Notes from the Field
Philosophy Workshop Experience at "Life with Children" Camp

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For six years, we have organized sleepaway camps in nature, bringing together children aged 6-12, their parents and adults who are curious about life with children. Our camps, which are held 3 times a year on average, mostly take place in Antalya Geyikbayırı and last for 4 days. The camp is basically organized by a psychotherapist who is the founder of our camp and I as a specialist in 'philosophy with children and community' and an average of 3 other expert instructors accompany our camp. We schedule our camp dates to coincide with holiday periods and announce it on social media. Everyone up to 12 families and 14 children are welcome to join our camp, which requires a certain fee. We have an average of 30 people in total each session, including participants and instructors.

We strive to enhance the connections between parents and children, other children and parents present, and with the natural world, enabling everyone to gain different perspectives. This is achieved through joining parents and children together and the creation of holistic learning environments encompassing physical, mental, and emotional aspects. Our unique experiences unfold through various activities conducted during the camp that also involve vegetarian meals and the practice of refraining from using electronic devices. The activities involve both joint and separate participation of parents and children. The diversity of our workshops, which may vary in each camp, includes activities such as nature discovery walks, awareness activities in nature, music sessions, philosophy workshops, movement exercises, circus arts, creative arts, storytelling, and rock climbing.

Doing philosophy in nature offers an embodied learning experience that integrates physical engagement with intellectual inquiry. Participants can incorporate sensory experiences in nature into their philosophical exploration, improving their understanding of philosophical concepts. Doing philosophy in nature presents a distinctive chance for individuals to foster a deeper connection to the natural world, personal development and gain profound insights (Christelle, 2022). With the support of natural settings throughout the different philosophy workshops, we gain insights into our perspectives on specific subjects, recognize beliefs accepted without much contemplation, understand our thought patterns, identify contradictions, and explore the possibilities of thinking differently. Our opinions on various subjects may evolve, becoming clearer, more uncertain, or even changing altogether through ideas with other participants, the examples and counterexamples they provide, and the questions posed by myself and participants.

During the camp, I am the sole facilitator for philosophy workshops. To accommodate various schedules and dynamics, we organize sessions concurrently with other activities. For instance, we might conduct philosophy workshops with parents while the children enjoy a nature walk. Alternatively, when parents participate in a music workshop, we engage with the children in a philosophy session. We separately organize at least 2 philosophy workshops with children and parents throughout the camp. Each workshop takes 1.5 hours.

When we reach our upper participant limit for children, I assess group dynamics and harmony on the first day to determine whether to conduct philosophy workshops for children in a single group or divide them into two groups. This decision depends on whether their attention span is compatible. If the participants exhibit compatibility, we may opt for a unified workshop experience. This flexibility ensures that our philosophy workshops align with the specific needs and dynamics of each camp session.

In my workshops, I employ the 'Philosophy with Children and Communities' approach, which is designed to cultivate critical thinking skills and foster active participation in philosophical thought among participants (Kizel, 2016). This approach encompasses various methods, including Nelson's Socratic Method, Lipman's Philosophy for Children, and McCall's Community of Philosophical Inquiry (McCall, 2017). In my practice, I predominantly employ McCall's Community of Philosophical Inquiry method.

The philosophical foundation of this method is rooted in realism. According to this perspective, our understanding of the world is separate from the actual reality, emphasizing that our knowledge does not precisely mirror the world as it exists (McCall, 2013). This implies that even if consensus is reached on a particular point, there is a possibility of collective error. The method is designed to bring forth differences and disagreements, making contradictions and counterexamples visible.

The successful implementation of this method relies significantly on the facilitator's expertise in philosophy and logic (McCall, 2017). A facilitator well-versed in these domains is crucial for guiding participants through the process of uncovering diverse perspectives and encouraging rigorous thinking. Given my background as a graduate of the philosophy department, I value the significance of philosophical and logical knowledge in implementing the approach. Moreover, I endorse the adoption of a realistic perspective when questioning concepts, which is why I typically employ this method in my workshops.

In terms of content, our camp structure revolves around specific concepts and elements assigned to each day. The founder of the camp had decided these concepts and elements based on their relevance to the overall goals of the camp. Each day, we focus on specific concepts, consisting of 'self', 'other', 'togetherness', and 'nature', and concurrently the elements of 'water', 'earth', 'fire', and 'air'. We think that investigating these concepts along with essential elements of the natural world is crucial for gaining an understanding of nature and human existence within it. To create a cohesive experience in the camp, all daily activities, including our philosophy workshops, are closely tied to a designated concept and element that serves as the theme for that day.

