

inverting questions: an invitation to take a stroll on another side of questions

júlio miguel aráujo sousa¹
universidade dos açores; eb secundária da calheta, são jorge, portugal
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9193-4842>

abstract

This paper has two objectives: to explore how *inverting questions* in the Community of Philosophical Inquiry (Kennedy, 2004) can be a useful tool for triggering thought processes; and, more generally, to explore the importance of inverting the role traditionally given to children as bystanders to their own education and thought processes. On this basis, we will assume that children have an epistemic and political voice and that this voicing, placed on equal standing with the adult voice, is long overdue. It is undeniable that questions have a central role in P4C sessions (Costa-Carvalho E Mendonça, 2020; Costa-Carvalho E Kohan, 2020) and that, in the context of any given community of philosophical inquiry, they can trigger (Kennedy, 2004) a wide range of thought processes. Some questions may be too vague and require sharpening to adequately address the problem at hand, while others may promote a metacognitive approach to the issue under discussion, and to the entire thought process that sustains it. We will explore how *inverting questions* may be useful in this context. Moreover, we will consider how this thought *anastrophé* may emerge in concrete philosophical discussions with children. Our argument will, therefore, navigate the intersection between language and thought, logic and semantics, and theory and practice. Assuming that the term “inversion” may offer different understandings, we will try to outline this rhizomatic approach (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) to the concept. We will focus primarily on the child’s point of view, which we hold to be epistemologically privileged (Kennedy, 2020). It is our core belief that children’s voices should be granted scientific and political standing and that an epistemic inversion between adulthood and childhood in education must be explored.

keywords: inversion, *anastrophé*, questions, rhizome, Deleuze.

inversão das perguntas: um convite a deambular por um outro lado das perguntas

resumo

Este artigo procura atingir dois objetivos: explorar quão importante é a *inversão das perguntas* em contexto de comunidade de investigação filosófica (Kennedy, 2004), nomeadamente no desencadear de processos de pensamento filosófico; e, mais genericamente, reconhecer o quanto é necessário inverter os papéis dados tradicionalmente às crianças, essencialmente tomados como espectadores do seu próprio pensamento e educação. No seguimento desta última ideia, assumiremos que as crianças possuem voz epistémica e política, em pé de igualdade da do adulto, e que esta voz há muito que tarda em fazer-se ouvir. É um facto indesmentível que as perguntas têm um papel central nas

¹ e-mail: julio.m.a.sousa@gmail.com

inverting questions: an invitation to take a stroll on another side of questions

sessões de Filosofia para Crianças organizadas em comunidade de investigação filosófica (Costa-Carvalho e Mendonça, 2020; Costa-Carvalho e Kohan, 2020), e que desencadeiam (Kennedy, 2004) inúmeros processos de raciocínio e de pensamento. Algumas destas questões necessitarão de clarificação, sendo vagas, e outras poderão mesmo facilitar um posicionamento metacognitivo face ao assunto em discussão e face ao próprio processo de pensamento que o sustenta. Exploraremos, pois, neste contexto, o quanto a *inversão das perguntas* pode ser uma ferramenta útil, considerando igualmente, como esta anástrofe do pensamento pode ocorrer em diálogo filosófico com crianças. A nossa proposta deambulará, pois, na intersecção da linguagem e do pensamento, da lógica e da semântica, da teoria e da prática. Conscientes que o termo “inversão” pode ter vários significados, ensaiaremos neste artigo uma abordagem rizomática ao conceito (Deleuze e Guattari, 1987) com especial foco na voz e na perspectiva das crianças e no quanto esta perspectiva é epistemologicamente privilegiada (Kennedy, 2020). Um dos nossos pressupostos centrais é o de que a voz das crianças possui valor epistémico e político igual à do adulto, e que esta inversão entre adultidade e infância no contexto da educação também urge fazer-se.

palavras-chave: inversão, *anastrophé*, perguntas, rizoma, Deleuze.

