



THE CHILDREN'S POLYLOGUE – DOING PHILOSOPHY WITH CHILDREN IN INTERCULTURAL ENCOUNTERS

Britta Saal

В статье рассматривается связь между интеркультурной философией и занятиями философией с детьми. В 2016 г. был инициирован проект детского полилога, предполагающий философское общение между учениками начальных школ из Вупперталя (Германия) и Гонолулу (Гавайи). Это был большой опыт и успех для всех участников. Основываясь на этом опыте, в 2019 г. проект был продолжен – между учениками начальных школ из Вупперталя и поселка Теней в регионе Фукусима (Япония). Этот проект также был завершён успешно. Идея детского полилога является закономерным развитием полилого-интеркультурной позиции в философии. Автор статьи – по образованию интеркультурный философ – активно занимается философией с детьми. В статье предпринята попытка при помощи анализа полученного опыта рассмотреть некоторые важнейшие темы интеркультурной философии, а именно вопросы о месте, пространстве и мире, в контексте занятий философией с детьми, в частности, сопоставив эти вопросы с проблемой определения смысла игры. Целью этого рассмотрения является изучение творческого потенциала человека, реализующегося в интерактивном процессе построения мира, продвигающемся в направлении к все большей гуманизации. Делается вывод о том, что взрослые должны начать с саморефлексии и самопреобразования, чтобы установить надлежащие отношения с детьми. То же верно и для выстраивания надлежащих отношений между людьми, принадлежащими к различным культурам, придерживающимися различных философских взглядов и проживающими в различных регионах мира.

Ключевые слова: интеркультурная философия, философия места и пространства, философия с детьми, исследования детства, детство, построение мира, философия игры.

Polylog – Journal for Intercultural
Philosophizing, Austria

In my paper I'd like to connect intercultural philosophy with doing philosophy with children. In 2016 I initiated the *children's polylogue*. This is to say, I was mediating a philosophical exchange between elementary school children from Wuppertal, Germany, and elementary school children from Honolulu, Hawai'i. It was a great experience and success for all participants included. Building on these experiences, in 2019 I had the opportunity to continue this project between elementary school children from Wuppertal and elementary school children from Tenei Village, in the Fukushima region of Japan. Again it was a very touching experience for us all. The idea for the children's polylogue has grown up from my polylogical-intercultural orientation in philosophy. Trained as an intercultural philosopher, I am actively engaged in doing philosophy with children. Becoming more and more aware of the existing multiplicity of local children's philosophical activities, I was wondering how these children also could become aware of each other. So, what I will try to do in my paper is, by referring to my practical experiences, to reflect about some basic intercultural philosophical topics – in concrete: the topics of place, space and world – and connect these with reflections about some basic topics connected with doing philosophy with children, like e.g. the meaning of play. What I am finally concerned with is our creative human potential in our inter-active world-building process to make the world more humane. We (adults) have to begin with self-reflection and self-transformation to come into true relationship with children. The same is true for building true relationship with human beings from other parts of the world.

Keywords: intercultural philosophy, philosophy of place and space, philosophy with children, childhood studies, childism, world-building, philosophy of play.

Introduction

“Because children are full human beings, neglecting children diminishes the humanity of us all” [16, p. 2]. These words, formulated by theoretical ethicist John Wall point to one of the basic roots of the ethical problem of “humanity’s inhumanity” [16, p. 48]. When I read them, they resonated with what I already feel for quite a long time. They express, in short, that humanity is basically connected with the relationship between adults and children, and more concrete: with an honestly accepting and appreciative attitude towards children. Already before I started to be professionally busy with children, I recognized that many adults, including parents and educators, not really encounter children at eye level. And when I entered the field of doing philosophy with children, I also realized, roughly speaking, two different approaches: one more pedagogic and intentional and one more open, dynamic and unplanned. The adult’s role is picked up and questioned only by the second approach. But to encounter children on eye-level, in my understanding, the view of the adult teacher as the ‘knower’ has to be completely left behind. Encountering children, e.g. during a philosophical conversation, should happen playfully and respectfully. The adult should act as a facilitator, that means he or she is mainly responsible for providing a safe setting, so that every single child can feel safe in any respect: physically, emotionally and intellectually. All of this we find in the Hawaiian approach of doing philosophy with children, founded by Thomas Jackson in the 1980s. This approach provides the ground for my own philosophical work with children.

