

# Philosophy for Children and respect as a value in preschool education

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**Abstract:** After a long period of practical experience in the kindergarten and day care section of the department of education, an opportunity arose to expand my influence into the education of children aged birth-three. Despite the importance of high-quality educational programs for this age group, it was only recently that a bill was passed regarding licensing and supervision of educational frameworks for children under three. Based on a theory of change, this study will proceed from the assumption that any change of values with the caregivers would only be significant if it existed through nannies who love their work and want to pursue it long-term. Furthermore, caregivers, whose work experience will be valued by the organization, will be able to produce a similar experience for the children under their care. In this study, I try to find out whether recognition and respect support the relationship in the daycare and allows the caregivers to experience respect, meaning and influence.

**Key-words:** Dignity, respect, honor, philosophy for children, conflict resolution

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## **Introduction**

'Man's honor' is a very meaningful concept. It is found in all our lives, reflected in the Bible, literature, history, art, and sports. It has philosophical, legal, psychological, and educational aspects. The term "human dignity" is passed as a thread between religions, cultures, and disciplines, and can be found in various sources of reference to it, following some sources:

In Jewish sources: "Honor thy father and mother," (Exodus, as, ye); ["For the honorable ...] are easy" (Shmuel a, B, L); "Zimmerman and as Bachman and D-Schmshmmel and shall be as Bhaad and Thaltthaud" (Psalms, Tu, B); "What is honorable? May your friend be honored as yours" (year, fathers' mask, episode B, sub-sub).

In other sources: "Protecting human dignity is the basis for peace in the world" (Pope John Paul II, 1998); "one must maintain his behavior on human dignity, not only out of the feeling of respect for himself, but because he is responsible for others" (Tagore, India); "Dignity is a kind of pleasure that a man feels in seeing others appreciate his actions and praise them, without looking at any benefit and advantage" (Epicurus, Greece); "all men are born free and equal in dignity and rights" (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948); Basic Law: Human dignity and Liberty (Jerusalem Supreme Court, 1992) .

Thus, it is possible to note that 'honor' is a universal concept that sees all humans as valuable and with a right to self-respect. This is a fundamental value, on which moral values and principles are built. As mentioned, different cultures, societies and thinkers have treated the concept of respect for its various aspects, and we are also now finding diverse references to it.

This work examines another aspect of the application of honor in practice, focusing on educational work in the field of preschool children. For this purpose, the primary goal of the study was to find out how early-age educators perceive the concept of dignity in their work. Moreover, how do they cope with dilemmas between respecting parents versus children, respecting staff members and dilemmas of respecting children? What are the ways to implement respectful access and the difficulties involved in implementing this approach? In this study, I was interested in the educators' subjective point of view and how this topic relates to their work

today and their life in general. For this, I was assisted by a qualitative approach that allowed me to have this kind of subjective examination. At the core of the qualitative approach, the perception is that to study human a phenomenon and to understand it deeply, one should directly examine the perspective of those who experience this phenomenon within the context in which it occurs. So, I conducted interviews and observations at the caregivers' workplace, through which I sought to deepen the understanding of their world in the context of the concept of respect.

It is worth noting that qualitative research has many advantages, with a significant one being the opportunity given me to "penetrate" the personal world of early-age educators. These women have laid out emotional and personal aspects of their lives in their present and past and shared their dreams for the future. This has contributed to my understanding of the complexity involved in the educational work. Due to their cooperation, as well as my professional involvement in the field of preschool age, I felt involved and even identified emotionally with certain content that had come up.

During the interviews, the educators referred to the various aspects of the concept of respect, and it was noticeable that the topic was relevant to them on a personal level.

### **Philosophy for children**

While academic achievements may facilitate access to pathways of success in life, some commentators suggest that there are underlying attitudes and behaviors also influenced by education, which may be important (Brunello and Schlotter 2011; Gupta and Simonsen 2010; Heckman and Rubinstein 2001). The list of such personal qualities is long and could include social and communication skills, resilience, determination, motivation, confidence, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. Various collective terms are used in the literature such as non-cognitive outcomes, soft skills, personal characteristics, personality traits, life skills, social and emotional skills, and wider educational outcomes.

