classes we conducted work that favoured the Inquiry Talk model (Santi, 2007), which combines heuristic and deliberative aspects and is usually presented separately in the literature (Santi, 2007; Wegerif, Mercer, & Dawes, 1999); our work comprised the pragmatic rules of debate: (1) Everybody in the CoI is encouraged to speak by other members, (2) Reflect before speaking; (3) All



relevant information is shared; (4) Reasons are expected; (5) The structure of reasoning is important; (6) Challenges are accepted; (7) Inquiry talk is built on others' ideas; (8) Alternatives are discussed before a decision is taken; (9) The process is self-corrective; (10) The CoI seeks to reach consensus; (11) The CoI takes responsibility for its decisions.

Research has coincided with the approval of Italian Law No. 169 of October 30, 2008, by which "Citizenship and the Constitution" classes are introduced into school education. Therefore in line with the P4C curriculum, which includes the use of texts and manuals used to encourage philosophical discussion and to exercise thinking skills, unpublished short stories have been developed with related exercises inspired by the principles of the Italian Constitution.

#### METHOD

##### *Participants*

The project involves the Children's Municipal Council of Rovigo, a town situated in the North-East of Italy. The Council comprises 41 children elected by peers from their own school and the classes of the 41 children elected (31 classes, 802 pupils, from fourth to eighth grade, 9-to-13-year-olds). The schools come from the town's 6 educational districts.

Even though the P4C curriculum has been implemented in all classes that provided a counsellor, I chose to present data collected in three classes. This choice is due to the following reasons:

- They are the classes in which I directly conducted the P4C sessions over the two years as an expert facilitator;
- Sixth grade classes ensured us the continuity of the class group throughout the research period;
- They are the classes of the two schools that authorized us to administer the tests, even in the classes that did not take part in the project but had the role of the control group.

The experimental group is formed of three sixth grades (54 children). Each classroom in the P4C Program is implemented (1 hour per week, over nine months, under the supervision of a CoI facilitator, expert trainers in Philosophy for Children); specific materials were created for the project in line with P4C curriculum structure. The control group is formed of three sixth grade classes selected in the same school of experimental groups (52 children).

##### *Tools: Moral Judgement Test*

The Moral Judgement Test (MJT) was developed in 1976 by Georg Lind, a psychologist and student of Kohlberg. It aims to overcome the limits of the instruments for the evaluation of moral thought (Moral Judgement Interview and DIT) which was inspired by Kohlberg's work. The MJT measures moral competence (C-index) and is based on a dual approach: in addition to the cognitive

dimension of the test, it also measures the affective dimension that the subject expresses towards the suggested topics, "The MJT, but no other test, can simultaneously assess both the affective and the cognitive aspects of moral judgment without mixing them up" (Lind, 1995).

The reasons for choosing the MJT to measure the influence of philosophical dialogue on the development of moral competence are:

- it is based on the dual approach, enhancing the cognitive and affective dimensions of moral judgement;
- it is not used to diagnose the moral development of the tested subject, but to assess the educational method chosen for the development of moral competences;
- the index calculated by the MJT (C-index) measures the consistency of the subject in judging arguments;
- it measures competences, not aptitude;
- it is a test that can be used with children;
- it is a test that was not devised within the scientific community of the Philosophy for Children.

The MJT is composed of two dilemmas: the first is known as 'the workers' dilemma'; the second with the name of 'the doctor's dilemma.' With 'dilemma' we mean a situation in which there are two alternatives both equally undesirable. After reading the story, subjects are asked to judge the choice of the protagonist and then to express their opinion (Likert scale from 'completely wrong' -2 to 'absolutely right' +2) on the arguments proposed. For each dilemma, in fact, there are 12 arguments, including six in favour and six against the choice of the story's protagonist. Arguments are constructed so as to present different levels of moral judgements from Kohlberg's model (pre-conventional, conventional, post-conventional).

The MJT offers dilemmas in which the protagonist must make a choice that requires the transgression of a law or moral principle. The subject's responses are not interpreted as individual answers, but as a whole.

