

“Prejudice in the end is a conviction”: Critical Discourse Analysis, Philosophy for Children and Hate Speech

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Abstract

This contribution will address the epistemological issues underlying a possible dialogue between Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the Philosophy for Children (P4C) educational programme. In particular, it will focus on the possibility of analysing philosophical dialogue – understood as a specific type of interactional discourse – through analytical tools inspired by CDA and, specifically, by the perspective of the ideological triangle proposed by Teun van Dijk (2015). The dialogues examined took place during a number of P4C sessions with pupils at a school in Naples (Italy), organised between March and May 2022, as part of a doctoral research project aimed at combating and preventing hate speech among adolescents. The analysis was conducted taking into account both the epistemic construct related to the development of complex thinking (Lipman, 2000, 2003; Sharp, 1995, 2004, 2005) and that related to critical discourse analysis inspired by the field of ideology (van Dijk, 2006, 2008, 2012, 2015).

Il contributo affronterà le questioni epistemologiche alla base di un possibile dialogo tra la Analisi Critica del Discorso (ACD) e il programma educativo della *Philosophy for Children* (P4C). In particolare ci si concentrerà sulla possibilità di analizzare il dialogo filosofico – inteso come un tipo peculiare di discorso interazionale – attraverso gli strumenti di analisi ispirati alla ACD secondo la prospettiva del triangolo ideologico proposto da Teun van Dijk (2015). I dialoghi esaminati hanno avuto luogo all’interno di alcune sessioni di P4C con gli alunni di una scuola di Napoli (Italia), organizzate tra marzo e maggio 2022, durante un progetto di ricerca di dottorato finalizzato al contrasto e alla prevenzione dello *hate speech* tra gli adolescenti. L’analisi è stata condotta tenendo conto sia del costrutto epistemico relativo allo sviluppo del pensiero complesso (Lipman, 2000, 2003; Sharp, 1995, 2004, 2005) sia di quello relativo alla ACD ispirata al filone che si occupa di ideologia (van Dijk, 2006, 2008, 2012, 2015).

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis; Philosophy for Children; hate speech; philosophical dialogue; deconstructing prejudice

Parole chiave: Analisi Critica del Discorso; *Philosophy for Children*; *hate speech*; dialogo filosofico; decostruzione del pregiudizio

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1. Introduction

In 2022, as part of a doctoral research project¹ aimed at combating and preventing hate speech among adolescents, several Philosophy for Children (P4C) sessions were held with two classes at a lower secondary school in Naples (Italy). This paper will not deal with the research design and results, for which I would refer the reader to Miraglia (2025a), but will focus on the possibility of using an analytical tool that combines two epistemological approaches, that of P4C and that of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). These approaches were used in a complementary manner to analyse the philosophical dialogues which took place during the P4C sessions carried out at the “Don Giustino Russolillo” Comprehensive Institute in Naples between March and May 2022 with pupils aged between 12 and 13. The project involved two classes from the Institute, one consisting of 16 pupils and the other of 19, for a total of 12 meetings in each class, 7 of which were dedicated to P4C sessions. The analysis examined the transcripts of the audio recordings of only the 7 philosophical inquiry meetings held with each class, for a total corpus of 14 dialogues. The objective of the research was to explore the pedagogical hypothesis that an educational approach based on reflection and philosophical inquiry using the P4C model could be a valid tool for combating hate speech.

The purpose of the dialogue analysis was to determine whether the students involved had shown a gradual expansion of complex thinking abilities (Lipman, 2003) and a rising propensity for critical reflection on issues related to hate speech during the sessions. With particular regard to the latter point, the analysis attempted to identify in the dialogues whether and how students were able to detect the stereotypes and prejudices underlying hate speech and possibly break them down. To this end, a qualitative analysis system was built that blended the tools related to the P4C construct with those of CDA, focusing on the perspective of the ideological triangle proposed by Teun van Dijk in the 1990s.

The contribution will attempt to analyse the reasons behind this choice, starting from the epistemic affinities between one of the foundations of P4C, namely its Vygotskian matrix, and the socio-cognitivist approach of van Dijk’s ideological theory. In the first part, after a brief description of the P4C methodology and its matrices, the Vygotskian perspective embedded within it will be analysed. The second part will deal with CDA from van Dijk’s perspective. The third part will describe the construction of the analysis tool and provide some examples of its use.

The analysis tool was built taking into account three epistemic constructs: the first two are related to the development of complex thinking, using a specific focus on Matthew Lipman’s (2000, 2003) approach to the transformation of linguistic acts and mental acts and states into epistemic movements, and on the development of caring thinking according to Ann Sharp’s perspective (1995, 2004, 2005); the third refers to the construct related to CDA inspired by the school of thought founded in the 1990s by Teun van Dijk (2006, 2008, 2012, 2015) which deals with ideology.

The decision to use CDA analysis tools is based on two sets of considerations: the first concerns the hypothesis that philosophical dialogue can be considered a peculiar type of interactional discourse (van Dijk, 1997; Fairclough, 1995; Wodak & Mayer, 2015); the second is based on the observation that P4C, due to its Socratic matrix, encourages the participants in the activity of questioning common sense through the practice of dialogue (Cosentino, 2016, 2017; Miraglia, 2025b). As we will see, beliefs shared in daily social interaction -understood as common sense- can be responsible for biased reasoning, which is at the basis of hate discourse. Questioning such beliefs means identifying where and how racist or homophobic ideology (for example) is hidden and can be disrupted. The CDA analysis device can monitor and detect this process in a more in-depth way and give a contribution to the understanding of the evolution of students’ critical, ethical and value-based abilities on issues deriving from hate speech.

This article, therefore, aims to make a small contribution to the possibility of considering this type of tool for an analysis of the philosophical dialogues carried out in P4C sessions.

