



Analyzing “Frog in Love” with Children in a Greek Kindergarten

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Can children between the ages of four and five engage in philosophical dialogue, listen carefully to each other, argue, change their minds, create new words, make clarifications and take other steps in thinking? This paper highlights a dialogue with twenty-two children in a local kindergarten in Heraklion, Greece who are familiar with P4C practices. The aim of this paper is to show an example from everyday school life of how teachers or P4C practitioners can minimize their interventions and listen carefully to the children and analyze their arguments and ways of thinking.

Inspired by Valentine’s Day, children were introduced to “Frog in Love,” a picture-book by Max Velthuijs. Children listened attentively to the text and illustrations. At the end of the storytelling, the children had some time to reflect on the book and come forward with comments and questions that the book triggered in them. The following table shows the children’s initial comments and reactions:

Children’s Questions and Reaction on Max Velthuijs’ Frog in Love

- Why didn’t Frog know that he is in love? (Chris, age 4)
- Why Frog’s heart went thump-thump faster and he felt cold and hot? (George, age 4)
- Why did he jump so high since he knew he would fall and hurt himself? (Panos, age 5)
- Can a frog marry a duck? Is that possible? (Orestis, aged 5 and many other children)
- Can a frog love a duck? (Marci age 4, John age 5 and many other children)
- Why did frog take the flowers and his drawing to the duck’s house? (Ntina, age 4)
- Because he was in love (Stavros response to Ntina)
- Why was the frog so shy? When people get married, they should not be shy. (Gregory, age 5)
- Why did the frog get red? (Stavros, age 5). Yes . . . as if he is roasted (Gregory and John, age 5)
- If we cut the flowers and there are no more there will be no beauty! (Chris)
- Why didn’t frog get white like the duck? (Panos)

Children’s Dialogue

Can a frog love a duck? The children voted for Marcy’s and John’s question highlighted in the table above. Orestis, however, suggested replacing “love” with “marry.” He argued that you can love anyone, but it is different if you are to marry someone. The children agreed on this clarification and changed the question. Some of the children argued that such a marriage was not possible, while other children said that it was.

As facilitator, I introduced the wise owl, a small wooden ornament that the children already knew. Everyone holding the owl is allowed to say something and the other children have to listen attentively. Then the person who has the owl passes it on to another child. The children divide into

teams, the “marriage team” (a frog can marry a duck) and the “non-marriage team” (the frog cannot marry to duck). To make it more visible, I demarcated the space that each team could occupy with a stick. The children were allowed to switch to another team as long as they justified why they changed their mind.



FIGURE 1: CREATING SPACE FOR THE MARRIAGE AND NON-MARRIAGE GROUP

The children have chosen their places. Below, I have grouped the dialogues that took place in each team, along with all the comments and interventions that the children made, regardless which team they joined at the time. It is also noted when children changed their minds and moved to another group.

“Marriage” Team

Gregory (aged 5): This marriage can happen. Sometimes people with blond hair marry people who have black hair. Also, Black people marry white ones!

(Panos changed his opinion and moved to “marry group”)

Panos (aged 5): Yes. You can marry someone from a different country. This is possible

Maria (aged 4): They can travel to different countries

Fotis (aged 4): The duck can wear the marriage uniform and marry the frog

Steve (aged 5): There is not a marriage uniform. It is a wedding dress.

George (aged 4): The frog should marry the duck because he needs someone to cook for him and do the rest of the housework and be happy.

Asteris (aged 5): If the frog put on the duck’s dress he can be the duck.

Facilitator: If we put on someone’s else dress do we become another person?

Steve: No! We made animal uniforms for the carnival but we didn’t become animals.

(Panos changed his mind again and stepped back to “not marry group”)

Panos: What if frogs are used to marrying frogs? Then they wouldn’t get married to a duck.

(Stavros changed his mind and moved to the “marry group”)

Stavros: But if they love each other?

Anthi (aged 5): If the duck loves the frog then she can marry him.

Fotis: The frog should marry to the duck because he doesn’t want to lose her.

Facilitator: What do people need in order to be together?

