

# Teachers' Views on Taboo Concepts in Philosophical Discussions with Children\*

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**Abstract:** This research aims to determine the taboo concepts that teachers tend to avoid during philosophical discussions with children and why these concepts are considered taboo. We focus on teachers' experiences using phenomenology, a qualitative research design. For this purpose, we used the snowball sampling method to reach 73 teachers and they answered a questionnaire consisting of 5 open-ended questions. We carried out semi-structured interviews with 7 of these teachers to get in-depth responses and to reflect different views on the subject. Accordingly, 65 teachers had one or more taboos, while 8 teachers did not have any taboos. Death, religion, and sexuality emerged as the most prominent taboo concepts. According to the participants, taboos are formed because of children, teachers, and society. The participants expressed that taboos could have a negative impact on the child, the discussion environment, and the teacher, and they offered solutions. Teachers need to develop a better level of competence in engaging in philosophical discussions with children in order to overcome taboo concepts. Teacher training sessions can be organized to address how to approach taboo concepts and how to select children's books that contain such concepts. Research can be conducted on engaging taboo concepts in philosophical discussions with children. This body of research can explore the impact of questioning such concepts on children's perspectives toward them.

**Keywords:** Philosophy for children, philosophical discussions, taboo, teachers, death.

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## Introduction

Philosophy for children (P4C) is an action where children can engage in philosophical discussions with a facilitator. The teacher or facilitator enables children to discuss a philosophical question based on various stimuli. These questions could include those such as “what is happiness,” “what is freedom,” and “what is correct behavior,” often based on a text. Such texts may include stories for children, picture books, novels, and news stories. The teacher introduces the children to different options through questions and supports them in explaining and justifying their views. The teacher uses his/her knowledge at the right time by asking the right questions, thus arousing curiosity in children (Lipman et al., 1980).

P4C began in the 1970s under the leadership of Matthew Lipman. P4C has introduced children to philosophy in many countries, from preschool to high school. With the implementation of P4C in classrooms, research on the subject has gained significant momentum. Studies have examined the contribution of P4C to thinking skills (Daniel and Auriac, 2011; Millett and Tapper, 2012), democracy (Bleazby, 2006; Burgh and Yorshansky, 2011), citizenship competencies (Garraat and Piper, 2011; Splitter, 2011), and reasoning skills (Lam, 2012; Marashi, 2009). Some researchers have evaluated the effects of P4C on discussion and dialogue skills (Cassidy and Christie, 2013; Poulton, 2014). Moreover, studies have revealed the positive effects of P4C on the courses included in the curriculum. Philosophical questioning in science and mathematics lessons enhances children’s competencies in accurate description, hypothesizing, clarifying concepts, analyzing, synthesizing, employing inductive and deductive reasoning, making formal and informal inferences, and evaluating evidence (Calvert et al., 2017). P4C also has contributions in social aspects; it improves assertiveness, collaboration, and self-control (Okur, 2008), while helping solve communication problems (Akkocaoğlu Çayır and Akkoyunlu, 2016).

For over fifty years, P4C has not been fully considered a method or included in curricula as a discipline or course despite its contribution to thinking skills and its general adoption across the world. The problem with formally implementing P4C in schools is partially associated with difficulties in its implementation and achieving the desired goals through P4C. This could be explained by the fact that most teachers have little or no experience with formal or informal philosophical questioning (Lewis and Sutcliffe, 2017). Teachers have difficulties carrying out philosophical discussions and fail to ask argumentative and philosophical questions. Green and Condy (2016) determined that pre-service teachers found it more challenging to ask philosophical questions compared to factual questions. While these pre-service teachers had an awareness of philosophical subjects, they struggled to transform this awareness into questions. Knight and Collins (2014) found that P4C could not progress at the desired level in Australia despite the significance given to it. Also, elementary school teachers perceived philosophical questioning as a useless effort. Therefore, the authors associated this lack of progress with teachers’ attitudes towards philosophy and their epistemological beliefs. Indeed, the difficulties teachers face in engaging children in philosophical discussions can be fundamentally

linked to their epistemological beliefs, i.e., their views on education and learning. Moreover, teachers' approaches to philosophy and children may also be associated with these difficulties. An approach where the teacher does not trust children's thinking capacities and looks down on their knowledge, skills, and experiences will create difficulties in P4C practices. Lyle (2014) also concluded that teachers' perceptions of children influenced the quality of P4C practices.