invertir las preguntas: una invitación a dar un paseo por un otro lado de las preguntas

resumen

Este artículo tiene dos objetivos: explorar cómo *invertir las preguntas* en la Comunidad de Indagación Filosófica (Kennedy, 2004) puede ser una herramienta útil para desencadenar procesos de pensamiento; y, más en general, explorar la importancia de invertir el papel tradicionalmente asignado a los niños como espectadores de su propia educación y de sus procesos de pensamiento. Sobre esta base, asumiremos que los niños tienen una voz epistémica y política y que esta voz, situada en pie de igualdad con la voz de los adultos, hace tiempo que debería haberse hecho oír. Es innegable que las preguntas tienen un papel central en las sesiones de FpN (Costa-Carvalho E Mendonça, 2020; Costa-Carvalho E Kohan, 2020) y que, en el contexto de cualquier comunidad de investigación filosófica, ellas pueden desencadenar (Kennedy, 2004) una amplia gama de procesos de pensamiento. Algunas preguntas pueden ser demasiado vagas y requerir un pulido para abordar adecuadamente el problema en cuestión, mientras que otras pueden promover un enfoque metacognitivo de la cuestión en debate, y de todo el proceso de pensamiento que lo sustenta. Exploraremos cómo *invertir las preguntas* puede ser de utilidad en este contexto. Además, consideraremos cómo esta *anastrophé* de pensamiento puede surgir en discusiones filosóficas concretas con niños. Nuestra argumentación, por tanto, navegará por la intersección entre lenguaje y pensamiento, lógica y semántica, y teoría y práctica. Asumiendo que el término "inversión" puede ofrecerse a diferentes interpretaciones, intentaremos esbozar este enfoque rizomático (Deleuze y Guattari, 1987) del concepto. Nos centraremos principalmente en el punto de vista del niño, que consideramos epistemológicamente privilegiado (Kennedy, 2020). Estamos convencidos de que a las voces de los niños se les debería conceder un estatus científico y político y de que una inversión epistémica entre adultez e infancia debe ser explorada en la educación.

palabras clave: inversión, *anastrophé*, preguntas, rizoma, Deleuze.

inverting questions: an invitation to take a stroll on another side of questions

some initial thoughts about listening to children's voices and cartography

*To philosophize, therefore, is to invert the
habitual direction of the work of thought.
Bergson, Henri, 1999*

This paper is part of an ongoing wider publicly-funded research project, projecto *escuto.te: vozes das infâncias entre a filosofia e a política* M1.1.C/C.S./031/2021/01, funded by the Regional Government of the Azores, that explores the silence and anonymity children have suffered in educational contexts. This silent, nameless and powerless child – and we may even add that it may also be a silenced, unnamed and power deprived child – is at the core of our research project, as well as our practical engagement with the community of philosophical inquiry (Kennedy, 2004). But in addition to explaining *who* we are and *what* we are proposing, we must also offer a brief reflection on *how* we intend to do it. To this end, we intend to use cartographic methodology, inspired by Gilles Deleuze's rhizomatic approach to concepts and thinking. A way of engaging reality, not from a linear and single point of view, but one that embraces diversity and multiplicity at its very core. In Deleuze's words (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 21):

Let us summarize the principal characteristics of a rhizome: unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states. The rhizome is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple. It is not the One that becomes Two or even directly three, four, five, etc. It is not a multiple derived from the One, or to which One is added ($n + 1$). It is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (*milieu*) from which it grows and which it overfills. It constitutes linear multiplicities with n dimensions having neither subject nor object, which can be laid out on a plane of consistency, and from which the One is always subtracted ($n - 1$).

This point of view embraces diversity and plurality as one of its most significant features. It is a qualitative approach to children's speech and thought,

inverting questions: an invitation to take a stroll on another side of questions

and we strongly believe that any other method would probably result in measuring how close or far children are from a predetermined adult standard. We will thus narrate how and in what subtle ways we were affected by our own interactions with a large group of children, which whom we believe that we share the same epistemic, philosophical and political voice. We will, as Passos and Barros propose, undergo a methodologic inversion. No longer attempting a *metha-hódos*, a pre-determined path that will ensure a specific goal, but its inversion, an *hódos-metha*, one in which we will assume that the path itself is our goal and provides us with meaning (Passos, Kastrup and da Escóssia, 2009, p. 17).