2. Philosophy for Children and its epistemic matrices

P4C is a project conceived by Matthew Lipman (2003) and Ann Margaret Sharp (2005) in the 1970s and now widespread throughout the world. The programme presupposes the need to rethink the curriculum from a philosophical perspective at all school levels, from the kindergarten to the secondary school. Philosophy, understood not as the teaching of the history of philosophy but as a way of thinking and reasoning, precisely in a philosophical manner, is the means by which students acquire “thinking habits” that enable the development of “high-level thinking” (Lipman, 1995a, 2003), i.e., what Lipman defines as complex or multidimensional thinking consisting of three dimensions: critical, creative and caring. The programme is based on three fundamental matrices: Socratic, pragmatist and Vygotskian.

- The Socratic matrix:

Lipman and Sharp draw from Socrates a) the idea of philosophy as a way of life (Lipman et al., 1977), i.e., a practised philosophy that anyone can achieve, including, and this was the great novelty of the programme, children and adolescents; b) the model of dialogue as a means of philosophical inquiry, a tool that guarantees depth of analysis, correctness of argumentation and the acquisition of formal and informal logical abilities; and c) the model of maieutics, seen as a tool for the inquiry which draws from the vast ocean of common sense those certainties that have never been questioned – that is, the beliefs taken for granted - in order to cast doubt upon, dismantle and rebuild them in a shared quest for meaning.

- The pragmatist matrix:

Lipman and Sharp take from pragmatist philosophy both the idea of inquiry and that of the community of inquiry. In fact, on the one hand, P4C adopts Deweyan inquiry (Dewey, 1910/2009, 1938) which, deeply rooted in experience, starts from an indeterminate and problematic situation (the doubt) in which a reorganisation of cognitive experience is necessary through a process of trial and error aimed at reaching a solution that is not to be considered definitive but to be re-evaluated, if necessary, from a fallibilist perspective. The indeterminate situation, which gives rise to the philosophical inquiry, is introduced by educational materials taken from the P4C curriculum (short philosophical stories and manuals) constructed in accordance with a spiral model that follows different levels of ability and cognitive complexity from the kindergarten to the secondary school. On the other hand, Lipman and Sharp borrow from Charles Sanders Peirce (1877) the idea of the relationship between community and inquiry (Gregory, 2022) and coin the notion of the Community of Inquiry as a device for philosophical inquiry. Every group or school class which engages in inquiry through the practice of philosophical dialogue becomes a Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI), within which participants question the meaning of reality and make sense of the world around them, in a process of deconstruction and co-construction of meanings. The teacher abandons her/his role to become a reflective guide (facilitator) who leads (but does not direct) the heuristic flow.

- The Vygotskian matrix:

Lipman and Sharp borrow from Vygotskij (1934/ 2011) the idea that the development of intellectual functions emerges from social experiences and linguistic interactions. Vygotskij’s perspective supports the principle that the development of thought occurs through discourse between peers in the social and interactional environment of the CPI.

In particular, for the purposes of this contribution, it is interesting to consider Vygotskij’s constructivist perspective for two reasons: the first concerns the fact that, for the psychologist, language is structured through

social interaction; the second has to do with the introduction of the notion of proximal development, which reinforces the idea of the social role in the construction of thought and the language connected to it. The two notions supported Lipman and Sharp's idea underlying the acquisition of habits of thought which are constructed through dialogue between peers (thus acted out in the social context of the CPI) and internalised by individuals in the community of inquiry during the process accompanied by the facilitator, who encourages the development of thinking abilities through stimuli and provocations.

3. Vygotskij's perspective

According to the Russian psychologist, social interaction is fundamental to the structuring of language from the very beginning of its formation. Therefore, even what Piaget called egocentric language has a social function for Vygotskij. In fact, unlike the Swiss psychologist, he believes that the child's egocentric language does not disappear at a certain stage of growth but that language and thought, which originally follow different evolutionary paths, unite and converge in a single process of development. The egocentric language of children is thus transformed into internal language and supports the development of part of human thought, the verbal one, in the complex syntactic, grammatical and semantic structuring of language and thought. This means that social interactions that take place through language are internalised through a process of internalisation in the life of the mind (Lipman, 1996).

According to the theory opposed [to Piaget's], the child's egocentric language is one of the phenomena of the transition from interpsychic to intrapsychic functions, that is, from the child's forms of social, collective activity to [her/]his individual functions. This transition is a general law [...] of the development of all higher psychic functions, which initially appear as forms of collaborative activity and only later are transferred by the child to the sphere of [her/]his own psychic forms of activity. Language for oneself arises from the initially social function for others. Not progressive socialisation, brought about by the child from outside, but progressive individualisation, arising from the basis of the child's internal sociality, is the main feature of child development (Vygotskij, 1934/2011, p. 365, auth. trans.).²

Internal language and external language diverge at the moment in which egocentric language is transformed into internal language, the social and egocentric functions separate and "finally, the verbal structures assimilated by the child become the fundamental structures of [her/]his thinking",³ determining an incontrovertible fact, namely "the dependence of the development of thought on language, on the *means of thinking* and on the child's socio-cultural experience" (ivi, p. 131, auth. trans.).⁴ This marks the transition from biological development in early childhood to "socio-historical" development (ivi, p. 132).

Vygotskij's epistemological construct demonstrates how "language is not just a medium for articulating ideas, but it is an essential mechanism for *forming new ways of thinking and knowing*" (Reznitskaya & Gregory, 2013, p. 120). The cognitive development of children, therefore, involves the internalisation of linguistic and behavioural abilities that evolve within the social sphere. "For Vygotsky, cognitive development is social in two ways: (a) it is mediated by sociocultural tools and (b) it occurs through social assistance" (Castleberry & Clark, 2020, p. 46). In fact, in the formation of scientific concepts in school-age children, Vygotskij introduces the notion of the zone of proximal development (Vygotskij, 1934/2011, pp. 280-301), through which he reinforces the social function of verbal language. Indeed, the cooperation with an adult (in particular a teacher-facilitator) or with

peers with more developed abilities, who act as mediators in the learning of complex concepts, plays an important role in the child's cognitive development. Such mediation bridges the gap between sign and meaning from the earliest stages of a child's verbal language development (Vygotskij, 1934/1986, p. 195), providing the scaffolding for the entire cognitive process.

