

Can a Philosophy for Children Programme Empower the 21st Century Child in Africa?

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KEYWORDS Children. Empowerment. Philosophy. Critical Thinking. Dialogue. Judgment. Africa

ABSTRACT In this paper the researchers present a theoretical debate in which they advance the case of doing philosophy with children. It is their case that children in Africa will take their rightful, empowered positions and play meaningful roles in adult life if they are exposed to philosophy in schools from an early age. Throughout the history of ideas, philosophy has been interpreted as providing enlightenment and attending to the questions and issues that seek to improve human life. Critics have, however, denigrated the role of philosophy in contemporary life and hence relegated it to mere verbiage that serves no purpose for practical life. They have accused it of being a distraction which contributes nothing to society; one that is dangerous. On the contrary, in this paper we attempt to justify doing philosophy with children as a pragmatic and realistic way of empowering children as citizens-in-waiting. The Philosophy for Children approach aims at the development of critical thinking in young learners through philosophical dialogue. Starting with children, the researchers contend that philosophy is needed now in Africa more than ever to address issues of ethnic diversity, oppression, and the creation of more tolerant and inclusive societies.

INTRODUCTION

Philosophy for Children is an intensive programme of education first established in the 1970s more or less aligned with the broad principles of progressivism in education. It aims at a radical change in education—from an approach that emphasises the role of the teacher and is based on the transfer of knowledge to an approach that puts the child at the centre and stresses discovery learning and experimentation, and the construction of knowledge. In this case, the purpose of education is to mould the cognitive skills and interpersonal awareness of children and the youth. In this paper the researchers use Aloni's (2011) definition of education as “the intentional activities that promote personal growth and self-realisation, cultural richness and intellectual rigour, interpersonal caring and aesthetic sensitivity, moral conduct and engaged democratic citizenship.- it aims at humanising and empowering the young towards worthy, full, and dignified ways of life”(Aloni

2011: 74) to explore the role of Philosophy for Children in empowering the youth. The central question is: how can education be instrumental in making children live reasonable lives and share equally through deliberative engagement in a democratic Africa? The researchers isolate philosophy as providing children with the methodology which empowers them to live an enlightened and examined life. To this end, the researchers present a philosophical-theoretical case for doing philosophy with children as the avenue for empowering the 21st century child in Africa.

The proposition of the empowerment of children implies that they are lacking in power or authority within our society; hence the need to promote their ‘voices’ in order to give them some kind of participatory role. In this paper two central questions that attract the researchers’ attention are:

- a) To what extent can doing philosophy with children contribute to the empowerment of the African child and consequently the development of the African continent?
- b) What dispositions does Philosophy for Children offer to children to confront the challenges faced in the 21st century Africa?

This theoretical exposé will focus on the relationship between Philosophy for Children and

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the subsequent empowerment skills it offers to children. First the researchers discuss the concept of 'child' in the African context. The researchers will proceed to discuss, briefly, the notion of empowerment. This will be followed by an examination of nature of Philosophy for Children in schools. The researchers shall end the debate by critiquing the virtues of doing philosophy with children as an empowerment vehicle for the 21st century child in Africa.

The Concept of 'Child' in Africa

Child and childhood are best understood within a cultural context and to attempt to universalise the concept child is a misrepresentation of the world of children. Children and the notion of 'child' have been regarded in very different ways in different historical epochs, in different cultures and in different social groups. For purposes of this paper the researchers explore the notion of 'child' in the traditional African context. It is however inaccurate to argue that all African societies have the same conception of 'child' although there are some dominant themes that appear to permeate their general understanding of it. The researchers also recognise the extraordinary cultural diversity of the African continent, though they are conscious of the possibility of extricating some common strands of thinking that typify the world of 'child' in Africa.

While it may be difficult to arrive at a universally accepted explanation of the phenomenon of childhood, different conceptions and pathways seem to point to the way in which childhood as *beginning* is valued. "Beginning" implies absence of experience, the need for help, deprivation of something of highest value, or the initial part of a circumscribed whole. This conception points to an understanding of children as in need of experience, adult assistance, protection, and that therefore children are not yet ready. What is glaring in this approach is the whole idea of lack, absence and incompleteness. Children, it is commonly assumed, are those subjects who are yet to reach biological and social maturity or simply they are younger than adults and are yet to develop those competencies adults possess. Children are, in this vein, seen as human *becomings* rather than human beings, who through the process of socialisation are to be shaped into fully human adult beings. This perspective regards them as "adults in the

making rather than children in the state of being" (Brannen and O'Brein 1995: 70). Consequently, adults are perceived to be translators and interpreters of children's lives and therefore adults are right and children are wrong. This relegates children to the position of servitude from an early age.

Traditional African thought and practices are rooted on the principle of communalism (Fayemi 2009) where community implies a social-political set-up made up of persons or who are linked together by interpersonal bonds; with communal values which define and guide their social relations. Like in other social settings, the family in traditional Africa is the most basic unit (Muyila 2006) and it exhibits the strongest sense of solidarity which extends beyond the nuclear members of the husband, wife and children to the larger group, mainly linked by blood. It is in the context of a web of kinship and relatedness that the child's welfare is founded in the community of relationships. In fact, every child is everybody's child (Hansungule 2005). Characterised by a communalistic philosophy, traditional African communities place the child in close contact with a larger group and socialise the young into the group and the group in turn has the responsibility towards the child. The child responds by offering a duty towards not only the immediate family members but also the larger community. Thus, a reciprocal relationship prevails. The reciprocity principle entailed values "*sharing resources, burden, and social responsibility, mutual aid, caring for others, interdependence, solidarity, reciprocal obligation, social harmony and mutual trust*" (Oyeshile 2006: 104). The community demands require that the child abandons the individual good to submit to the collective interests.