Having said this, in my paper I would like to connect intercultural philosophy with doing philosophy with children. By doing so, this paper is intercultural in two ways: concerning the relationship between different cultures and concerning the relationship between children (culture) and adults (culture). For providing a framework, I will first deal with the topics of place, space and world. These topics play a major role in the field of intercultural philosophy. In a second step, I will introduce the so called ‘childist’ perspective. Here my thesis is that, like intercultural and decolonial approaches, the childist approach is a reaction to unjust conditions in societies and in the world. In connection to that, I will critically reflect the concept of the ‘adult’. Like in intercultural philosophy also in doing philosophy with children the attitude of how one encounters the other is of vital importance. Concerning the relationship between adults and children, it is always the adult who defines and determines e.g. about the meaning of ‘child’ and ‘childhood’. But the concept of the ‘adult’ is nearly never reflected; it rather serves like a norm concept taken for granted. In a third step, I will focus on the meaning of play and on the polylogue – that means on the children’s polylogue in particular. Play as well as the polylogue I do understand as basic philosophical activities: play in the context of doing philosophy with children and the polylogue in the context of intercultural philosophy. Nevertheless, both are at the same time entangled: Play, in a broader sense, is the creative aspect of philosophizing and the polylogue could *play* a major role for the children’s world-building process (in the sense of Hannah Arendt). All in all, I consider play as well as the polylogical thinking and

speaking about the world not only as a basic condition of children, but as a basic human condition.

The concern of my paper is twofold: 1) to implement a childist perspective in doing intercultural philosophy and 2) to show one possibility of doing philosophy with children interculturally. As a major aim, I would like to stick up for a more just society – on the local as well as global level – which is able to respond to any kind of differences: differences in culture, ethnicity/'race', gender, class, ability and also in age.

The 'inter' as the space and place of doing philosophy

In intercultural philosophy the topics of place, space and world play significant roles. My basic assumption here is that philosophy always comes from a place. The *place* where philosophy occurs – anywhere in the world – is always imbedded in an environment and is thus situated in a *space* which is created from the respective place. In this context, one of my leading questions is: Where, in which place, *inter*-cultural philosophy is to be located? The term 'inter', at first sight, seems to be contradictory to place, because already conceptually it denotes an in-between *space*; and by using the term 'inter-cultural', the term 'inter' refers to the in-between space between cultural places. Until here, we can sum up that the term 'inter' describes two aspects: 1) The mutual constitutive relationship between a place and the space created from this place and 2) the space between places. These two aspects, I would say, characterize fundamentally the concept of 'inter'.

Having said this, we realize that the notion 'inter-cultural' goes beyond the above mentioned pretended contradiction. In both cases, the relationship between place and space and the space between cultural *places*, place is the constitutive reference point. Especially in the second understanding of the intercultural inter-space, place as *places* in the plural is always implied and referred to. Thus, places in the plural – or in other words: the plurality of places – and space are mutual constitutive. Taken the plurality of places, it becomes visible that the space-in-between does not differ from *the* space and is also not a particular space, but rather is a meeting space of places in relation.

The French sociologist and philosopher Michel de Certeau describes the relationship between space and place in a short, but very illuminative way: "Space is a practiced place" [5, p. 117]. In this view space is not given as such. It is rather through the activity in a place – carried out by actors – that a space opens up. Transferred to the intercultural context it can be put in the following way: Cultures are platial cultural spaces from where the *inter*-space could open up. Or, in other words, cultural subjects from places *in the plural* create, on one hand, their philosophical places and spaces and at the same time the *intercultural* philosophical space through their *relational* philosophical activities. Thus, the intercultural place of active philosophizing *takes place* in the form of a polylogue. In other words: The place of *inter*-cultural philosophy is neither located prior nor after the philosophical activity, but simultaneously in the very moment when the philosophical conversation or polylogue takes (its) place and by this opens up the inter-space. This kind of a

patial thinking-(inter-)space cannot be located inside one culture, but is at the same time not detached from cultural relatedness.

The taking-place of the polylogue as world-building

The expression ‘taking place’ in English is commonly used to denote a planned or scheduled, more or less specific event (like e.g. a concert), while ‘happen’ refers to an unplanned or accidental event. In German there is a similar use between the different verbs ‘*statt-finden*’ (take place) and ‘*geschehen*’ (happen). The word ‘*Statt*’ in German means ‘place’ or ‘location’. So we can see, in the English as well as in the German case there is a reference to place when describing the happening of a specific event. But there is also a very interesting difference. In German this place is *found*, and thus refers to a mediating process in which the subject and the object become fitting, whereas in English the place is *taken*, what refers to a very active process led by the subject¹. It is in in this tension between *finding* and *taking* (a) place that I like to locate my following reflections.

Like elaborated above, the place of intercultural philosophizing appears as an *event-place*, a place that arises in the very moment when the philosophical polylogue *takes place*. This event-place (or – in the words of de Certeau: practiced place) is what I like to call the ‘taking place’ of intercultural philosophy as polylogue. Consequently, *interculturality*, or *intercultural philosophy* respectively, means the dynamic potential of starting philosophizing from manifold cultural places, *finding* a meeting place in the inter-space and finally *taking* place as a polylogue. In this event-place it is possible to philosophize together without a given direction or a particular result. From here we can ‘come to the world’² and create the world anew.

