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TITLE: The Child and Philosophy Education: The Right of the Child to Contemplate, Practice Critical Thinking, and Explore Philosophical Curiosity.

THE CHILD AND PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract. Philosophy is often included in educational curricula only at the secondary school level, whether in Arab or Western countries. This raises numerous questions about the absence of philosophical thinking and philosophy as a subject in earlier educational stages, especially in primary school. At this stage, children naturally develop a sense of curiosity and a strong capacity for asking philosophical and logical questions. These questions stem from the ambiguity that dominates their thoughts. For example, a child might wonder: "How did I come into this world?" "Who is responsible for our existence?" "What does God look like?" "Are angels like us?" or "Are cartoon characters real beings we could meet?" Such profound and logical questions reflect a child's innate ability to engage in philosophical thinking, particularly during their early years. However, these

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bold and challenging questions—often considered too sensitive for even adults to answer—remain unanswered or dismissed. Despite these clear indicators of a child's capacity for philosophical reflection, philosophy as a discipline continues to be marginalized and absent, leaving children without proper guidance to explore the nature of life and existence during their formative years. In Algeria, philosophy is only taught during the later years of secondary school, starting when students are already in their teens. However, philosophical practice can and should begin much earlier. A child has every right and ability to engage in philosophical inquiry, asking questions about themselves, the world, and knowledge without fear or hesitation. This is emphasized by the French philosophy teacher, Edwige Chirouty, who advocates for incorporating philosophy into children's education to help them develop critical thinking skills. This presentation aims to emphasize the importance of philosophy in Arab countries, particularly in Algeria, and to advocate for integrating philosophical thinking into primary education curricula. Children urgently need philosophy as a tool to foster freedom of expression. The significance of this lies in its ability to nurture a child's capacity for critical thinking. Many psychologists have highlighted that a large percentage of children ask questions with often ambiguous answers. This underscores their active cognitive processes and innate ability for philosophical thought.

Keywords: child, philosophy, education, teaching, critical thinking.

Key Questions:

- Can children truly engage in critical and philosophical thinking during the early stages of education?
- Does early engagement in philosophy enhance intelligence, capacity, and effectiveness in their future endeavors?
- How can we restore the value of philosophical thought and integrate it into the educational curriculum for primary education, given the numerous challenges philosophy currently faces?

Introduction

Managing the school environment necessarily requires a framework capable of guiding education toward achieving the expected educational objectives. These objectives aim to shape the student into a positive and active member of their society. In the absence of this framework, which should be built on intellectual curiosity and philosophical inquiry, the child risks becoming a victim within their community, family, and school?

The school is a vital component of the educational process. It plays a significant role in nurturing the child and shaping their personality in all aspects to achieve social and emotional harmony with their environment. The school serves as a source of learning for the child, fostering their behavior, thinking, and various roles they will perform in the future. Children have the greatest role in building the foundation of civilization, which underscores the need for specialists in childhood psychology and education to raise awareness within institutions and guide them in selecting the right approach. This approach should nourish the child’s mind healthily, particularly during the early stages of education, starting from the primary level.

Institutions must aim to provide the child with comprehensive physical and intellectual education while ensuring their full right to ask philosophical questions to satisfy the intellectual curiosity that often dominates their minds. However, this satisfaction should not be limited to educational institutions. It must also begin within the family, which is often tasked with answering the philosophical questions raised by the child. These questions, though ambiguous and unclear to them, drive their search for answers both within and outside the family. This process typically begins as early as the age of four.

Despite the fact that the family and educational institutions are key elements in the upbringing and development of the child, the educational and familial systems still lack an essential aspect of the child’s life and social development—namely, providing the child with intellectual and philosophical nourishment.

Through this paper, we aim to initiate social, educational, and pedagogical changes that focus on directing these institutions to activate philosophical thought in the child’s mind. This can be achieved by introducing philosophy into the educational system, starting from primary schools.

This approach leads us to open the door for inquiry and discussion:

- How can we build a philosophical foundation within an educational system that does not fully acknowledge the role of philosophy in the child's social and educational life?
- Can philosophy be framed as a necessary and integral subject within the primary education curriculum to enable children to exercise their right to philosophical thinking?

These questions will be explored and addressed throughout this presentation.