During the philosophy workshops, I integrate the element of the day into our warm-up game and utilize the daily concept as the focus of our main inquiry. This intentional thematic alignment ensures that each day offers a unified and immersive exploration of the chosen concept and element, creating a holistic and interconnected experience for participants.

On the first day of the camp, in the philosophy workshop, we start with a warm-up game focused on the element "water." An example of this game is asking participants, "What kind of water would you rather be?" Following the warm-up activity, we move into the main inquiry focused on the concept of "self". Through thought-provoking stimuli on "self", we delve into questions such as "Who am I?" and "What makes me who I am?"

On the second day, we begin with a warm-up game centered around the element "earth". During this game, I may ask participants to consider what object another participant in the circle would be if they were an object, and to provide reasoning behind their choice. Following the warm-up, we transition to the main inquiry focused on the concept of the "other". Through thought-provoking stimuli on the "other", participants deliberate on whether a person can live alone, the necessity of living with others, the meaning of 'we,' and the role of rules in social life. Participants explore questions that delve into the relationship between the "other" and the "self."

On the third day, we start with a warm-up game centered around "fire". For this game, I might place pictures of fire and a group of people in the center and ask participants to establish a connection between them. After the warm-up, we move into the main inquiry focusing on the concept of "togetherness." Through thought-provoking stimuli on "togetherness," participants explore questions regarding whether a person can live alone, the necessity of living with others, the meaning of 'we,' and the role of rules in social life.

On the fourth day, our warm-up game focuses on the concept of 'air.' I might lay a rope in the center to divide the area into "I agree" and "I disagree" sections and introduce Anaximenes' idea that "Air is the source of all things." I then ask participants to take a stance based on this proposition. Following the warm-up, we transition to the main inquiry focusing on "nature." Through thought-provoking stimuli on "nature," participants ponder the meaning of nature, the distinction between nature and environment, and the importance of protecting nature. In this way, I facilitate the philosophy workshops, creating cohesive inquiry throughout the camp.

We organized a camp last year, and now I focus on the first philosophy workshop with children that took place during this camp, which consisted of 8 children. Thus, we can see the initial impact of doing philosophy with children in a natural setting nature. On the first day of the camp, our philosophy workshop with children unfolded as follows.

We gathered in a circle in a place where we could easily realize our activity under the trees. I initiated the session by placing a bowl of water in the center of our circle and posed the question, "What comes to mind when we look at this water?" In this way, I would both connect with the element of the day and prepare the participants for the main discussion by encouraging them to think creatively. Following this, I introduced an engaging activity where the children were tasked with

collecting branches from nature to construct a ship that would float on the water. The children dispersed, gathering 30 short branches over a 15-minute period. Once they reconvened, I instructed each child to build their own ship using 15 branches. After creating their ships, we collectively envisioned embarking on a cruise. It is thought that allowing students to use the resources they found to construct their own boat strengthens the bond between themselves and nature as well as strengthens their discussions about themselves and others. After the boat was completed, I started to tell the Ship of Theseus story, encouraging the children to replace parts of their ships with the remaining 15 branches they also collected.

A moment arose when all the ship's components were replaced with new ones. I told them "Here's the same ship as the one at the beginning!" After that, I prompted the children to reflect on whether there was anything surprising or interesting about this new ship. Subsequently, I organized the participants into pairs for a 4-minute session, instructing them to formulate one perplexing or thought-provoking question related to the activity. This question should be thought-provoking, have more than one answer, and open to discussion. Following this, children in pairs formed their questions in a group discussion and then announced these questions to the entire community. However, most of their questions were questions that have one correct answer or in which answers can be easily guessed or imagined, rather than discussed and reasoned about; thus, the children were largely unable to stimulate philosophical discussion. Considering the importance of having thought-provoking questions for stimulating further discussion, I, as the facilitator, aided the children and selected what I regarded as the most thought-provoking question among those provided.

The question which we selected is: "How can the first ship and the last ship be the same ship?"

After discussing the selected question in pairs, participants extended their reflections to the broader community. I instructed them to articulate their thoughts with supporting reasons, urging them to engage with others' ideas using expressions like 'I agree with..., because...' or 'I disagree with..., because...'. This fostered the development of individual perspectives and initiated a collective philosophical dialogue among the children. I took some notes at that workshop and now reproduce our conversation based on these notes.

Child1: Of course, it's the same ship because it looks the same...