George: Love and care.

Dimos (aged 4): And kissing.

“Non-Marriage” Team

Dimis (aged 4): The frog shouldn't marry a girl duck.

Panos (aged 5): The duck lives in a different family and so does the frog.

Francis (aged 5): They don't belong to the same kind

Orestis (aged 5): They have a different color. Frog and duck are two different things. They don't have the same color.

Chris (aged 5): Yes, the frog cannot marry the duck because he is green and the duck is white.

Facilitator: Is the color a reason for them not to get married?

Gregory (aged 5 shouting from the marry team): This marriage can happen. Sometimes people with blond hair marry to people who have black hair. Also, Black people marry white ones!

(Steve moved to the “marry group”)

Steve (aged 5): A Black man can get married to a white lady.

Orestis: It is different for humans. They can get married if they have different color. This is not the same for animals.

Fotis (aged 4): The duck cannot get married to a frog. They don't have the same shape. The duck has a beak, the frog hasn't.

Orestis: Yes, I agree with Fotis.

Giorgina (aged 4): The duck should marry a man duck.

Frances: They are different.

Orestis: They do not have similar blood.

Agape (aged 5): The frogs should love frogs and the ducks, ducks.

Giannis (aged 4): The Frog should look for a girl frog.

Panos: And if he couldn't find one? Is it better to be alone? (intervention from the “marry group”)

Steve: The duck wouldn't understand frog's language.

Facilitator: If they speak different language does that mean they cannot be together.

Francis: My mum is Italian and my dad Greek. My dad taught my mum Greek and my mum taught my father Italian.

Steve: OK, but then duck has to teach frog how to do “papapapa” and the frog teach the duck how to do “hoax hoax”

Marci (aged 4): What about the food? Frog must feel disgust for the duck's food.

Steve: How do you know? (intervention from the “marry group”)

Panos: They eat different things. How will they live together?

Fotis: They don't have the same legs...

Francis and Gregory: What type of children are they going to give birth to?

Children: Both frogs and ducks

Francis: Frogducks.

Agape: Or duckfrogbabies!

Gregory: He should marry to a girl frog and have frog babies.

Agape: Yes, that sounds right.

In the final round, the wooden owl passed from hand to hand and the children made a final comment on the initial question. The children who had not yet spoken were given one last chance to argue. Some of the children's answers were as follows:

Children's Final Thoughts

Michael (age 5): Let them get married so there will have fewer problems.
 George (age 4): If the duck asks the frog to take her back home then she will make a cup of tea for him. Then, they will go for a picnic and she will cook for him and then the frog will marry her and there will be someone to do the housework!
 Francis (age 5): The frog might find a girl frog and not love the duck anymore so it is better not to marry her at all.
 Orestis: They cannot be together. They also have different legs.
 Steve: So what?
 Asteris: They cannot be together because the duck cannot jump like a frog and the frog does not swim the way duck does.
 Giorgina: A man duck and the duck can be better together and go for a stroll.
 Agape: If the duck gets married to the frog there will be a problem with having many different babies.

Highlights and Analysis of the Dialogue

The following table summarizes the arguments the children used to support their opinions and the types of thinking that emerged (critical, creative, collaborative and caring).

"Marriage Team"

Argument	Basic Concepts	Type of Argument	Type of thinking
They can travel to different countries.	Things frog and duck can do in common / Mutuality	Example	Critical
If the frog puts on the duck dress he can be the duck.	Pretending and Becoming what we pretend	Hypothesis	Imaginative
The frog should marry the duck because he needs someone to cook for him and do the rest of the housework and be happy.	Marriage for practical issues and happiness	Practical / Pragmatic/ Manipulative	Critical
If the duck loves the frog then she can marry him.	Love as condition to marriage	Cause and effect	Critical/ Hypothesis/ Caring
The frog should marry the duck because he doesn't want to lose her.	Not losing someone	Cause and effect	Caring
Sometimes people with blond hair marry people who have black hair. Also, Black people marry white ones!	Arguing against different color as a reason for not getting married	Counter examples	Critical
And if he couldn't find a frog? Is it better to be alone?	Loneliness	Hypothesis	Critical/ Caring

