

*Notes from the Field***Philosophy on the Radio and the Little Thinkers Society**

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Abstract: This article is about a radio program called Little Thinkers Society that has been running for five years with children at Açık Radyo, an independent radio station in Istanbul. The radio program's goal is to engage children in philosophical inquiries on various questions and concepts and to share their voices with a wider audience. The article provides detailed information on how the radio program was created, planned, and executed. It also presents quantitative data to demonstrate the program's impact, and qualitative reports to evaluate its effect on children, educators, and the broader community. The article evaluates how Little Thinkers Society, which brings the philosophy for/with children sessions held in the classroom to the radio studio, contributes to the development of children's critical and creative thinking abilities, along with caring and collaborative social skills.

Keywords: Matthew Lipman, Philosophy for/with Children, P4/wC, Açık Radyo, Little Thinkers Society, a radio show with children.

It has been almost fifty years since Matthew Lipman, along with Ann Margaret Sharp, developed an educational program that introduced philosophical inquiries into schools as a practice.¹ This program is now known as **Philosophy for/with Children (P4/wC)** and has spread globally with new approaches in both theory and practice. Various studies have been carried out in the field, especially on practices with children in schools and teacher training. Including lesson plans, teaching materials, books, research papers, competitions, films, digital content, and radio programs, the production in the field continues through many channels and more people are getting involved in this movement. As one of the people who initiated the recognition of P4/wC in Turkey, I have been orchestrating programs inspired by this movement since 2014. In this article, I will describe only one of these works, the radio program called **Little Thinkers Society**, which we conducted with children on **Açık Radyo**.²

The inspiration for the Little Thinkers Society program began with an invitation to participate in Professor Güven Güzeldere's program on Açık Radyo in March 2018.³ At the time, I had recently

¹ In his autobiographical book, Matthew Lipman explains how they developed the Philosophy for/with Children curriculum at Montclair State University (Lipman, 2008, p. 124-152)

² The original name of the program is *Küçük Düşünürler Topluluğu*. (<https://acikradyo.com.tr/program/kucuk-dusunurler-toplulugu>)

³ Güven Güzeldere, who is a professor of philosophy and a faculty member at Harvard University, has been hosting a program on Açık Radyo called *Açık Bilinç* (Open Consciousness) covering topics in science and philosophy since 2012. (<https://acikradyo.com.tr/program/acik-bilinec>)

published the first two books in a series of philosophy books for children with Redhouse Kidz Publications and was also running a P4/wC trainer training program at Boğaziçi University. Güzeldere, who was familiar with my work, invited me to his program and I attended with two students from my class. After receiving positive feedback, we talked about the idea of creating a program on the radio where we do philosophy with children. Over the course of a year, this idea evolved into the Little Thinkers Society program. On November 6, 2019, my four twelve-year-old students and I broadcast the first episode.

The Little Thinkers Society program is a philosophical inquiry program that I conduct with four of my students every year. We create a program consisting of thirteen episodes with a new group of students each year. Our primary goal, as mentioned in the program's opening theme, is “to engage in philosophical inquiries with children on different questions and concepts.” We bring the philosophical inquiry into the recording studio as Lipman and Sharp brought it to the classroom. As is known, the Philosophy for/with Children method focuses on enhancing children's critical and creative thinking skills through the exploration of philosophical questions and concepts. Moreover, it aims to foster communication and cooperation skills from an early age for democratic development and civic participation (Lipman, 2003, p.94-100). We kept these objectives in mind while creating the radio program.

We typically begin each episode with a story and engage in a discussion around the question or concept that arises from the conflict in the story. We avoid using technical jargon and strive to create a space where children can think critically, justify their thoughts, reason effectively, listen to each other respectfully, and review their ideas. Our session is not just a casual conversation or a heated debate about a topic, but rather a deliberate effort to encourage children's intellectual growth and social development. As Lipman states, it is a study that aims at “the growth of reasonableness (in personal) and democracy (in social character)” (Lipman, 2017, p. 6). The recording studio is similar to a classroom, where we study and learn, but it also offers the opportunity to take our work beyond the classroom, to share it with a wider audience, and to preserve it as permanent work.