First: The Child

Definition of a Child:

This term applies to genders, male and female, referring to human beings who enjoy rights and undertake various duties. It is the responsibility of social, economic, and cultural institutions to provide for these needs. Defining a precise concept of a child is challenging due to differing opinions and perspectives among psychologists, sociologists, legal experts, and others concerned with children and childhood.

A. Linguistic Definition of a Child:

The term "child" linguistically stems from the triliteral root *t-f-l*. It refers to something tender, soft, and delicate. The plural is *tifāl* or *tufūl*. A male child is called a *tifl*, and a female child is a *tiflah*. A child refers to an infant or newborn up to the point of maturity. "The child is considered such from the time of their birth until they reach puberty."

B. Conceptual Definition of a Child:

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, a child is defined as "any human being under the age of eighteen." Thus, any individual who has not reached this age is considered a child.

In sociology, the concept of a child varies among experts, forming three primary perspectives:

1. First Perspective:

This view defines childhood based on a specific age range, starting from birth and ending at eighteen years.

2. Second Perspective:

This perspective considers childhood as the initial phase of life that begins from birth and ends at the onset of puberty.

3. Third Perspective:

This view sees childhood as the period of life from birth to adulthood. Adulthood may be marked by marriage or puberty. Despite differing views, all agree that childhood begins at birth, although its endpoint varies among perspectives.

Childhood in Psychology:

Psychologists consider childhood as a phase extending from the formation of the fetus in the womb until sexual maturity. This period differs in characteristics and traits between the two genders, with each having distinct developmental aspects.

Childhood in Philosophy

The philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau declares that the child is a complete being, though not in the sense of seeing the man within the child. Rather, he highlights that childhood is a distinct stage of development, characterized by a natural progression toward completeness, wherein the degree of maturity aligns harmoniously with this stage. Rousseau’s conception of childhood portrays the child as a unique entity with individual traits that set this stage apart from other phases of human development.

Rousseau draws attention to the precise distinction between a man and a mature child, stating: "The principle governing the activity of the child is the same as that governing the reasoning of the man; however, the mechanisms of this activity and the nature of needs and interests are what differentiate them."

Second: The Nature of Philosophy

Significant efforts have been made to define the essence of philosophy in its broadest sense. As a result, many scholars and researchers have raised questions about it, such as: What is philosophy? Are the truths presented by philosophy eternal? What place can we assign to philosophical systems? And why do philosophers often seem so enigmatic? These recurring questions will be addressed by exploring multiple definitions of philosophy.

Philosophy, at its core, is a desire for acquiring knowledge. It is not limited to merely posing questions; rather, it delves into the depths of ideas, analyzing them, exploring the reasons for their existence, and then offering answers. These answers are seen by philosophers as comprehensive, accurate, and absolute.

For instance, Plato believed that his views on knowledge were entirely correct, not just for himself but universally. Similarly, Descartes was convinced that his metaphysical propositions were eternal truths through which people would acknowledge his contributions to uncovering them. This pattern extends to other philosophers like Kant, Spinoza, Rousseau, and John Locke, among others.

If we reflect on the nature of the philosopher and their persona, we find that they often resemble a child in their simplicity. Philosophers, like children, are tormented by questions and dilemmas that may seem insoluble. They pose questions and, when people fail to answer, conclude that others are preoccupied with matters unrelated to existence, knowledge, or values—core domains of philosophy.

Thus, these individuals are entirely engrossed in pursuits far removed from the philosophical inquiry into existence, understanding, and moral values.

Philosophy has been defined as the search for the deeper causes of phenomena, in contrast to science, which seeks the proximate causes. However, people often misunderstand these deeper causes, viewing them as hidden and attributed to unknown forces, or associating them solely with spiritual or religious causes, ultimately leading to the "Cause of Causes," which is God. This misunderstanding can result in philosophy being regarded as a pursuit of the unknown or a quest for the metaphysical and the unseen.

Yet, philosophy is neither religion nor something else entirely. It is an ongoing effort to comprehend reality, delve into its depths, and uncover its layers that are not immediately visible.