The Vygotskian perspective examined so far, in its socio-historical idea of the structuring of language and thought, connects, in our opinion, both the Vygotskian matrix of P4C and the cognitivist perspective of CDA. On the one hand, in fact, the structure of the philosophical session in which children and adolescents are involved allows for the development of a particular type of critical thinking that translates into the acquisition of habits of "reasonableness" (cf. Lipman, 1998; Sharp, 2005; Franzini Tibaldeo, 2015, 2023) through the exercise of philosophical dialogue. At the same time, peer interaction and the support of the teacher-facilitator in the philosophical inquiry activity work on the borderline of the zone of proximal development in the acquisition of concepts and methods of reasoning, which involve the logical, semantic and linguistic spheres. In this way, thanks to the stimulus materials and the facilitator, who acts as a model of the CPI style and behaviour in the course of the inquiry (De Marzio 2011; Kennedy, 2004; Kizel, 2021), cognitive and behavioural processes are activated -favouring the transition from the intersychic to the intrapsychic as theorised by Vygotskij- which are internalised by individual participants, structuring the development of complex thinking.

Through a Vygotskian lens, [the] moves [of the facilitator] serve as mediational tools that can be used first as category labels and then for planning and regulating social and internal processes. By identifying critical reasoning moves already spontaneously produced in students' conversations, facilitators make them a focus of conscious attention. As facilitators model the use of these moves to guide discussion, they mediate inquiry on the "social plane" [...] Eventually, the moves will be more planned, as students call for various moves from others and, when internalized, from themselves (Castleberry & Clark, 2020, p. 47).

On the other hand, some epistemic similarities can be identified between Vygotskij's socio-historical perspective on the process of internalisation and cognitive development, as adopted by P4C, and the CDA perspective related to ideology and represented by Teun van Dijk's approach. According to van Dijk, in fact, cognitive processes are closely linked to discourse and the society that generates it in an indissoluble triangle that supports the formation of the belief system that structures ideologies.

4. Ideology and social cognition in van Dijk's perspective

The cognitive approach proposed by van Dijk suggests a multidisciplinary study of how knowledge becomes embedded in individuals and communities through cognitive and discursive processes. However, during this process knowledge may solidify certain beliefs that become structured as stereotypes⁵ and prejudices.⁶ The analysis of discourse categories is therefore of fundamental importance in order to understand where these stereotypes are hidden, how they are structured and whether they are generated by ideologies of domination that implement real abuses of power through discourse (think, for example, of racist or sexist discourse).

According to van Dijk (2014, 2015, 2016), beliefs are products of thought, part of which consists in a specific category of those that form knowledge. They are stored in memory. What we know about the world, in fact, resides in long-term memory, in which, in the part called "episodic memory", both autobiographical memory and some of the experiences that occurred in the distant or recent past are stored. These events constitute a mental model (Johnson-Laird, 1983; van Dijk, 2014, 2015) which is functional to our behaviour and provides

us with the coordinates to act in certain situations: these are stereotypical representations that allow us to act appropriately in different situations (the frame: cf. Goffman, 1974; van Dijk, 2023), as if we were following a script. What we construct in our memory of our experience is structured in terms of patterns and frames of reference, which correspond to mental models built on any object, experience or linguistic construction we have encountered during our lives, and these same patterns are functional for learning and understanding new events and experiences. However, even though each of us has her/his own mental models, we are able to communicate with others and understand public discourse, which presupposes a common knowledge, i.e. the ability to activate social cognition. Social knowledge is thus defined as those “beliefs” which are “shared by all or most members of epistemic communities or cultures” (van Dijk, 2016, p. 69).

Furthermore, knowledge takes place through mental processes involving various levels of short- and long-term memory (van Dijk, 2014) and is socially shared through discourse. In detail, knowledge is generally expressed through statements, descriptions or explanations that we consider true or objective depending on the social group to which we belong. However, beyond this, each of us has (and expresses) our own opinions stored in our biographical memory and represented in our mental model. The mental representation of an opinion is personal, but its content may coincide and be shared with that of other people. When our opinions are shared with members of a social group, van Dijk defines them as attitudes (2014, 2015). Opinions and attitudes constitute the personal value sphere (the former) and the social value sphere (the latter) of individuals. Furthermore, prejudices and stereotypes are types of attitudes formed by a combination of shared negative or positive opinions. Generally, these are negative opinions towards groups outside one’s own (the outgroup) and positive opinions towards one’s own group (the ingroup). Opinions do not have a structure that can be analysed but are value beliefs that can be identified through language thanks to discursive structures (Martin & White, 2005). Opinions and attitudes, as shared products of knowledge and cognitive structures, can be influenced by ideologies.

Ideologies are socially shared belief systems. Teun van Dijk proposed a multidisciplinary study to examine ideology in general as it relates to society, what the Dutch linguist defines as the ideological triangle (van Dijk, 2012, 2015, 2016) in which the dimensions of discourse-cognition-society are inextricably linked.

The originality of van Dijk’s theory lies in its overcoming of the tradition, especially philosophical, according to which ideologies are developed by dominant groups with the aim of reproducing power dynamics to the detriment of oppressed groups in a perpetual preservation of the status quo, as in Althusser’s perspective (1970/2014) or Marx and Engels’ concept of “false consciousness” (1846/2018). Obviously, this is not wrong but, according to van Dijk (1997), it only represents one side of the issue and does not do justice to the broader connection that ideologies have with society as a whole. Ideologies, then, should be studied “[a]s systems of ideas of social groups and movements” that “not only make sense in order to understand the world (from the point of view of the group), but also as a basis for the *social practices* of group members” (van Dijk, 2012, p. 6).