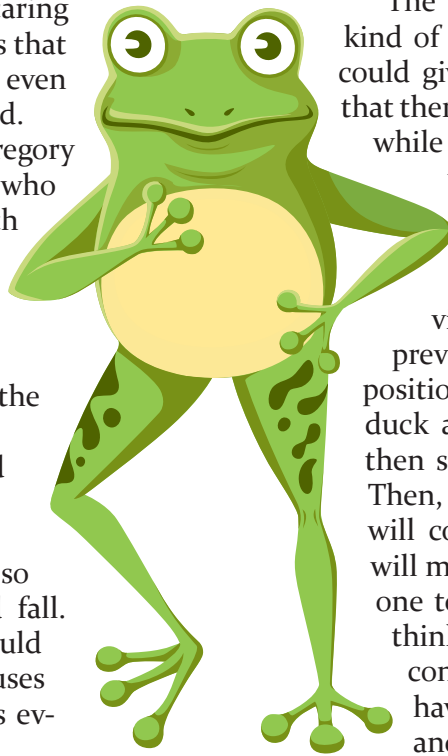
“Non-Marriage Team”

Argument	Basic Concepts	Type of Argument	Type of thinking
The duck lives in a different family and so does the frog. They don't belong to the same kind	Difference based on the kind	Making distinctions	Critical
They don't have the same color. The frog cannot marry the duck because he is green and the duck is white	Difference based on color	Making distinctions	Critical
They don't have the same shape. The duck has a beak the frog hasn't/ They do not have the same blood/ Different legs	Difference based on characteristics/ shape	Making distinctions Give an example	Critical
The duck wouldn't understand frog's language.	Difference based on the language that frogs and ducks use	Making distinctions Give an example	Critical
What about the food? Frog must feel disgust for the duck's food / They eat different things. How will they live together?	Difference based on the food	Making distinctions/ Hypothesis	Critical, Imaginative
They cannot be together because the duck cannot jump like a frog and the frog does not swim the way duck does.	Difference based on skills and abilities	Making distinctions/ Give an example	Critical
It is different for humans. They can get married if they have different color. This is not the same for animals.	Discriminating among humans and animals	Incomplete argument	Critical
The frogs should love frogs and the ducks, ducks/ The frog should look for a girl frog		Categorical	Critical
What type of children are they going to give birth to?	Difference based on the progeny	Questioning	Imaginative/ Critical

Other Potential Philosophical Concepts That Emerged Through Children's Dialogue

The children's initial questions and comments, whether or not were not selected, could raise many potential philosophical concepts that could be discussed among the children at another time. Such concepts are the following

- **Beauty:** Chris asked what would happen if we cut the flowers. She argues that there would then be no more beauty! This comment could be discussed further. Her thinking is imaginative and caring at the same time and she shows that she is able to offer a hypothesis even though she is only four years old.
- **Shyness and marriage:** Gregory (aged 5) thought that those who marry should not be shy with each other. He thinks categorically (he uses a "should") but does not elaborate on his thought because there was not much time at this point of the discussion.
- **Causes, consequences and the intentionality of our actions:** Panos (aged 5) wondered why the frog jumped so high, knowing that he would fall. This question, if taken up, could lead to other examples of causes and effects from the children's everyday life.



Other Philosophical Thinking Moves

Even though the majority of the children voted on whether a frog could love a duck, Orestis preferred his question, which happened to be the second most popular. He found that the children would discuss his question if he just changed one word. To achieve this, he had to convince the children of this change. He pragmatically made a distinction between "love" and "marry," arguing that marrying someone brings more difficulties than just loving. He is only five years old, but the process of his thinking was very sophisticated. As a facilitator, I did not want to interfere and opt for the questions that the majority had initially opted for. I preferred

to observe the children's reactions and see if they would be persuaded.