Instead of excluding its subject of interest, and in doing so asserting an elusive degree of objectivity, this research method takes research to be a space of *encounter* between a ~~subject~~-researcher and ~~object~~-researched². Nor is it a reflection, in the traditional sense of trying to emulate an external image of the given object of our considerations, but rather, a diffraction (Davies, 2014, pp. 2-5). A moment and a methodological attitude that emerges from the *encounter* one acknowledges as the onto-epistemological basis for research. As Davies says: "The diffractive researcher's task (...) is not to tell of something that exists independent of the research encounter, but to open up an immanent truth - to access that which is becoming true, ontologically *and* epistemologically, at the moment of the research encounter." (Davies, 2014, p. 3). Our scientific authorship, emerging from our encounter with children - no longer viewed as outside objects of consideration but as fellow researchers - will thus seek to avoid being exclusively adult in nature.

walking forward and returning to some sort of beginning

If it is possible to identify a moment in time that could serve as the starting point for this paper, we would have to choose two Master's level classes held online

² The concept subject and object were written this way, according to Bronwyn Davies (Davies, 2014, p. 3), to emphasize and interfere "(...) with the tendency that our language has to invoke entities which it then takes to be real, fixing them in place through ways of speaking - or modes of enunciation." Passos and Barros offer a complementary point of view to this discussion (Passos, Kastrup & da Escóssia, 2009, p. 18), stating that subject and object are "(...) coemergent effects of the research process."

in April 2019, in which Walter Kohan challenged us to think about *what else* (besides answering them) we could do with the questions that emerge in any given community of philosophical inquiry³. We suggested at the time, still unaware that our answer would lead to this article, that inverting questions might be a useful tool for philosophical thinking in community. The group immediately latched onto this idea and decided to try it out. We took one of the community's previous questions and experimented with various forms of inverting it.

Our starting question was "Where does a question begin?" and, as we tackled this challenge to invert it, soon intriguing *inversions* started to emerge. "Where does a question end?" "When does a question start?" "When does a question end?" "Where or when do we question for a beginning?" "Does a question demand an end?" "What is a non-question?" ... That day we realized how useful this tool could be when working in community, and how rich the thought processes it triggered could be. Suddenly, in this first attempt at inverting questions, we were questioning whether *beginning* had the same conceptual content as *start*, or if *end* was their inversion. What do we mean when we invert concepts related to time, such as *when*, with other concepts related to space, such as *where*? Were *answers* the direct inversion of the *questions* we considered? Were we promoting, with this exercise, multidimensional thought along the lines of what Lipman proposed (Lipman, 2003, pp. 195-204)? Were we promoting *critical thinking* (Lipman, 2003, p. 212), by inviting those engaged in philosophical dialogue to search for a personal meaning of *inversion*, and consequently thinking critically in accordance with it? What instances of *creative thinking* (Lipman, 2003, pp. 245-247) were we addressing? By inverting questions, were we *caring* (Lipman, 2003, pp. 261-271) and valuing our fellow members of any community of inquiry?

³ We would like to thank Walter Kohan for his thought provocative classes and for nurturing question inversion from scratch. We would like to thank and acknowledge also Magda Costa Carvalho for being a friend and an inspiration, and for reading and commenting the various drafts that preceded this last text. Her generosity is without measure. We would like to thank also Paula Vieira for enriching the ideas here presented, for believing in their potentiality and, last but not least, for being a friend. We would also like to express our gratitude regarding our friends at *escuto.te* project for their support, critics and openness of spirit. All our talks and discussions are also part and parcel of this text. And finally, we would like to thank all the children and teenagers with whom we worked for the past years for all their enthusiasm, freedom of thought, generosity and friendship.

inverting questions: an invitation to take a stroll on another side of questions

The possibilities offered by this exercise appeared promising, and it reminded us of how Susan Gardner acknowledges how important it is, when working in P4C, to *question to hesitation*, rather than *hesitating to question* (Gardner, 2011, pp. 352-358). Inverting the questions seemed to do just that: to promote an attitude of profound questioning, even when we may have felt that we had taken no steps ahead, or anywhere, for that matter. On the other hand, this exercise echoed Sharp and Splitter and their acknowledgement that the nature of philosophical concepts is central, common and controversial (Sharp & Splitter, 1995, p. 130). The concept *inversion* seemed to do just that: it was a *central* concept, meaning that it was a focal point, one that emerged from the grayness that so often characterizes human existence and experience; it was a *common* concept, in the sense that it related to general human experience; and, third, it was *controversial*, meaning that it might hold different conceptual contents. Henceforth, at the end of this activity, as we thought together about its relevance, an urgent critique arose: what do we mean when we use the word “inversion”? Is it an exercise in logic? Is it a question of semantics? Is the meaning and sense of the term “inversion” clear enough to have practical value? Or does it, in a subtle way, have a deep philosophical foundation underlying it?