According to Farahani (2014), the main difficulties teachers face in engaging children in philosophical discussions include the following: teachers believe that children cannot engage in philosophical discussions based on Piaget's cognitive developmental stages, they disregard children's ideas and do not listen to them properly, they consider philosophy as a framework of knowledge and neglect its relationship with life and accurate thinking, and they interpret it as an adoption of certain beliefs or ideas. Another difficulty that impacts the implementation of P4C is teachers' inclination toward providing definite answers to children during discussions. Research indicates that there are certain challenges to implementing P4C in Turkey. These challenges include the nature of questions asked by teachers during discussions, statements, and behaviors that hinder critical thinking (Boyras, 2019). Besides, teachers are not adequately qualified to integrate P4C into the curriculum or effectively carry out assessment and evaluation processes (Kabil, 2021). Koyuncu and Demircan (2022) sought the opinions of 11 preschool teachers who implemented P4C in their classrooms about various factors that could impede this implementation. These factors included the suppressive effect of the traditional education system on children's curiosity and thinking, a lack of support or pressure from school administrations, the perception that children are incapable of engaging in philosophical discussions, and the belief that philosophy is complex and unnecessary. These difficulties impact all three critical features that are important in P4C: the teacher's role in the classroom, managing the questioning process, and selecting stimuli. The latter is crucial because texts and visuals can either enhance or limit the scope of questioning. A restrictive attitude can lead to missed opportunities for thinking (Haynes and Murriss 2009).

One of the tools used as stimuli in P4C is storytelling. Stories make philosophical questions more concrete for children through events and characters. Children may be hesitant to give examples from their own lives; thus, giving examples and expressing their opinions through characters is safer for them. Stories contain concepts that are suitable for philosophical thinking, such as good, evil, friendship, beauty, and love; they arouse curiosity in children and capture their attention more effectively, particularly children's books with illustrations (Akkocaoğlu Çayır, 2021).

According to Haynes and Murriss (2009), teachers often avoid bringing certain children's books to the classroom and consequently refrain from introducing important philosophical questions or concepts due to concerns that these books may contain taboos or undesirable messages. The avoided subjects include death, sexuality, and love. Teachers also tend to shy away from engaging in philosophical discussions about

death, fearing that it may upset children. According to Gregory (2008), politics and religion are some other areas that teachers tend to avoid discussing in the classroom.

Because teachers avoid engaging in philosophical discussions on such concepts, children are deprived of the opportunity to explore the diverse perspectives that exist in real life regarding these subjects. Children often encounter and discuss these topics in their everyday lives. These concepts are already a part of their lives and avoiding their discussions can result in an approach that is disconnected from real life. This can also mean disregarding their need to talk about these concepts. Avoiding these discussions can hinder the development of a democratic community and restrict children's potential to shape, organize, and make decisions about their thoughts. Besides, children should have the freedom to express their thoughts on these concepts as a human right. Ignoring children's views on such issues is inconsistent with their right to participate (Haynes & Murriss, 2009).

Restricting children's range of philosophical questions not only hampers the implementation of the P4C but also undermines the objectives of fostering critical thinking and promoting a democratic education model. By preventing children from engaging in critical thinking and discussing religious, moral, or political matters, they develop a distorted understanding of the nature of thinking. The perception that "only certain issues can be questioned" is one consequence of this approach. Moreover, it diminishes children's interest in the process of questioning itself (Gregory, 2008). Exploring teachers' taboos provides insights into the implementation of P4C and reveals their perspective on education and the education system. Karin Murriss and Joanna Haynes, who have contributed to the P4C literature, discuss taboo concepts that are avoided in philosophical discussions with children and picture books that contain these concepts in their article titled "The Wrong Message: Risk, Censorship, and the Struggle for Democracy in the Primary School," published in 2009. Based on the conceptual framework of this article, the current research addresses taboo concepts that are not examined in Turkey and are only studied to a certain extent abroad. Taboo concepts refer to those that are intentionally avoided, not discussed, or not subjected to philosophical questioning in the classroom, as used in the aforementioned article.

This research aims to discuss the taboo concepts that teachers avoid in philosophical discussions with children and the reasons they do not reflect these concepts into the questioning process from different perspectives. It is crucial to examine this issue in depth from the perspective of P4C practitioners in order to understand the problems that they experience, to include P4C in the classroom, to make it popular, and to institutionalize it.

