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Child's Voice, Child's Right: Is Philosophy for Children in Africa the Answer?

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Abstract In this concept paper, we explore the notion of the child's right to be heard, starting in the classroom. The idea that children have unique needs has paved the way for the admission that children have a similar spectrum of rights as adults do. The notion that children are valued as citizens, and have significant contributions to make now and in the future is the foundation of the path to listening to children's voices. There has been mounting interest in the importance of listening to children's voices and their points of view. Notably, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child has informed conceptions of children as capable, competent and agentic. Giving the child a voice from early childhood is possible if opportunities and environments are availed them, particularly during their early school years. However, the majority of children around the world are yet to realise their right to be heard. We posit and defend the introduction of the Matthew Lipman-initiated Philosophy for Children (P4C) programme in schools as a fertile means of nurturing children's right to have their voices heard. P4C is a critical thinking skills programme designed to contribute to the development of rational, open-minded deliberation among young children, as befits a democratic society. Our argument is that P4C's community of philosophical inquiry as pedagogy is the best approach for the development of a critical, open-minded and right-bearing citizen, capable of living according to democratic principles in twenty first century Africa.

Keywords Critical thinking · Philosophising · Participation · Community · Individuality · Rights · Democracy

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Introduction

For many years, there has been pervasive recognition, at least in theory, that children are entitled to the realisation of their social and economic rights to education, health care, an adequate living standard for proper development, as well as special protection from abuse, neglect and exploitation (Lansdown 2001b, p. 1). The suggestion that children should be equipped to develop into ideal citizens has found the endorsement of educators, historically and currently (Jewel 2005), while there is indubitable evidence that children's youthful experiences contribute to shaping their future abilities and personalities (see Bowman et al. 2001). This type of thinking marks the appearance of 'new images of the young child', which in turn, has amplified interest in the ratification of children's rights in the civic realm (MacNaughton et al. 2003). Counterarguments have naturally appeared, proposing that children are dependent on adults and lack competence, knowledge and judgement, as well as formal defence as a group of citizens, and hence they are excluded from citizenship rights (O'Neill 1992). Consequently, in this view, involving children in decisions lays an arduous burden on them; adults and parents know the best interests of their children (ibid.). To this end, giving children a voice runs the risk of unwarranted demands, bad behaviour and disrespect for elders. Notwithstanding such views, there have been progressively stronger appeals for consideration of the right of the child in making decisions that directly affect their lives (Christensen and James 2000).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) provides that children have the right to express their views and should be taken seriously in accordance with their age and maturity. This global convention expresses the need to give the competent child a voice as a citizen (MacNaughton et al. 2003); however, the convention has faced serious challenges in implementing it in practice (Lansdown 2011). While the convention proposes that children are subjects and have rights and are not recipients of adult protection, an added dimension is that those rights demand that children themselves are entitled to be heard (Lansdown 2001b). Citing the CRC, Boshier (2005) observes that 'No longer are children to be thought of as the property of their parents, unwarranted of consideration until the attainment of adulthood. Children are human beings and entitled to the same degree of respect as adult human beings' (p. 7). While we note a sincere commitment to the fulfilment of the obligation to promote ways of providing children with a voice, we also observe an absence of the relevant pedagogy, conviction and competence to achieve this goal. We propose that introducing children to the discipline of philosophy from an early age in a philosophical community of inquiry in the classroom will develop children into reasonable citizens (Ndofirepi and Shumba 2012), who are open-minded (Ndofirepi 2013b), and empowered to live an examined life (Ndofirepi et al. 2013b).