The MJT produces two indices. The first one is a stage-preference score. Since each of the six stages presents four arguments, the one that receives the highest score, is the favourite stage. But this measures only an aptitude, not the cognitive structure.

The second index is the most representative and significant: C-Index. This index is based on the coherence of the arguments expressed by those assessments and it measures their moral structure.

The more interesting aspect of this index is that it does not determine which stage has the highest amount of assessment, but it identifies the subjects' consistency in evaluating the four items pertaining to the same stage. "The main point is that C score represents the participant's consistency of rating for all groups of stage-typed items rather than the participant's preference for a specific stage" (Rest, Thoma, & Edwards, 1997).

According to Lind, consistency is a measure of structure, since moral competence is the ability "to appreciate a certain moral principle independently of

the fact, whether or not it agrees with one's opinion on a particular issue" (Lind, 1995).

Since each stage represents a moral principle, the fact that the arguments associated with it are judged equally, regardless of their opinion on the dilemma, indicates the level of value attributed to moral principle. "For Lind the appreciation shown by consistency rating is the essence of moral competence" (Rest et al., 1997).

Competence is expressed in terms of consistency because, through the assessment of the arguments, moral quality is judged from the perspective of the subject's principles and values, and is not based on the choice made by the protagonist of the dilemma.

*Procedures*

The MJT was administered at the beginning and at the end of 20 sessions. The pre-test was administered individually in February 2009 and then again in April 2010 (post-test).

RESULTS

The results presented in this study refer to two groups ( $N = 112$ ): the first is the experimental group consisting of three classes of sixth grade pupils ( $N = 58$  Mean = 11.36  $SD = 0.552$ ); the second is the control group, which came from the same schools as the experimental group ( $N = 54$  Mean = 11.54  $SD = 0.638$ ).

The classes are distributed in two different schools (Table 1.), Section A and D (experimental group) and Section C and E (control group) at the 'Alpha' secondary school, Section A (experimental group) and Section C (control group) at the 'Beta' secondary school.

Table 1. Description of experimental and control groups

School	Group	Male	Female	Total
Alpha	A (exper.)	6	10	16
	D (exper.)	7	14	21
	C (control)	9	9	18
	E (control)	12	6	18
Beta	A (exper.)	7	14	21
	C (control)	10	8	18
Total		51	61	112

When compared to the effects on the classes at 'Alpha' secondary school, Figure 1 shows how the C-index grows in experimental classes. Sections A and D have an increase of 7.3 and 2.7 respectively, while the control group classes in the C-index decrease to 0.9 in Section C and to 5.2 in Section E.

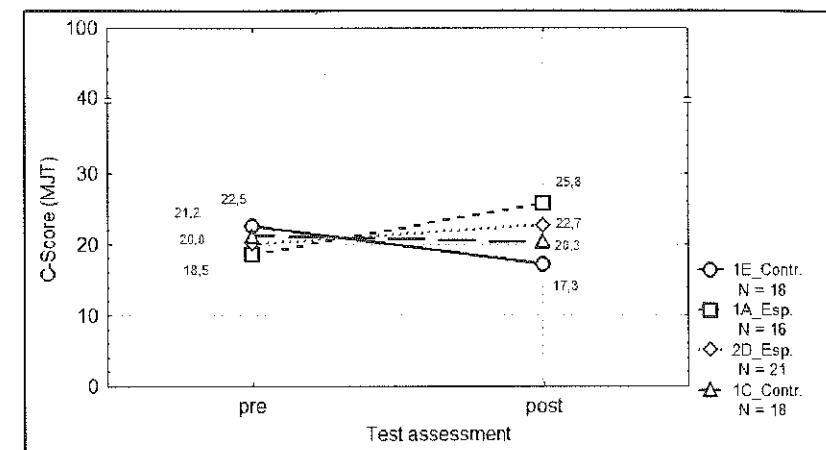


Figure 1. The effect of intervention in the Alpha secondary school  
 $r_{xy} = 0.37$ ;  $F(3.69) = 2.93$ ;  $p < 0.0394$

As for the results at the Beta, we note an increase in the value of C-index in both classes. However, the increase in the experimental class is greater than in the control class (Fig. 2).