The Israeli education system is neglecting for years thinking and education for thinking among students and especially young students. Thinking, and especially philosophical critical and creative thinking, is the main tool to encourage students to apply the core learning skills. In recent

decades, the educational system in Israel prevents young students – as well as teachers – from dealing with the great existential questions that relate to the essence of human beings.

The pedagogy in Israel views students as in a constant need of "repair". In contrast, P4C movement offers a space for addressing existential questions, some of which deal with urgent social issues such as honor, dignity, empathy, social justice etc... Philosophic inquiry has thus gradually been driven outside the young person's learning world – despite the fact that more than 40 years ago Matthew Lipman and Ann Margaret Sharp, the founders of Philosophy for Children, proposed a vast alternative space that paid respect to attentiveness to the authentic and original philosophical questions.

The question is, based on the information I have presented in the introduction is whether programs such as 'Philosophy for Children' can contribute to the level of empathy, honor, and appreciation among children and teachers in Israel?

Schools may be deficient in encouraging these qualities and somehow fail the broader purpose of education. So far, we have very limited knowledge about schools incorporating programs in Israel, for the development of non-cognitive outcomes. However, if the outcomes of school-based programs for character building, higher aspirations, social cohesion, well-being, and happiness can show a positive impact on pupils' life-long achievements then there is a need to revise the curriculum by incorporating wider outcomes of schooling. There is a need to see education beyond the limit of academic attainment. The need is to design education systems where active social participation, citizenship, honor, and empathy is considered as important as academic achievement. Research done by Nadia Siddiqui et al (2017) in England checked the effect of P4C on children's empathy. The results for FSM-eligible pupils at post intervention show them to be more empathetic than the control. They also show an increase in the selection of the "empathy" option over time. Moreover, the research showed that P4C improves children's social skills, communication, and respect for others.

The study shows some promise from P4C for areas like empathy, co-operation, and communication. This is perhaps especially the case for disadvantaged pupils as indicated by FSM-eligibility.

In another research, Siddiqui et al (2017) shows that teachers report of behavioral outcomes as a positive impact of P4C. These were noticed within P4C settings during the circle of enquiry, in more general classroom settings as well as during play time:

The children in class are more willing to reason with each other and listen carefully before jumping in and talking over each other. We have noticed a fall in the number of behavioral incident forms being submitted, suggesting a fall in the number of incidences of poor behavior. We think this is because the children are now more able to communicate with each other. Children seem less likely to squabble at play times. The occasions of telling tales have decreased a lot. Children deal with conflict resolution in a mature and grown-up way and think about actions after an argument. The children can articulate more about how they feel and feel confident to disagree without it being seen as a cause of quarrelling.

The teachers reported an important change in pupils' behavior in response to arguments. Pupils were thought to be becoming more respectful of different opinions: Children aren't afraid to question each other or refer back to someone else's point from earlier on in any lesson. Children are confident to challenge me, the teacher, without being disrespectful or rude. The children in class are more willing to reason with each other and listen carefully before jumping in and talking over each other. Children have become more accepting of the different opinions within the group. One SEN pupil, who is a very good speaker, seems to have gained more respect from his peers as he is often vocal and persuasive in our debates.

The core of education is in shaping the character of the learner, in the ability to expose him to and awaken significance in him, with the possibility of giving him the mental strength to be complete with his choices, and to fight for the fulfillment of his authentic self. "Philosophy for Children" is one of the alternative programs that have been offered for several years, as a way of dealing with challenges that arise because of difficulties in state-run education in Israel and around the world. A thorough understanding of the principles and hypotheses of the founder of "Philosophy for children", Matthew Lipman, will help in the future by assimilating these principles into the educational process, through the cultivation of the meaningful element within it, and not only superficially and externally. According to Lipman:

"We are aware of the ineffectiveness of the educational system, but, nevertheless, we repeatedly try to fix it instead of redesigning it. The main purpose of redesigning education will be based on inherent and essential values, in contrast to the system today whose values are utilitarian and external" (Lipman, 1980a, 2).