We don't make any significant preparations before the recording to keep the excitement of the discussion alive. Sometimes, I start the discussion with a thought experiment, a picture book, or a philosophical claim. Other times, children come to the program with a philosophical question or concept on their minds. Sometimes, we think together and decide what to discuss before the program. As the program is not broadcast live, we do not have guests who connect to the program live and ask questions. Hence, in each episode, we set the question for that day and discuss it for around twenty-five minutes. Throughout the discussion, children express their ideas, listen to each other, create opposing ideas, and work together to better understand the topic. I clarify their assumptions, deepen the discussion with new questions, and preserve the conceptual framework of the discussion. In summary, in each episode, we produce a short but condensed version of a P4/wC session held in the classroom. The program has received positive feedback, so we have not needed to make any substantial changes to its main structure over the years. However, since we work with a new group of children in each broadcast season, the children's personalities and their relationships with each other bring a unique element to the show.

We experience the most challenging process of preparing for the program at the beginning of the broadcast season. It's difficult to determine the dates when we will record in the studio and arrange transportation for the children to and from the radio station. Many variables come into play, such as the setting of available dates for the recording studio and arranging shuttle drivers. During this process, we collaborate with radio staff, school administrators, and parents to make everything work smoothly. We always work well as a team because everyone is enthusiastic about the work we do.

We can gauge the impact of our program, which is now in its fifth year, by analyzing some data.⁴ We have created the program with four different children in each broadcast period, meaning that **twenty children** have participated in the program as broadcasters so far. We release thirteen episodes in each broadcast period, which means that we will have recorded and discussed **sixty-five episodes** by the end of this year. Although we are unable to measure the number of listeners who tune in during the broadcasting time, we can examine the listening rates on digital media platforms since the episodes are broadcast indefinitely. As of now, the episodes that have been released have been downloaded roughly **fifty-five thousand times**. Some episodes have even been downloaded almost **two thousand times**. We have listeners from over **fifty countries**, but **ninety percent** of the listeners are from Turkey since the program is broadcast in Turkish. It has also been listened to in Germany, America, England, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Despite our lack of advertisements or promotions, we can say that the program has been listened to significantly. One of the reasons for this is the identity of the radio we broadcast on. Açık Radio has been broadcasting voluntarily with an independent approach for nearly thirty years in Istanbul. This radio focuses on the global climate crisis, war and peace, the struggle for rights, culture, art, and music. The radio's listeners and programmers are people who care about these issues, value independent thinking, and are interested in alternative perspectives. So, I would like to express once again the success of our long-term collaboration and the mutual satisfaction we feel from working together.

I designed the Little Thinkers Society program with the primary goal of showcasing a philosophy for/with children session held in the classroom. Moreover, I aimed to challenge conventional thoughts about children and philosophy and demonstrate that both can be integrated well together. Over time, we have largely achieved this goal, as evidenced by the observation and evaluation reports I have conducted. We can examine the impact of the program on children, educators, and the broader community to see how successful it has been.

The Impact of the Program on Children

The Little Thinkers Society program has had a significant impact on the twenty children who participated in it. We hold an evaluation meeting with the children at the end of each broadcast period, and the feedback I receive from them is overwhelmingly positive. They express **joy** and **pride** in having an **authentic experience** in their school life and take their work on the radio seriously, almost like professionals. They report that meeting and chatting with other people during the radio visits enriches their lives. They also mention that they feel good hearing compliments and support from their relatives at home, teachers, and friends at school. The historical district of Tophane, where

⁴ The data was collected on April 12, 2024, from *transistor.fm*, a podcast publishing and management platform of which the radio is registered. (<https://dashboard.transistor.fm/shows/kucuk-dusunurler-toplulugu>)

the radio station is located, and the time spent in that neighborhood are some of the feedback they express the most. They particularly mention the historical bakery we visited after the program, the small celebrations held in small cafes, and the funny events they experienced on the school bus while coming to the radio station as unforgettable memories in their lives. Here are some of the answers we received from them:

Saba: “The time we spent on this radio was great. Something like magic happened in our lives.”

Mithatcan: “The supportive words of my family, teachers, and friends made me very proud.”

Nural Atacan: “I would like to listen to these recordings after ten years, it would be nice to see the difference.”

Ömer Faruk: “Instead of being sad about the end of the program, I prefer to be happy that I experienced something like this.”

Kuzey Sarp: “I think it is a great chance to take part in such a program.”

Defne İpek: “Determining the topic we would discuss while coming to the radio always gave me the excitement that we were doing a great job. I felt like a very mature person here.”

Mehmet Alp: “This experience added so much to me that, first of all, I learned to be calm and careful.”