This paper thus constitutes an attempt to sit with these demanding questions and to follow the path that our own thought processes have taken since then. Like wandering in the woods without a specific purpose or destination, that is, wandering as our sole purpose and destination, we will identify the stepping stones that led us on our path to this day.

First, we will explore the concept of *inversion*, with its multiple possible meanings. Second, we will consider what a question is and how it may trigger different thought processes... processes that might be of interest to and importance for the community of inquiry. Underlying these two moments, like when we raise our head up, gaze upon the landscape and realize that our personal path is a meaningful part of it, it is important to note that we are taking a deleuzian perspective as we outline the meaning of *inversion*. In other words, we assume that it may not have a precise and unequivocal content, but rather a rhizomatic one. This

is what Kohan invites us to do when he rejects any univocal perspective of education, of learning and knowledge, stating that multiplicity is the way, the means and the meaning of every philosophical exercise (Kohan, 2002, pp. 123-130). A meaning that doesn't exclude diverse and problematic approaches to the concept, but rather welcomes them. Our path, as you may have guessed, is not straight, but will, as *anastrophé*⁴, the Greek word for inversion suggests, turn us upside down, turnabout, turn around, return, re-turn, repeat, go back, but also, hold ourselves in place, gather and inhabit.

what is a question? a question is what? a first step

In classic Aristotelian Logic, we learn that an inversion is the obverse proposition of an initial one, being its logic equivalent. For example, "All of A is B" becomes, when inverted, "None of B is not A". This is, as we all know, a paradigmatic example of this thought structure, and we can clearly see that both propositions are equivalent (Blackburn, 1997, pp. 235, 306). In his first novel, *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*, Matthew Lipman provides several of these formal Aristotelian inversions, like when, for instance, Harry explores how a true proposition such as "No subjects are interesting" can be inverted into an equivalent proposition as "No interesting thing is a subject". Or when, later, how "Some subjects are interesting", may be inverted into its logical equivalent "Some interesting things are subjects" (Lipman, 1994, pp. 75-76). It is noteworthy that *inversions* are indeed placed at the very beginning of Philosophy for Children, as well as in Lipman's earliest texts, thus indicating that *inversions* are a tried and true resource for the community of philosophical inquiry and are part and parcel of its core exercises⁵.

The Stoics also debated about inversion, arguing that propositions, or assertions, have truth value on their own, on the relations they have with other

⁴ Liddell, Scott and James Greek-English Lexicon, New York, Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1966.

⁵ A more complete discussion of the logical structure of *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*, namely transitive, intransitive and nontransitive and symmetrical, asymmetrical and nonsymmetrical relationships between terms and propositions can be found in Lindop, Clive (1992), "Relationships", in Sharp, Ann Margaret, Reed, Ronald F. (Ed.), *Studies in Philosophy for Children - Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, pp. 128-134.

inverting questions: an invitation to take a stroll on another side of questions

assertions – thus forming non-simple assertions - and are largely dependent on the context that produced their meaning and content. Using a classic example, the assertion “Dio walks” is true only if Dio is actually walking in the moment the assertion is proffered (Bobzien, 2003, pp. 85-123). According to the Stoics it is also possible to invert the assertions that form any conjunctive or disjunctive proposition, thus creating equivalent propositions. These logical operations have commutative properties, and therefore can be inverted at will. If on the one hand, Aristotelian Logic, and Lipman’s *Harry* as well, aimed to build a rigorous thought structure that ignored the content of the premises it used in multiple inferences, Stoics, on the other hand, opened up this scheme to the infinite possibilities of concrete human existence. No longer constrained by the pure truth value of any given assertion, disconnected from its actual meaning, Stoics considered the context and the multiple peculiarities in which assertions emerged as constituting a significant dimension of their truth value. *Inverting* is no longer a positional game one plays with the concepts used in a declarative proposition. *Inverting*, now, considers life and human experience. Its truth value becomes interwoven with concrete human existence and thought.