My desire is to connect the path that the philosophy of education has taken up until today, in the sense of honor and respect. There is a fundamental difference between honor and respect, which can help to make the world a much better place - as philosopher Kwame Antony Appiah believes. In Maslow's Pyramid of needs, respect is in the fourth place, which is why it is so significant and can motivate people to do unreasonable things - for better or for worse.

### **Summary and recommendations**

In this work it is possible to see how the educational ideal of Caring, as formulated by Nuddings, is translated into the practicalities of teaching and learning. In addition, I noticed that there is great importance in applying the principle of caring, specifically in early childhood education. However, we must not forget teenagers, since it is also an essential tool for teenagers, precisely because of the unique characteristics of this age.

The physical, emotional, and cognitive changes of early childhood, as expressed in Matthew Lippman's teachings, require an educational approach that treats the pupil as a combined body and mind, encouraging him to create relationships of caring with others, and the surrounding world. Education with care, honor, and respect can foster independent learning abilities in children, strengthen their self-esteem, and make them attentive to others, whole and free.

Educators in the spirit of Nuddings and Lipman do not try to implant good qualities in their students, but to cultivate them through caring relationships, like those between good parents and their children. Nuddings distinguishes between two types of caring: natural and ethical. Natural concern is a response that arises from the love or natural inclination of parents for their children, and it does not require ethical effort. Ethical caring stems from a conscious choice to lead our lives as concerned people, and from our need to be good human beings, in accordance with the spirit of early childhood educators. In this study we

see that Nuddings' words, which advocate the need for educators to cultivate ethical caring in their relationships with their students in order for them to learn to be caring people, to work to create a better world, where morality guides their actions, is reflected in early childhood education. Another characteristic of caring and concern expressed in this study is the duty of the caregiver to act to fulfill the needs of others while expressing an attitude of respect and honor. According to this approach, values should be embodied and not transferred, which is done by providing tangible examples of caring, concern, and respect. Hence, relationships, not laws or rules, are what are actually necessary in order to teach values.

One of Dewey's principles, that I believe was reflected in this research, is giving above and beyond: the educator must show care and sensitivity, be attentive, and respect the needs and wishes of the child. In my research, I discovered that moral education discourages early childhood educators due to the weight of responsibility that this issue puts on their shoulders, so it is much easier for them to stay within the realm of pedagogical fields than to address issues of respect and morality. I eventually came to realize that many educators avoid dealing with the issue of respect in their daily work routine.

Another factor that prevents educators from dealing with these subjects in a planned and systematic way, is their premise that children cannot understand such abstract concepts, and, therefore, there is no point in "teaching it" at such an early age. In addition, it is commonly thought that the representatives of education about honor and respect in children, are actually their own family members.

The assumption that the issue of respect can only be placed in the hands of the parents is wrong for several reasons. First of all, toddlers and kindergarten-aged children in Israel spend a significant part of their day in a nursery school or kindergarten. Secondly, the social experiences in the kindergarten setting enable learning that is not possible at home. Thirdly, the child must learn to develop empathy, which may be hidden within him, even towards people who are somewhat more distant from him than his own family circle. The mediation of the early childhood educator allows the child to utilize his inner tools also in a wider public context than just within the community of his friends and the kindergarten.

In the State of Israel, in its core educational program, the role of educators is specifically emphasized in instilling social values, including identity, respect for others, democracy, culture, aesthetics, etc.

The question is whether these programs with their intellectual emphasis are suitable for preschoolers and what may be done about it? It is interesting to note in this context that the educational system almost no longer uses the word, "respect", but the word, "values". One can only assume that the word "honor" somehow sends us straight to prohibitions and restrictions and presents aspects of restraint - what is forbidden to do, while the word "value" presents the positive side - what should and is worthy to be done.

This research emphasizes the need for developing space in the school curriculum where the focus is the development of pupils' character and values. This report presents the findings that a structured classroom inquiry and dialogue can support pupils in learning through listening to different perspectives and developing positive attitudes such as empathy, cooperation and resilience. My research is aimed to emphasize the importance of P4C program because it can show a gradual increase in empathy, dignity and respect among pupils and teachers.