This indicates that philosophy holds significant importance in human life, as it concerns itself with reality and the human being as a thinking entity. Since humans are rational beings, this thinking originates in a specific stage of life—childhood. It is during this phase that philosophical thinking begins to take root, driven by curiosity and the desire to explore the mysteries of existence.

The child begins to ask many questions without any embarrassment, such as: How was I created in this life? Who is God? What does He look like? All of these questions are common for children, especially in their early educational stages. This inevitably calls for including philosophy as an educational scientific subject in primary school, as it is closely related to the child's thinking, enriching their mind and satisfying their philosophical curiosity.

Third: The child and philosophical thought: The relationship between the child and philosophy is a reciprocal one, where both parties exchange this process. Forty years ago, Lipman launched the Children for Philosophy movement (C4P), with the aim of introducing children to the world of philosophy, as a way to practice thinking in all areas of knowledge. The encounter between philosophy and childhood enriches the child's thinking in all aspects of life. Many researchers and philosophers have agreed that there is clear empirical evidence confirming that teaching philosophy to children through stories greatly helps improve their reading, writing, and mathematics abilities. Philosophy also contributes to strengthening the democracy of education by clarifying concepts of justice, freedom, personality, rights, duties, justice, virtue, and others through the practice of reflective thinking, which in turn influences the child's daily life experiences.

Thus, practicing philosophy in schools will effectively help children better understand the teachings of life and enrich their minds. This enrichment will enable them to enter the social world and understand it in the simplest ways, gradually becoming a relative, albeit incomplete, version of the adults.

In the philosophy of childhood that we are talking about here, it is a movement that can express the child's thinking on various issues and problems. Therefore, it is a field and moral, political, social, and metaphysical philosophy. This gives the child a voice to either accept or reject, and this rejection leads to continued discrimination and neglect, resulting in their exclusion and marginalization. Meanwhile, this philosophy works to create equality between adults and children in acquiring knowledge and calls for the removal of the distinctions that have often placed philosophy solely in the domain of adults.

This distinction is not only found in philosophy but also in the differences between genders, such as between women and men, between children and adults, and between blacks and whites. However, it should not be practiced in the process of thinking, which necessarily calls for a reversal of the hierarchical relationship between these binaries into a relationship of clear equality.

This means that children's philosophy works hard to restore the status of all that has been marginalized, especially the practice of philosophical thought among children, and to create balance and equality between the child's thinking and that of adults. The process of shaping the child and training their mind philosophically and scientifically must start from the very early stages of their educational development.

"Until he manages to acquire a wealth of knowledge, this wealth of knowledge makes him intellectually fulfilled, which makes it easier for him to adapt to life and understand reality in a logical manner. Philosophy, fundamentally, if we delve into its depths, should accompany the child from the very beginning of his educational and formative years, not from the secondary stage when the student finds himself faced with questions that may seem trivial to an adult, unlike a child who raises difficult questions but without worrying about them."

"His only concern is searching for answers, which is a remarkable thing. This is why we have made it a priority to direct education in a philosophical direction, as it is the only way that strengthens the child's mental abilities and satisfies his curiosity."

"Fourth: Philosophical Thinking Skills in Children (The Descartes Model)

The Descartes model has led to the development of an educational ideology in recent years. It runs parallel to the promotion of education and its transformation in the age of the knowledge economy. Descartes called for a rethinking of how we think and how we teach children to think, by introducing new possibilities and methods to teach children how to think and philosophize. The 'National Curriculum Model' formulated specific skills for teaching thinking to children, which are as follows:

1. **Skill of Information Processing and Analyzing:** This is a skill that allows the child to identify information related to one another, organize it, sort it, and compare it.
2. **Skill of Justification and Proof:** This enables the child to support their ideas, opinions, and actions by relying on reasoning and evidence, with a focus on using clear and precise language. This is the essential element through which we explain everything we think.
3. **Skill of Investigation and Research:** This skill enables the child to raise appropriate questions, identify problems, and plan what we want to do, while predicting and anticipating the results. This helps in further developing and stimulating the child's thinking.
4. **Skill of Creative Thinking:** This skill helps generate and develop new ideas, enabling the child to hypothesize, use imagination, and search for new results.
5. **Skill of Evaluation:** This allows us to assess the accuracy of information, determine the value of what we read, hear, and do, and develop our standards to judge our work and ideas, as well as the work of others around us.