The learning of ideologies takes place through discourse and at various levels of context, starting from shared discourse within the family and, more generally, within the group to which one belongs, up to that conveyed through cultural media. On this point, it is useful to note that “[s]ome discourse genres, such as those of catechism, party rallies, indoctrination and political propaganda indeed have the explicit aim of ‘teaching’ ideologies to group members and newcomers” (ivi, p. 7).

Ideologies reflect the characteristic properties of groups and assert themselves in the same ways that structure the learning and sharing of beliefs and knowledge namely through the structures of cognition. However, there are some specific categories that identify the ideological framework as a result of the fundamental properties of the social group:

- Membership criteria [identity]: Who does (not) belong?
- Typical activities [actions]: What do we do?
- Overall aims [objectives]: What do we want? Why do we do it?
- Norms and values: What is good or bad for us?
- Position: What are the relationships with others?
- Resources: Who has access to our group resources? (ivi, p. 13).

Ideologies, therefore, respond to criteria of self-assessment and self-representation of the social group on the basis of which its members are willing to act. They share values, objectives and access to resources, and define the boundaries of exclusion-inclusion based on the frame of reference that describes and delimits the contours of the group's representation. This means that the formation of patterns and scripts occurs in the same way as the cognitive process in general and allows members to quickly identify with the group through inferences and/or assumptions, while at the same time permitting individual members “to understand or to build, reject or modify an ideology” (ivi, p. 12). Furthermore, ideologies can also be responsible for movements of inclusion and exclusion (ingroup and outgroup), polarisation (us vs. them) and conflict, which means that ideologies can often be responsible for stereotypes and prejudices. And just like the cognitive products, ideologies are communicated through discourse.

The six categories outlined above can be applied to any type of ideology, but very often the positive and negative representations of ideological polarisation are not so straightforward. In order to formulate a heuristic that allows us to identify ideologies in discourse, we must bear in mind that, in general, ingroups describe themselves by emphasising their positive characteristics while concealing their negative ones, and at the same time emphasise the negative characteristics of outgroups while concealing their positive ones. This dynamic can be summarised in what van Dijk calls “the ideological square”, composed as follows:

- Emphasize positive things about Us.
 - Emphasize negative things about Them.
 - De-emphasize negative things about Us.
 - De-emphasize positive things about Them.
- (ivi, p. 34; see also van Dijk, 2015, p. 333).

There are many ways to arrange the ideological square at various levels in discourse and, through the analytical strategies of CDA, it is possible to identify how and in what forms ideologies are expressed.

Now, if, according to van Dijk (2006, p. 133, 2015, pp. 309-310), children acquire the ideologies of their own group from an early age, this means that adolescents already possess the cognitive categories related to ideologies. And, as we have seen, ideologies can be influenced by the stereotypes and prejudices, including those racist, sexist, homophobic, etc. which underlie hate speech.

5. The methodology underlying the structuring of the analysis of P4C dialogues

In examining the formation of mental models, we have identified points of contact with Vigotskij's perspective discussed at the beginning of this article. We have also seen how P4C has embraced the Russian psychologist's perspective by emphasising the principle of the internalisation of behaviours and linguistic uses and their social matrix. This perspective presents two directions. The first concerns the possibility that children and adolescents acquire stereotypes and prejudices from their social interactions. Not only the family but also the school (cf.

Fairclough, 1989; Rodríguez-Iglesias, 2021) and the continuous exposure to social networks can forge rigid attitudes that are not conducive to reflection and are influenced by sexist, homophobic or racist discourse, or can be responsible for the internalisation of power dynamics. On the other hand, however, it is precisely by acting on the relationship and discursive exchange between peers, within a perspective of reflective practice, that prejudicial and stereotypical attitudes can be dismantled through the training of critical, creative and caring thinking. Recovering the Vygotskij's perspective, it is precisely through philosophical inquiry, based on dialogue between peers and the teacher-guide (the facilitator), that critical thinking abilities are acquired, structured through the transition from the intersychic to the intrapsychic dimension.

In an education programme aimed at combating hate speech, it is essential to dismantle stereotypical thinking and potentially polarised discourse along with the stereotypes and prejudices that accompany it and P4C is a program suited to this purpose. In fact, the abilities in inquiry enhanced through philosophical dialogue develop a style of reasoning based on “reasonableness” rather than mere rationality, i.e., a type of thinking that adopts a principle of evaluation based on “good reasons” to support every judgement. This involves paying attention to authoritarian tendencies, together with a continuous deconstruction of stereotypical thinking. For Lipman and Sharp, the habit and therefore the internalisation of this type of reasoning provide children with useful tools to ensure openness to a plurality of viewpoints and, at the same time, to combat authoritarian impositions, polarised positions and stereotypical and prejudicial reasoning.

However, in order to implement a style of thinking that is open to comparing perspectives with others and to ethical judgement, it is crucially important to develop caring thinking and cultivate relationships between CPI members, which play a central role in building a caring attitude, as outlined in Sharp's perspective. In fact, on the one hand, even though the concept of the Community of Inquiry was introduced by both Lipman and Sharp,

she was the first who stressed the social dimensions of the community of inquiry [...]. For Sharp, the practice of original philosophical inquiry as a social, intellectual, emotional and bodily activity enables children to reflectively intervene in their own lives, inoculating themselves against indoctrination and propaganda, and preparing them to struggle against injustice (Gregory & Laverty, 2018, p.13).

On the other hand, also her idea of care is subtly different from that of Lipman. If the latter considered caring thinking in a cognitive way (Lipman, 1995b), Sharp understood the idea of care as a bridge connecting critical thinking to creative thinking and as a link between the subject and the object stressing its intentionality “that shows itself especially in our relationship with other persons (Sharp, 2004)”. For her care, in a quasi-Heideggerian way, is an ontological category of human beings which cannot be realized without inquiry toward what is valuable, and such inquiry involves an intentional reaching out to the world and to others with curiosity and trust.