But after we had spent some time wandering along this path, the Logical nature of questions, became our central issue. What is a question, after all, when looked upon from a logical point of view? Felix S. Cohen gave us quite a remarkable answer to this. In a rather curious article, published in 1929 and concisely entitled “What is a question?”, he acknowledges that a question is a psychological event characterized by the search for a particular piece of information and that aims at the consequent fixation of a certain belief, naturally involving some sort of evaluation of the terms from which its content gains meaning (Cohen, 1929, p.352). But when it is specifically considered as a logical entity, Cohen states that a question is a propositional form or function, without any intrinsic, predetermined truth value, and one that at its core contains too many variables, thereby rendering its truth value unknown. Seen this way, answers would be the unveiling of this unknown propositional truth value, or the acknowledgement one makes of the terms it holds. From Aristotelian strict thought structure and its multiple variable forms to the

Stoic appeal to context, we were now confronted with the idea that, when considered from a logical point of view, questions were pure possibility. They were neither true or false, meaning that they had the possibility to be both, and at their core they hold too many unknown or unrevealed variables, thus expressing our ignorance and our awe.

inverting questions in community? community inverting questions? a different step

If Logic was our first step into the forest, as we began inverting questions in the communities of philosophical inquiry in which we worked, a new array of concerns appeared, enticing us to follow. No longer constrained by a given definition of the concept of inversion, we were able to embrace all the meanings that emerged in philosophical dialogue with children and teenagers⁶. We will also resist, in the pages that follow, any urge to organize or systematize their contributions and, in doing so, make them conform to a predetermined adult standard. The invitation to take a stroll across the landscape still stands. It is our one and only purpose.

One of the inversions that affected us occurred in a community of inquiry in our hometown, when M. (9 years old) inverted another child's question: "From what is the pen's ink made?" into "The pen's ink is made from what?". Were we asking the same thing? Was the unknown term or information demanded by the question the same? Was the relative position these terms occupied interchangeable, thereby creating equivalent questions? Or, are we, as Deleuze suggests, tackling head on the disruptive relationship that exists between identity and repetition?

Another young person, V. (aged 10) asked: "Where are you going tomorrow?" Inverting this question, M. (10) countered "Where did you go yesterday?" In these *inversions* we can see that time is the main focus. More specifically the future and past dimensions of chronological time. Are they opposed to each another? Are they the *inversions* of one another? Is the past an inversion of the future? Is the narrative of our past accomplishments the direct inversion of our future and potential actions? Is what we have already done the immediate inversion

⁶ The examples here present were collected from the communities of inquiry we worked with since 2019. At the time we did not ask for the children's permission to use their questions in this paper. For this reason only, we decided to anonymize their rich and thoughtful contributions.

inverting questions: an invitation to take a stroll on another side of questions

of what we may potentially do? Are we also inverting time with space, as we aggregated when and where?

Another example of this broader and more inclusive meaning of inversion might be what J. (14) asked when she said: "In your opinion, what does school do to us students?" As she considered this question, D. (also 14) demanded: "For us students, what does school make us into?" And by doing this, a question apparently became a question-oneself. No longer does the focus reside outside, but rather within the person that formulated the original interrogative. No longer seeking objective information outside-oneself regarding what school may or may not do to us students, but reaching inside oneself and pondering what, in our own opinion, we might identify as school's direct influence on our own being. Are we creating some sort of distance from being merely subjected to school practices and goals, to become a critical participant of this ongoing complex process we call education or schooling? Are we distancing ourselves from being bystanders of the whole process to become active agents of our own personal enrichment?

Another time, when D. (15) asked: "Does life has any purpose?", J. (also 15) inverted it to "Is life predestined?". Are these synonymous expressions? Are they equivalent propositional forms? Does living a life with purpose mean the same thing as living a life that is predestined? Does having a purpose in life mean the same as having one's life predestined in advance?

In the same community, another pair of inversions stood out: S. (15) asked "What do I appear to be?" a question that M. (15) inverted to "What am I really?" Are appearance and essence terms that invert each other? What does it mean to really be something? How is it different from what I appear to be? Our thoughts wander and wonder.