From this, we can say that these skills should be viewed as mental processes, which strengthens the prevailing idea in the education of children."

"From this, it can be said that these skills should be viewed as mental processes, which reinforces the prevailing idea in the education of children that these skills must be acquired and practiced, as skills are gained through training and experience. This is in order to reach both technical and intuitive knowledge, as described by René Descartes.

From this, we can understand that these skills must necessarily be acquired, as they are mental processes, and the mind is the managing and carrying faculty that allows us to acquire knowledge, whether simple or complex. The child has the right to practice these skills, which require effort, training, and continuous work, enabling the formation of a mentally mature child. This means that philosophy is a new project for children, through which we reconstruct a new history of

philosophy and reveal it to children. Philosophizing with children is what leads us to involve them in the process of inquiry and the search for truth."

"Fifth: Children and the Philosophical Lesson:

Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development suggests that most children, before the ages of 11 to 15, are not capable of philosophical thinking or thinking about philosophy. He believes this is because children before this age cannot 'think about thinking,' which a level of thought characteristic of philosophical is thinking.

On the other hand, the philosopher Gareth Matthews offers a contrasting view to Piaget's, arguing that Piaget failed to recognize the philosophical thinking evident in every child he studied. Matthews provided many examples of the philosophical curiosity of very young children, such as:

Tim, aged 6: This child, deeply immersed in licking a bowl, asked his father: 'How do we know that everything is not a dream? And how can we be sure of that?'

Jordan, aged 2: While going to sleep at 8 PM, he asked, 'If I go to bed at 8 PM and wake up at 7 AM, how can I really be sure that the little hand of the clock has only moved once? Do I need to stay up all night to watch it? And if I look away, even for a moment, maybe the little hand moves twice?'"

These experiences and stories were obtained by Matthews from his friends, as they knew about his strong interest in philosophical thinking in children. However, these experiences are not limited to adults only, and it is possible that these questions could come from an adult as well.

This indicates that all these experiences children go through are evidence of the clear emergence of philosophical thinking in their minds starting from the age of four or five. A child cannot be prevented from asking questions about the daily life they live because the child contemplates, wonders, and asks. Their goal is to find clear answers to all the questions they ask without any hesitation.

However, we need stories and experiences from children aged seven to eleven to prove that children are indeed capable of serious philosophical thinking. In this regard, Matthews provided us with illustrative examples. For instance, when Gilles was with children aged 7 to 11, he used the following example to initiate a story for discussion:

A 6-year-old child found that four of his father's friends had monopolized watching television, excluding him from watching his favorite show. He asked his mother, feeling upset: 'Mom, why are there four selfish children instead of just one?' This story Matthews shared sparked a lively

philosophical discussion, where these children sought appropriate answers to resolve the interesting question. However, they were searching for a solution that would satisfy all parties without conflict.

From this, we understand that Matthews had developed a sound and precise method, creating a spirit of philosophical dialogue and active discussion among a group of children. This shows that children have a natural love for philosophy and are attached to it, which makes it easier for a teacher to present the philosophical lesson to a child with great enthusiasm."

"Sixth: Establishing the Philosophy Institute for Children and Developing Their Intellectual Growth:

In the mid-1970s, the Philosophy Institute for Children was officially established, located at Montclair State College, and soon the media published reports highlighting the significant improvement in reading and thinking skills of children in middle school who participated in the program offered by the institute.

This institute offered a series of materials primarily composed of children's stories written by Lipman, and it also presented a range of educational programs. This institute's program reached a vast number of children in New Jersey, USA, and included most countries around the world.

One of the distinguishing features of the 'Philosophy Institute for Children' is its focus on encouraging the exchange of ideas and opinions among students in a respectful and clear manner. It views students as having a significant ability to contribute to a range of topics under discussion."

"Among the main features of this institute is its refusal to marginalize the ideas and perspectives of any student, regardless of the type of idea or the nature of the question. It encourages students to develop their listening skills to understand others' ideas, strive to support and improve them, and if the ideas are incorrect, work on rephrasing, restructuring, and adjusting them in a new direction. This clearly confirms that the institute guides students toward rational thinking.