Given the premises analysed so far, it is clear how P4C can be a fundamental educational tool to combat hate speech because, thanks to CPI, students increase a) critical thinking, which allows them to deconstruct ideologies originating from a shared culture and identify the prejudices and power dynamics hidden within it; b) creative thinking, which allows them to imagine new perspectives and new ways of being in the world; and c) caring thinking, which enables them to understand the reasons and emotions of others and to cultivate moral judgement and relational attitudes.

These assumptions have inspired the research carried out in the school of Naples, with the conviction that implementing the P4C project in educational contexts can be effective in understanding the damage that hate

speech can cause in people's lives. In fact, the philosophical dialogue, through the exercise of thinking philosophically, allows for the orchestration of all those parts of complex thinking that we have briefly illustrated above. Thanks to the reflective process, the abilities that structure mental activities are developed.

5.1 *Blending P4C and CDA*

Thinking abilities develop when their parts are in harmonious connection and, to understand how they work, we can refer to them as a set of atoms which, when set in motion by the reflective process, compose the molecular aggregates that constitute macro-thinking abilities. Lipman believes that mental activities are based on smaller units consisting of mental acts and states. Verbal acts are also part of these units and, in their close connection with mental acts, can play

a tactical role in discourse. The speech act is not something independent of the mental act yet somehow corresponding to it. Rather, it is that portion of the single discursive entity that has developed to the point of utterance. In this sense, speech acts have their roots in ongoing mental performances, while at the same time they interact with other speech acts that are parts of the communal dialogue, and they produce the phenomenon of *distributed thinking*, in which each participant contributes to the single thinking process. Without the activity of tiny molecules of thought – interacting mental acts – that process would be fairly unintelligible (Lipman, 2003, p. 139).

Lipman bases his examination on the works of Austin (1962/2019) with regard to speech acts, and Vendler (1972) with regard to the distinction between mental acts and mental states. While mental acts are conveyed through language and are therefore observable, states are “mental mood, atmosphere, attitude, etc.” (Lipman, 2003, p. 140). In fact, following Austin, Lipman calls performative verbs, which identify mental acts, verbs of “achievement” because they confer an action and denote movement. Some mental states also possess movement, but it is so slow that it seems immobile; for example, “[a] person in a state of doubt is not paralysed - mentally at any rate - in that condition” (ivi, p. 144). The development of thinking abilities is based on the thinking process, whose components are, precisely, mental acts and states. The process takes place in a spiral movement in which “thinking consists in the development of mental acts into thinking skills, and their orchestration into further mental moves” (ivi, p. 150). The process of transformation takes place through reflection on one's own thinking, which means

to *objectify* a mental performance we have just engaged in [...]. To become aware of our own mental acts is to lift ourselves by our own bootstraps until we are functioning on a metacognitive level. To reflect is to be swept along by this metacognitive current of thought. Much of the success or failure of one's educational activity depends on one's ability to allow oneself to be carried along by this current (ivi, p. 143).

The movements of thought, which Lipman calls epistemic (ivi, p. 148, 151 -Figure 7.1, p. 152 -Figure 7.2), are therefore exercised through the practice of philosophical dialogue. What helps to achieve this is undoubtedly the entire structure of the P4C programme. The philosophical dimension necessary for the activation and evolution of the entire process is provided by the curriculum texts, by the attitudes and strategies used by the facilitator and by the dialogue itself that develops in the classroom-CPI. Furthermore, the implementation of the

philosophical dialogue promotes the development of thinking abilities through what Lipman calls “shared cognition” (ivi, p. 95), when mental acts are conducted by community members in a distributed and self-correcting movement of thought. And it is precisely when thought becomes distributed among the members of the CPI that the sharing of epistemic movements can be observed.

Now, the question was how it would be possible to evaluate the change in the development of the cognitive process through the monitoring and analysis of the transcripts of the dialogue recordings among the pupils with whom the educational intervention had been carried out.

In this perspective, an evaluation grid was constructed (Table 1) that would allow the researcher to identify if and when the mental acts and states of the students involved were transformed into thinking abilities (epistemic movements), when individual thinking was built on that of the other members of the community in the activation of the relational sphere of caring thinking, according to Sharp’s approach. Furthermore, the grid would enable the researcher to identify how and when the students involved detected the stereotypes and prejudices reported in common language, deconstructed them and broke them down.

For this last point, some strategies inspired by the CDA and the analysis approach proposed by van Dijk were used. Indeed, the analysis took into account the lexical and syntactic forms used by students to describe the phenomenon of hate speech along with the identification of the beliefs that underlie it. At the same time, the ideological square and the 6 categories of the ideological scheme proposed by van Dijk were taken in consideration. These strategies were used, so to speak, in reverse: not so much as a means for the researcher to identify the presence of strategies and schemes that highlighted the ideologies underlying the students’ discourses, but, rather, the ability of the students to identify the ideological structures that are present in the social discourse they reflected on during the P4C sessions. For this purpose, the focus was on the presence and use in the dialogues: of pronouns, when the students identified group typifications; of markers, which indicated examples and generalizations, conditions, consequences and comparisons; and on the observation of the way words and verbs were expressed and used by adolescents during the inquiry, with the objective of understanding if there had been a change in the way of thinking (in terms of epistemic movements and dialogue composition) and if the students had been able to find stereotypes and prejudices and deconstruct them with valid arguments.

Therefore, the theoretical and methodological implantation of the perspectives illustrated so far by Lipman, Sharp and van Dijk formed the basis of the analysis aimed at showing the changes and development in the way of thinking of the students.