Although this last example was not an explicit inversion of any question - and of course, it is still legitimate to ask to begin with, "What is an inversion of a question?" - it happened during the research for this paper and affected us in ways that we could not ignore. Should we not, like Kastrup asks us, when describing *attentive recognition*, let our attention focus on it, even if it requires us to reshape the whole field of observation? In her own words (Passos, Kastrup and Da Escóssia,

2009, p. 44): “What do we do when we are attracted by something that forces our attention to stop and requires the reconfiguration of the territory under observation?” We decided not to ignore it.

One day in a P4C session, while considering what questions are and if there might be different questions and/or different types of questions, in a very clear voice S. (3 years old) told us, “A question is a thing. A question looks for things for us little ones.” In these two sentences we can see how, suddenly, questions are brought into the concrete realm of things. A question is not an abstract exercise. A question is not an immaterial entity. A question is a thing. There is an undeniable materiality (a question matters!) to its nature that somehow eludes us when thinking about questions. And this boy, with his privileged, shining 3-year-old eyes, continued with, “A question looks for things for us little ones.” Not only we are talking about a thing-question but also a thing-looking-for-things. Questions, no longer abstract and immaterial but concrete real things, find themselves searching for concrete material things. Searching for things for the small ones, the minorities. Perhaps we could also say, as S. suggests, that questions are things and thing-looking-for-things-for-the-small-ones. Are concrete material things the inversion of abstract immaterial ones? The *little ones* are the inversion of whom? What relations might we unveil in these inversions?

entering uncharted territories? territories uncharted entering? territories entering uncharted? nonsense and play

When we presented a first draft of this paper at ICPIIC Conference in Tokyo, Japan 2022, two questions came from the audience regarding how to distinguish this *inversion* of questions from other contributions related to nonsense or play. What could serve as a firm criterion to determine which contributions fall in the category of interesting inversions and which ones do not? How do we distinguish question inversion from nonsense and play?

When walking in the woods, how do we know that we have reached the limit of our stroll? Can nonsense and play function as a kind of formless land? A land apart from the one we inhabit and through which we leisurely walk? If this is the

inverting questions: an invitation to take a stroll on another side of questions

case, and a border that divides our path in two stands in our way, what would our next steps be? Should we cross this *limés*? Should we not? Should we thread it up and down, thus creating a new imaginary path on which to wander and wonder? In fact, why not, as the word *anastrophé* also suggests, inhabit and stay for a while in this formless land? It may well happen that every step we take may take place in this space in between back and forth, reason and nonsense, seriousness and play.

Deleuze offers one possible path when he asserts that the rhizome is always at the very center of a conjunctive view of reality. No longer oscillating or choosing between different and opposing concepts, we find ourselves on this ontological middle ground that aggregates rather than distinguishes, thus rendering any line or border a pivoting point in this *thousand-plateau*-long structure (Deleuze, 1987, p. 25).

A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb "to be," but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, "and... and... and..." This conjunction carries enough force to shake and uproot the verb "to be." Where are you going? Where are you coming from? What are you heading for? These are totally useless questions. Making a clean slate, starting or beginning again from ground zero, seeking a beginning or a foundation—all imply a false conception of voyage and movement (a conception that is methodical, pedagogical, initiatory, symbolic...).

On the other hand, the concept of nonsense is highly debatable with regards to children's contributions. When we say that a child's contribution doesn't make sense, that means nothing. What are we really saying? We may be envisioning a sort of dissymmetrical correlation expressed in dualities. One that, like Deleuze states (Deleuze, 1990, p. 66), "is at once excess and lack, empty square and supernumerary object, a place without an occupant and an occupant without a place, 'floating signifier' and floated signifier, esoteric word and exoteric thing, white word and black object." When confronted with nonsense, are we trying to name this strangeness that exists when we come across words and things that belong to different *series*, *series* that do not align or overlap or intersect? Or are we, like David Kennedy points out (Kennedy, 2006, p. 97), repeating the "normative self-structure that dominates the western patriarchal tradition, and which must exclude the Other

in the form of child, woman, 'native' and 'slave' – any form of subjectivity in which body and feeling, in other words, 'desire' interplay in a different relation with reason”?