The idea of new-beginning is basic for the thought of Hannah Arendt. Arendt calls the realm where the world is created (anew) the ‘political’. The political here is neither meant to be the topic of political sciences nor being identical with politics, but rather is seen as the execution – or the *taking place* – of human interactions. “The world”, Arendt says in her Lessing-speech about ‘Humanity in Dark Times’ in the year 1959, “The world lies between people” [1, p. 4]. It is here, in this in-between of the world as an event-place where speaking and acting, and thus the origin of the political, is located. At this point, Arendt makes an interesting distinction between the first (objective) in-between – which refers to the worldly, objective reality – and the second (subjective) in-between – which refers to the human beings directly. The first in-between is created by the people – in plurality – who “constitute [...] something which *inter-est*” [2, p. 182]. Simultaneously, while acting and speaking about these inter-ests, the individual agents uncover themselves by unavoidably bringing in something personal or, in other words, showing something specific from one’s place. This second in-

¹ It would be really interesting to continue these interlingual reflections about the expressions of ‘taking place’ by including other local languages.

² This expression refers to Peter Sloterdijk [14].

between Arendt calls the “web of human relationships” [2, p. 182–183] to denote its intangible, but nevertheless real quality.

Given this, for creating the world *inter*-personal as well as *inter*-cultural, the world needs to be the topic of conversation: “For the world is not humane just because it is made by human beings, and it does not become humane just because the human voice sounds in it, but only when it has become the object of discourse. [...] We humanize what is going on in the world and in ourselves only by speaking of it, and in the course of speaking of it we learn to be human” [1, p. 24–25]. This is to say, only by discourse, conversation, polylogue the world becomes humane. Not the human world as such is humane, but we human beings prove to be humane when we speak together about the world. This has to *take place* interculturally by polylogical conversation and is the task not exclusively, but especially for us philosophers.

The political of the children's world

In her own translation of the German term ‘*Weltbildung*’, Hannah Arendt chose the English term ‘world-building’. Even though the words sound similar, this translation is quite unusual. But an interlingual ‘thick reading’ might give us some very interesting insights. While the English term ‘building’ refers to construction or the act of constructing, the German term ‘*Bildung*’ refers to a dynamic and creative activity as well as to education. While education, what corresponds to the German ‘*Erziehung*’, means training or knowledge transfer in the sense of teaching skills, ‘*Bildung*’ includes aspects like personal growth, self-cultivation, and personal transformation. The fact that Arendt decided *not* to use the regular translation of ‘education’ for ‘*Bildung*’ shows clearly that for her it is primarily the creative process which counts. World-building in this sense means the *creation* as well as *cultivation* and *transformation* of the world by human beings.

According to Arendt, the world is creatively constructed together through speaking and acting. To the extent that we consider adults *and* children likewise as human actors and world-creators, for me, doing philosophy with children is to be understood as an activity of the children's world-building process. This is why one has to be aware not to fall into the trap of instrumentalizing the activity of doing philosophy with children as an educational tool [3, p. 142]. The point is rather to include children and their perspectives and speak together about the world. Children are newcomers to the world. At least when they enter kindergarten – but it mostly starts already earlier – they actively start to create their world with other children and adults by speaking and acting. So, what Arendt worked out can be applied already to the children's sphere. It is even more present here, since children are really new-beginners: They are open and curious, they are not yet too much fastened to specific opinions or preconceptions, they think lively and playfully, they vividly change topics and are always in the flow. In reference to Arendt, for whom *the political* does primarily mean the *realization* of human interactions, I suggest to consider the realm which is opened up during philosophizing with children as the *political of the children's world*.

*The childist perspective*¹

At this point I like to introduce the *childist perspective* which is about including childhood and the children's perspectives as explicit basic and common parts of human experiences into the field of ethics and philosophy. The terms 'childist' or 'childism', suggested by John Wall, express a form of (self-)critique in analogy to the terms 'feminist' or 'feminism'.² According to Wall, the 'first wave' of childhood studies in the 1980s, brought the children's voices and agency into public discourse. They were acknowledged as a particular group with an own culture. In the 'second wave' during the late 1990s, children became more included as contributors in society and research, and adult researchers started to engage dialogically with children in their own cultures of communication. The 'third wave' of today's childhood studies (here Wall himself is an active contributor) is questioning basic concepts in a deconstructive way and one of the main challenging issues is the norm concept of adulthood. Adults' experiences are always taken for granted as the general reference points of agency and participation. One explicit goal is thus the conceptual reconstruction of agency and participation by taking into account particularly the experiences of children [17, p. 33–34].

In Walls childist theory, moral life is seen no longer as based on "individual autonomy" or the "authority of tradition", but on interdependence, rooted basically in the relationship between children and adults [16, p. 10]. The pitfall of an educational use of philosophy with/for children can be discovered in the underlying developmental adultist view that by using philosophy with/for children, children could and should learn and develop certain skills and capabilities. There is, of course, nothing wrong with learning those skills, but from a childist perspective this pedagogical (adultist) gaze does not fully do justice to the children's world. The adultist conception of the human being in this view is rather a non-child-inclusive one. A childist conception of the human being, in contrast, does not put the focus on the developmental or educational use of philosophy, but on its creative potential. Thus, philosophy, as I understand it, means the potential of seeing things in new ways, of being wide- and open-minded, and of thinking free-spirited about the world. It is not about reproducing existing discourses, but to create new discourses [15, p. 25]. These new discourses are of course

¹ I am very thankful to Tanu Biswas who introduced to me the childist approach of John Wall in the context of the new childhood studies [4].