Child2: I disagree with Child1, it may appear the same, but the parts of the ship changed so the ship is different.

Child3: For example, I have friends in my class, they are twins. They look the same, but they are different people.

Child1: How do you differentiate between twins?

Child2: Their names are different.

Child4: I don't agree with what Child2 said last. After all, there are people with the same name. So, if twins have the same name, will they be identical?

Child3: No, of course they won't be the same.

Facilitator: Child3, you just said that I distinguish them from their names.

Child3: Yes, I'm changing my mind. I realized that the name was not enough. I have to think a bit.

Child2: I agree with Child4. I think what separates the twins from each other may be their behavior. For example, if one of them does not get angry while the other gets angry immediately, we can distinguish them even if their appearance and names are the same.

(The group reached a consensus on this idea.)

Facilitator: Well, couldn't there be a situation where their behavior is the same?

Child3: Oh! He can imitate it. One may behave like the other.

Child4: But how much will he do the imitation? At some point, I think he stops pretending and acts like himself.

The central question "How can the first ship and the last ship be the same ship?" sparked a continuous discussion revolving around the concept of identity and change. It was initially argued that the ship remains the same because it looks the same. This reflects a basic understanding of identity based on appearance. However, this notion was challenged by pointing out that the ship's parts may have changed, suggesting a more deliberative understanding of identity as contingent on underlying components. An analogy with twins was introduced to further explore the concept of identity. This analogy highlights the distinction between appearance and essence, emphasizing that individuals can share physical traits but possess unique identities. This demonstrates a recognition of identity beyond superficial characteristics. The significance of names was brought up in determining identity, noting that people can share the same name without being identical. This prompted a reconsideration of the role of naming in defining identity and suggested a need for deeper analysis. It was suggested that behavior can serve as a distinguishing factor in identity. This insight expands the discussion beyond physical appearance and names, recognizing behavior as a dynamic aspect of identity influenced by individual traits and experiences. At this point, the group reached a consensus that behavior can be a key determinant of identity. Reaching a consensus is not imperative, however, it reflects a collective process of critical thinking and reflection. The discussion highlighted the complexity of identity and the multitude of factors that contribute to it. By exploring different dimensions of identity, such as appearance, names, and behavior, the children demonstrated an expansion of their understanding on the multifaceted nature of human identity. Overall, the discussion exhibited the children's ability to engage in critical thinking, carefully consider different viewpoints, and collaboratively construct knowledge about a complex philosophical concept like identity.

After each philosophy workshop in the camp, children evaluate themselves and the dialogue by posing questions such as: "Did we listen to each other carefully? Did everyone have an opportunity to speak? Did we adhere to turn-taking or interrupt each other? How much did we contemplate today? Did we provide reasons for our thoughts? Did we ask thought-provoking questions? Did we generate new ideas or change our ideas?" This process enables the children to review and evaluate the effectiveness of their communication, comprehension, and critical thinking.

Concerning my evaluation of the workshops in the camp, I have a framework for evaluating doing philosophy in nature. My present evaluation is based on engagement levels of participants, their communication, critical, creative thinking skills, respect for others and the improvement of the understanding of the concepts explored at the camp. Generally, during the first philosophy workshop at all camps, children often express excitement about being in nature, but they may initially feel unfamiliar with engaging in philosophical inquiries. This first workshop with children outdoors in nature was similar to the previous first workshops with children in the other camps. In particular, the excitement of collecting branches and building their own ships contributed to all of them discussing philosophy with enthusiasm. On the other hand, despite my invitations, some participants remained silent during the discussion. However, as evident in the dialogue, four children actively participated, contributing to a deepening and enhancement of their understanding of the self. For future camps, I aspire to conduct a more comprehensive and longitudinal evaluation.

I now focus on the third philosophy workshop with parents as an example from the last camp. This allows us to see the impact of philosophy with parents in a natural setting, some of whom had experienced our 'philosophy with children and community' approach previously. The example comes from the third day of last year's camp and involved seven parents, most of whom were single parents. Our philosophy workshop with parents unfolded as follows.

We gathered in a circle in a place where we could easily realize activity outdoors. I noticed that the participants were in need of some enjoyment and physical activity. Thus, as a warm-up activity, I set up a rope, designating one side as 'yes' and the other as 'no.' Then, I posed a question: "Do you think fire is good or bad?" Participants were asked to position themselves along the rope based on their answers. Each person took a stance in line with their opinion, providing explanations for their thoughts. As they shared their reasons, some individuals reconsidered their positions, leading to a change in their stance after listening to others.

