Children Waiting Philosophy for «100»

The aims and developments of journal «100»: the European journal for Children Doing Philosophy

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In December 1994, children at a primary school in Great Britain wrote a letter to several other European schools: «We hear you are keen philosophers like us. We are children at Manorbier Primary School ... and we would like to establish links with other European schools in philosophy. We hear you have had similar mind-puzzling questions to think about in philosophy as us. We would like to know about some of the ideas that you came up with in your philosophy sessions.»

These children's wish has come true. And it is doing so each half year at least. Since May 1996, European children doing philosophy have their own philosophical journal, appearing every six months. The journal is called 100. Up till now, four issues have been published.

In an earlier issue of *Thinking,* Berrie Heesen (1997), the manager of 100, has given a survey of the initial development and contents of 100. We now wish to sketch the development of 100 from the publication of that article on. Furthermore, we will focus on the aims of this journal for children doing philosophy.

We will try to show that 100 provides space for an important dimension of philosophy for children besides spoken dialogue in class: the activity of writing for public. In order to give some idea on what effects writing might have upon a child's philosophizing, we will offer a survey of recent theoretical inquiries on literacy. As with all interesting questions except 'what will we eat tonight?', the question what writing will do to the child's mind cannot be answered definitely. Our goal is to offer the reader some suggestions as to in what direction we should look for the answer.

This theoretical journey will be saved for later. First we will explain how the journal is made and sketch some general aims of 100 with regard to philosophy for children. We want to stress that the journal serves broader educational aims as well: involving the children in the making of the journal is a form of bringing the real world within school. Hereby the journal adopts some of Dewey's basic assumptions concerning education. Dewey (1964) believed that 'much of present education fails because ...the child must do these things for the sake of something else he is to do; they are mere preparations. As a result they do not become

part of the life experience of the child and so are not truly educative' (p.431). This insight should form the basis of education: 'Education ... is a process of living and not a preparation for future living' (p.430). In 100, these ideas are given form by giving the children as much control over the contents and production of the journal as possible.

Obviously, a central objective of 100 is the promotion of philosophy for children. Throughout this article we will show in what ways the journal contributes to the fostering of the philosophy for children-programme.

100: A JOURNAL FOR CHILDREN

The journal is written by children at primary schools with a certain history of doing philosophy. The schools that participate are spread all over Europe. The first two issues were composed of the writings of children from six schools; in the latest issue, 100, number 4, contributions were made by children from eight schools in eight European countries: Belgium, Catatonia, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal and Wales (United Kingdom). In the future, the number of participating schools and countries is likely to increase.

The children write about philosophical topics. Every six months, staff members of all participating schools come together in order to establish the main topics for the next issue of 100. Subsequently, the children at each school make a selection out of these topics for discussion in philosophy sessions. The source of the texts the children write is formed by the philosophical dialogues they have with their classmates.

Each school has its own editorial staff of children. This editorial staff is responsible for the selection and editing of the writings of the children. In order to give some insight into the selection procedures they use, here is a report from the Dutch editorial staff: [1]

> *The children's editorial* staff *about the children's editorial* staff. *First we sit together with the children's editorial staff. Then we divide the papers among groups of two children. For example, every group gets two classes. one from the primary school, and one from the junior school. Then we look at the best papers. We choose them by paying attention to: - whether they are well thought through, - and whether they have fluent sentences, - and whether the sentences make sense, - and also by noticing the age of the child, and which class it is in. Then we put the best parts together and grade them: good or well done. The good ones we send to Berrie [Heesen, 100's manager]. The final choice is up to Berrie. It isn't always easy to grade the best parts, because all the parts are quite good. And you can't play favourites either.*
>
> Ammeke, Sara & Koen, group 8; Borre, Hugo & Amber, group 7; Nathan & Anna, group 6.

As 100 was developing, the schools have made the children form these editorial staffs so that they would have more control over the realization of the journal. The activities of the staffs can also be considered as a direct application of Dewey's recommendation to bring reality into school. Adults have to be called on for

the further production and distribution of the journal. They translate the selected writings of all the participating schools into the seven languages used at the participating schools (by and large, the Dutch and Belgian school share their language); finally, seven editions of 100 are printed and distributed among schools. The extensive to and fro sending of manuscripts, translations and concept versions of 100, as well as the deliberations involved with all this business, are coordinated by the University of Amsterdam. The distribution of the journal is in general taken care of by the national centers for philosophy with children.