² By taking a childist perspective, Wall intends to formulate a new, more dynamic and child-inclusive ethics. What for him is at stake is an ethical restructuring towards a child-responsive moral theory. By this, the basic ethical question of "what it means to be human" comes to the fore and is expanded towards social – inter-human – interrelationship [16, p. 3]. Here one of Wall's basic questions is "Does childhood offer any lessons that can save our account from ontological despair?" And the answer he gives is the starting point for his ethical theory based on the notion of play: "What childhood ultimately shows is that moral creativity remains possible because of an inexhaustible human capability for play" [16, p. 48].

not radically new; they are connected to the existing ones, but also go beyond. This is, in my view, the main point of Arendt's idea of new-beginning.

The UN-Convention on the Rights of the Child from 1989 considers a child as an active subject with rights. Additionally, by following the Hawaiian approach of doing philosophy with children, I am convinced that for a peaceful and just society we need to develop mindfulness and heartfulness. Children's voices should be listened to and taken serious and not be infantilized or restricted to what adults want to hear from them. For doing so we need to provide places for children to express *their* thoughts, free spaces and environments which are as less pedagogic and educational as possible. There is an urgent need to be sensitive to the existing power structure between adults and children. Children have something to say; their worldviews and their ways of being are essential parts of our human world. In order to achieve (global) justice for children, I therefore consider the transformation of the adult-child relationship as one major aspect. In the following part of my paper I would like to uncover the 'adultist' gaze and to sensitize to the normative role of the category of the 'adult'.

Uncovering the adultist gaze

We know, roughly, three stages of age: childhood/youth, adulthood and old-age. These stages have been frequently (re-)defined, and their meanings often changed in the course of history. 'Age', thus – like other differentiating categories such as 'race', 'class', 'gender', 'ability' – can be understood as a social construct with meaning creating function which is used, applied, practiced, conceptualized, and normalized in different ways, but always hierarchical. Concerning the category of age, we don't find many philosophical reflections. None of the founding modern theories of social justice deals explicitly with the concerns of children. It is primarily the disciplines of sociology and pedagogy which deal with the category of age. In pedagogy, childhood and youth are seen as stages of life in which knowledge should be transmitted to the still 'unready' children and adolescents to prepare them for the following (st)age of adulthood. In this process they are taught by adults according to their – adultist – aims, purposes and intentions. The basic assumption in this educational engagement is that children are "people who *lack* something" and that by education "they can become 'real' people" [12, p. 33]. There is also an opposite view, shaped by Romanticism and Rousseau, in which children are seen as *the* authentic, real incarnations of being human. But what prevails in our present time is a 'developmental' thinking which indicates that the 'savage' or 'primitive' child needs to be 'cultivated' and implicitly holds the view that childhood and children's activities only have meaning insofar as they lead to adulthood [12, p. 34]. This shows very clearly that our present predominant educational and pedagogical attitude is supported by the commitment to development; and the adult is the (unsaid) norm for this development. Finally, this prevalent adultist approach takes itself – tacitly and as a matter of course – as 'general human'.

This view is challenged by new approaches in childhood studies where the adult-child-relation is reflected concerning inequality and power. Barbro Jo-

hansson, for example, worked out several aspects in which we can obviously find the hierarchical relationship between children and adults. First, there is the asymmetric interdependency: Children depend on adults, but adults don't depend on children (even though all societies depend on children for their continued existence). Second, there are the implications concerning agency or, more concrete, to which extent agency is denied or ascribed to children. And third, there is the fact that it is always the perspective and interpretation of the adult from where the child is located as the 'other' [9]. What becomes clear in this listing is that child/childhood and adult/adulthood are dichotomous and at the same time entangled constructs. Like 'white', 'middle-class', 'male', etc. the 'adult' is the norm taken for granted and as such the 'blind spot' which has to be uncovered and deconstructed. While the constructive character of childhood is widely accepted, the constructive character of adulthood is less investigated. But according to Johansson, the construction of adulthood is "an enterprise in which not only adults, but also objects, environments and not least children are involved" [9, p. 111]. In her conceptual analysis of the 'adult' she discovered (for now) four forms of adulthood which I will not explicate in detail, but only mention briefly: There is 1) an 'adult-in-charge', 2) an 'adult-included-in-commonality', 3) an 'adult-as-incompetent-child' and 4) an 'adult-as-other' [9, p. 105–111]. Probably we could find even more 'adults' or aspects of adulthood, but already these four aspects show that adulthood appears "no more homogeneous, complete or unambiguous than childhood" [9, p. 112].