The pre-eminence of *community* in African tradition demands that the child forsakes personal interests and submits to the collective interests. Opposed to the western world-view that attaches great importance to individual interest, autonomy, universality, natural rights and neutrality (Daly 1994), the African communalistic world-view stresses the common good, social practices and traditions, character, solidarity and social responsibility. Traditional Africans endorse the view that the community is more important than the individual and it takes precedence over the individual. In addition to the significant role the community plays in pre-

scribing norms to the child who is expected to imbibe and retain them as definitive of him/her, individual children are not given the option to question but simply receive and live out them to the best of their abilities if they are to become fully recognised 'persons' in their respective communities. Based on this understanding, traditional paternalistic conception of childhood treats the child a blank slate in need of protection and training for adulthood just like conceptions of childhood in other societies.

In addition, Menkiti (1984) posits that personhood in traditional Africa is not automatically granted at birth but is achieved as one gets along in society. For him, it takes quite a lot of time for a child to accumulate knowledge of social values and norms thus the more knowledgeable in terms of these values the more *person* you become. Hence, for the Shona, for example, reference to a small boy or girl is prefixed by "*chi*" implying "it". For example they say *chi-komana* and *chi-sikana* meaning young boy or young girl respectively. The "*chi*" denotes small, but more importantly an "*it*" - a non-human object. This has implications on the notion of child traditional Africans hold. Practically and on this sense, some children may fail to become persons which corresponds with the Platonic child that never becomes adult in the harmony of the tripartite self. Plato asserts that "*some, ... (children), never become rational, and most of them only late in life*" (Plato 1941: 138). The researchers see a relationship between the Platonic child and the traditional African view of it where some adults will remain with the label 'child' despite their age because they fail to meet the social criterion of being adulthood. Similarly, young individuals and children on this view are *lesser persons* because they still have a lot to learn the moral requirements of their communities. Consequently, 'child' becomes a 'person' as one gets older and more accustomed to the ways of one's respective community and conversely one remains a child as long as they fail the personhood in the adult. The "*it*" perspective referred to above implies the malleability of the young to fit into the mould of the adult world. By situating youth in this way, the experiences of the young people are obscured and relegated to a less important realm. Hence 'child' is defined in the context of a condition in which one lacks liberty especially to determine one's course of action or way of life which defines the condi-

tion of servitude. Based on this understanding, adults are sceptical of the cognitive and affective potentialities of the child thus they are denied opportunities that can expand and explore these innate powers till they are socialised to become 'persons'.

While on closer scrutiny of African conception of childhood there appear pointers to the effect that the traditional paternalistic society treats children as empty slates in need of protection and training for adult roles, such a perception of childhood is universal and transcends most cultures with children considered to be immature, dependent and therefore in need of training. Even in western tradition, Locke held the view that because of their ignorance, children look upon their parents as "their lords, their absolute governors" and stand in awe and reverence of them (Locke 1996). The Lockean conception contends that the child is born without faculty to understand the laws of nature and so parents are accorded the duty to train children to submit their love of dominion to reason. On this view, children are a kind of '*not yet*' who lack qualities of adult members of the community. This conception of child goes to affirm the Aristotelian conception of child as 'unfinished' relative to a human end. The child is viewed as unfinished biologically in his or her growth as a human animal, ethically in the training of virtue and politically in the education for adult life as a responsible citizen. Similarly the notion of unfinished child in both the Aristotelian view and the traditional African view denotes that while human nature is not yet fully realised, it will be realised as long as it is properly protected from harm and the haphazard influences that may change the course of or damage its natural growth. Further to this, traditional African children are 'citizens-in-waiting' and are "*potential bearers of rights, which they may exercise only when they have reached the age of reason*" (Arniel 2002: 70). If childhood is thus defined as a process of becoming, adulthood is, without reservation, seen as a finished state. In this sense adult qualities such as rationality, morality, self-control and 'good manners' clearly make adults privileged above children while the goods of childhood are less valuable. In the process, the child's voice in an adult-child relationship becomes silenced and invisible. In effect such a traditional African conception "...locates children within the (macro) social

structure and is more interested in the systematic denial of their agency” (Vandenbroeck and Bourverne-De-Bie 2006: 128). However not every adult can be adjudged a finished product since some may fail to dispose values expected of adults. The goods of lovingness, naturalness, freshness of vision, frankness and sincerity and imagination that characterise the child’s life are downplayed in the traditional African communities. Instead, institutions such as educational and other socialising agents are established, not as violent or destructive forms of power, but rather forms of discipline meant to produce docile subjects through processes of training, correction and normalisation. However, we cannot rule out the central role of socialisation through initiation, enculturation and other processes of incorporation in the upbringing of the African child.

Further to the above, the traditional African ‘child’ is a socialised being from birth into the authority dimension which is based on the principles of age and seniority and which is made up of the mother, elder siblings, and father, elders, ancestors and God. Adults depict the child’s life outside the home or neighbourhood as full of danger thereby seeking to protect their children thereby denying them autonomy. This weakens children’s trust in their own authority if by authority in this case is implied the ability to control, influence and exercise one’s power. It comes as no surprise that even the African Children’s Charter (CRC) Article 27 endorses this dimension by entrenching that “[e]very individual shall have duties towards his family and society” while under Article 31(a) the individual shall also have the duty to “...work for the cohesion of the family, to respect his parents, superiors and elders *at all times and to assist them in case of need.*” (*Emphasis mine*). The two articles are rooted in the African belief that because adults have had sufficient experience of life and are ethically complete due to their own earlier training while children’s cognitive faculty for deliberation is not developed, children are not capable of choice. Writing about the Shona people of Zimbabwe, Gelfand further illustrates the previous view by pointing out that

Almost every Shona reveres his parents. Not only does the child love them, but he looks up to them and accords them proper respect. He listens to them, seldom argues with them and tries to avoid causing them pain. Honour thy

father and thy mother is far stronger in the Shona than among the Europeans (Gelfand 1965: 16).