Budak, Durmuş, and Çalışkan (2022) examined 69 studies conducted in Turkey on philosophy with children. The sample groups mostly consisted of elementary and preschool students. These studies focused on teachers' views on P4C, though studies that relied on teachers as a source of data were quite limited. Still, there is a need for research that focuses more on teachers' experiences, delves deeper into the problems and solutions, and highlights different dimensions of the subject rather than providing

general and limited insights. It is also important to increase the number of studies that focus on teachers in terms of effectively incorporating P4C into the classroom. Relevant research in literature is quite scarce. Thus, our results will make contributions both to the researchers and the practitioners of P4C. Within this framework, the current research seeks answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the taboo concepts that teachers avoid in philosophical discussions with children?
2. What are teachers' views on the sources of the taboo concepts that they avoid in philosophical discussions with children?
3. What are teachers' views on the stimuli that contain such taboo concepts?
4. What are teachers' views on the consequences of having taboo concepts?
5. What are teachers' suggestions for de-tabooing such concepts?

## Method

### Research Design

We utilized phenomenological design, a qualitative research method. This design focuses on phenomena or concepts that we are aware of but may not have a deep and detailed understanding of. Such phenomena can take various forms like events, experiences, perceptions, orientations, and concepts (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2018). The phenomenon that we investigate in-depth is the taboo concepts for teachers who engage in philosophical discussions with children. We explore such taboo concepts, their nature, the reasons behind their formation, the consequences of having such taboos, and suggestions for de-tabooing these concepts based on the experiences of teachers who engage in philosophical discussions with children.

In phenomenological research, data sources consist of individuals who have experienced and can express the phenomenon that the research focuses on. To achieve this, the researcher can determine participants who can be included in the sample through observations and preliminary interviews conducted in the field. The snowball sampling method can be suitable for such studies (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2018). The data source for this research consists of teachers who engage in philosophical discussions with children. We selected the teachers using the snowball sampling method. Initially, we used an open-ended questionnaire to understand teachers' perspectives on the phenomenon, to provide a general overview of taboos, and to identify areas that require further exploration. Subsequently, we conducted interviews with 7 teachers who represented different perspectives. Indeed, in phenomenology, the data collection process often involves interviews with individuals who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). During these interviews, teachers closely examined the taboo concepts they avoided in philosophical discussions and shared their insights on the formation and effects of these concepts in depth.

## Data Collection

We used the snowball (chain or network) sampling method to reach the participants. This approach is used to reach people who can provide more information. The process starts with the question “Who should we interview about this issue?” By asking people who else to talk with, the snowball gets bigger as new information is accumulated (Patton, 2002). Since teachers have only recently recognized P4C and a limited portion of such teachers have introduced P4C to classrooms, our first sample consisted of teachers who engaged in philosophical discussions with children and who received training, lectures, or seminars on P4C. We then expanded the list of people who would respond to the questionnaire based on the suggestions of these teachers.

We sent the open-ended questionnaire via e-mail to P4C practitioners who worked in state or private schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education. Thus, the research involved 73 participants who volunteered to complete the questionnaire. We decided not to increase the number of participants further for purposes of data saturation, that is, reaching the point where there is enough data. We read the teachers’ responses and conducted a preliminary analysis, which revealed that the responses fell under similar categories and showed repetition. Therefore, we did not expand the participant list any further. Data collection took place over a period of approximately three months, from December 2021 to February 2022.

## Participants

Our sample consisted of 73 teachers from various disciplines who engaged in philosophical discussions with children. Table 1 shows the participants’ demographic information.

**Table 1.**

*Demographic Information of Participants*

Number of participants: 73		f	%
<b>Discipline</b>	Elementary school teaching	25	34,2
	Philosophy group	21	28,7
	Preschool	9	12,3
	Turkish language	4	5,4
	Psychological counselling and guidance	3	4,1
	Turkish language and literature	2	2,7
	English language	2	2,7
	Special education	1	1,3
	Social studies	1	1,3
	History	1	1,3
	Physics	1	1,3
	Mathematics	1	1,3
	Religious culture and moral knowledge	1	1,3
	Academic	1	1,3

<b>Age</b>	25-35	26	36,6
	35-45	34	45,5
	45-55	13	17,8
<b>Gender</b>	Female	67	91,7
	Male	6	8,2
<b>Implemented P4C in the classroom for</b>	1 month-1 year	20	27,3
	1- 5 years	45	61,6
	5 -10 years	7	9,5
	10 years and above	1	1,3

Because P4C is an interdisciplinary field, teachers from various disciplines participated in the research. Most teachers who engage in philosophical discussions with children are elementary school teachers, and most have P4C experience ranging from 1 to 5 years.