Coming back to the issue of education, we should probably see childhood as the "possibility of a radical questioning" and the "radical change of the given order" [11, p. 3]. What is stake is a concept of education that puts priority on creative self-thinking which enables children – but not only them – to always see things new¹. To overcome the understanding of the 'unready' child, who has to learn to become an adult 'ready-to-society', we need an open-minded re-questioning of basic issues like 'What is learning?', 'What is education?', 'What is *Bildung*'? What should/must we learn and what do we want to learn? In this process of re-shaping our understanding of learning and education "[t]here are so many things to unlearn in order to create conditions for learning differently [...]. Above all, unlearn a way of learning that inhibits experience" [10, p. 180].

This childist approach of education takes the children part of the adult-child-relationship serious and includes actively children's life-worlds, experiences and imaginations. When we really like to achieve social and global justice for children, e.g. in the field of education, a mere reform of the education systems is not enough. What is needed is a reform of the whole society especially concerning the power structure between adults and children and a critical questioning and reflection of the 'adult'. I am not saying that education is wrong or that we don't need education. What I say, is that we should rethink education and pedagogy in order to do more justice to children. And there-

¹ In fact, children by themselves do see things always new, but during school life this way of looking at the world – this 'sense of wonder' (like Thomas Jackson calls it) – becomes gradually 'de-educated'.

fore, the best way to shift this gaze is to enter a creative process of *unlearning*. In this process of looking anew to the issues of learning and education play should 'play' a major role. In short: A child-just education has to be understood as the children's world-building process in the form of play.

Play as a basic condition of being (child-)human

In general we associate play primarily with an activity performed by children. But we also use the expression in the context of sports, theater, literature, imagination, arts, etc. In all cases, play is deeply connected with culture and, in particular, it is an essential part of children's culture. In Article 31 of the *UN-Convention on the Right of the Child* the right "to engage in play" is explicitly mentioned. Children need to play. Play is a basic condition for being a child. It is not yet that long, that play and games carry a positive connotation. In the 18th century games were even seen as "poisonous" for children's education. With Romanticism the qualities of imagination and spontaneity were revalued. They were seen as central qualities especially of children, but also of human beings in general. In what follows, play was defined as something "particularly appropriate to childhood" [12, p. 21–22].

This very brief historical outline shows that it is a cultural and historical grown consideration, emerged in the last 150 years, that play belongs to children like work belongs to adults – but in fact, play is very often "taken more seriously by children than is work by adults" [16, p. 49]. Children grow into a given culture, take it over by playing and create their 'children's culture'. This term, formulated by Flemming Mouritsen, has three different shapes: 1) the culture that is produced *for* children (books, games, movies etc.), 2) the cultural activities that are practiced *with* children (leisure activities, workshops etc.), and 3) culture that is produced *by* children what Mouritsen specifies as 'play culture' [12, p. 16]. This play culture is transmitted from child to child and does not exist in a fixed form; it depends on situations. Play is something that is not already known by a child, but is coming to the world *by* playing. There are as numerable differences in the ways of playing as different conditions like e.g. age (younger/older), gender (girl/boys), class (rich/poor), geography (province/city, country), and culture (religion, language, etc.). Play culture enables children to 'cultivate' themselves, that is, to create patterns or to produce artistic expressions. Play culture, furthermore, takes place everywhere in the world and is thus local and global at the same time.

Concerning the evaluation of play and games, the child's gaze very often differs from the adult's gaze. Where the adult mostly looks through the 'pedagogical lens', the child looks through the 'lens of play' what frequently leads to clashes. Mouritsen sees the reason for this in the role adults play in the 'game' of viewing children and childhood which is mostly an educational or pedagogical game and has become something like a "cultural law" [12, p. 31–32]. When a game or play does not look like to have a learning effect, adults tend to devalue it as wasting time, bad, or annoying. This pedagogical view, or "pedagogical project", is "settled into us" (adults) and shapes

our view and understanding of children, childhood, child culture and children's cultural expressions [12, p. 32–33].

In contemporary theories of play, play is understood no longer in an utilitarian way as an educational tool, but as “something in its own right” and, in a broader sense, as “a characteristic human form of expression” [12, p. 25–26, 35–39]. Play is the “deeper capability” for “creating already created worlds into meaning”; it is the “gift in all persons from birth to death for opening themselves up to more expansive experiences of being and relations” and, on a deeper level, play is “the very dynamics of human being-in-world” – “being-in-the-world [...] is play” [16, p. 48–49]. Finally, children as well as adults are seen as the “coauthors of the play of life” [16, p. 57].

This approach is very clearly directed against any instrumental understanding of play, especially against the view of play as a teaching tool in the context of children's educating. Play, in this sense, is a basic condition for being human; it is, in reference to Hannah Arendt, a human condition. In a broader sense, it is a human right of every human being to play a part not only “in the formation of their societies” [17, p. 41], but also, again in reference to Arendt, in the creation of the world. The capability to create the world is for all human beings – adults and children – the basis for culture. Through play children take part in the human world-building process and we adults should learn from that for the sake of an all-inclusive humanity.