Children, no matter how young they are, want to use the "right" words to express their ideas and be understood. Anthi corrects Fotis who refers to a "marriage uniform" as a wedding dress. Is Fotis suggesting that marriage is an act of pretense, with both parties wearing their "marriage uniforms" and withdrawing when necessary? Or is he using this invented expression because he does not know what a wedding dress is?

The children could imagine what kind of children the duck and the frog could give birth to. Some children said that there would be both frogs and ducks while others invented completely new words (Frogducks/ duckfrog babies).

Children often make up stories and scenarios to convince others that reveal their previous assumptions and presuppositions. George argues that "if the duck asks the frog to take her home then she will make him a cup of tea. Then, they will have a picnic and she will cook for him and then the frog will marry her and there will be someone to do the housework." The child thinks imaginatively, hypothesizes, considers previous experiences that have arisen from his observations, and reveals presuppositions and assumptions that marriage is about having the woman do the housework.

Finally, there were many incomplete arguments that seemed more like assertions without further support. For example, when the children argued that a duck should belong to a duck and a frog to a frog, they did not further substantiate their opinion. Also, when Michalis argued that it is better for the Duck and Frog to be together because they would have fewer problems, he did not indicate what these problems would be and how they could be resolved.

Facilitator's Interventions Or Non-Interventions

Below, I state the cases of the facilitator's interventions:

- When Asteris mentioned that “if the frog puts on the duck’s suit, he becomes a duck” I questioned whether we become what we pretend to be. Steve illustrated this with a concrete example (“We made animal uniforms for the carnival but we didn’t become animals”).
- When children mentioned that a frog and a duck should get married if they love each other, I asked the children what people need to be together. This move gets the children thinking about the requirement for marriage and the needs that marriage fulfills.
- When some children insisted that Duck and Frog have different colors and therefore they cannot be together, I asked if the color is a reason not to marry someone.
- The children pointed out that Duck and Frog would not understand each other because they speak a different language. I asked if language could be a reason for frog and duck not getting together. The children answered either on the basis of their experiences (The boy whose mother was Italian and his father Greek explain that such marriage is possible) or by logical thinking (“the duck will teach the frog Papapa and vice versa”).



There were a few cases where the facilitator could have intervened more. For example, I could have paid more attention to Pano’s comment (“What if frogs are used to marry frogs? Then they wouldn’t marry a duck”) because he introduced the idea of habit as a reason for actions. I could have asked Panos to clarify what

he meant by the habit of doing something. Also, in the case of incomplete arguments (especially those that start with a “should”) I could have urged the children to explain more precisely what they mean.

Conclusion—Follow Up Activities

Children at a young age seem to be able to sustain a discussion for a long time if it takes the form of a simple dilemma. “Can a frog marry a duck?” is a question that can be answered with a “yes” or “no” but at the same time it allows children to open their minds and justify their answers. The children were able to change their minds which made them listen carefully to others and be persuaded if there were valid arguments. Thinking and changing their minds allow the children to change their point of view and put themselves in the shoes of others.

Most of the time the children talked to each other and the role of the facilitator was as small as possible. The facilitator’s questions serve to clarify further but even if these questions were missing, the quality of the children’s dialogue would still be high. The children seemed to care about convincing the others and succeeded in putting themselves in Duck’s and Frog’s shoes and thinking about their dilemma as if it were something that concerned them. Therefore, the children thought both critically and imaginatively, and in some cases included their past experiences.

The discussion about the “Frog in love” could be an end in itself. However, due to the children’s interest, some follow-up activities took place, which are summarized below:

- **What is love:** The children listened to different songs and discussed the meaning of love. They also choose the kind of music they found more loveable than others

- **The children wrote their own love stories and illustrated them.**
- **Love hearts:** Each child was given a piece of paper. The children chose the size and color. They folded the paper and drew half the shape of a heart. Then they cut it out and as

the paper unfolded, hearts appeared in different shapes and colors. The teacher wrote on each child's heart their ideas of what love is. These answers gave birth to a new philosophical inquiry regarding love and its ways to express it. ■



FIGURE 2: CHILDREN'S IDEAS OF WHAT LOVE IS WRITTEN ON HANDMADE PAPER HEARTS

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