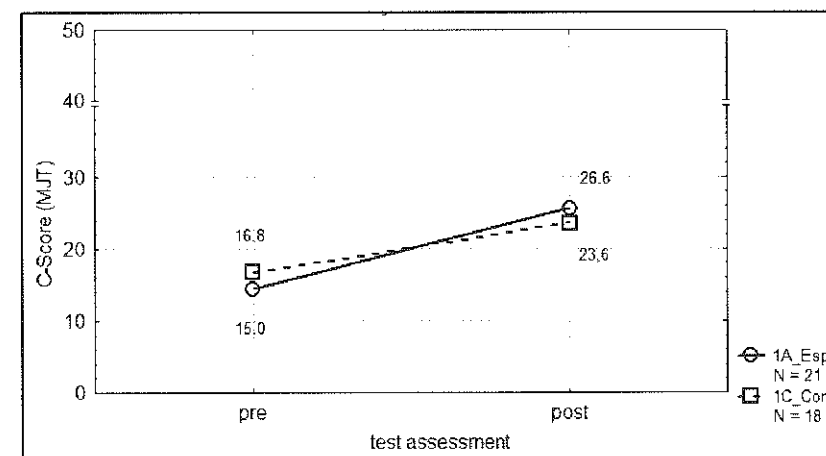


Figure 2. The effect of intervention in the Beta secondary school  
 $r_{xy} = 0.14$ ;  $F(1.37) = 0.66$ ;  $p < 0.4213$

The C-index value in the Section A pre-test is equal to 15.0 and in the post-tests it is 26.6, an 11.6-point increase. However, although the Section C pre-test starts with a higher C-index value than Section A (16.8), in the post-test the C-index reaches a value of 23.6, a 6.8-point increase. Significant results are also shown in the following two graphs, where we can see that the preference of topics related to moral principles represented by the six stages depends neither on the gender (Fig. 3) nor on the age (Fig. 4) of the subjects.

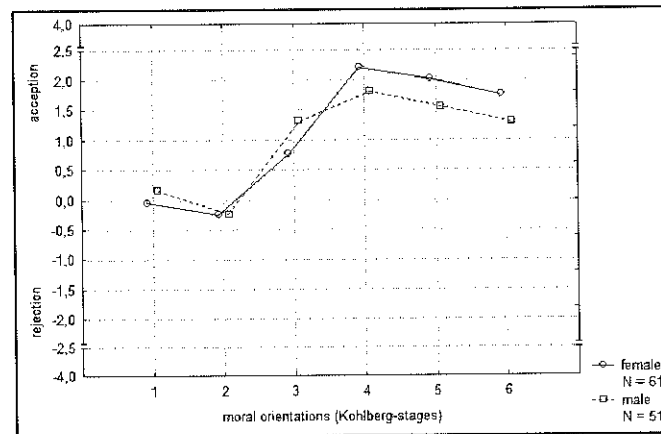


Figure 3. The hierarchy of moral preferences divided by gender  
 $r_{xy}=0.09$ ;  $F(5.550)=0.86190$ ;  $p<0.50647$

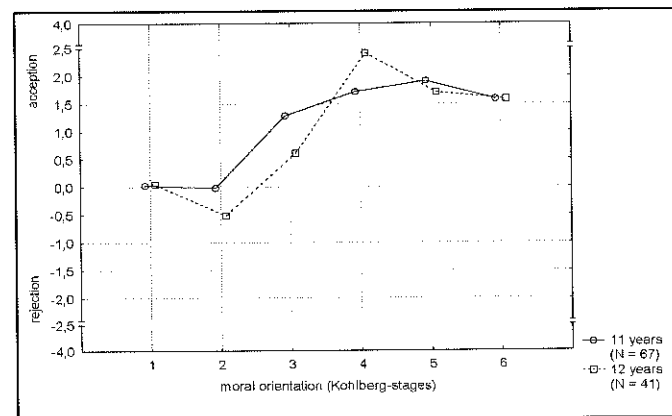


Figure 4. The hierarchy of moral preferences divided by age  
 $r_{xy}=0.1$ ;  $F(5.530)=1.0236$ ;  $p<0.00284$

## DISCUSSION

The hypothesis of this study was that participation in a community of philosophical inquiry, where educational activities centred on dialogue take place, developed a moral competence that is the heart of education for democracy.