For Fricker (2003: 70) this kind of epistemic injustice results in a “situated hermeneutical inequality” in which the subject is unduly deprived of submitting one’s social experiences intelligible, to the other and to oneself. While the above sounds hypothetical and only an ideal, it is actually the norm in most rural communities in Africa. In sum, the understanding of ‘child’ as discussed above gives an image of the traditional African conception of child as a subordinate member of society whose being is only recognised by the quantity and quality of the goods and services rendered by the same to senior members in the community hence the argument that the child in such communities occupies a position of servitude. Given the traditional African and even western conception of childhood and of the incomplete, ignorant, *human-in-the-making* child, one might be persuaded to conclude that such characterisation involves epistemic injustice. Hence, doing philosophy with children in Africa, as has been initiated in other parts of the globe, can be instrumental in advancing testimonial sensibility as “...something that governs our (including children) responsiveness to the word of others...” (Bai 2006: 154) The question then is: how can children be saved from such a disadvantaged position? As will be argued later, the introduction to philosophy from an early age can be one avenue through which children can be empowered in order to exit from this cocoon of subordination. The researchers attempt to clarify the notion of empowerment in the next section.

What is Empowerment?

Empowerment originates in the educational social, cultural and political discourse of the second half of the 20th century. (Giroux 1988; Sadan 1997). Human life is continuously a place of the struggle over existence, control and domination. In these power struggles is located the ability of human beings to develop and attain a full human life and dignity. Empowerment is a process that challenges our assumptions about the way things are and can be. Aloni (2011) comes up with a combination of two meanings that define empowerment: 1) the traditional meaning of the development of the spirit, the

intellect and the morality and 2) the newer meaning of the development of self-worth and capability together with critical and political literacy (Aloni 2011). Empowerment challenges our basic assumptions about power, helping, achieving, and succeeding. It is a process that fosters power in people for use in their own lives, their communities and in their society, by acting on issues they define as important. It is conceived as the idea of power because empowerment is closely related to changing power: gaining, expanding, diminishing and losing; hence it is “*a multidimensional social process that helps people gain control over their lives*” (Page and Czuba 1999: 25). It is multidimensional in that it occurs within sociological, psychological, political and other dimensions. It also occurs at various levels from, individual, to group and community. It is a social process in that it occurs in relation to others (Page and Czuba 1999; Peterson et al. 2005). Besides, it is an outcome that can be enhanced and evaluated. For this paper we will attend only to the individual empowerment dimension since attention is on how philosophy can enhance the empowerment of the child. We will work with the understanding that individual empowerment develops when people attempt to develop their capabilities to overcome their psychological and intellectual obstacles and attain self-determination, self-sufficiency, and decision-making abilities (Becker et al. 2004).

By self-determination is meant “... *the ability to chart one’s course in life*” (Fetterman 1996: 92). This forms the theoretical foundation of individual empowerment and is characterised by 1) consistency and perseverance in activities 2) courage to take risks 3) initiative and proactivity and 4) ability to voice one’s opinion. Self-determination makes possible individuals to meet the challenges of different situations. Besides, individual empowerment also involves a mastery of one’s situation by being “... in full control over someone, or something, and through in-depth understanding or greater skills” (Hu 2006: 531). In addition, such a form of empowerment entails increased levels of the ability to understand reality and the capacity to make decisions that impact on the conditions and qualities of life while self-determination refers to one’s ability to maintain a firm stand and give expression to one’s inner voice to achieve personal rights. Empowerment is best summed up as “... *the expansion of assets and*

capabilities of poor people (including the disadvantaged, among them children) to participate in, negotiate with, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives” (The World Bank 2006). On this view, empowerment recognises that all people, including children require assets and capabilities that not only increase their well-being and security, but their self-confidence in order to negotiate with the more powerful. This is also an acknowledgement that such capabilities are inherent in people and all that is needed are opportunities that enhance the realization of such potential. One might then pose the question: How does Philosophy for Children enlarge the child’s assets and capabilities to share in and navigate the socio-cultural, economic and political institutions that have an effect on their lives? The researchers posit that in order to help people to gain control of their lives we propose that exposing children to doing philosophy in schools from an early age is one way of getting them empowered. In the section that follows the researchers address the nature and character of Philosophy for Children in schools.

The Nature and Character of Philosophy for Children

As an educational approach, Philosophy for Children was first experimented within the classroom environment for more than a quarter of a century now (See Accorinti 2000; Cam 2006; Lipman 2009). This is credited to the initiative of Matthew Lipman, an American philosopher-cum-educationist who proposed that children can do philosophy from an early age. Philosophy for Children is a thinking approach designed for children, which encourages the development of questioning and thinking skills and through dialogue, it builds speaking and listening skills. A traditional (from Lipman’s original view) Philosophy for Children session starts with the children sitting in a circle and being presented with a stimulus, a story, an episode or picture. The children, individually or in pairs, then formulate philosophical questions inspired by the stimulus. Their questions are voted for and a dialogue on the question receiving the most votes ensues with the teacher being both an active participant and a facilitator. At the end of the enquiry they are asked to make a final statement and not a conclusive to the ques-

tion. Many activities and games can be introduced to the pupils within the traditional session or outside of the session to help develop skills to enable them to gain the most possible from the process. Hence Philosophy for Children has the goal to develop critical thinking in children through philosophical dialogue (Lipman 2003; Lipman et al. 1980).