## Data Collection Tools

### Open-ended Questionnaire

We developed an open-ended questionnaire form consisting of 5 questions based on the opinions of two experts working in the field of philosophy with children. Then, we carried out a pre-implementation process with four teachers engaging in philosophical discussions with children and finalizing the form based on their opinions and suggestions. The questionnaire inquires whether teachers have taboo concepts that they avoid in philosophical discussions with children and why. Furthermore, we provided summaries of three picture books on such taboo concepts and asked the teachers whether they would use these books in philosophical discussions in their classrooms, along with their reasons for their decisions. Table 2 presents information about these books.

**Table 2.**

*Stimuli Containing Taboo Concepts*

<b>Name of the Book</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Major concept</b>
Duck, Death, and the Tulip	Wolf Elburch	Death
Tango Makes Three	Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell	Nature of family, identity, homosexuality
Whadayamean	John Burningham	God, religion, faith

### Interview

In the second stage, we carried out semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with 7 teachers. All participants were located out of town, so the interviews were conducted face-to-face through a video conferencing platform. The interviews lasted an average of 45 minutes and were recorded with the participants' consent. We used the maximum variation sampling method in order to reflect different views. The purpose here is to

reveal different dimensions of the problem by reflecting the diversity of the individuals involved in the problem at the maximum level and to determine whether there are any common or shared phenomena among a wide range of cases (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2018). Table 3 shows the demographic information of the 7 interviewed teachers.

**Table 3.**

*Demographic Information of Interviewed Participants*

Participant	Gender	Discipline (Major)	Age	Implemented P4C in the classroom for
P4	Female	Elementary school	50	5 years
P17	Female	Elementary school	43	4 years
P32	Male	Philosophy	48	25 years
P36	Female	Preschool	49	3 years
P54	Female	Elementary school	36	5 months
P55	Female	Philosophy	30	4 years
P56	Female	Philosophy	48	1 year

To deepen and clarify the responses, we followed a flexible process during the interviews. The semi-structured interview included the following questions:

1. Are there any concepts or philosophical questions that you avoid discussing with children because you consider them taboo or difficult?

a. If yes, what are those concepts or questions?

b. What are the reasons behind your belief that they are taboo or difficult?

c. What experiences have influenced your views on these matters?

2. How do you evaluate a teacher's stance on having or not having taboo concepts?

a. Should facilitators have no taboo concepts? Why?

b. Can certain taboo concepts continue to remain so? Why?

c. What are the consequences of teachers having taboo concepts? Why?

d. What are the consequences of teachers not having taboo concepts? Why?

3. What are your thoughts on using stimuli (such as stories, picture books, films, visuals, etc.)

that contain concepts you consider taboo (such as death, belief, sexuality, love, politics)?

a. Do you have any additional thoughts regarding the book "Duck, Death, and the Tulip"?



- b. Do you have any additional thoughts regarding the book "Tango Makes Three"?
- c. Do you have any additional thoughts regarding the book "Whadayamean"?
- 4. What are your thoughts on the importance of engaging in philosophical discussions on concepts that are considered taboo, such as death, religion, sexuality, love, and politics? Why?
- 5. What are your views on teachers de-tabooing these concepts?
  - a. If you believe that these concepts should be de-tabooed, what are your suggestions for doing so?

### **Reliability, Validity, and Ethical Considerations**

One of the strategies used to increase credibility is triangulation. Triangulation involves using data obtained through different methods to confirm each other (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2018). In this study, we used individual interviews to validate the participants' responses to the open-ended questionnaire. We reminded the teachers about their responses and asked them to add, correct, or further explain any parts they wished to enhance and deepen their opinions. A detailed description is one of the strategies used for transferability. This involves presenting raw data that is organized according to themes to the reader without adding interpretation (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2018). To achieve this goal, the study frequently included quotations that reflect the relevant themes and subthemes. Another approach that we used to enhance transferability was sample selection. Ensuring maximum diversity in selecting individuals for interviews serves the purpose of allowing readers to use the study in various fields and for different purposes (Merriam, 2009). In this research, we employed the maximum variation sampling method in selecting individuals for individual interviews, thus selecting teachers who reflected different perspectives in their responses.

Prior to the research, we obtained the necessary ethical permissions from the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee at Hacettepe University. We explained the research purpose and the data collection process to the teachers who completed the questionnaire and those who participated in the interviews and provided them with the necessary information regarding their rights. The teachers voluntarily participated in the research and signed a consent form confirming their participation.