Authoritarianism and violations of basic individual freedoms and rights have remained familiar traits of many governments in Africa (Ndofirepi et al. 2013a)

and this has cascaded downwards to disadvantage vulnerable groups including women, children and the disabled. But specific to this paper is the definition, focus on and concerns of the *child*. The opening question that comes to mind is who is the child? The CRC defines a child as a human being under the age of eighteen. While this is a global, universally accepted definition, conceptions of the child and childhood tend to vary from culture to culture (see Ndofirepi 2013a; Ndofirepi and Shumba 2014). Various societies consider the definition of the child from different perspectives, as do communities and families. The space allocated to this article does not allow us to delve into this debate in detail. We will, however, briefly engage in conceptions of the *child* and *childhood* in traditional African societies (Ndofirepi and Shumba 2014), since this has a bearing on the notion of children's voices as children's rights in twenty first century Africa.

The fast-changing twenty first century has offered new opportunities and challenges that demand a different approach to education. A new-look education is critical for children to gain the necessary knowledge, skills, values and attitudes in order for them to adapt and thrive. Besides, the democratic life that all nations around the world aspire to offer their citizens, and contemporary lifestyles demand everyone's participation in civic life, irrespective of age. This implies and includes giving children a voice, hence addressing their right to be heard (Clarke 2000). We argue that schools can become fertile sites for nurturing children's rights to have their voices heard through the introduction of Philosophy for Children (hereafter referred to as P4C) in the classroom. P4C is a critical thinking skills programme rooted in the work of Matthew Lipman (Lipman 1991, p. 199; Lipman et al. 1980; Lipman and Sharp 1978), in which classrooms are turned into *communities of philosophical inquiry* (Lipman 2003). The programme is designed to contribute to the development of rational, open-minded deliberation among young children, suitable for preparing them for life in a democratic society (Lipman 1991; Weinstein 1991). Concisely, our case is premised on three claims:

1. That giving people, including children, a voice creates opportunities for them to know and claim their rights;
2. That schools are sites for enhancing children's right to be heard; and
3. That right-bearing children will grow into open-minded, democratic citizens equipped to survive in a democratic society.

We enter this discourse by sketching, in brief, the background. Where and how did the notion of children's voices as a children's right begin? We proceed to narrow the discussion by situating our debate in the African context as we attempt to answer the question: what are the conceptions of the *child* and *childhood* in Africa? An exposition of the notion of Philosophy for Children then ensues. Finally, we debate the introduction of Philosophy for Children in schools as sites that mark the initiation of children's rights, as an endeavour to develop the twenty first century child in Africa into a democratic citizen.

Background

The CRC, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989, includes a provision that introduced the right of all children capable of forming a view to be heard and to be taken seriously (Lansdown 2011, p. 1). Article 12 of the Convention states that:

1. States parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
2. For this purpose, the child shall, in particular, be provided the opportunity to be heard either in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, directly, or through a representative or appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law (United Nations 2009, p. 3).

Implicit in the above statement is the acknowledgement that the child is a citizen and social participant in his or her own right, thereby making a major shift from the old maxim that 'children should be seen but not heard'(Boshier 2005, p. 7). In that traditional conception of children as *property*, the young are a *possession* under the *ownership* of their parents until the realisation of adulthood. However, Article 12 of the CRC is an admission that children are experts, and not novices, in their own lives, who have skills to communicate by making use of a spectrum of approaches to share their experiences and competences. It also speaks to their agentic role in influencing the world around them, while at the same time being shaped by it. In this sense, the convention grants them a place as their own meaning-makers, constantly in search of knowledge and understanding of their daily experiences. Hence, we realise the need to treat children as: '…subjects of rights, rather than merely recipients of adult protection, and that those rights demand that children themselves are entitled to be heard' (Lansdown 2001b, p. 1). In support of this position, the ratification of the CRC has marked

> …the emergence of new images of the young child, increased interest in enacting children's rights in the public sphere, and increased scientific knowledge about the importance of children's early experiences for their future as competent citizens (MacNaughton et al. 2003, p. 14).