The children's polylogue

In this last chapter I will deal in more detail with the question: How could it be possible to do philosophy with children interculturally? After some general thoughts about doing philosophy with children, or P4C¹, I will briefly sketch the two implementations of the children's polylogue project – 2016 in Hawai'i and 2019 in Japan – and also add some reflections.

Doing philosophy with children/P4C does exist now for more than 50 years and could definitely be called a worldwide movement. Nevertheless it is always a very local project: Small groups or classes take place at the location of residence, the children are characterized by their direct cultural, familial, and social environment, and they think and communicate in their mother tongue or the respective official language. But mostly, already here we can encounter a first intercultural dimension – I call it: ‘*local* interculturality’: The children represent various cultural backgrounds which have influence on their philosophical inquiries.

Besides this, there is a ‘*global* interculturality’. It appears, on one hand, in the worldwide philosophical activities with children and, especially, in the manifold ways in which Matthew Lipman's or Gareth Matthews' ap-

¹ The term P4C (philosophy for children) has been invented by Matthew Lipman in the 1970s and is commonly used in the English speaking areas. Also Thomas Jackson uses the term, but uses small letters to denote the processual activity of doing philosophy – and adds the Hawaiian reference: p4cHI. For me, I prefer the term ‘with’ instead of ‘for’, because it refers more directly to an eye-level-relation between adults and children. In accordance with Jackson I prefer the progressive form.

proaches¹ are culturally adapted. The approaches in different cultural contexts differ in relation to language, history, topics, conflicts etc. Another global intercultural dimension appears in academic reflections about intercultural aspects observed by philosophers or other scholars working with children. One interesting example is the project of Amy Reed-Sandoval who is doing philosophy with indigenous children and youth in Oaxaca, Mexico. Her experiences of the ethnic dimension due to the particular positionality of herself as the foreign teacher and the indigenous students resulted in reflections about a “place-based philosophy” [13, p. 9–12].

In my work with children my main interest lies in the intercultural dimension of the children's questions and reflections: What kind of questions do children ask in different cultural contexts? Are the questions similar? Or are there very specific questions? With what kind of images and arguments do children think in different places? And finally I am wondering, how children from one country (cultural context) would deal with questions from children from another country (cultural context). In other words: How could a children's polylogue work and what kinds of effects would this have on the children?

The starting point for my inaugural project of *the children's polylogue* was in early spring 2016. At that time I was practicing philosophy with elementary-school-children in Wuppertal, Mid-West-Germany, and I got the opportunity to visit Hawai'i to collaborate with Thomas Jackson and other members of the *Uehiro Academy of Ethics and Education* at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. In preparation, I took pictures of the wonderings from 14 of my 3rd and 4th graders with whom I had been philosophizing regularly once a week for already one year and translated them into English. In Hawai'i, I was introduced to several classes and teachers of Waikiki-Elementary-School, where p4c is deep-seated in school life. In one class of 5th graders with 20 children I conducted a p4c-session. I first showed the power-point-presentation with the wonderings of the children from Wuppertal. In the style of the so called *Plain Vanilla*² the children from Honolulu democratically chose one question about which they wanted to do their inquiry which I audio-recorded. The question was: “Is there an end of the world?” After the session I took pictures of their wonderings, translated them into German and prepared a PPP for the children in Wuppertal. Back home, I first reported to

¹ Both didacts of philosophy count as the ‘founding fathers’, starting in the 1970s to put their focus on children's thinking. While Lipman was following a more didactic path of teaching critical thinking skills, Matthews considered that children have a natural capacity to philosophize and therefore adults should engage in serious conversations with children.

² *Plain Vanilla* is a strategy suggested by Jackson which can be used for a p4c session. The name refers to the basic taste of vanilla ice cream which can be modified in taste depending on your preference. In short there are five steps: 1) Reading/watching/hearing a text/picture book/film/song etc., 2) the children are formulating their questions in reference to the stimulus, 3) the children vote democratically for one question, 4) the children do their philosophical inquiry about this question, and 5) the children are reflecting about their inquiry [7, p. 463].

the German children the course and outcome of the Waikiki-inquiry. In the next sessions I showed the Power-Point with the Waikiki-questions, and since we had more time, the children from Wuppertal could choose some more wonderings for their inquiries. Finally, I sent the proceedings of our sessions to the Waikiki-teacher, and she transmitted them to her class.

All of the children involved liked the project very much and participated enthusiastically. They were very proud to realize that children from another place, “from the other side of the globe”, did philosophical inquiries about their questions. And they also found the respective other children’s questions very exciting. Out of the not so many culturally specific questions, there were two questions from the Hawaiian children concerning Buddhism and reincarnation in which the German children – most of them Muslims and a few Christians – were especially interested in, because they didn’t understand these topics at all. It would go too far to describe the inquiries in detail here, but their inquiries, e.g. about the meaning of reincarnation and how to imagine it, were really very fascinating, for them and for me. For all of us new thinking horizons – intercultural thinking horizons – opened up very literally.