For Lipman, the strengthening of the child's reasoning and moral judgment should be the chief business of the school. He criticised what he referred to as the *standard paradigm* of education – which is even difficult to do away with not only in the underdeveloped communities but also is the so-called first world. Such an education is the normal practice in schools and is characterised by the transference of knowledge from those who know (teachers) to those who do not know (learners). Knowledge about the world is thought to be clear and without problems. It is also thought that all existing knowledge about the world can be achieved and that the learning of the pupils is only based on the teacher's knowledge. It is assumed that pupils adopt knowledge by absorbing and storing information in their memory, that "*an educated mind is a well-stocked mind*" (Lipman et al. 1980: 14). These dominating suppositions lead to the conclusion that children who begin their formal education are lively, curious, imaginative and inquisitive, but gradually degeneration sets in, and with gradation upwards they become passive, incurious, uncritical and thoughtless.

It must however be noted that the practice of Philosophy for Children does not grant children with a body of explicit knowledge of the great works of philosophers known in the history of ideas. Rather there is a distinction between *doing* philosophy and *learning* philosophy; *teaching* philosophy to children and *doing* philosophy with them. In effect, Philosophy for Children consists in initiating children to engage in and practise philosophy through critical thinking as opposed to teaching them bound abstract knowledge. Gazzard makes the distinction more explicit as he writes "*...philosophy as a subject matter is something one learns about, and as such, it is not actually relevant to Philosophy for Children because the latter is founded on the view that philosophy is something one does*" (Gazzard 1996: 13). The bridge that links philosophy to Philosophy for Children is "*...complex thinking, which some refer to as critical*

thinking..." (Daniel and Auriac 2009: 418) hence Philosophy for Children is actual doing rather than learning and serves as the model of getting children to engage in thinking. As an approach Philosophy for Children then becomes a critical thinking skills programme specifically designed for children. But what is critical thinking and what does it involve?

The question of critical thinking, just like the question of philosophy, has had no consensual definition with philosophers and psychologists offering what according to the dimensions of their disciplines, is the most point-scoring definition. The researchers will sum up the multifarious definitions of critical thinking by engaging Robert Ennis, Matthew Lipman, and Harvey Siegel's conceptions of the notion. For Ennis critical thinking is "*...reasonable, reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do*" (Ennis 1987: 10). He later adjusted his definition to include creative thinking and the predispositions that accompany it. For him, creativity includes the skills of associating, inventing, proposing alternatives, formulating hypothesis and predispositions are attitudes such as being curious, strategic and rigorous. Hence critical thinking is "*...the ability to judge the credibility of sources, to identify conclusions, reasons and hypotheses, to appreciate the quality of an argument, to develop and defend a point of view, to ask relevant clarifying questions, to search for reasons, to draw conclusions that are credible and viable, etc.*" (Ennis 1993: 180). Matthew Lipman adds to the above by arguing that critical thinking is "*...skillful, responsible thinking that facilitates good judgment because it (a) relies upon criteria (b) is self-correcting, and (c) is sensitive to context*" (Lipman 1988a: 39). Siegel uses the link between critical thinking and education by defining the critical thinker (that is, a product of an ideal education that provides for critical thinking) as someone who has a critical spirit. Thus for him a critical thinker has the

... ability and disposition to consult her own independent judgment concerning matters of concern her...must be autonomous- that is free to act and judge independently of external constraint, on the basis of her own reasoned appraisal of the matter at hand...(is) self-sufficient and capable of determining her own future (Siegel 1985: 70).

The above scholars speak to notion of critical thinking as involving "...reflective, and evaluative thinking oriented towards what to think, believe and to do" (Daniel and Auriac 2009: 420). Just like philosophy, critical thinking implies a) the complex skills of logical, creative and caring thinking, and b) the critical spirit demonstrated by the affective and dialogical skills and predispositions in order to develop autonomous thinkers who can improve the quality of human experience. Splitter and Sharp (1995) offer a discussion of the nature of philosophy that stresses its connection to the activity of inquiry. They arrived at the conclusion that "the discipline of philosophy is, traditionally, a home for the teaching of thinking, for it is intimately connected, in terms of process and content, to thinking itself" (1995: 89) In effect they argue that there is a link between the improvement and teaching of thinking and inquiry and philosophy since

- *philosophy is thinking about thinking ... the foundation and the criteria by which judgments are made...*
- *philosophy is the quest for meaning...for connections and relationships of personal experience and understanding...*
- *philosophy is conversation as dialogue... facilitates the movement between the concrete and the conceptual...*
- *philosophy is about asking open questions ...the kind of thinking which both increases our understanding and leads us to ask further questions*
- *philosophy is creative thinking ...encourages and relies upon those who can think for themselves,...involves a dimension of freedom ; a capacity to take what one has learned and relate it to one's experiences in new ways (Splitter and Sharp 1995: 89-98)*

The question then is: if philosophy is about critical thinking and doing philosophy with children in schools can be one way "...to improve the quality of life in a democratic society" (Lipman 1998: 277), how can schools enhance the development of higher order thinking, better thinking and thinking about thinking? If Philosophy for Children is an activity-based inquiry into common and contestable questions that come in children's ways then how does it differ from any other discipline meant to enhance thinking? Proponents of the approach

have suggested that a safe conducive classroom environment called the *community of inquiry* is vital.