The child's right to be heard can also be conceptualised in the context of *participation*. In this context, participation is considered to be:

> …An ongoing process of children's expression and active involvement in decision-making at different levels in matters that concern them. It requires information-sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect, and requires that full consideration of their views be given, taking into account the child's age and maturity (Lansdown 2011, p. 3).

Given the above global conception and subsequent ratification of the rights of the child's voice, what then is the notion of the right of the child from the multi-faceted and culturally-biased understanding of child and childhood in the context of Africa?

Child and Childhood in Africa

In this section, we debate the notion of child and childhood in the context of traditional Africaas a possible avenue for disentangling some common strands of thinking that typify the world of the child in Africa. But we need to unpack the concept of traditional African before we proceed to the two concepts that we aim to probe. The word 'tradition originates from the Latin verb *tradere* meaning to transmit or to give over, and the noun *traditio* which means a process through which something is handed down'(Ndofirepi 2013, p. 223). The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1990, p. 1174) defines tradition as '… the passing down of opinion, beliefs, practices, customs, etc., from past to present; especially by word of mouth or practice'. The term tradition thus symbolises an assortment of existing beliefs, practices, and modes of thinking inherited from the past. As a process or activity, tradition, in this context, is the action of transmitting or handing down from generation to generation; the transmission of ideas and rules, especially by word of mouth or by unwritten practice. These ideas and rules may be used to guide and organise, as well as regulate, a people's ways of life to make meaning of their world.

As Kanu (2003) describes it, all people understand and construct their identities in terms of the traditions of which they are part. Admittedly, some cultural traditions, despite their neglect and efforts to dismantle them as lively processes, survive as fragments of value on the periphery of their centred, original contexts. Other traditions persist at the centre, more or less unharmed, though basically, on the periphery of society, within a largely weakened space. In this paper, we submit that while traditional African values and beliefs have been eroded by the advent of westernisation, christianisation and islamisation, there are traditions that persist and 'continue to run on the margins as worthwhile fragments that deserve our courting in the present time (Ndofirepi 2013, p. 223). We therefore make an exposé of the traditional conceptions of child and childhood in Africa.

The concepts child and childhood are best represented within a particular cultural milieu—hence efforts to universalise the concepts are misplaced. These two notions have been interpreted in various ways in different historical epochs, in different cultures and in different social groups (Ndofirepi and Shumba 2014). Hence, when we interrogate the concept of child in Africa, we are engaging in an inquiry into African people's perceptions of cultural and personal identities of the child (Fayemi 2009, p. 167). In this purview, the notion child becomes culture specific. We submit that not all African societies have the same conception of 'child' although there are some dominant themes that appear to permeate their general understanding thereof (Ndofirepi 2013a).

While the above position speaks to the particularism of the notions child and childhood, we observe that it is a universal truism to define childhood in terms of beginning, characterised by lack of experience and hence the need for help. Such an

understanding locates childhood as a phase in human life in which the child is a not yet a subject—one who is in need of adult experience, adult assistance, and protection hence foregrounding idea of lack, absence and incompleteness. Children are, in this vein, seen as human becomings rather than human beings who, through the process of socialisation, are to be shaped into becoming fully human adult beings (Ndofirepi and Shumba 2014). This view regards them as '…adults-in-the-making rather than as children in the state of being' (Brannen and O'Brien 1995, p. 70). If this is the universal conception of child and childhood, what then is the traditional African conception of these notions?

The communocratic nature of African tradition demands that the child abandons personal interests and surrenders them to the collective interests, by putting forward the common good ahead of the personal. Adults and parents prescribe social norms and values to children who are expected to absorb and retain them, without the option of questioning them. Such a paternalistic conception of childhood defines the child as a blank slate in need of protection and training for adulthood, just as with conceptions of child in other societies. Even personhood is not a taken-for-granted right in traditional African societies, but an achievement owing to one's deportment in the community. For example, the Shona people of Zimbabwe refer to a boy or a girl as *chikomana* (boy) or *chisikana* (girl). In both cases chi means small or tiny, implying that a child, at birth, is an it; and is not yet a person, but an object(see also Menkiti 1984; Ndofirepi 2013a). The *it* dimension implies that the child is a malleable object (which cannot speak), to be sculpted into the construct of the adult world, thus relegating the child to the realm of servitude. The child will only become *mukomana* (a matured boy) or *musikana* (a matured girl) once they have successfully gone through the processes of ritualisation and socialisation to become *munhu* (human being) whose voices can now be listened to in a community of others.