A democracy characterized by participation in public deliberation means that it should be able to give voice to all instances as an affirmation of a right, but also to help identify alternatives; it is therefore open to control and any decisions taken may be questioned.

This research therefore explored how moral competence was developed through the discursive practice of a dialogic argumentative type and how this had a direct influence on the acquisition of capacity assessment by children aged 9 to 13.

Previous research indicates that philosophical discussion enhanced by the use of inquiry talk within a community of inquiry could promote the development of the complex thinking or the critical-creative-caring thinking (Lipman, 2003) necessary for an active participation in democratic life (Santi, 2006).

This study highlights in particular the caring dimension of complex thought, which is interpreted not only as care, but also as a value. This interpretation may be forced, as both Lipman and Dewey thought that morality is not a separate dimension from humans, but that all their activities were primarily moral. This is probably why there is no moral dimension in Lipman's model of complex thought. Caring thinking is responsible thought; it is a dimension of thought that is fundamental to deliberation as it reopens to feelings, emotions and desires that post Kantians, such as Rawls and Habermas, have neglected in favour of a universal principle of reasonableness.

According to Mouffe, "by privileging rationality, both the deliberative and the aggregative perspectives leave aside a central element, which is the crucial role, played by passions and emotions in securing allegiance to democratic values." Also for this reason, the MJT has been identified as the most appropriate instrument to measure the effects of a philosophical dialogue on strengthening the capacity of moral judgements. The MJT is in fact built from what Lind defines the *dual approach*:

Affective and cognitive mechanisms are inseparable, although distinct. Moral affects (values, ideals) are exhibited in moral behaviour in various ways depending on the individuals' cognitive structures and competencies. Thus, in order to measure them properly, we must also study them closely. Moral competencies, on the other hand, cannot be defined and measured without reference to an individual's moral ideals or principles. Therefore, an adequate measurement must be designed to assess both aspects of a person's judgment behaviour as distinct aspects of a same pattern of behaviour.

Although moral dilemmas were faced during the discussions, the dialogues in the classroom were conducted mainly from a 'philosophical' text, which means a text made to facilitate the formulation of 'radical' questions, not one solely related to the meaning of life, ethical values and logic rationality; the text put forward

problematic situations and contexts and in order not to force the discussion, indirectly stimulated the deepening of concepts that are initially identified by individual participants and then chosen by the community.

It is important to emphasize this aspect also when reading the test results (remember that the test is based on moral dilemmas); as the children did not directly discuss moral dilemmas during the educational intervention, this tells us that the positive results cannot be attributed to training that children received between the pre- and post-tests.

The increase in the C-index can be attributed to the exercise of argumentation skills in the CoI through its pragmatic rules (knowing how to build arguments, but also how to recognize and evaluate those of others), which clarify and build meanings for the moral concepts discussed in class.

The limitations of this study are those typical of an exploratory study. We also noted a difficulty in identifying ways to assess whether the skills acquired in class on moral judgements are transferred to other contexts or not, such as that represented by the Children's Municipal Council. We are working in this direction to find ways to assess, with a qualitative approach, the protocols of discussion in the council and commissions meetings.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> "States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child."
- <sup>2</sup> "Participation and active citizenship is about having the right, the means, the space and the opportunity and where necessary the support to participate in and influence decisions and engage in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society."
- <sup>3</sup> Polisofia is a research project realised within the Doctoral School in Pedagogical Sciences, Education and Training, University of Padova, in collaboration with the Municipality of Rovigo and funded by the Foundation Cariparo.

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