

# Philosophical Conversation

## In the early years

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### I wish the school and the teacher were ...

Children seemed unhappy. Some of them said that they didn't like the school and the teachers. I asked them to discuss it all together and try to find solutions so that all of us will be happy. This is part of the dialogue that took place. We discussed possible changes in the school program and the teachers' behaviour.

**George:** We could have three break times each day!

**Michael:** Yes, and we will make less fuss!

**Teacher:** OK, that's great. But I have to ask first if this is possible.

**Michael:** Ask who?

**Teacher:** The primary education office.

**Emily:** What is this?

**Teacher:** People who tell us how to do our job properly. They might tell us if we can have three breaks every day. But they will be shorter. Are you ok with this?

**Children:** We don't mind.

**Teacher:** Then I will ask and I will let you know. Other suggestions so that we have a great time at school?

**Emily:** Miss Mary is quite strict.

**Teacher:** Is she strict without a reason?

**Helen:** OK ... we do silly things, and fuss and there are children who fight with each other.

**Teacher:** So does this behaviour make teachers get angry?

**Michael:** You can always talk politely.

**Teacher:** Of course. But teachers talk politely, don't they? What if we talk and you don't listen to us?

**Michael:** You can come close to us and not shout

**Teacher:** Sure! We can do this. But you have to listen when someone talks to you. Do you listen?

**George:** Not always.

**Teacher:** When we have to repeat the same thing one, two, three times and you don't listen to us, how do you think we feel? Is this a good reason to get angry?

**Children:** yes

**Teacher:** When you say something and nobody listens to you, how do you feel?

**Children:** Yes ... we don't like this.

**Vasoyla:** Maybe we can stop doing silly things...

**Michael:** Yes, but the teachers should not argue with young children!

**Teacher:** I agree! But what if children do things they shouldn't do?

**George:** We should not use sticks as weapons. We might hurt ourselves or the others.

**Kostas:** We should not hit the others.

**Michael:** These are all rules. You discuss rules now.

**Teacher:** But maybe these rules help us to be safe during our play. What do you think?

**Emily:** Yes ... but not all the children hit each other. I don't hit the others.

**Children:** (*many children talk at the same time*) Me neither.

**George:** We have to listen to the teachers when it comes to accidents.

**Teacher:** Do you do this?

**George:** No ...

### **Teacher's food for thinking**

This dialogue has a more practical orientation and aims at suggesting ways of improving our common life in the classroom. Children offer practical ideas for getting on well with each other. They also acknowledge the teacher's regulatory role and the restrictions they must enact to ensure the smooth operation of the classroom. Children offer examples such as "speak politely, come close to us when you speak and don't shout". At one point in the dialogue the teacher enables children to see things from a teachers' point of view when they talk but they are not heard. Children have experienced how it is to speak and not be listened to. Therefore, they should be able to understand how the teacher feels in the same situation. Some children give examples of times the group should listen better or behave differently. I wonder if this means they will change. Are the children that give the examples the same ones that misbehave?

Shall the teacher get involved in the discussion offering arguments? Usually, teachers should stay neutral and do not interfere in children's discussions. This is because they tend to persuade children do what the teachers want. This is not a desirable thing because children might feel pressed to agree with the teacher

and his/her authority. The table bellows describe more thoroughly what happens during the dialogue:

Michael: Yes, but the teachers should not argue with young children!	Child's suggestion
Teacher: I agree! But what if children do things they shouldn't do?	Teacher's agreement. Then a question suggesting a possible counter argument from the teacher's point of view.
George: We should not use sticks as weapons. We might hurt ourselves or the others.	First example offered of things to avoid in the classroom
Kostas: We should not hit the others.	Second example
Michael: These are all rules. You discuss rules now.	Categorisation links the examples and provides a topic for more dialogue.
Teacher: But maybe these rules help us being safe during our play. What do you think?	Suggested reason for the examples of rules and a question.

George: We have to listen to the teachers when it comes to accidents.	Child's suggestion
Teacher: Do you do this?	Questioning practical application of the rule.
George: No...	An honest response suggests openings for using words like <i>always, sometime, never and when</i>

There are many issues with potential philosophical value that stem from the dialogue above:

- Shall teachers interfere with children's inquiry? Should they offer arguments and counter arguments? Does teacher behaviour and argument oppress children's ideas?
- Are there issues that could be discussed equally children and teachers?
- Is it ok for teachers to defend themselves when speaking with children?

### **Concept: Silliness**

Children referred to "silly things" that they sometimes do in the classroom. There could be more clarifications regarding "silliness" through questions such as:

- What is silliness? What makes something silly?
- Is it silliness the same as foolishness?

- Can you give examples of silly things? What makes them silly?
- Are there things that could be silly for some people but not for others?
- Can something silly be serious? Can something serious be silly?
- Are there things that are sillier than others?
- Are there different degrees of silliness? How can we tell?
- Is silliness necessary?
- What if there was no silliness in the world? Would the world be better/worse? Why?
- What do you think was the first silly thing to happen in the world?
- Who decides what is a silly?
- Are silly things allowed? ARE there times that silly things are not allowed? Give examples.
- What if nobody did anything silly?

### **Other activities**

- Draw or write down your best silliness. If you have done it give information of how to do the best silly thing. Tips to consider!
- Measuring silliness: Find ways to measure silliness and discuss it with the others.
- The importance of silliness: Argue in favour and against.
- Write a list of silly things in order of most to least silly.