In the long run, the coordinators of 100 aim to hand over to the children as many aspects of the making of 100 as possible. An efficient way for the different editorial staffs to prepare the contents of 100 together might be achieved through the Internet. One step in this direction has already been taken: since 1997, 100 is represented on a website, www.xs4all.nlhkrant 100. On this website, one finds information with regard to the contents of all the issues of 100, addresses of the participating institutions and background information about 100 and philosophy for children in general.

USING 100 AT OTHER SCHOOLS

100 is not solely intended for the schools that are contributing to its contents. An important objective of the journal is the promotion of the philosophy for children-programme at other schools. Each school that is interested can order copies of the journal for use in its classes.' The articles in the journal are very useful as a starting-point for philosophical dialogues.

In order to give teachers some suggestions as to how the journal can be used, from the third issue on a 'didactic supplement' is added to 100. Basically, the idea is to use the same procedure as was followed by the children who made the journal. The starting-point of each issue of the journal is formed by two or more leading questions. These questions can be taken up as subjects of the philosophy lessons. For instance, one of the questions in the fourth issue is: 'What picture-book originating from your own country or region really made you think?' Teachers can ask their pupils to bring to school their philosophically most inspiring book (or, when the pupils are under eight, the most beautiful book). Then they can incite the children to a dialogue in which the children try to decide for the best among the books they have brought into the classroom. During, or after the dialogue the answers given in 100 can be read for comparison, or as a trigger for dialogue. Finally, the children may write down their own thoughts and opinions on the subject, or they may be asked to make a drawing for the front cover of their favorite picture-book. The resulting texts and drawings can be assembled in a school magazine for philosophy - this has been done at several schools, including a Dutch secondary school!

The didactic supplement to the third issue also contained theoretical background information for teachers. The issue's main topic was art. One of the stories all authors of the journal had read, is about a girl, Mary, who is angry with art. The theoretical article in the supplement gives a possible explanation of Mary's anger: perhaps she is angry because adults have never been able to tell her what art is good for - it does not seem to have any use. The article then renders the opinion of the philosopher of esthetics, Danto, who holds that the history of art has come to an end (van den Brambussche, 1994). By getting

acquainted with other people's thoughts about a subject, teachers learn to recognize or develop their own thoughts and opinions relating to it. This may help them in structuring the philosophical dialogues in their class.

In fact, the use of 100 is not restricted to philosophical matters. Through connections with the Polish Korczak Foundation for Children's Rights, 100 has reached as far as Moscow. There, it is shown that the journal serves other educational purposes as well: teachers at primary schools in Moscow use the English edition as an aid in their English lessons.

100: AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

Through 100, children get acquainted with the way children at other schools think about and deal with philosophical questions. In particular, they learn about the ideas of children from other countries. In a sense, 100 makes the philosophical dialogue extend beyond the walls of the classroom, across the borders of the nation, to an international, European level.

The international character of the journal has been made subject of reflection for the children contributing to it. In making the journal, the participants became curious as to how the different cultural backgrounds of the children would be reflected in their thinking. This curiosity formed the background of the subjects in the fourth issue of 100. For this issue, the children were asked to write about what they considered to be the best idea and the philosophically most inspiring picture-book from their country or region. Especially the Portuguese children seemed to have clear opinions on the best Portuguese idea. Not surprisingly, the explorations of the world by ancient sailors like Vasco di Gama play a central role in the children's ideas about national identity. Others point to more abstract ideas, like the Portuguese language: 'If the Portuguese language didn't exist, Portuguese ideas would not exist', explains Miguel Lefio. According to Andre Costa, the best Portuguese idea is the world: 'The world is Portuguese because we know the word in Portuguese.' You do not have to have worked through the whole history of philosophy in order to be drawn to structuralism, it seems.