I hope that the new research, which emphasizes the connection between emotions and the development of values and morals, will encourage kindergarten teachers and other educators to begin to touch on the subject in a greater frequency. For many years, pedagogical teaching avoided dealing with emotions and left the handling of them to the professionals. One of the prominent signs of this that I remember, was the changing of the name, "caretaker" to "teacher supporter". To this day, we bear the unfortunate consequences of these decisions that prevented educators from dealing with emotions and left the nurturing of the mental health of the children under their care, empty-handed within the classroom setting. Today, when we know more about the strong connection between the emotional world and the moral world, perhaps we will re-emphasize to educators the legitimacy of talking to children with respect, treating them with honor, discussing intimate feelings and desires of toddlers, strengthening the positive feelings inherent in us to do good, and most importantly - to engage in education and not only in teaching.

The findings of this study have refined, therefore, the importance of a systemic perception, which does not focus solely on the child himself but



expresses a holistic view that sees a continuum between the home and the daycare. Meaning, the child's behavior in the daycare is correlated to personal experiences, education patterns and communication ways at home. This approach also recognizes the importance of establishing productive staff relations, as an integral part of the application of respect and quality early-age care. I find it important to explore the other side of the issue, too, parents. To examine how parents perceive the subject of respect in the context of childcare. Topics such as: day-to-day dealing with the children, the influence of the educational institution, the influence of informal frameworks, the influence of their own education on their goals and expectations of their children, will all advance the issue and the educational agenda. Furthermore, new insights on this subject may contribute to finding a way to help children express their views and feelings in the context of respect, moral values, and a single-group relationship will shed light on the internalization of children's skills associated with the present and future, as well as the day-to-day in the daycare.

Thus, if we wish to influence the current situation in education and bring about a true sense of respect with all its potential implications, it is important to have guidance on the subject. For example: group training for caregivers on the subject will help them to vent, to state their positions and thus provide a thorough self-exploration of the various values and beliefs in the context of the matter. In the next step, training can be provided to focus on the tools that can be used to implement elements related to the concept of respect. These elements may include on the job guidance, focusing on developing social skills in children, skills for educated use in hands-on, hands-off, hands-out methods, as a way to help the educator establish an atmosphere of respect and acceptance within the educational framework. In my humble opinion, this is the infrastructure for achieving more developmental and educational goals.

I find that focusing on the subject's narrative revives their story in a way that clarifies their positions, feelings, memories, and beliefs, not just for me, as a researcher but also as the storyteller. I could recognize moments when the informants surprised themselves when they realized that they hold a world of opinions and feelings about the subject. The very opportunity to talk about it and to be fully attentive to this issue, I think, meant something to them and not just as a requirement of the study.

Ayelet's statement in the second interview illustrates this point in her satisfaction with her daughters in the first interview: "at first you told me what the subject was, so I thought, what is there to talk about? And suddenly it evolved into something this big, I enjoyed what came out, sometimes it comes out spontaneously and sometimes it doesn't come out." At the end of the second interview, after a more personal exposure that also included profound insights, she noted with excitement: "Clever things, ideas I can discuss with you for hours."

I find in an open interview a tool, not only for gathering information and exploring a different worldview, but also a tool for empowerment of the educators. As I mentioned, they need to find the inner motivation that will allow them to perform quality work with the preschool age. Similar to the importance of training and especially narrative training, which gives a place and time for a story and connecting to it, so does the interview, even if it is on a one-time basis, it contributes to the establishment of a professional identity and the sense of self-esteem of the caregiver character, which is so necessary for the essential work with the preschool age. Throughout the process, there is room for emotional expression and an inward glance. Although the model refers to an emotional expression as a stage in a conversation, an organizational change process has a place to combine these opportunities. The treatment of emotions allows openness, intimacy, but also relief, as emotional expression helps to "evacuate" the negative emotions generated in unsettling situations.

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