We are not underlining any peculiarity of the Shona tradition of Zimbabwe by citing illustrations from that context. Other examples from various cultural settings in Africa are available, although space does not permit a detailed engagement with this topic. The general African conception of a child aligns well with the Aristotelian one of a child as being 'unfinished' compared to a human being, thereby rendering African children as 'citizens-in-waiting' who are 'potential bearers of rights, which they may exercise only when they have reached the age of reason' (Arniel 2002, p. 70). As indicated earlier, we note the existence of some common strands that demonstrate a generalised presence of this concept, particularly given the diversity evident among African societies.

We therefore understand the conception of child in the traditional African worldview to be an interested 'systematic denial of children's agency' (Vandenbroeck and Bourverne-De-Bie 2006, p. 128) which underlines the absence of the child's voice. Such a conception is one way of dampening children's confidence in their own authority to control, influence and exercise their rights. Interestingly, even the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) (Article 27) sanctions this dimension by cementing the requirement that'[e]very individual shall have duties towards his family and society' (our emphasis). Article 31(a) affirms that 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' (see Sloth-Nielsen and Mezmur 2008). In concurrence with this convention, Gelfand describes the gerontocratic child–adult relationship among the Shona of Zimbabwe. He writes:

> Almost every Shona reveres his parents. Not only does the child love them, but also 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 (1965, p. 16).

Smeyers describes such an adult-child relationship as essentially romantic: '…is one of persecuted innocence in which sensitive and intelligent children are constantly thwarted by the obtuseness and neuroses of punitive adults' (2008, p. 2). The question that attracts our attention then is, given this conception of child and children, to what extent do traditional Africans acknowledge their children's right to be heard?

The current situation in Africa is not permissive to open, critical civic choice, since citizens are allotted little say in the affairs of running a country. Often African governments are chastised for '…political and economic distress and [being] deep in bad governance, poverty, corruption, insecurity to life and property and the marginalisation of those who do not belong to the ethnic affiliation of the governing regime' (Harber 1997, p. 3). Records of violence caused by public disorder, violent despotism and recurring wars against neighbours are quite frequent. All these vices 'can be extrapolated' into violations of children's rights. We argue that if child citizens are offered opportunities that provide for their voices to be heard from an early age, they will grow into reasonable, tolerant and judicious right-bearing citizens, capable of living a reflective, examined life.

The understanding of 'child' as discussed above paints a picture of the traditional African concept of a child as an inferior member of society, whose being is only recognised by the extent of goods and services they might deliver to adults in their communities. Hence, we observe that the child in such contexts resides in a position of servitude, whose right to a voice is subordinated and whose human rights are violated. The question then is: how can children in Africa be saved from such a disadvantaged position? As discussed below, we posit that exposing children to the science of philosophy from an early age maybe one avenue through which they can be empowered in order to exit from this cocoon of silence and subordination. In the following section, we provide an exposition of the Philosophy for Children programme to situate the debate in context.

What is Philosophy for Children?