This approach promotes creativity in thinking, as expressed by 'Lawrence J. and Ann Margaret,' who stated: 'Thinking, at its core, is a social inclination. A rational person respects others, is willing to consider their viewpoints and feelings, and may even change their opinion accordingly.'

From this, we can say that many countries have worked hard to establish the principle of teaching philosophy to children, as evidenced by the institute that was founded to restore the importance of philosophical thinking in children.

Such an initiative deserves recognition, as it has restored the primary faculty of thought—philosophy. On one hand, it has reinforced the principle of equal opportunities among all students, regardless of their academic or intellectual level. Its sole aim was to train children's minds in philosophical practices and foster free creativity in their thoughts, while emphasizing the importance of respecting others' ideas."

Seventh: Contemporary Philosophy and the Child

Contemporary philosophy is making great efforts to revive philosophical thought by supporting educational institutions in cultivating a philosophical spirit in children.

In light of the rapidly growing global interest in philosophy for children, the "International Council for Philosophical Inquiry with Children" (ICPIC) was established in 1972. This council hosts an annual international conference featuring guests from countries such as Australia, Austria, Brazil, England, Mexico, Spain, and Taiwan. The most recent conference was held in Madrid, Spain, organized by Félix García-Moriyón. The event was attended by over 999 participants from various countries worldwide.

New resources and innovative teaching methods have emerged to engage children in philosophical discussions. Researchers and scholars, including Gareth Matthews, have contributed by presenting children's stories in publications such as *Thinking*, the official journal of the institute. This initiative also inspired Tom Wartenberg to develop his successful pre-college philosophy program at Mount Holyoke College. This program, which earned an award, includes a collection of classic stories as part of its curriculum.

On the other hand, contemporary philosophy has integrated modern technology, primarily the internet, which facilitates communication among individuals and children, particularly with educators who are interested in philosophy for children. However, many of these websites do not remain active for long on the internet due to unknown reasons.

A pressing question in current discussions is whether children truly have the capacity to philosophize. However, this question is meaningless unless we consider the steps and stages necessary to reach effective intellectual activity. This critical intellectual activity was revived in the 20th century through research in cognitive psychology. Jean Piaget, for instance, studied the stabilization of formal logical reasoning in children aged 10 to 12, at the end of primary school and the beginning of secondary school. This transition to a foundational stage enables adolescents in secondary school to develop reflective thinking, where they begin to pose questions as if for the first time. Most of

these questions revolve around themes such as beauty, goodness, happiness, life, and death—questions that are perpetually significant, though adolescents often avoid answering them.

Despite this avoidance, it is essential to encourage and engage them by listening and guiding them to overcome the mistakes they may encounter. It is equally crucial to involve parents, educators, and teachers in these efforts to build a modern, contemporary philosophy imbued with the child's love and enthusiasm for philosophy. This is particularly important in an era marked by disturbances and various ethical challenges.

The Right of the Child to Philosophy and the Role of Philosophy in Schools and Families

Philosophy plays a crucial role in the educational environment, enabling students and children to acquire a coherent language and balanced thinking. Philosophy consists of discussions and oral debates, which significantly help children develop clear and fluent language skills while promoting eloquence. Additionally, it nurtures mature thinking through rational and logical mechanisms. In essence, philosophy strengthens both oral and intellectual reasoning, emphasizing the harmony between thought and language.

Historically, there have been philosophical debates about whether thought or language precedes the other. Many philosophers considered language merely a secondary tool to express ideas. However, reality suggests otherwise—language is essential to understanding the thoughts of children. Without this faculty, it would be impossible to uncover the workings of their minds. This underscores the critical role of language in acquiring and understanding knowledge.

Thus, achieving sound philosophical thinking must be founded on the integration of language and thought to construct a robust intellectual framework and valuable standards. On another note, children are deprived of their right to philosophize because philosophy is entirely absent from the curriculum of the early educational stages. Without philosophy, education risks remaining superficial, as philosophy are the key to moving beyond the confines of general education.

This subject is completely absent from the curriculum of the primary educational stage. Without philosophy, it is impossible to break free from the confines of general education, as we find that the teaching of this subject is limited only to the secondary stage.