The international design of 100 has also played a role in the choice of its name: as a number, 100 is written the same in each language but pronounced differently. This makes the journal easily recognizable for people speaking different languages. [3]

The choice of the name reflects the topical idea of striving for a certain unity between the different European countries, while preserving the idiosyncrasies of each country's culture. This idea is reflected in other aspects of 100 as well: each edition has specifically national characteristics. For instance, the journal has a different subtitle in each language. And from the last issue on, each edition has a different national page. In this way, more children can have their writings published.

100: PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN AND WRITING

It is reported from several schools participating in the production of 100 that contributing to the journal has a positive effect on the children's writing activities. Reading the philosophical digressions of other children stimulates them in their own writing.

As Berrie Heesen (1997) mentions, the journal adds an important new dimension to philosophy for children: whereas so far philosophy was mainly connected to spoken dialogue, for 100 the children engage in philosophy in written form. This may lead to new ways of doing philosophy as well as new philosophical questions and insights.

It can be expected that when children have to write down their conclusions with regard to a dialogue they have participated in, they are forced to reflect upon the views that have been put forward in that dialogue. Apart from this, writing gives them the opportunity to announce ideas they had during the dialogue but did not find the occasion to express, as well as ideas that did not come to mind until after the dialogue.

Furthermore, the written word has a certain character of finality - certainly so when compared with locution. In writing, you have to make up your mind about what you want to share with the people who will read your text, be it today, next week or perhaps not before 2045. In other words, writing fixes your thought, gum and wastepaper baskets notwithstanding. This feature might have a positive effect on the children's readiness to form opinions, provided agnosticism is judged as a legitimate opinion too.

In order to acquire more insight into the aspects that working with 100 might add to philosophy for children, a glance at scientific research on the cognitive influence of writing and reading might be helpful.

The relations and differences between speaking and hearing (orality) on the one hand and writing and reading (literacy) on the other hand, have been the subject of extensive research during the last thirty years (Havelock, in Olson & Torrance, 1991, p.11-27). Generally speaking, this research takes two forms: philological studies of the rise of alphabetic literacy in Athens in the fifth century before Christ and anthropological research into present oral cultures. From these diverse inquiries it can be concluded that, to a certain point, orality and literacy involve different cognitive attitudes. As Egan (1997, p.76) notes, 'fluent literacy is not simply a matter of thinking and then writing the product of one's thoughts; the writing, rather, becomes a part of the process of thinking.'

Regarding the introduction of journal 100 to philosophy for children, this means that the writing of the children is not just 'writing down what was said in the dialogue'. Something else comes in with the transition of 'oral thought' into 'literal thought'.

What is it that comes in? The traditional view on orality and literacy is that the two form an opposition, roughly corresponding with the opposition between irrational and rational thinking. This view is primarily based on the observation that in non-literate cultures the prevailing mode of communication and understanding is the narrative myth, together with the assumption that this mode of communication and understanding is essentially irrational. Accordingly, orality is associated with all that is said to go with irrational thinking: emotionality, uncritical acceptance of the views handed down by some social authority, poetry, subjectivity and the absence of curiosity into the real nature of things; literacy, on the other hand, would correlate with a rational, critical mind, always ready to inquire into the real nature of things in an abstract and logical-analytical way - in short, the dream-mind of western modernity.

To what extent is the traditional picture of the different features of orality and literacy correct? Recent studies suggest that there is a strong historical link in Western Europe between the development and dispersion of alphabetic literacy on the one hand and the emergence of democracy, logic, philosophy and the rational search for objective truth on the other hand (Egan 1997, p.76; Olson, p.152, in Olson & Torrance, 1991).

According to the researchers, some of the features of western modernity are indeed explainable as an implication of the emergence of the ability to write and read. Literacy appears to encourage abstract thinking. As a possible form of explanation Egan (p.72) notes that an important difference between speaking and writing is that the former 'is a bodily activity, involving «the whole person»; writing is language transported outside the body, involving the eye and mind.' Written language is 'decontextualized' (ibid.). According to Luria (1976, 1979, in Egan, p.74-75), this explains why people in present-day oral cultures have such difficulties in using syllogisms, whereas literate individuals in western cultures are quite versed in this form of thinking. Syllogistic reasoning also involves analyzing verbal utterances into smaller meaningful units. Analytical thinking is said to be fostered by alphabetic literacy in particular, as alphabetic writing suggests that speech is made up of elements that can be broken into phonemic segments (Olson, 1993, in Egan, p.75).