Philosophy for Children is a form of dialogic education with an emphasis on the development of critical and creative thinking through questioning and dialogue between children and teachers, and between children and children (Fisher 2007). It was initiated by Matthew Lipman in the 1960s in the United States of America, and

to date over 80 countries have implemented doing Philosophy with children in schools. While some specialists in the field (see Kennedy 1999; Murris 2008) have made attempts to universalise the implementation, of the Lipmanian approach to doing Philosophy with children, critics have suggested that the programme should be specific to the cultural context of the children in question. Hence we argue for a quest for an African perspective of the idea (Ndofirepi 2013). However, we note that, except in isolated cases in metropolitan areas, Africa has not advanced in accepting and adopting the initiative and value of 'motivating reflection and questioning at a young age' (Ndofirepi 2013a, p. 1). The question yet to be addressed is a pedagogical one: What approach is most suitable for ensuring that children's voices are developed in the enterprise of philosophising with children in the classroom? The notion of a *community of inquiry* is at the heart of Philosophy for Children in schools (see Lipman 1985, 1991, 2009; Sharp 1987, 1993).

Philosophy for Children is driven by the *community of inquiry* as the primary and central pedagogy (Ndofirepi 2013b) to enhance questioning and thinking skills in order to gain meaning about the world around us. In the Deweyan view, human beings are inescapably dependent on each other for the ability to inquire and for the everyday meanings that are essential for autonomy and growth, since a human being is an individual only in as much as one relates well with others (Dewey 1983). In the phrase *community of inquiry*, community implies 'a spirit of cooperation, care, trust, safety, and a sense of common purpose…' (Splitter and Sharp 1995, p. 18), while inquiry invokes'… self-correction driven by the need to transform that which is intriguing, problematic, confused, ambiguous…' (ibid.). Hence, community of inquiry converts the classroom into a place of mutual respect, with a concern for all participants, children and teachers alike.

A formal Philosophy for Children class is a structured session that starts with a stimulus in the form of a story, a picture, or a video. Children are encouraged to draw on their imagination to ask a question centred on amazement (I wonder why…?). Children then make a shared, democratic decision as to the question that attracts them most. The discussion starts without being delimited by adult experiences of the teacher. It follows its own course directed by the children's thoughts and ideas, supporting and opposing each other, but continually giving a reason for their point of view. Meanwhile, the teacher becomes the facilitator of the conversation while remaining actively involved in the children's deliberations. Hence, through the classroom community of inquiry, philosophising with children is a practice, which from an early age, provides opportunities for them to:

- Accept corrections by peers willingly
- Listen to others attentively
- Revise one's views in the light of reasons from others
- Take one another's ideas seriously
- Build upon one another's ideas
- Develop one's own ideas without fear of rebuff or humiliation from peers
- Be open to new ideas
- Show concern for the rights of others to express their views
- Ask relevant questions

- Show respect for persons in the community
- Show sensitivity to context when discussing moral conduct
- Ask for reasons from one's peers
- Discuss issues with impartiality
- Ask for criteria (adopted from Sharp 1987, p. 38).

From the above discussion, we observe that Philosophy for Children is a programme designed for augmenting communicative skills as well developing habits of intelligent behaviour. Through asking deep and interesting questions, it motivates children to be *curious,* and by engaging in thoughtful discussion, they become *collaborative*. Their *critical thinking* skills are sharpened and enhanced through giving reasons and evidence, and their *creativity* and caring attitudes are promoted by generating and building on each other's ideas and developing awareness of self and care of others respectively (see Ndofirepi 2013a). Hence, doing Philosophy with children is a learning approach '…that emphasises dialogue, deliberation, and the strengthening of judgment and community' (Lipman 2003, p. 230). In addition, Splitter concludes that doing Philosophy in the classroom is an effective agency of teaching good thinking, specifically since it is a '…paradigm of a "community of inquiry" in action'(Splitter 2000, p. 12). Consequently, Philosophy for Children motivates children to develop the capacity to have their voices heard as they grow into adult citizens, as further analysed below.