Moreover, the word play presents us with a different set of issues that stem from its rich conceptual content. In Portuguese, the word *play* can be translated as a game - “um jogo” - with predetermined rules that determine a winner; a joke - “uma brincadeira” - something funny one does or says that provokes laughter; or the theatrical enactment of an activity or character - “uma peça de teatro”. The corresponding verb names the action of said activity, joke and enactment – which in Portuguese may be expressed by verbs such as “jogar”, “brincar”, “atuar” and “fingir”. Can inverting questions in fact be a sort of play? And perhaps, closer to the question raised when we presented this as a conference paper, do we want inversions to be some sort of play? And if so, why is play understood as the inversion of serious and substantial work?

Again, like nonsense, play has played – the repetition here is fully intentional - a very significant role in philosophical thought and is highly problematic. For instance, Giorgio Agamben, in a tribute to Claude Lévi-Strauss, stresses how important play is because of its disruptive role in rite and structured time (Agamben, 2008, pp. 81-107). Its emergence accelerates time, destroys the calendar, subverts hierarchies. Isn't this in some way correlated with what one seeks to accomplish in a community of philosophical inquiry session with children? Aren't we all looking for this suspension and acceleration of time? This subversion of the roles we normally *play* within the confines of our own institutions? This subversion of those who hold power and those destitute of voice and political decision? Should we not acknowledge that children are *unconscious masters* of play, like Kennedy states (Kennedy, 2006, p. 155) when he defines playfulness as a *paradigm of the universality of the lived event*? In his own words:

Play is the universal quality of event in two ways: both the activity of the “playing out” of roles and narrative patterns that always transcend the participants, a being caught up in a play of the world that the event is; and the particular re-presentation – the “play” In the sense of the dramatic narrative as a whole – which the playing out accomplishes. The young child is a sort of unconscious master of both these aspects of the lived event.

inverting questions: an invitation to take a stroll on another side of questions

Re-turning and again wondering, while strolling through this borderland that the nonsense and play arguments sent us to, one might even feel, like Gareth Matthews states (Matthews, 1980, p. 11), that “Philosophy may indeed be motivated by puzzlement. But to show that and stop there is to suggest, quite mistakenly, that philosophy is something terribly serious. In fact, it is often play, conceptual play.” If this is the case, and play is at the heart of what we call philosophy, ontologically interwoven with the puzzlement of human existence, how can we cast it aside? A strange land that exists beyond the realm of reasonable thought. Should we not, instead, returning to Deleuze and his reflection about Lewis Carroll’s games in *Alice* (Deleuze, 1990, p. 59), seek the ideal game situation? One without preexisting rules. One in which each movement brings forth its own set of rules. A game also that, instead of dividing chance into a set of possible plays or movements, assumes that the whole of these movements is fortuitous, random, and keeps spreading chaotic ripples as the game advances. And third, a game that involves qualitative movements instead of numeric actions or plays.

why inverting questions. returning home? home re-turning?

The path we took in this paper was not straight, and it meandered through the forest without a predetermined path or objective. Inverting questions is not meant to be a methodology, and even less a prescription for philosophical dialogue with children. At best, it is a tool (or toy) we can use in the community. A sort of first step that may lead us wherever the argument takes us (Lipman, 1997, p. 7). Or just an example of a simple question (what else can we do with questions besides answering them?) that can trigger different ways of thinking with a community of inquiry.

From the straight paths of logic – although it is debatable what a straight path is and how it is preferable? - to the meandering trails our walk has led us on, our thoughts have revolved around two issues: to pinpoint moments and thoughts that, up to this point, made up our path of reasoning about *inverting questions*; and to listen to children’s thoughts and the enunciations that emerge and are produced in the process. On this second matter, we must acknowledge, with Bronwyn Davies,

how important listening is, for when we listen to children, we open ourselves to life in all its multiplicity and difference. As Davies puts it (Davies, 2014, p. 1):

Listening is about being open to being affected. It is about being open to difference and, in particular, to difference in all its multiplicity as it emerges in each moment in between oneself and another. Listening is about not being bound by what you already know. It is life as movement. Listening to children is not just a matter of good pedagogy; encounters with others, where each is open to being affected by the other, is integral, I will suggest, to life itself.