Table 1

The evaluation grid used to analyse P4C dialogues

Dialogue	Mental acts and states/ linguistic acts	Epistemic movements	Caring thinking	CDA
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5.2 Example of analysis

This paragraph provides some examples of excerpts from the dialogues⁷ analysed together with the criteria with which the analysis was carried out. Starting from a passage taken from the first encounter (Table 2), we will see how the dialogue has transformed over time:

Table 2

An excerpt from the dialogue analysis taken from the first P4C session

Dialogue	Mental acts and states/ linguistic acts	Epistemic movements	Caring thinking	CDA
Bruno – for me I hate it when I don't like that person	He gives an example – he asserts.			The boy equates the assertive speech act 'I hate' with the assertive speech act "I don't like"
Facilitator – don't like? What do you mean you don't like it?				
Bruno – his way of being Anna – if one then has his own personality, it may be another case	They justify			
Facilitator – okay, so, if I write "you don't like how she or he is", is that right?				
Bruno – yes				
Carmela – but not as he is externally ...	She points out			
Facilitator – how then...?				
Aurora – temperamentally	She explains		She speaks up in support of her classmate	
Facilitator – maybe we can write "not externally"?				
Anna – like, for me, hate is just when, how to say it, when I tell people I don't like your personality, I don't like it, I don't feel comfortable	She gives some examples – she expresses a belief			

From this brief exchange, it is clear that the thought patterns are rather static. No particular movements are evident; everyone expresses her/his own opinion, and the facilitator’s interventions are frequent, aimed at stimulating dialogue. The analysis reveals only a few mental actions, such as giving examples or expressing assertive opinions or beliefs that do not build or stimulate deeper reflection; the students do not provide explanations but only justifications. No particular aptitude for relationships is evident, the individual’s thought is not yet built on that of the others, and creative abilities are affected by the effort required solely to respond to the facilitator’s prompting. Furthermore, we can see that the students’ statements suggest that they are probably reflecting on the topic for the first time. They are grappling with a question (what it means to hate) that they had perhaps never considered before. Thanks to the facilitator’s prompts, the students begin to become familiar with their own ideas and to question them through peer discussion: the process of deconstructing their preconceived notions is still in its infancy.

In the next grid, monitoring a brief example taken from one of the encounters in the same class acted out within the middle of the pedagogical path (Table 3), we can see how the epistemic movements and caring abilities together with the ability to detect biased reasoning began to develop:

Table 3

An excerpt from the dialogue analysis taken from the middle of the pedagogical path

Dialogue	Mental acts and states/ linguistic acts	Epistemic movements	Caring thinking	CDA
Aurora – but, if she was a real friend, then in my opinion she shouldn’t judge someone who has a so-called ‘abnormal’ friend...		She makes an evaluative judgement	She makes an evaluative judgement	She identifies (and breaks down) the normal/abnormal dichotomy
Sasi - but it’s not as if he has to judge		He makes an evaluative judgement	He makes an evaluative judgement	
Diana - ...because he is a perfectly normal person	She expresses a judgement		She builds her argument on that of the others	She identifies (and breaks down) the normal/abnormal dichotomy
Facilitator – let’s take a moment to see why ...				
Paolo – in my opinion, if he’s a true friend, he shouldn’t be afraid of being judged by the others. I reckon it’s better to have one true friend than lots of fake ones. In my view, he shouldn’t worry about what	He expresses his beliefs (first and third sentences)– he generalises (second sentence)	He formulates balanced evaluative judgements – he develops explanatory hypotheses – he clarifies concepts. He identifies the dynamics of hate in the social network	He formulates balanced evaluative judgements	He identifies two distinct opposing groups through the pronouns ‘the others’ ‘they’/‘everyone’

the others think; the problem isn't that he has the syndrome, they do it to everyone and judge everyone... they do it to everyone

Facilitator – what do you mean, they do it to everyone?

Paolo – I mean, they judge everyone ... anyone who isn't on their side, anyone who doesn't play with them, anyone who isn't intimidated

He clarifies

He provides examples to back up his claim

He is identifying with the victim

He identifies two distinct opposing groups through the pronouns 'they'/'everyone' and 'anyone'/'them'
He identifies through the term 'intimidated' a condition in which a victim may be found

Facilitator – ah, and what does that mean?

Serena – it's the same point we made when we were talking about bullying

She provides an analogy

She offers an analogy to support and explain the classmate's statement

Anna – if you're ashamed to introduce a friend who has, say, a syndrome, and the others say, 'you're his friend? Don't hang out with us anymore', then, in my opinion, they're not real friends, so it's definitely better to have a real friend

She formulates a balanced evaluative judgement

She bases her argument on the previous reasoning put forward by her classmates

From this brief example, we can observe the students' attitude towards the formation of the Community of Inquiry and the first steps towards epistemic movements. The students still turn to the facilitator seeking validation for their statements, but the first signs of shared understanding are beginning to emerge. The level of listening is very high and attentive, which fosters a positive group dynamics within the context. However, from the section dedicated to CDA, we can see how they are beginning to identify the social process which is at the

basis of a possible dynamics of exclusion. It is an important exercise that structures moral judgement. Caring thinking is activated not only through the exchange of ideas between the CPI members but also by the effort to identify themselves with the imaginary friendship about which they are reasoning: how should I behave in the case that the object of hate is me because of my friendship with a person the haters consider “abnormal”?

Let’s see now the excerpt from the dialogue taken from the last session⁸ reported below. In this example, I have chosen not to display the grid, both for reasons of space and in order to illustrate the CDA tool in a more detailed manner. To this end, I will present one of the standard representations of the analytical tool (see, for example, Fairclough, 1995) and explain in a discursive way the dynamics of epistemic movements and caring thinking:

- 1 Anna – for example, when they say negroes have taken our jobs, things like that ... that’s our country and...
- 2 things like that.
- 3 Serena – in the end I think it’s racism because if for example a person comes to Italy and they think they are
- 4 stealing our jobs, these things so, in the end I think it’s like racism.
- 5 Aurora – I mean, like, for example, a black guy steals from a lady. After that, some people may think that all
- 6 black people steal.
- 7 Serena –prejudice.
- 8 Aurora – eh, prejudice.
- 9 Carmela – I think what Aurora said can also be connected for example with the Russians who are making
- 10 this war and all the Russians think so... I think, eh.
- 11 Aurora – even the fact of covid. For example, a Chinese person takes covid and all Chinese are bad.
- 12 Serena – or... I hate the Russians because they are Russians, that’s because there is Putin who is Russian and
- 13 wants to make war, for example, and therefore practically all Russians want to make war.
- 14 Facilitator – so it’s not a physical matter, then?
- 15 Bruno – is for where they come from.
- 16 Carmela – he is different, so to speak, from our ideals.
- 17 Facilitator – so, it is not only a physical diversity but also a diversity...
- 18 Carmela – ...of his ideals.
- 19 Serena – But prejudice is not just for people who are different for their skin or nationality, that is, prejudice in
- 20 the end is a belief, that is, something that everyone is convinced of, something that is said. For example, it is said that
- 21 the Neapolitans steal, it is a prejudice, something that is believed, a conviction. It is not only for the colour
- 22 of the skin, it is also for the things that people do, it is not just because that person is like this and then is bad...
- 23 Anna – In my opinion, prejudice also arises from what they tell you. For example, it is said that Peruvians are
- 24 bad... I, for example, said to my mother “in Pianura we are full of Peruvians”. Mom said “don’t come near
- 25 them ’cause they’re mean” and thus I’m born with a prejudice that I don’t go near Peruvians because my mom
- 26 told me they’re mean.
- 27 Facilitator – so, you’re telling me that prejudice can also be taught?
- 28 Serena – by the family.
- 29 Aurora – yes but it is not true. In my park there are many Peruvians and some are my friends. And there is a
- 30 child who is very good.
- 31 Anna – It’s true, but they say they’re traitors.

We can notice that the girls and boys are able to identify fallacious reasoning (lines 1-6, 9-10, 20-22), use adequate examples (lines 23-26, 20-22) and employ good reasons to support their arguments (lines 9-10, 19-22). The dialogue shows a wealth of epistemic movements: the students are able to elaborate explanatory hypotheses, offer appropriate analogies, support opinions with convincing reasons, provide examples and counter-examples, try to uncover implicit assumptions, draw adequate inferences, discover implications and formulate balanced qualitative judgements. The skills just listed, in addition to highlighting the students' critical thinking, also reveal their creative and caring thinking: the former in the ability to provide relevant examples or to highlight the reasons behind the examples they report (lines 11-13, 12-18, 19-26); the latter is evident both from how thought is distributed among the members of the community -there is a continuous reference to each other's observations, sometimes made explicit in the words (line 9), combined with a careful respect for speaking turns- and from the observations reported through some syllogisms (lines 1-6, 9-13) and in Aurora's final intervention on the Peruvian community (lines 29-30), which show a propensity for care and the ability not only to "put oneself in the other's shoes", but to reason around the motivations that lead to the affirmation of prejudices against people.

The dialogue therefore addresses issues related to the construction of prejudice and stereotyped thinking. The use of CDA analysis tools allowed the researcher to scrutinize the students' discourse and to demonstrate how, by identifying reasoning based on broad generalizations, they were able to detect the mechanisms underlying racist prejudice, naming the phenomenon and recognising the belief structure at its base. The analysis investigated the lexical, syntactic and ideological structure of the dialogue in question. Let's look at the details.

Lexicon:

- we can notice the difference between the use of the word "negroes" (line 1) and "black guy" (line 5). In the first case, the girl reports what she is used to hearing from people ("when they say" – line 1) and therefore she uses the racist term "negroes". In the second case, the girl expresses her own reflection and adopts the anti-racist term "black guy";
- lines 3, 7 and 8: there is an initial identification of the phenomenon, which is identified with the words "racism" and "prejudice";
- lines 16 and 18: the pronouns "our" vs. "his" detect an identification of an ingroup vs. an outgroup, which will become explicit in the analysis of the ideology;
- lines 11, 24, 25, 26 and 31: prejudice and racism are identified through negative value attributions (bad, mean, traitors) and easy generalizations in relation to the victimized people.

Syntax:

- lines 1-6; 9-13; 24-26: here we find the identification of broad generalizations expressed in examples introduced by the markers and logical connectives (blatant or implied) "for example", "if...then", "(if) one...(then) all", which denote the expression of conditions and conclusions/consequences, by expressions such as "it is said" and by the use of syllogisms.

Ideologies:

- identifying ingroup *vs.* outgroup:
 - lines 1-13: white *vs.* black; Italians *vs.* those who are not of Italian origin (black people who come to Italy, the Chinese during covid, the Russians who want war);
 - lines 21-22: Italians *vs.* Neapolitans;
 - lines 24-26: Neapolitans *vs.* Peruvians;
 - lines 16 and 18: "our ideals" *vs.* "his (ideals)";
- lines 1-2: identification of the resources underlying prejudice (racist ideology);
- lines 19-22: identification of the structure of prejudice as belief;

- lines 15, 16 and 18: one of the causes of prejudice comes from the difference in cultural ideology;
- lines 1-4: one of the causes of racism is the access to resources;
- lines 1-26 and 31: identification of expressions aimed at emphasizing the negative aspects of the out-group (they steal, they have covid, they want to make war, they're mean, they're traitors, etc.);
- lines 24-26 and 28: identification of the cultural character of prejudice.

The structure of racism and prejudice in this way is totally unpacked through deep reflection until arriving at evidence of fallacy both thanks to logical deductions and through examples taken from one's own experience, as can be seen from lines 29-30 ("In my park there are many Peruvians and some are my friends. And there is a child who is very good") and, later, from a statement by Carmela not reported in the previous dialogue: "I have a black friend and she is not bad, a red aunt and she's not bad, a Russian friend and he doesn't want war".

