Abstract

PHILOSOPHY WITH CHILDREN, INQUIRY ETHICS AND VALUE TRANSMISSION: MERITS, DEMERITS AND RELATIONS BETWEEN THE APPROACHES

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In this presentation, I draw a distinction between two approaches to ethics education that I call “the inquiry ethics approach” and “the value transmission approach”, respectively. Roughly, the value transmission approach holds that school should mediate some set of predefined values to the students, and the inquiry ethics approach holds that school should teach students to reason and think critically about ethics and to engage in ethical inquiry. Both approaches to ethics education are frequently proposed and defended in the research literature.

After spelling out these approaches more thoroughly, I investigate whether philosophy with children, as regards ethics, is best seen as a form of inquiry ethics approach or a value transmission approach. Dialogic education is defined, stemming from thinkers like Dewey and Bakhtin, and I show that inquiry ethics is a form of dialogic education, while value transmission is a form of monological education. Philosophy with children, I argue, is fundamentally a dialogic undertaking.

The compatibility of a value transmission approach and an inquiry ethics approach is discussed, and the two approaches are found to be contradictory, and hence, philosophy with children cannot be a form of value transmission. This further strengthens the view that a philosophy with children approach is best seen as an inquiry ethics approach. It is interesting to note, then, that it is not uncommon within the community of practitioners to consider PWC/P4C to be a form of value transmission education.

Some merits and demerits of each approach are considered. First, their abilities to educate for good citizenship are discussed. Second, their abilities to educate for quality of life of the individual are scrutinised. Third, the ability of each approach to facilitate better educational results in other subjects in school is evaluated, and lastly, the ability of each approach to help counteract the influence from online extremist propaganda aimed at young people on the Internet and to promote safe online behaviour in general is studied. It is concluded that an inquiry ethics approach is superior to a value transmission approach in all these respects.

Among the consequences of the results of the discussion undertaken in this paper is that there is an important place for philosophy with children in ethics education. Inquiry ethics, and hence philosophy with children, can fulfill important aims for ethics education that teaching based on the value transmission approach cannot, and there are hence strong reasons for including philosophy with children in ethics education. Since this paper shows that a value transmission approach is incompatible with an inquiry ethics approach, the value transmission approach to ethics in school ought not to be taken.