On the other hand, one might ask what is the point of acknowledging children's voices, only to realize that this voice remains powerless? Is it powerless because it's not loud enough? Could some kinds of listening actually be another way of silencing children's voices? Some of these questions suggest that another type of inversion is needed. An inversion that would, as Johanna Haynes and Karin Murriss argue, ensure children a form of participation not limited to periodical auscultation (Haynes and Murriss, 2012, p. 177). In their own words:

To participate is more than being periodically consulted about their points of view. Participation implies active involvement in decision making and some appropriation of the process of decision making itself, along with the introduction of processes that may allow various ways of representation, including those that are sympathetic to actual interests and those communicative forces related to the children involved. It implies having opportunities to question, present ideas and initiate an action.

This path we chose started... it wondered and wandered, and now it comes to an end. Maybe it never started, or maybe it will never end. The path we took, and mistakenly considered as going forth and back, reversing, inverting, and re-turning, was ultimately a middle ground (maybe a playground). Always a place in between. One of those pivoting places or moments, where we tried to add up different realities, and places, and ideas, and persons, with different points of view, living and breathing, caring and thinking and playing, and... the invitation to stroll still stands, and has no preset goals, or limits. Never.

references

Agamben, G. (2008) *Infância e História – Destruição da experiência e da origem da história*. Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG.

- Bergson, H. (1999). *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis.
- Blackburn, S. (1997). *Dicionário de Filosofia*, Gradiva, Lisboa.
- Bobzien, S. (2003) "Logic". In Inwood, Brad. (Ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to The Stoics*. Toronto: Cambridge University Press.
- Cohen, F. S. (1929). "What is a question?" *The Monist*, 39 (3), pp. 350-364.
- Costa Carvalho, M.; Kohan, W. (2018). "Da árvore e do rizoma: pensar para além do método o encontro da filosofia com a infância". *Revista Educação e Filosofia*, 32(65).
- Costa Carvalho, M.; Mendonça, D. (2020). "As potências do perguntar". In Costa Carvalho, Magda *Filosofia para Crianças*. Rio de Janeiro: NEFI Edições.
- Davies, B. (2014) *Listening to Children: Being and becoming*. Routledge: New York.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1987) *A Thousand Plateaus*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Deleuze, G. (1990) *The Logic of Sense*. London: The Athlone Press.
- Gardner, S. (2011) "Questioning to Hesitation, rather than Hesitating to Question: a Pragmatic Hermeneutic Perspective on Educational Inquiry", *Philosophy Study*. 1(5), pp. 352-358.
- Haynes, J.; Murriss, K. (2012). "Escuta, hospitalidade e ensino filosófico". In Xavier, Ingrid M., & Kohan, Walter O. (Ed.), *Filosofar: aprender, ensinar*. Autêntica Editora: Belo Horizonte.
- Kennedy, D. (2004). "The philosopher as teacher. The role of a Facilitator in a Community of Philosophical Inquiry". *Metaphilosophy*, 35 (5), pp. 745-765.
- Kennedy, D. (2006) *Changing Conceptions of Childhood from the Renaissance to Post-Modernity: A Philosophy of Childhood*. New York: The Edwin Mellen Press.
- Kennedy, D. (2020) *A comunidade da Infância*. Rio de Janeiro: NEFI Edições.
- Kohan, W. (2002). "Entre Deleuze e a Educação: Notas para uma política do pensamento". *Educação & Realidade*, 27 (2), jul./dez. 2002, pp. 123-130.
- Lindop, C. (1992) "Relationships". In Sharp, Ann Margaret, & Reed, Ronald F. (Ed.). *Studies in Philosophy for Children - Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press. pp. 128-134.
- Lipman, M. (1994) *A Descoberta de Aristóteles Maia*. Lisboa: Edições Colibri
- Lipman, M. (1997) "Thinking in Community". *Inquiry: Critical Thinking Across the Disciplines*, 16 (4), pp. 6-21.
- Lipman, M. (2003) *Thinking in Education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Matthews, G. B. (1980) *Philosophy and the young child*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Splitter, L. & Sharp, A. M. (1995) *Teaching for Better Thinking*. Melbourne: Acer.
- Passos, E.; Kastrup, V. & da Escóssia, L. (Org.). (2009) *Pistas do Método Cartográfico: pesquisa-intervenção e produção de subjetividade*. Porto Alegre: Editora Sulina.

submitted: 03.10.2022

approved: 02.02.2023