The community of inquiry is at the heart of Philosophy for Children and as a central pedagogy of the approach it involves

- *members learning to think for themselves by thinking with others... engaging in reasoned dialogue which, over time , is internalized within each participant*
- *each member seeing her/himself as one among others: to see myself as one among others is to understand that my place in the community is relational: that my identity, value and place in the group is bound up with identity, value and place of other members ...what, in psychological and ethical terms, is the reciprocity principle: I want/need to be valued by you, therefore I want/need to value you, and conversely... building a sense of identity requires the realization that I am both one (in relation to myself) and other (in relation to how others regard me) and*
- *the community as no larger than the sum of its parts, ...there is no inherent value or worth in the community of inquiry beyond that of its members. It serves as a vital means to an end, and that end is the personal development of those members (Splitter 2007: 271-273)*

The key practice that starts and drives the whole thinking process is enquiry if by enquiry is meant going beyond the information given to seek understanding and reflection is the key practice that leads to significant changes of thought and action. Hannam and Echeverria (2009) have identified the development of thinking skills as taking place through the interaction between four 'key elements' listed as critical thinking, creative thinking, collaborative thinking and caring thinking and four 'categories of skill', namely good reasoning skills, investigatory skills, conceptual skills, and translation skills (Hannam and Echeverria 2009: 13,159). In addition, the community of inquiry also gives the children the opportunity to put these concepts into practice—that is, to acquire habits of reflective thinking, of respect for peers, of co-operation with them, of seeking negotiation and of self-correction. The method also involves the development of a number of skills, such as giving good reasons, making good dis-

tinctions and connections, making valid inferences, hypothesising, asking good questions, using and recognising criteria, calling for relevance, seeking clarification, offering alternative points of view, building logically on the contributions of others, posing counter-examples, asking for reasons, testing and so on (Lipman et al. 1980; Sharp 1993). Hence participation in an ideal community of inquiry involves members in

- *Accepting corrections by peers willingly*
- *Listening to others attentively*
- *Revising one's views in light of reasons from others*
- *Building upon one another's ideas*
- *Developing their own ideas without fear of rebuff or humiliation from peers*
- *Opening to new ideas*
- *Asking relevant questions*
- *Discussing issues with impartiality*
- *Asking for criteria.* (Adopted from Sharp 1987: 38-39)

However as Sharp clarifies, "...these behaviours do not really pinpoint the presuppositions of the notion of the 'community of inquiry'" (Sharp 1987: 39). Educating children through the philosophical community of inquiry should serve the purpose of enabling the participants to make improved distinctions by recognizing the underlying suppositions, and separate better from worse reasons and criticise one's own goals, including those of others. Stressing the place of dialogical engagement in a philosophical community of inquiry, Sharp has concluded that human life would not be better off without "...*logic, open-mindedness, willingness to accept criticism, or consider alternative positions, willingness to subject our hypotheses to analysis, willingness to consider reasons...* (hence the need to) *approximate these traits to dialogue with one another* (Sharp 1987: 39). This draws us to the question of the relationship between Philosophy for Children and empowerment. If the above characterises the notion of Philosophy for Children how then does it enhance the empowerment of children from an early age?

Doing Philosophy for Children

Children in Africa can be exposed to do philosophy at an early age by reflecting on, analysing and interpreting their traditional beliefs, customs, habits and histories using their own

local languages as the medium of analysis. As Fasiku (2008: 11) informs us, "Different kinds of people, with different languages, cause their speakers to construe reality in different ways". It is in this respect that language becomes important as a tool in the formation of metaphysical and epistemological ideas, developing social and moral consciousness of a people. Essential in African ethno-philosophy are concepts such as: beauty; being; causation; evil; God; good; illusion; justice; knowledge; life; meaning; mind; person; reality; truth; right; understanding; and wrong. Children in Africa can analyse and synthesise the African traditional thoughts, beliefs, worldviews, concepts and through the traditional tools such as their vernacular and cultural background of folklores, tales, proverbs and puzzles. To emphasise the place of tradition in doing philosophy, Akpo-robaro and Emovon, have put forward that

... the proverbs of a community or nation is in a real sense an ethnography of the people, which if systematized can give a penetrating picture of the people's way of life, their philosophy, their criticism of life, moral truths and social values (Akporobaro and Emovon 1994: 1).

And in Africa, proverbs have a different function and level of theoretical meaning that make them key components, as well as expressions of a culture's viewpoints on a variety of important topics and problems. For example, among the Yoruba, the proverb has become so interwoven with living speech that can be heard at anytime and occasion. Proverbs, among the Yoruba also serve as means of achieving clarity and conciseness in discourse. The Yoruba proverb says that '*A proverb is the horse which carries a subject under discussion along; if a subject under discussion goes astray, we use a proverb to track it*' shows that in every statement made to reflect decisions taken by Yoruba people, proverbs are vehicles used in driving home their points. Children can thus be introduced to aptly employ proverbs in their vernacular deliberations on issues of interests as they explore concepts in their culture.

According to Mbiti (1970) it is in proverbs that the world of the Africans comes alive and prevails in science, metaphysics, logic, religion, and all other human endeavours ever known to humans. In support Makinde (1988: 5) proposes treating traditional African sayings as valuable

source-material for serious academic philosophical reflection because “*Although ... it is not a philosophy, it has in it a great stock of ideas that generate various philosophical issues, including metaphysics, ethics, epistemology, and science, of which the most developed is traditional medical science*”. The researchers agree with Makinde as he pares away useless or “outmoded” ideas, leaving some of “tradition” behind as he comments “*A great deal of African philosophy has its roots in cultural beliefs, some of which are not worth courting. Some of these beliefs may be regarded as outmoded in the 20th Century world and so ought to be forgotten*” (1988:5).

For Makinde, the philosophical task is to receive the messages of the past and to, carefully adjudicate what is worthy of passing on to the present generation. Thus, stories and proverbs can be understood as metaphors to guide moral choice and self-examination because when reflected upon they act as mirrors for seeing things in a particular way. More than any theoretical discussion, Van Manen (1990) underscores this point when he opines that they throw light on the concrete reality of lived experience; they serve as important pedagogical devices because they provide essential case material on which pedagogical reflection is possible. As learners analyse the proverbs and stories, they are able to reflect on the meanings and implications embedded in the experiences.

