

The links between Philosophy for Children and resilience

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The Yachay project has been developed by OCLADE (Obra Clarentina para el Desarrollo) since its inception in 1992. Its mission is to improve the conditions of life for young children in the Kolla indigenous communities in the Andes mountains in the north of Argentina (Jujuy and Salta provinces). Over the years, the idea of resilience has been an inspiration to the project as it works to accomplish its mission. Ramón Eduardo Lascano is the Director of the Yachay project.

A child of four years participating in a debate about justice? Can a girl of five say anything about politics, or beauty, or discrimination, or poverty? Yes they really can. Take a group of young children, put them in an appropriate environment and, with the guidance and coordination of a competent adult, they can make themselves into a community of reflection or enquiry in which they can freely express their ideas, supporting what they say with logical arguments. And they can listen, agreeing or not, to what the other members of the group have to say. The Philosophy for Children¹ movement has developed an effective process that, from a very early age, allows children to:

- make judgements and take balanced decisions;
- give good reasons to justify their opinions and expect others to do the same;
- conduct rational discussions with others;
- look for the meaning of their experiences rather than accept other people's prefabricated interpretations;
- try out new ideas and reflect on them;
- ask questions that help them get to the heart of a problem;
- evaluate the quality of their own thinking; and

- make connections between what they think, say and do.

This doesn't imply an intellectual activity in which children simply think, rather it means their total involvement and it means that the adults have to conduct themselves differently, and connect differently with the children.

In this sense, we can relate Philosophy for Children with resilience: they complement each other both in their conception, and in their methods and intentions.

What is resilience? Resilience is a human characteristic or quality that allows people confronting adversities that ought to unbalance them and disrupt their development, to overcome those adversities and even build positively on them. The concept of resilience holds that risk, stress or general adversity do not determine how children develop. Instead, it assumes that there is potential in each child and in their environment that allows them to confront these realities and achieve a good level of development despite them.

Philosophy for Children requires adults to trust children and value their thoughts, recognising that what they say has a special value. This basic confidence is also fundamental to resilience. The thoughts of young children have their own logic, are unique but are seldom recognised. From a very young age, children look to express their interests and needs, and also their vision of the world around them. To let children speak, say what they think and feel, support their statements, choose what they will do, defend

their rights, needs adults who believe in these things, so that children trust them. This creates the right kind of climate: one that is based on mutual confidence.

When children feel themselves valued for what they say, and see that others listen to them attentively, recognise the value of what they do, they develop self confidence, and discover their self esteem – a fundamental element in resilience. Vanistendael² says that Philosophy for Children 'is a fascinating focus for bolstering the cognitive capacity of children, for clarifying values' and for finding out about order, sense and significance in life.

Our country is the total of all the good that we do. An example, my father is working as a bricklayer in Formosa province and he's building a school so that more children can be educated so they can be useful to our country in the future.

(8 year old child)

Philosophy for Children allows children to develop very valuable cognitive capacities and aptitudes that in adversity, can help them understand, overcome and, above all, build the ability to rationalise and therefore comprehend reality. From there, they can go on to construct logical tools.

Understanding reality is an important element in the development of resilience in children; and is fundamental in enabling them to transform and overcome adversities. The words of children about how they understand what they are living, how they analyse their environment (families, neighbourhoods, communities, schools) and how they link up to the actors in each of these spaces, allows the development of their own vision about what is happening. To talk about war, presidents, the things that are wrong with the neighbourhood, the train that still hasn't come, the teachers in the school, their own culture, is to get themselves inside the problems around them in a different way, taking distance from them, being objective about them in terms of the individual logic of each child. In this process, children construct logical tools – that is to say, instruments for the processing of information to allow them to give their arguments a solid base, so they understand what they are speaking about and thinking about, so they know how to ask questions and what to ask questions about. None of this is



Yachay Project, Argentina
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Philosophy for Children and resilience may complement each other conceptually and otherwise

about fancifulness or wilfulness. Rather is about recognising and reasoning in a complicated process in which words are important conveyors of sense.

Resilience is a concept that is integrated into thinking and practices about overcoming adversity and building on that. It is an idea that is open and constantly being elaborated. But it has an incredible force and efficacy that inspires actions and a range of programmes, and allows a range of techniques, practices, and concepts that, like those that develop through Philosophy for Children, seek to deflect or mitigate the effects of adversity on children. Philosophy for Children starts from a basic premise: that children know and can, and have the tools, to understand the different cultural and social norms by which they live, from the biggest abstractions – such as beauty or goodness – to the most concrete and everyday.

Notes

1. See page 26
2. Vanistendael, S, 'Cómo crecer superando percances'; in *Resiliencia*, BICE