Another feature of modern thinking that is said to be stimulated by literacy is the idea of an objective state of affairs in the world that has to be uncovered by the inquiring subject. According to Olson (in Olson & Torrance, p.149-164), the rise of the search for objectivity (together with the idea that objectivity is not immediately available but is something to be attained) in modern times is to a large extent due to the proliferation of literacy, mainly through the invention of printing. Olson's explanation runs like this: writing is in an important sense the fixation of thought; hence, written texts become a fixed given, as opposed to the subjective interpretations of the reader. So in modern times, the question became important as to what was actually said in a text.[4] This question was then applied to nature as well - not in the least through the metaphor of nature as the Book of God. «Through literacy, people would develop a sensitivity for the opposition between how things are perceived and how things actually are. [5]

A proviso with regard to the cognitive features associated with literacy must be pointed out, though. Several authors warn that the link between literacy and a rationalist attitude towards reality should not be taken as a necessary connection, in the sense that among non-literate individuals features like rational, abstract and analytical thinking do never occur and that these features are always present in literate individu-

als. Anthropological as well as historical evidence is otherwise; furthermore, to maintain such a position has a distinct flavor of eurocentrism. Rather, the strong link between literacy and rationalism is tied to the history of Europe (Egan, p.78).

CONCLUSION

What do all these findings mean with regard to philosophy for children, and to the use of 100 in particular?

It could very well mean that writing for journals and projects like 100 fosters in the children a cognitive attitude that is focused on operations like abstraction, analysis and a wonder for how things really are (corresponding with the search for objectivity). This suggestion is strengthened by an assumption made by a number of authors on literacy and orality, namely that the cognitive development of a child is in significant ways a recapitulation of the ways of understanding the world that have figured in culture's history (Egan, p.73 and passim; Havelock, in Olson & Torrance, p.21). In experiments with preliterate children, Olson (p.158-159) confirmed the hypothesis that non-literate do not distinguish between what is said and what is meant (which distinction he considered to be analogous to the distinction between text and interpretation). Taking in mind the proviso that rationality is not necessarily linked to literacy, we should not be led to believe that without literate activities, philosophy for children would be less rational. Besides, one should appreciate the cognitive features of orality as well. In opposition to the traditional view, Egan points at valuable skills associated with orality - for instance the use of metaphor, which seems to deteriorate in children when they grow older (Gardner & Winner, in Egan, p.55). Furthermore, as Havelock (in Olson & Torrance, p. 21) says: 'Good readers ... grow out of good speakers'. It is important, not in the least for the development of a literate mind, to foster the oral skills of the child - like it is done in philosophical dialogues.

In conclusion we believe that the introduction of writing to philosophy for children can be considered valuable as a supplement to the methods already existing. Of course, children's initiation to literacy does not take place primarily by writing for 100. But if the conclusion is justified that literacy fosters in children the cognitive attitude predicted by the above-mentioned studies, then writing is especially useful in philosophy for children. After all, abstraction, analysis and wondering at how things really are, can be characterized as central features of doing philosophy.

Moreover, the cognitive attitudes associated with literacy may themselves become the object of the children's philosophical activities. Questions like 'What is the difference between writing and speaking?' and 'Where does the alphabet come from?' are suitable questions for philosophical inquiry by children.[7] Some of you may know Kristin's praise on letters, cited by Gareth Matthews in The Philosophy of Childhood (1994, p.15). Kristin was five years old and just learning to read: I'm sure glad we have letters ... Cause if there was no letters, there would be no sounds. If there was no sounds there would be no words ... If there was no words, we couldn't think ... and if we couldn't think, there would be no world.' In fact, language has been the main topic of 100's second issue. One of the questions the children discussed in this issue, was 'Where do words come from?' Some children from the Catalan school

answered: 'We think that the first word came from man, but it wasn't a perfect word. It must have been a sound with a meaning and later it was perfected.' In 100 number 1, a girl discussed the question 'what is the best human invention?' She opted for language:

> *But then 1 think: how can language be a human invention? Didn't it just develop? But I think that we have made the languages work for us ... Perhaps I am thinking about written language. That has to be a human invention, even if we have naturally developed language, someone must have invented a way* of *putting that language down in writing ... On Thursday I was thinking about my philosophy and I changed my mind. I thought about the wheel and I thought that might he the best invention.*

The activity of writing already has a place in the philosophy sessions at several schools: in the Dutch manual for teachers doing philosophy with children, the use of a notebook for philosophy is recommended (SLO 1994, part A, p.60-61).[8] In their notebooks, children can respond to a list of questions the teacher has assembled with regard to the dialogue they have participated in (for example: 'What was for you the most attractive idea in the conversation?' or 'Write down one statement that intrigued/fascinated /bothered you'). The book can also be used as a medium for written dialogue among the children. In some schools, this recommendation has led to exciting results. In the new method for primary schools that is published in 1998 by Berrie Heesen called 'Kinderen filosoferen' (editor Damon) the pupil's book requires a so-called 'filoschrift' (in English, 'philo-notebook'). Each story or exercise starts with a writing activity and then dialogue follows.

PLANS AND EXPECTATIONS

The back page of the fourth issue of 100 contained the report of a school that is not a regular contributor to the contents of 100. But the reported dialogue, of children on Freinet-school De Vlieger in Gent (Belgium), was so spontaneous and open in character that it could not be left out. The subject of the dialogue was overpopulation, introduced by the initial question: 'Will there be enough space on earth if more and more people are added?' Some rather drastic solutions were proposed ('take over space, that is something infinite'; 'help severely ill people die'), but the discussion contained sufficient argumentative sophistication to be labeled philosophical. The report has inspired the coordinators of 100 to devote the next issue to overpopulation. This topic yields a new challenge to teachers: the challenge of keeping the dialogue philosophical and preventing it from shifting into moral lessons or social studies.

As the use of the journal in classes in a number of European countries is increasing rapidly, in 1999 the circulation will probably rise from the current 10,000 to about 20,000 copies. Till the end of 1998, the European Union will supply 100 with financial support, by means of the Socrates Comenius Action 1, a fund for educational activities at European level. The organizers of 100 hope that the sale of 100 to schools will within five years be sufficiently high to make the journal self-financing.

Several times, 100 has received attention on public television. Presently, there are plans to compose a documentary about 100, which is to be recorded in several of the countries involved in the

production. Furthermore, as the making of the journal implies quite some lingual complexity, a theoretical article is in preparation that will focus on the problems relating to the translation of children's writings into seven languages.

NOTES

1. Published in the didactic supplement to the Dutch edition of 100, no. 3 (see below).

2. Information about ordering copies of 100 is given at the bottom of this article.

3. Apart from this, the name is also a reference to the works of a Polish combatant for childrens' rights in the 1920s, Janusz Korczak (see Heesen, 1997). The ideas of this man have led to the foundation of an institution for children's rights, the Korzcak Foundation. In the newsletter published by the Dutch Korczak Foundation, 100 has received favorable reviews.

4. Olson (p.157) notes that in oral cultures, the question 'what do you mean?' is very rare. He claims that in some of these cultures no distinction is made between what is said and how it is interpreted.

5. In more recent times, this opposition has been criticized vehemently by psychologists, hermeneutists, structuralists and so on, arguing that it is impossible, or even pointless, to look for a reality apart from our perception. The opposition between reality and experience is of course a central part of rationalist 'ideology'. The point here, though, is not the adequacy or truth of this opposition, but the fact that literate cultures used it as a tool for understanding the world.

6. In this context, it is interesting to note that a few decades ago, several Dutch school buildings - namely of schools that put into practice the educational theory of C. Freinet (1896-1966) - contained a printing press. The press was used for printing out texts written by children. Freinet's leading idea was that children should develop their reading and writing abilities as naturally as they developed their speaking abilities at home. Hereto the printing press was an essential pedagogical instrument.

7. In Dutch P4C practice, a philosophical lesson is devoted to the question 'how many letters «A» exist?'

8. The text referred to here has circulated on the P4C-list in 1995 and has been translated in Polish and Spanish. It can also be found on 100's Internet-website.

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FOR COPIES OF 100:

If you want to order copies of 100, please consult 100's website or get in touch with:

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