Most of the African oral narratives targeted at the children audience are forms of entertainment; the main reasons behind them are among other things for instructing, moulding of characters, and preparing them for adult roles (Nkata 2001). The themes and moral messages reflect the values of the society in which the stories are told. Some of the values which most Africans cherish as revealed in the oral narratives are honesty; hard work leading to achievement; perseverance; courage; respect for elders; obedience to the society and consideration for others. Other themes revealed in the oral narratives are warnings against: greed; laziness and gluttony which are rebuked.

From the above discussion, the researchers argue that Philosophy for Children programme in the African milieu should attempt to recover the aforementioned pedagogies of traditional Africa and integrate them into the content and processes of education in Africa. In support of

traditional methods of philosophical inquiry Bodunrin (1991) concludes that there is no *a priori* reason why proverbs, myths of gods and angels and social practices could not be proper subjects of philosophical inquiry. The researchers propose a creative recovery of the traditional ways of doing philosophical inquiry with children through taking a critical look at certain aspects of tradition that may have been effective in Africa’s past but now need to be re-appropriated in new ways to serve today’s purposes. Chinua Achebe, in his clarion call to save the African child from what he termed ‘the beautifully packaged poison’ imported into the continent in form of children’s story books, has advised African writers for children to draw from the infinite treasury of African oral tradition (Chakava 1998). Achebe is alarmed at the way African children are being fed with story books that do not reflect in any way the realities of their immediate social cultural values. The content and the methods of doing philosophy with children should start from the African experience before taking a global outlook. If, in this sense, philosophy is the activity of analysing and critically examining the raw materials in the form of beliefs, customs and values, that is, processing materials provided by culture, then it is defensible to situate Philosophy for Children against an African background. Through this self-reflective method philosophy becomes practical and is therefore precluded from becoming purposeless and unproductive abstraction.

Philosophy for Children as Empowerment

The researchers will begin this section by clearing the air and addressing critics who fail to discern Philosophy with Children from other educational practices that have been tried and tested in Africa and that emphasise child-centredness, critical thinking, open-mindedness, and critical decision-making to mention just but a few characteristics demanded of such projects in schools. One good example would be the Outcome-Based Education (OBE) attempted in South Africa. Admittedly, the two have almost similar expected outcomes. But of note is that Philosophy for Children is an approach specially designed to introduce children to philosophy by doing philosophy with them rather than teach them the ‘hard’ ideas of great philosophers in

history. As indicated in the previous section, its goal is to improve children's thinking so that they think better. The community of inquiry becomes the pedagogy that permits such to occur through dialogical engagement with peers. In this sense, Philosophy for Children is a discrete subject on the curriculum that will seek to meet the said goals. OBE, on the contrary, describes what disciplines should seek to achieve, that is, that all education should be based on certain assured outcomes such as critical thinking. Philosophy for Children as a programme and a discipline is not only about critical thinking but rather covers a wide spectrum of humanity including among them, the social (by enhancing collaborative and caring thinking) and the emotional (by enhancing the creative and imaginative domains). To this end, the researchers find Philosophy for Children a unique proposal for children in schools in Africa although it shares some commonalities with other thinking skills programmes. The researchers discuss below the promise of Philosophy for Children in fulfilling the empowerment agenda especially in the lives of the youth.

The human mind grants us with potent tools for knowing ourselves and others. By combining critical thinking with creative imagination in an effort to identify with and understand the lives, minds, and consciousness of human beings from the past and of our contemporaries in the present, we come to discover our own identity thereby empowering us to become the beings that we are. To this end, the goal of learning is the discovery of new questions about us and the world. Philosophy for Children is widely recognised for its ability to stimulate creative as well as critical thinking in young minds. It also extends children's thinking as well as encouraging them to express that thinking through speech thereby developing children's listening and speaking skills. However philosophy has certainly suffered from an image problem "... sometimes being thought of as a remote and abstract discipline suitable only for a small number of academically-minded adults..." (Millet and Tapper 2011: 1). But the UNESCO findings reveal that philosophy makes people and society better, that it contributes to the development of free citizens, to the maintenance of peace, and to the development of autonomous and critical judgments (UNESCO 2006, 2007). In support, Siegel writes:

The ideal [of cultivating reason] calls for the fostering of certain skills and abilities, and

for the fostering of a certain sort of character. It is thus a general ideal of a certain sort of person whom it is the task of education to help create. This aspect of the educational ideal of rationality aligns it with the complementary ideal of autonomy, since a rational person will also be an autonomous one, capable of judging for herself the justifiedness of candidate beliefs and the legitimacy of candidate values (Siegel 2003: 306).

Dearden expands the notion of autonomy and the alleged complementarity of the ideal of being a self-governing agent with the ideal of being a critical thinker. He writes:

...the development of autonomy as an educational aim ... is the development of a kind of person whose thought and action in important areas of his life are to be explained by reference to his own choices, decisions, reflections, deliberations—in short, his own activity of mind (Dearden 1972: 70).

However we are also aware of critics who have identified a contradiction between an ethos of reflection and questioning within the practice of the community of philosophical inquiry on the one hand and the "...unreflected and an unreflective foundation of this practice enacted through a particular pedagogy" (Biesta 2011: 311). In addition, such practice sees philosophy as an instrument to produce a particular kind of human subjectivity" (ibid). Based on the same view, Vansieleghen (2005) poses a critique of the instrumentalism inherent in Philosophy for Children especially with its goal of producing a democratic person. She questions whether education should be aimed at the creation of a pre-defined identity or it should remain open to something new. Hence she came up with the conclusion that

... Philosophy for Children cannot be seen as an experience of freedom because every act, every thinking process is determined by a future goal—namely creating autonomous, self-reflective citizens...(it therefore) remains within the realm of determining the subject...with its emphasis on critical thinking and autonomy, ...(it) is nothing more than the reproduction of an existing discourse. The autonomy that the child gains through Philosophy for Children by critical thinking and dialogue is nothing more than the freedom to occupy a pre-constituted place in that discourse (Vansieleghem 2005: 25).