The second round of the children’s polylogue took place in July 2019 in Japan. It was in collaboration with Prof. Dr. Taketo Tabata from *Miyagi University of Education* in Sendai, Miyagi prefecture in the North-East of Japan, who is one of the pioneers of doing philosophy with children in Japan. Prof. Tabata and his colleagues maintain close contact and an active exchange program with the Hawaiian *Uehiro Academy*. Like my own approach, the Miyagi style of doing philosophy with children has Hawaiian roots and it also has been adapted to the Japanese context. For six weeks I was invited to visit numerous schools – from kindergarten to high school – and thus could get a lot of different experiences. The opportunity to hold the children’s polylogue was finally provided by a very little elementary school with altogether eleven pupils in the countryside of neighboring Fukushima prefecture where I could stay for three days. The pupils already experienced p4c classes for four months, once or twice a week. Like in 2016, I brought with me pictures with questions – this time translated into Japanese – from twelve 2nd and 3rd graders from my Wuppertal elementary school where I still was busy then. On the second day I gave a little lecture (in simple Japanese) about Germany, Wuppertal, and the elementary school. On the third day, finally, the Japanese teacher and I held a p4c session.

The pupils between the ages of six and twelve chose one question their teachers were very surprised of. It was posed by a 3rd grade girl from Wuppertal and reads as follows: “Who invented the Kanji (the Japanese character) of Japan?”¹ This question provided an entry to a wonderful intercultural encounter and the inquiry that followed I consider as a masterpiece in creative intercultural thinking. In the following I will give a brief outline. The older children started with sharing their knowledge about the historical Chinese-Japanese encounter. One girl said that at one time in history the

¹ As one little activity for preparation I taught the German children how to write ‘Japan’ in Japanese characters what they really appreciated and were eager to learn.

Chinese forced the Japanese to use Kanji. A younger boy asked why they forced the Japanese. He further asked if it couldn't have been also possible that the Japanese liked the Kanji and therefore used it. The oldest girl at one point said that probably the Chinese didn't force the Japanese, but told them the Kanji on friendly terms (after the session the teacher told me that she is half Chinese). The inquiry turned then to the more general question, how very different people could meet as friends. After a while I tried to come back to the topic of Kanji and contemplated, that there must have been someone – probably a Chinese, but maybe also a Japanese person – who invented the very first writing of a Kanji. I asked them what they think about that¹. Again the older children started with their knowledge about the pictograms, and in the following they reflected and discussed very lively how pictures could have been changed into Kanji. When the time has passed I asked if they would like to invent a Kanji. They were first surprised and then very eager to do so. They took their drawing block, and every child by him- and herself drew a new and unique Kanji; one boy even several. When they finished, one by one explained the meaning of the respective Kanji. For us adults, especially for the Japanese teachers, it was a bit like magic. They couldn't believe this creative power of 'their' children. For the closing part of the session, I was inspired by the wonderful energy to ask, if they could draw their favorite Kanji for the German children so that they could learn them – maybe similar to the Chinese-Japanese Kanji encounter. Again very eager, they draw beautiful pictures of their favorite Kanji, explained the meaning and gave a reason why they like especially this Kanji as their favorite. I protocolled all and took pictures.

In Germany, unfortunately, after the summer break the structure in the Wuppertal school completely changed and there was no more time for philosophy sessions. Therefore, I only had one short opportunity to show the pictures to the 3rd grade children. So, sadly, I could not complete this part of the children's polylogue, but nevertheless, this experience, in addition to the first round in Hawaii, provides a very fruitful basis for further development. In conclusion, again all the children involved were very excited and enthusiastic in terms of the project. I can say that the children's polylogue caused a clear extension of the children's horizons concerning global connectedness. The local places, so to say, opened up a global *intercultural* thinking space by practicing the polylogue. Or, in other words, the places appeared as event-places, where the polylogue *took place*.

Résumé

In this paper I elaborated that the polylogue is central for *creating the world*. This creative world-building process could and should already be part of children's life experiences. The activity of playfully doing philosophy

¹ Concerning this kind of 'intended intervention' towards a specific direction, it is never sure that it will work that the discussion will take the intended direction. It is well possible – and it often happens – that the children don't 'catch this ball', but go further with what they are more interested in.

with children could play a basic role here. What I call playfully doing philosophy with children builds on a childist concept of play and on a childist concept of philosophy which is oriented towards not-knowing. Not-knowing is an experience very alive to children and it was also very alive for Socrates [3, p. 49–50].