This is precisely the problem. When a child is not trained to think philosophically from a young age, how can they engage in discussions or raise questions during maturity? They find themselves in embarrassing situations that cause them to refrain from asking questions. They may face

significant criticism from listeners and evaluators, leading to the disappearance of the freedom that is essential during childhood. At this stage, the child has the full right to ask philosophical questions without embarrassment or criticism.

Unfortunately, parents or educators often fail to respond to such questions, considering them trivial due to the child's young age. However, the child often focuses and repeatedly asks the same questions. If these questions are left unanswered, the child may react negatively, such as crying or screaming. This, in turn, leads the parent or educator to respond inappropriately, sometimes resorting to violence. At this point, the child feels fear, which prompts them to abandon their questions entirely due to the intimidating and threatening approach. Consequently, the child feels that their right to satisfy their philosophical and intellectual curiosity has been taken away.

It is essential to restore the value of philosophy in the intellectual sphere of the child. Every child has the full right to understand their familial, educational, social, and general life reality. When we grant them this right, it is as if we have given them the entire world. This sense of complete freedom enables the child to enrich their mind and further enhance their ability to engage with and love philosophy.

Personal Critique and Evaluation:

We can say that philosophy is extremely important in the daily lives of children and in their academic pursuits, as it nourishes the mind and trains it to ask questions, fostering within them the power of thinking and creativity. The idea of teaching philosophy to children has been widely praised by many researchers and scholars, particularly psychologists and philosophers.

However, unfortunately, there is also some skepticism surrounding this idea. One argument is that children at an early age cannot engage in philosophical practice because they lack the sufficient linguistic skills required for such an activity. Additionally, their thinking at this stage is often limited to basic and clear concepts, which they gradually learn as they mature. Therefore, children require simple thinking that aligns with their cognitive abilities.

If we train children in philosophy from a young age, there is a risk that they might delve into dangerous topics as they grow older. It is, therefore, essential to teach children to philosophize about beneficial and practical topics that they will need in the future. In other words, we must ensure that children are not introduced to ideas that lead to skepticism or heresy, such as questioning the existence of God, angels, or other core beliefs. Such exposure could lead them away from religion.

Similarly, in other areas such as economics, politics, and social issues, it is crucial to always guide children’s thinking toward positivity. In essence, care must be taken to direct their philosophical exploration toward constructive and beneficial aspects.

Guiding children toward positive philosophy that enriches their cognitive knowledge is crucial. Teaching philosophy in a negative manner, however, gives their thoughts and reflections a different, potentially harmful meaning, leading them into inescapable complexities.

Despite the challenges of teaching philosophy to children and linking it to their developmental stage, the task is not impossible. Success in this endeavor requires collective efforts and dedication. The project can be realized through the continued commitment of researchers, educators, and university professors who strive to instill philosophical and reflective thinking in the minds of children.

Conclusion

Considering childhood as the earliest stage of life after birth, it serves as the foundational phase where a person begins to accumulate diverse knowledge and experiences that life naturally demands. To establish a solid foundation for sound thinking, one must rely on methods that nurture intellectual growth. Among these crucial methods is incorporating philosophy as an effective and essential component in primary education. Philosophy, as a subject, nurtures the human mind and enriches the child's soul.

In response to the question previously posed regarding the feasibility of teaching philosophy in the early stages of education, the answer is a resounding yes. It is entirely possible, and there is no place for impossibility in this endeavor. Philosophy can be integrated into educational curricula—a goal that researchers and scholars strongly advocate, emphasizing its importance for enriching the child’s mind. Therefore, we, too, must advocate for embedding this idea among educators and those responsible for developing educational programs.

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. The child is an active member of society and must be raised with a sound intellectual foundation.
2. There is a need to encourage teaching philosophy to children, as it is a vital tool for enriching their minds and preparing them for future dialogues and discussions.

3. Philosophy holds great importance as the "mother of all sciences." Hence, it is indispensable in all fields without exception, as neglecting philosophy equates to neglecting both thought and language.

4. It is essential to promote and advocate for the inclusion of philosophy in children's educational curricula.

5. Philosophical thinking must be practiced not only within the educational environment but also in family and social contexts. A child's questions extend beyond the academic sphere to encompass all aspects of life.

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Research Article

“Child and Philosophy Education: right of the child – Khelfaoui Achouak & Ziani Youcef” (Algeria)



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