A Child's Voice in a 'Democratic' Africa

Many traditional societies have been accused of thinking of 'education as an initiation' (see Peters 1965) into practices in which children, as novices, are increasingly and expertly initiated into the knowledge and values of the cultured life unquestioningly. However, the more liberal twenty first century societies in Africa have seen a shift in thinking about adult-child relationships. There is evidence of movement and modification, at least in some communities and particularly in metropolitan areas, from the question 'What should be done?'or 'How should children be taught to live?' to 'Whose interests are to be considered?' and ultimately 'Who is entitled to decide?'(see Smeyers 2008). However, on the broader scale, we note a continued absence of education and upbringing that confidently supports and strengthens the development of autonomy that permits children to choose ultimately their own understanding of a meaningful life.

We have shown how Philosophy for Children in schools is a participative initiative. Considering the best interests of children and offering them prospects to voice their views on matters affecting them are at the heart of the fundamental principles in child rights protection. We are aware that adults often claim that giving children the right to be heard may have negative implications on children as young adults. Their argument is premised on the assumption that children lack the competence and experience to participate in the decision-making activities of their lives, and that they should be able to take responsibility before they can be granted rights. It is also sometimes argued that by offering children rights to be heard, adults

will be robbing children of their childhood. Further arguments point to children's possible lack of respect for parents and adults in general once they are allowed to participate in adult activities and have their voices heard.

On the contrary, progressive views hold that children's participation involves adults working with children to guarantee that their views are heard and valued in carrying out decisions that affect them. As Jewel writes:

> …children should be educated to be ideal citizens, capable of making rational and informed decisions… *[and]*… societies that favour liberalism preach the primacy of the individual autonomous citizen and a concomitant tolerance for others (2005, p. 494).

Children require an atmosphere that provides the impetus to learn and grow up as children and good citizens. It is simply a case of becoming good citizens first, before they can be successful leaders. By listening to children and having their voices heard, better decisions can be made since we submit that children possess a body of experience and knowledge that is unique to their situation. They have views and ideas because of that experience. As discussed above, the Philosophy for Children approach, through the community of inquiry, offers opportunities that groom children's potential to make effective decisions. Hence McNaughton et al. assert that:

The principles underpinning democratic societies require that everyone—regardless of age—should be able to participate in civic life and so listening to young children is a prerequisite of a vigorous democratic society. By listening to children, adults can assist them to enact their right as citizens to participate in decisions that affect their lives, giving them a stake in those decisions. Listening to young children helps them to build the skills and knowledge they need to be active citizens and gives them experience in participating in decision-making (2003, p. 12).

But for a democratic state to be realised, and to encourage the development of democratic citizens, who are deliberative, responsible, and aware of their rights and those of others, education needs to be bordered by a deliberative democratic framework (Gutmann and Thompson 2004); hence, our proposition for the introduction of Philosophy for Children in schools.

In many schools in many countries, authoritarian and undemocratic practices are the order of the day. In such traditional situations, it is the adult (the teacher) who

> …decides on behalf of the not-yet-rational child and in her best interests. By confronting the child with (*adult)* rationality in this way, the adult seeks to awaken the child's potentialities to become a rational human being (Smeyers 2008, p. 1) (*our emphasis*).

In general, children are not respected as partners and are seen as passive recipients of adult experiences. They are seldom allowed to work together in order to give them strength as active citizens who possess self-confidence. In many cases, they are not well prepared to have their rights and abuses brought to light; neither are they offered opportunities to challenge the adult authorities to take action where necessary, and act more effectively to protect their own rights (Lansdown 2001b).

Children need opportunities to actively engage in democratic decision-making processes within the school first, and then within local communities, before they can learn to abide by subsequent decisions in society as they grow up (ibid.). Arguments have, however, been forwarded to support the view that for democracy to succeed, citizens need to be taught to be democrats, especially in countries where there have been shifts from non-democratic to democratic governments (Enslin et al. 2001, p. 47). We argue that philosophising with children provides the requisite opportunities for them to discover what their rights and duties are, how their individual freedoms are limited by the rights and freedoms of others, and how their actions can affect the rights of others (Lansdown 2001a, b, 2011).