The intercultural dimension of the children's polylogue can be experienced in two ways: 1) between children from different cultures and 2) between children (culture) and adults (culture). In order to do justice to children, we adults have to be aware especially of the second way. It is not about teaching children, but about encountering them on eye-level. As I have shown, during the taking place of the children's polylogue the children experience directly and concretely self-active world-creation. They don't create something what we adults prescribe to them, but what arises anew to them in the very moment. In this sense we can speak of the children's world-building-process. Additionally, the children experience the connectivity with children in other world regions in a way that the worldwide plurality and diversity of children and cultures is not taught by adults, but is bodily and sensually experienced by the children themselves. This realm which opens up during playfully doing philosophy with children I consider as the political of the children's world. By providing a thinking space for children that goes beyond national and cultural borders we adults enable them to actively take part in world-building through encounter and exchange with other children far away. This, I would say, is one way of learning to be human.

On a theoretical level, childhood has the potential of a radical questioning and radical changing of the given order – primarily in the context of education and pedagogy, but also in philosophy. What is needed, is not knowledge transfer at all costs, but to put priority on creative self-exploration and self-thinking for enabling to see things new. This is why the childist approach is a great enrichment especially for rethinking questions about social and global justice as well as human rights. A childist or child-just behavior in relation to children could finally also change the behavior between adults. Furthermore, the primacy of the value of interdependence over individual autonomy or tradition could be helpful not only in the context of child-inclusive ethics or child-inclusive human rights, but also in the global and intercultural context. So, my central claim could be formulated as follows: We (adults) have to begin with self-reflection and self-transformation to come into true relationship with children; this is the most important part of doing justice to children. The same is true for building true relationship with human beings from other parts of the world. World-building is peace-building and this concerns all human beings including children.

As I started my paper with some words from John Wall, I like to end with some words from Mahatma Gandhi excerpted from a speech he hold at the Montessori Training College in London in 1931 and in which he refers to the great educationist and philanthropist Maria Montessori: “[I]f we would but stoop and humble ourselves, we would learn not from grown-up learned men, but from the so-called ignorant children... [I]f we are to reach real peace in this world... we shall have to begin with children” [6, p. 240].

References

1. Arendt, H. (1993), On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about Lessing, in: *Men in Dark Times*, Harcourt Brace, New York, pp. 3–31.
2. Arendt, H. (1998), *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed., The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, London.
3. Biesta, G. (2012), Philosophy, Exposure, and Children: How to Resist the Instrumentalisation of Philosophy in Education, in: Vansieleghem, N., and Kennedy, D. (eds.), *Philosophy for Children in Transition. Problems and Prospects*, Wiley-Blackwell, Hoboken (NJ), pp. 137–151.
4. Biswas, T. (2017), Philosophieren mit Kindern über Grenzen hinweg: Eine childdistische Perspektive, in: *Polylog – Zeitschrift für interkulturelles Philosophieren*, no. 37, pp. 89–102.
5. Certeau, M. de (1984), *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California Press, Berkeley.
6. Gandhi, M.K. (1971), Speech at Montessori Training College, in: *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 48, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, Delhi.
7. Jackson, T.E. (2001), The Art and Craft of ‘Gently Socratic’ Inquiry, in: Costa, A.L. (ed.), *Developing Minds. A Resource Book for Teaching Thinking*, ASCD, Alexandria, pp. 459–465.
8. Jackson, T.E. (2004), Philosophy for Children Hawaiian Style – On Not Being in a Rush..., in: *Thinking. The Journal of Philosophy for Children*, No. 17 (1&2), pp. 4–8.
9. Johansson, B. (2011), Doing adulthood in childhood research, in: *Childhood*, no. 19 (1), pp. 101–114.
10. Kohan, W.O. (2012), Childhood, Education and Philosophy: Notes on Deterritorialisation, in: Vansieleghem, N., and Kennedy D. (eds.), *Philosophy for Children in Transition. Problems and Prospects*, Wiley-Blackwell, Hoboken (NJ), pp. 170–189.
11. Masschelein, J. (2001), The Discourse of the Learning Society and the Loss of Childhood, in: *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, No. 35(1), pp. 1–20.
12. Mouritsen, F. (2002), Child culture – play culture, in: Mouritsen, F., and Qvortrup, J. (eds.), *Childhood and Children's Culture*, University Press of Southern Denmark, Odense, pp. 14–42.
13. Reed-Sandoval, A. (2014), The Oaxaca Philosophy for Children Initiative as Place-Based Philosophy: Why Context Matters in Philosophy for Children, in: *The APA Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy*, vol. 14, No. 1, pp. 9–12.
14. Sloterdijk, P. (1988), *Zur Welt kommen – Zur Sprache kommen. Frankfurter Vorlesungen*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M.
15. Vansieleghem, N. (2005), Philosophy for Children as the Wind of Thinking, in: *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, No. 39(1), pp. 19–35.
16. Wall, J. (2010), *Ethics in Light of Childhood*, Georgetown University Press, Washington D.C.
17. Wall, J. (2013), All the world's a stage: Childhood and the play of being, in: Ryall, E., Russell, W., and MacLean, M. (eds.), *The Philosophy of Play*, Routledge, Oxon, pp. 32–43.