Following the warm-up game, we gathered in a circle, and I read Kafka's story 'Gemeinschaft' to the participants for 2 minutes. This short story is about a group of five friends who respond to a man who would join them as a sixth. Subsequently, I prompted them to reflect on any surprising or interesting aspects of the story. To further engage them, I paired participants for 4 minutes and tasked them with formulating a perplexing question about the narrative. Once prepared, they shared their questions with the entire group. In general, participants may not know exactly which question will lead us to philosophize in the first workshop of the camp. After the first or second workshops, I prefer to leave the question selection to the group, if I think that the group can choose a question that is more suitable for philosophizing. Given that it was the third day of the camp and participants had

gained more experience in the philosophy workshop, I introduced a voting system for them to collectively choose which question they would discuss.

The question that parents formed and voted to discuss is: Why didn't they include the sixth person in their group of five?

Following the sharing of their initial thoughts within the pair thinking groups, participants extended their ideas to the entire community. I directed them to articulate their thoughts along with reasons and encouraged them to engage with the ideas of others by expressing agreement or disagreement using phrases like 'I agree with..., because...' or 'I disagree with..., because...'. This approach facilitated the participants in constructing their own philosophical dialogue. I took some notes at that workshop and now reproduce our conversation based on these notes.

Parent1: The exclusion of the sixth person might be attributed to concerns about potential disharmony with their community.

Parent2: Is it a prerequisite for a community to be harmonious?

Parent3: We should delve into our understanding of harmony. Some might equate it with uniformity, but I see harmony as a willingness to agree and compromise.

Parent2: I disagree with Parent3; because his definition seems more about a desire to harmonize than harmony. To me, harmony is about the ability of similar or different elements to coexist. Being a community requires harmony, albeit not always in agreement.

Parent4: I agree with Parent2 about the definition of harmony. A community, in my view, is a structure capable of standing together and acting in unison. Particularly when we're diverse, desiring harmony becomes crucial to coexist and act collectively. Harmony and desire to harmonize are interconnected yet distinct concepts.

The question ‘‘Why didn't they include the sixth person in their community of five?’’ sparked a thoughtful discussion and provided parents with an opportunity to critically reflect on the definition of a community and what constitutes the conditions for being a community. They discussed the concept of harmony within a community, leading to a deeper understanding of its complexities and implications for collective well-being. They seemed to realize that harmony involves more than mere agreement or uniformity and encompasses notions of diversity, cooperation, and collective action. Additionally, there was recognition of the interconnectedness between harmony and community cohesion, as well as the distinction between the concept of harmony itself and the desire to achieve it.

At the end of every discussion, I invited participants to evaluate themselves and the discussion regarding active listening, effective self-expression, and reflective thinking. Thus, they conducted a review of their dialogue processes guided by these inquiries.

Concerning my evaluation of the workshops with parents in the camp, the content of my evaluation is identical to that used for the children's workshops. On the third day of the workshops, all parents had formed bonds with each other, appearing relaxed and familiar with the approach. Based on the notes I took during the workshops, over the course of the camp days, it is seen that the participants became adept at formulating more thought-provoking questions and distinguishing them from other types of questions. Moreover, specific to the third day of the camp, I evaluate whether their understanding of "community" has improved. As evident in the dialogue, parents actively participated in the discussion and contributed to a deepening and enhancement of their understanding of the community. They fostered the exploration of thoughts, reflected on each other's ideas, and developed new insights.

After the workshops, I frequently witness that parents especially continue the discussion with each other. Moreover, I recall moments when one child asked their parent what they talked and thought about in their philosophy workshop, and this led to a fruitful discussion. I can say that I observe that the workshops support meaningful dialogue and bonding between both parents and children and parents with other parents. At the end of the camp, we always hold a closing circle, and all participants share their evaluations about the camp and our shared experience together for 4 days.

As in past camps, in this last camp a considerable number of parents and children expressed how our camp benefited them physically, mentally, and emotionally, and how they wished that our camp would last longer and that we could meet again sooner. Furthermore, we, as organizers, have come to see that extending the duration of the camp, and conducting another camp experience specifically for those who have participated before, will serve our purposes better. Through regularly holding these kinds of philosophy-nature camps, we can strongly support the practice of doing philosophy in a natural setting, as an embodied learning experience that integrates the appeal of the natural world with intellectual inquiry. Taking this approach allows us to promote continuous improvement in fostering a deeper connection with the natural world and to facilitate personal development through reflecting on profound philosophical concepts.

References

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