But conversely the researchers hold that by introducing philosophy to children at an early age, education becomes a process of continuous group dialogue that makes possible children to acquire collective knowledge they can use to change society. The teacher, unlike in the standard paradigm of education referred to above, acts as a facilitator asking questions that help children identify problems common in their lived experiences (problem posing), and working with learners to discover ideas or create symbols (representations) that explain their life experiences (codification), and encouraging analysis of prior experiences and of society as the basis for new academic understanding and social action (conscientisation) (Shor 1987). Hence children become empowered to attend to life challenges with an open-mind. Philosophy for Children presupposes that it will begin from the classroom in which everyone has a recognised area of expertise that includes, but is not limited to, understanding and explaining their own life, and sharing this expertise becomes an essential element in the classroom curriculum. Both the teachers and learners with their areas of expertise are only one part of the community. All hold responsibility for organizing experiences to the entire community. As groups exercise this responsibility, children are empowered to take control over their lives. If this is what a classroom community of inquiry offers, then does it not fulfill the two basic central tenets of individual empowerment, that is, *self-determination* as monitoring and registering one's course in life and *mastery of one's situation* as the capacity to make decisions that impact on the condition and quality of one's life?

As discussed in the previous section, the dialogical classroom condition which typifies the Philosophy for Children approach is

...an environment characterized by trust and open inquiry (in which) we can also educate children to reason together regarding a balanced, humane conception of how to live well, while at the same time develop a more thoughtful tolerance of the diversity of perspectives that individuals have regarding what it is to live well (Sharp 1987: 39).

On this sense, providing education that allows children to do philosophy from an early age helps the young to proceed towards living an objective and impartial view of their world. Through inter-subjective dialogue in a commu-

nity of others, inquiring experimenting and considering others' evidence objective truth is arrived at. As Sharp affirms "... *through speaking to other persons, ...one becomes a person oneself...*" (Sharp 1987: 40). Hence the child, through engaging in a community of philosophical inquiry, takes control of his or her own world since speaking out one's ideas to others is creating and expressing one's thinking thus creating oneself. Doing philosophy with others in community then becomes a means of self-discovery; a vehicle of self-determination. To this end, Philosophy for Children is instrumental in making children what they can be or can do thereby justifying the concept of doing philosophy as empowerment.

In addition, Philosophy for Children transforms children into more objective members of society. To this McCall (1991) concluded 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... 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 (McCall 1991: 38)

Lipman et al. (1980) adds that Philosophy for Children, as a form of higher-order thinking, is an initiation into democratic and free life (Lipman et al. 1980). In line with Dewey, Lipman sees democracy not as a form of government but rather as a form of governing the self and a way of living together. Governing the self refers, on this account, to a process of seeking and increasing control over one's own thinking and action, and over the environment one lives in. To obtain that control it is important to act because it is only by acting and doing, according to Dewey (1916) that we can achieve the results to which our actions are directed. After all, the outcome of acts is judged by the consequences they produce. It is in this respect that Lipman speaks about children doing philosophy as a 'self-correcting practice': the more questions, the more hypotheses, and the more reliable the criteria. According to Splitter and Sharp,

[t]hinking for oneself involves a search for more and more reliable criteria so that one's judgements can rest upon a firm and solid foundation. Those who think for themselves are able to formulate arguments and conclusions that support specific points of view. But they are also

prepared to come up with new ideas and possibilities (Splitter and Sharp 1995: 16).

Hence an education that includes the above in the form of Philosophy for Children will endeavour to empower its clients - the learners, thereby ensuring that “...children are educated to be ideal citizens, capable of making rational and informed decisions...” (Jewel 2005: 494). What then does this imply for the child in Africa as described in earlier sections of this paper?

Implications for the Child in Africa

The humanitarian problems of Africa are manifest and widespread. Periodic occurrences of ethnic cleansing as was seen in Rwanda, the conflict in Darfur-Sudan, the breakdown of democracy in Zimbabwe, the outbreak of post-election violence in Kenya, the widespread growth of HIV/AIDS and overwhelming prevalent abject poverty are by no means isolated examples of the tragedies which continue to afflict the continent. The researchers contend that an empowered youth, as will be argued below, might save Africa since “Africans tend to remain in a victim role, which is easier than taking responsibility for their own sins and hatred” (Maathai 2009: 4-5). Given these circumstances how then can education be a useful instrument to curtail this morass? The researchers argue for the need of an education that will equip the citizens-in-waiting with the skills and competences that combat the identified vices in society. The researchers argue a case for a school curriculum that permits doing philosophy with children from an early age. The researchers concur with Gehrett (1997) who observed that:

As change agents the children who have the ability to think for themselves at their disposal are able to determine, through their own responsible deliberation, the desirable avenues for their own culture to traverse. They can understand the value of taking one course of action over another and can therefore manifest some control over the destiny of the culture themselves, from within. When faced with imperialism or oppression or imposition, children who have learned to critically evaluate will understand the consequences of their actions and will be better able to preserve the culture through both intracultural and intercultural dialogue. The transformation of the society will be pos-

sible through these children as-adults who are open to possibilities and can deliberate well for themselves (Gehrett 1997: 50-51)

Hence children grow and develop into critical thinkers usually involved in complicated life circumstances in which they have to exercise good judgment “...in interpreting [these norms] and determining what they require in [a] particular case” (Bailin et al. 1999b: 292). The community of inquiry mirrors a democratic spirit and initiates the children into the principles and values of this model; it engages young generations in a procedure of individual and political growth. Exercising in school freedom of thought and action allows children to enjoy a democratic way of living when they become active adults within their society. Given the African predicament described above, Philosophy for Children would contribute to a citizenry that disposes

...intuition to anticipate changes before they occur; empathy to understand that which cannot be clearly expressed, wisdom to see the connection between apparently unrelated events and creativity to discover new ways of defining problems, new rules that will make it possible to adapt to the unexpected (Csikszentmihalyi 1993: 109).