Silenced children cannot confront violence and abuse that may be committed against them. The capacity to learn is constrained in the absence of opportunities to probe, question and deliberate. In situations where adult decision-makers do not listen to children, the former will fail to notice the presence and character of the barriers affecting the lives of the latter. In support of this assertion, Willow comments:

> …to fail to consult or involve …children and young people because of an assumed innocence is patronising and it does not take into account their experiences or competence in making difficult decisions (1997, p. 12).

In many classrooms, learners are often punished for making their voices heard. In fact, talking in class has a 'bad name' and children who do so are covertly treated as exhibiting disobedience (Ndofirepi and Shumba 2012, p. 253). Schools lack opportunities to view alternative behaviour as being reasonable. As Wyn explains:

> Conceptually, the positioning of youth in this way obscures the experiences of young people by relegating them to a less significant realm than those who have reached 'adult' life. Young people are seen as 'non-adults', a group who are deficit. They are citizens of the future rather than citizens in the present… the present is seen as preparation for the future, thereby devaluing the experiences young people have (1995, p. 52).

Adults are uncertain about methods and implications of implementing the practice of allowing children's voices to be heard as their right, despite evidence of unreserved commitment to the principle. Lansdown describes the dilemma as follows:

> Only by experiencing respect for their own views and discovering the importance of their respect for the views of others, will they acquire the capacity and willingness to listen to others and so begin to understand the processes and value of democracy. It is through learning to question, to express views and having their opinions taken seriously, that children will acquire the skills and competence to develop their thinking and to exercise judgement in the myriad of issues that will confront them as they approach adulthood (2001b, p. 6).

We posit and defend the introduction of Philosophy for Children in the classroom. Its pedagogy of the community of inquiry is a radical challenge and channel through

which children can start to express their views and have their voices heard openly, critically, caringly and creatively. We contend that if these dispositions are initiated and groomed from an early age, education will produce tolerant, democratic adult citizens capable of nurturing future children with a voice to be heard. It is our justified defence that doing Philosophy with children from an early age strengthens their pledge to, and understanding of democracy. It is a fundamental human right. All people have a right to express their views when decisions are being made that directly affect their lives—and children are people too (Lansdown 2001b, p. 7).

In sum, we acknowledge that giving the child the right to a voice is devoted to ensuring their right to freedom of expression; to freedom of religion, belief and opinion; to human dignity; to equality; and consequently their right to citizenship in a democratic Africa can be realised. The community of inquiry, putting the child at the heart of the educative process becomes the hub, in our view, of the beginning of the child's right to voice their inherent potential and, in the process, they become adults with an awareness that they have an equally progressive capacity as active citizens. To this end, the philosophical community of inquiry is indispensable as pedagogy of doing philosophy with children.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have made a case for schools to initiate and create an atmosphere where children's voices can be heard as a basic human right. We have demonstrated how the concept of *child* and *childhood* in Africa denies the child's right to be heard, thereby relegating children to the periphery of society where they are mere recipients of the adult imposition of authority and doctrines. We noted how, as a result, children in Africa fail to confront abuses or abandonment of their rights or to act in defence of those rights. Our discussion has invested in education the instrumental role of creating opportunities for children to be initiated into becoming reasonable, participative and critical thinking citizens. Our argument is that by doing Philosophy with children from an early age, they will exercise their voices and in the process enjoy their basic human rights in line with the UNCRC.

It is our submission that Philosophy for Children is a participative programme and progressive movement that enhances children's abilities to act as a collective to contribute to recognising their presence from an early age in order to build a better way of life for all. The classroom philosophical community of inquiry becomes the hub for opportunities that nurture the right of the children to express their views and to participate in various activities in accordance with their evolving capacities. This, in turn, will profit not only the child, but will spread outwards to accrue benefits for the school, the family, the community, and the ideal of democracy that Africa continues to aspire to.

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