Hüseyin Kaan: “I am no longer ashamed when talking to others, this has been the biggest gain for me.”

Ece: “Radio days were both fun and proud.”

The radio program has a positive impact on the children who tune in. Based on the messages received from both children and parents, they enjoy listening to their peers and getting excited about their ideas. Some children even follow the program regularly and show interest in participating. Though we may only be able to reach a small number of children, we are pleased to know that our program is having a big impact on them.

The Impact of the Program on Educators

The radio program has a positive impact on teachers and P4/wC practitioners. Each episode of the program serves as an example of a **lesson plan** and a **facilitation model** for educators to understand what philosophical inquiry is and how it differs from other inquiries. When educators and parents listen to the episodes, they can observe children taking the following steps in a philosophical inquiry: expressing their ideas, listening to others, respectfully challenging others' thoughts, stating their assumptions, providing good reasons, making inferences, and following the inquiry. In many episodes, they can also identify the facilitator taking the following steps: being open

to new ideas, positioning herself as a co-inquirer, asking open-ended questions, making assumptions explicit, encouraging justification, enabling alternative perspectives to emerge, recognizing distinctions, enabling connections to be made, maintaining the framework of the discussion, and continuing the inquiry and dialogue. The long-term objective of the Philosophy for/with Children method is not merely polite forms of thought and communication, but genuine attempts **to critique and create, to care and collaborate**. By listening to many episodes, an educator has the opportunity to see these aspects of thinking holistically and understand how these thinking skills improve over time.

The radio program has a significant impact not only on educators but also on educational institutions. The children who participate in the program are students of **Erkan Ulu Schools**, where I have been an academic consultant for five years. At Erkan Ulu Schools, the Philosophy for /with Children course is included in the curriculum as a lesson from preschool to middle years. The radio program helps to raise awareness about the impact of having this course in schools on children. It sets an example for other schools to know, understand, and adopt.

The Impact of the Program on the Broader Community

Recent childhood studies challenge the traditional **adult-child distinction**. It goes beyond the voices that have risen since the 1980s to understand children's agencies and empower children's participation. The new ethical-political approach put forward by John Wall with the concept of **childism** says that it is necessary to restructure social norms and power in light of the different and diverse experiences of children (Wall, 2013, p.70). It is now widely recognized that childhood is no longer a concept constructed by adults, but rather a concept constructed for and with children. Our radio program reflects this shift in perspective from adultism to childism. We acknowledge that children can think, reason, and freely express their ideas. They are not passive learners, but active and creative contributors to knowledge and culture. By giving them a voice and listening to their thoughts, we hope to foster a more inclusive society where children's contributions are valued and integrated into our understanding of both childhood and adulthood. If it happens this way, our knowledge, values, and practices of childhood and adulthood will transform. Our radio program is based on these principles and supports their recognition and dissemination.

Conclusively, over the course of five years, we have produced a radio program in which children actively participated. The program has had a profound impact not only on the children but also on educators and the broader community. The episodes are digitally available, ensuring that the impact will continue to grow over time. As the producer and presenter of the program, there is an emotional side to my work. In today's world, despite the abundance of voice, photo, and video recordings, children's ideas on a subject are rarely recorded. The recordings of the radio program serve **as a memory** for the children who participated in it. In the years to come, as they listen back to their discussions, they will notice how their thoughts, ways of communicating, and even their tone of voice have changed. This applies to me too; the work I have done, and a certain period of my life, is recorded. Speaking of the personal and emotional impact of the program, I would like to say this as a final word. At the start of each broadcast period, we take a traditional photo with the children in front of the radio building. I hope that years later, I can meet them there again and we can take new photos where they are taller than me.

Appendix: Children participated in the program as broadcasters

2019-2020: Alya Şencan, Saba Koca, Toprak Şahan, Tuna Çakır (12 years old)

2020-2021: Ayşe Kiraz Akman, Deniz Sönmezaş, Mithatcan Özdemir, Nural Atacan Çebi (12 years old)

2021-2022: Duru Kayahan, Kuzey Sarp Levent, Ömer Faruk Dereli, Zeynep Ece Asar (11 years old)

2022-2023: Ece Aksoy, Hüseyin Kaan Kaplan, İpek Defne Obuz, Mehmet Alp Ünver (10 years old)

2023-2024: Ayda Nil Akın, Cemal Sami Şenyuva, Doğa Karaağaç, Yekta Özkasap (10 years old)

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