A number of educational theorists, (Noddings 2005; Nussbaum 1997, 2010; Sternberg 2003) have been drawing attention to the moral and political danger of education that aims exclusively at socio-economic advancement, and not also at living well, or wisdom. Yes, some parents and educators don't trust children to be 'the guardians of their own virtue' (Lipman and Sharp 1980: 181). They would say “No one should talk to my children about right and wrong but me” But doing philosophy with children involves empowering dialogue motivated by moral consciousness for the welfare and dignity of others and a just and amicable understanding of life in society. This involves acknowledgment of equal human value to others, recognising their human rights and committing oneself to treat others with dignity, honesty, fairness and consideration. The researchers project an empowering Philosophy for Children approach as having the potential of impressing on the child participant “growth in cognitive competencies which in turn facilitate the development of understanding and tolerance of different points of view...” (Hannam and Echeverria 2009: 44) as well as “... the development

of the ‘personal qualities of self-governance [and] self-control’ (ibid: 65). Hence, through the Philosophy for Children approach in schools in Africa, one aim of education should be the liberation of learners from unquestioning, uncritical mental habits as discussed earlier, in order that they may better develop the ability to think for themselves. On this view, Lipman et al. concluded that *“There is no study that can more effectively prepare the child to combat indoctrination than philosophy”* (Lipman et al. 1980). This however, does not suggest that the dispositions so acquired will remain in the classroom domain but rather it is assumed that children, as learners, will grow up as reasonable and judicious citizens and in turn form a reasonable adult citizenry in Africa. In sum, the ability to create meaning from a dialogical reflective practice promoted in a classroom community of philosophical inquiry is best articulated in Dewey’s (1938) words:

What is it to win prescribed amounts of information about geography and history, to win ability to read and write, if in the process the individual loses his own soul: loses his appreciation of things worthwhile, of the values to which these things are relative; if he loses desire to apply what he has learnt and, above all, loses the ability to extract meaning from his future experiences as they occur? (Dewey 1938: 49).

From the above, the researchers argue that exposing children to philosophy from an early age is empowering children with the capacity to reconstruct and reorganise each of their daily experiences through rigorous reflection thereby increasing their ability to direct subsequent actions which better their lives. Philosophy will build learners’ capacity for and skills in analysis and problem-solving and the ability to communicate ideas and information, to plan and organise. Hence the researchers argued that by doing philosophy from an early age, the child in traditional Africa is liberated from the position of servitude in which he or she is located by tradition to a new position of empowerment. Education becomes a vehicle for the liberation of the disadvantaged group- the children. The reflective character of philosophy is a meaning-making process that permits the child to progressively move from one experience to the next deeper understanding of their new experience thereby ensuring them individual progress and consequently

the progress of society. Education becomes, as Dewey puts it “... that reconstruction or re-organisation of experience which *adds* to the meaning of experience, and which *increases* (one’s) ability to direct the course of subsequent experience” (Dewey 1916: 74, 1944). An empowering philosophy for children through the community of inquiry demands children from an early age to commit themselves to engage into inquiry with their peers. Such a commitment is the beginning of a political commitment from the elementary school level. Based on the above, Sharp concluded that, In a real sense, *...(philosophy for children)* is a commitment to freedom, open debate, pluralism, self-government and democracy ... It is only to the extent that individuals have had the experience of dialoguing with others as equals, participating in shared, public inquiry that they will be able to eventually take an active role in the shaping of a democratic society (Sharp 1993: 343) [Emphasis ours].

CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is undeniable that one of the keystones of a quality education for all is the teaching of philosophy. In the discussion above the researchers have argued that the main attraction of the educational use of philosophy lies in the claim that it can help children and young people to develop skills for thinking critically, reflectively and reasonably. Doing philosophy with children in schools enhances the ideal that education has an instrumental role to ensure children blossom into autonomous critical thinkers. Significant to this ideal, an outstanding dimension of being self-governing, is that the child matures into an autonomous agent. Philosophy can also be conceived as creative thinking and a kind of ethical awareness in the form of caring thinking and hence a way of life—as the study and practice of how to live well, to live wisely. Hence doing philosophy with children proffers a promise to make children and society better by contributing to the development of free citizens, to the maintenance of peace and the development of autonomous and critical judgments. In effect, the whole conversation of Philosophy for Children is a quest to help participants, in this case children, to lead qualitatively better lives. It contributes to open the mind, to build critical reflection and independent thinking, which constitute a defence against

all forms of exploitation, obscurantism and segregation. If the general goal of education is to provide children with the maps of a complex world in a continuous condition of tension and distress, Philosophy for Children promises to be the compass that makes it possible the child to negotiate in that lifeworld. While Africa may not value the impact of philosophy on children in the immediate, its impact on tomorrow's adults could be so substantial as to astonish us for denying or marginalising Philosophy for Children to this date. The child becomes a fully paid up member of the humanity by learning the meaning of 'why' and 'because'. Hence the clarion call on Philosophy for Children to liberate the 'child' from the position of servitude to one of empowerment.

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