6. Conclusions

The aim of the examples given here was to demonstrate how the analytical tool—which brought together the three perspectives of Lipman, Sharp and van Dijk— has worked. The objective in developing this tool has been to gain a broad overview of the development of students' thinking and linguistic acts. However, not only this. It has also made it possible to see how P4C, when applied within a specific frame such as education aimed at combating hate speech, enables us to identify the fixed categories that are perpetuated by shared beliefs, which in turn lead to the formation of stereotypical thinking. The analytical tool has allowed an examination of the ability of the students to reflect on the contradictions that stereotypes present not only to them, but also to certain social groups with whom they interact on a daily basis. The CDA analysis device, therefore, combined with the one based on the perspectives of Lipman and Sharp, can serve as a means of understanding not only the development of the critical, creative and caring skills of the CPI, but also a more in-depth identification of the deconstruction of the stereotypes that underpin the existing ideologies in society and which are inevitably present in the minds of students. We have seen, in fact, how van Dijk's perspective sheds light on the cognitive mechanism at the base of the construction of our knowledge. The cognitive categories of the cognition-discourse-society triangle illustrate the circular nature of learning content conveyed through discourse, which is the means of communicating the ideas and ideologies that constitute the knowledge shared by the members of society. Van Dijk's perspective is supported by the bond between thought and language illustrated by Vygotskij: the socio-historical nature of the development of thought is responsible for the acquisition of shared knowledge through the structuring of language and thought. Therefore, the discourse acted out in society can shape the opinions and attitudes of individuals and social groups in ways that are difficult to challenge. However, if we consider philosophical dialogue as a specific form of discourse, it serves as a vehicle for reflection on topics of interest which, starting from the concrete experiences of the CPI members, leads to considerations of a general nature, in terms of structuring not only critical but also moral reflection together with relationship abilities. In this sense, the CPI can be seen as an embryo of the wider society in which its members are immersed. Therefore, if the structure of the ideological triangle – justified by the socio-historical perspective of language and thought acquisition in the Vygotskian sense – is responsible for stereotypical categories in the realm of knowledge acquisition, the social embryo of the CPI, through P4C activities, can function as a vehicle for acquiring modes of thought suited to the deconstruction of stereotypes and prejudices. As we have seen in the preceding paragraphs, the habit of reflection – practised through peer discussion and within a perspective of proximal development – leads to the internalisation of these thinking skills. Through the use of the analytical tool examined so far, it has

been possible to trace the process of transition from the intersychic to the intrapsychic sphere of complex thinking skills, which have enabled students to identify the structure of prejudice and its root sources.

Now, before concluding, it is worth drawing attention to a couple of points. Firstly, we should bear in mind that also the facilitators have their own cognitive models and ideologies, which may conceal stereotypical thinking. The reflection generated by the perspectives here considered, together with the analytical tool itself, could also serve as a means for the facilitator to raise awareness of their own ideological biases by analysing, for example, their own discourse alongside that of the students. Such an awareness can help the facilitator to be as mindful as possible of the stimuli to be used during the sessions and to deconstruct their own prejudices in order to reach what David Kennedy (2004) calls ‘the position of ignorance’. The role of the facilitator is, in fact, a very delicate one, and it is of the utmost importance that they do not influence the CPI with their own perspectives, however valid they may seem. Although facilitators undergo highly effective training, maintaining such a neutral stance requires extensive experience and continuous professional development.

Another critical point to note is that, in an educational programme aimed at combating hate speech, great care must be taken in selecting the materials to be used,⁹ to ensure that they are effective in stimulating philosophical dialogue focused on issues relating to this topic. Indeed, the P4C curriculum consists of educational materials that recreate fictional situations as close as possible to the students’ own experiences. Similarly, the presentation of stimuli within the context of education on hate speech must also be as close as possible to the likely experiences of young people, whilst highlighting the critical issues that exist in real life between individuals and social groups with whom some school classes do not actually come into contact. In fact, not all communities of inquiry include the diverse socio-economic or cultural groups which would allow for a comparison between people who are victims of prejudice and those who are not. The risk that is often encountered is that one finds oneself faced with what Darren Chetty (2018) calls ‘gated Communities of Inquiry’, in which belonging to the same social group can still lead to a risk of ingroup-outgroup reasoning.

It is hoped that a consideration of the issues above mentioned and the examination of the analytical tool here presented will help to contribute further to developing educational initiatives aimed at combating hate speech and at analysing the philosophical dialogues carried out in P4C sessions.

Notes

1. PhD in Mind, Gender and Language at the University of Naples Federico II and in Ciudadanía y Derechos Humanos at the University of Barcelona.
2. “Secondo la teoria opposta [a Piaget], il linguaggio egocentrico del bambino è uno dei fenomeni del passaggio dalle funzioni intersichiche a quelle intrapsichiche, cioè dalle forme di attività sociale, collettiva del bambino alle sue funzioni individuali. Questo passaggio è una legge generale [...] dello sviluppo di tutte le funzioni psichiche superiori, che compaiono inizialmente come forme di attività in collaborazione e solo in seguito sono trasferite dal bambino nella sfera delle sue proprie forme psichiche di attività. Il linguaggio per se stessi nasce dalla differenziazione della funzione inizialmente sociale del linguaggio per gli altri. Non una socializzazione progressiva, apportata dal bambino dall’esterno, ma una individualizzazione progressiva, nata sulla base della socialità interna del bambino, è il tratto principale dello sviluppo infantile”.
3. “infine le strutture verbali, assimilate dal bambino, divengono le strutture fondamentali del suo pensiero”.
4. “la dipendenza dello sviluppo del pensiero dal linguaggio, dai *mezzi del pensiero* e dall’esperienza socio-culturale del bambino”.
5. For a definition of stereotype see Lippmann (1922/2007) and Allport (1954). Even though the two interpretations are not in agreement, both emphasize the cognitive structure.

6. For a definition of prejudice see Allport (1954) and, for an extension to its emotional and behavioural components, Brown (1995/2007). For the process of categorization underlying the construction of prejudice, see Allport (1954) and Tajfel (1969).
7. The names of the children are fictitious. Furthermore, the authorization for the recordings of the children's dialogues was granted by the internal regulation of the school in which the research took place.
8. The same dialogue excerpt has been published also in Miraglia (2025a).
9. For the purposes of my doctoral research, two philosophical stories in the Lipman style were devised to stimulate dialogue in the two classes. For further details, please refer to the doctoral thesis Miraglia (2024).

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