### **Data Analysis**

We analyzed the data using content analysis. Content analysis aims to uncover hidden truths within the data. We grouped similar data based on specific concepts and themes and presented them in a way for readers to understand (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2018). We derived these themes from the participants' opinions. We separated the responses of teachers with taboos and those without taboos and subjected their reasons to content analysis. In this analysis, we also examined the reasons given by the participants under three categories: those who stated that they would use the presented books, those who would not use them, and those who would use them under certain conditions. We used content analysis again to investigate the participants' reasons, their thoughts on the

consequences of having taboos, and their thoughts on de-tabooing certain concepts. Various codes, themes, and subthemes emerged from these analyses.

In the first stage, we watched the recorded interviews and transcribed the dialogues between the researcher and the participants. Subsequently, we transferred the responses to an Excel file. We then identified and grouped meaningful units. Each of these meaningful units was then encoded with a single word or phrase. We grouped the codes under subthemes that aligned with the research questions and accurately reflected their meanings. These subthemes were further organized under the main themes. We applied the same process to the interview data. We compared the themes derived from the two data sources and reached the final versions of the themes. We presented certain quotes under the relevant research questions, reflecting the themes and subthemes. All participants were numbered P1, P2, P3, and so on, and the quotes were shared using these codenames.

## Findings

### 1<sup>st</sup> Research Question

We asked the participants if there were any concepts that they avoided in philosophical discussions with children. 8 had no taboos, while 65 teachers had one or more taboos. Death, religion (beliefs, God, worship, fate, creator), and sexuality (sexual orientation, sexual identity, gender roles) were the most prominent taboo concepts among the teachers. Some other taboo concepts were emotions (love, fear, pain, jealousy), politics (justice, national values, democracy), violence (war, bullying), moral judgments, and family (divorce, parental roles). Some teachers also identified loneliness, free will, freedom, ethnic origins, culture, migration, goodness, existence, individual differences, illness, reality, the concept of self, and the concept of time as taboos. Below are some examples of teachers' statements.

*"Concepts that are abstract and difficult for the age group (7-8 years): Ethics, sexuality, etc. Concepts that are considered taboo by society: Religion, sexuality, etc. Concepts that are considered inappropriate to talk about by the families: Death, sexuality, etc."* (P2)

*"Death, pain and suffering (wars, natural disasters, irreversible damage to nature), sexuality and sexual preferences (LGBT and so on), believing in God."* (P58).

Below are two examples of teachers who had no taboos.

*"I do not restrict or censor children in philosophical discussions with them. So, no taboo concepts. I have only one criterion, which is appropriateness!"* (P32)

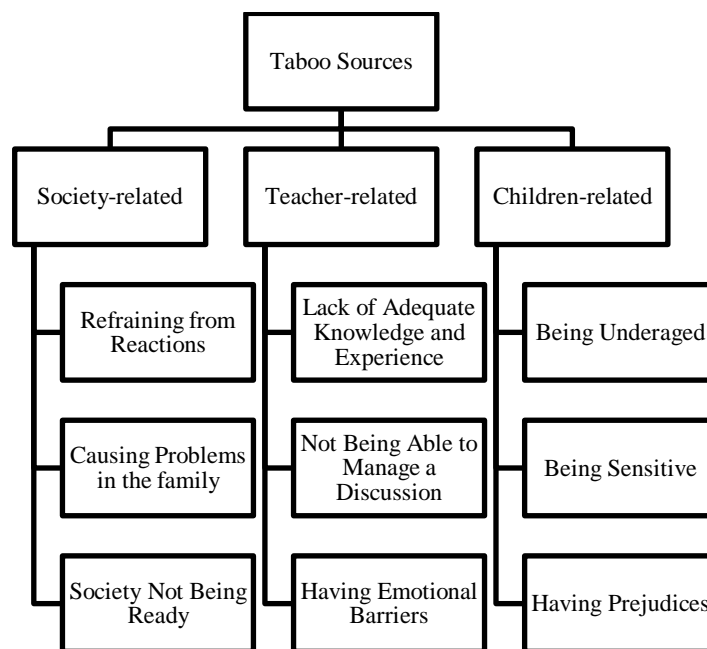
*"Any concept that children are curious about should be open to questioning."* (P53)

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Research Question

The participants wrote down their reasons for having taboos in the questionnaire. Teachers' taboo sources were grouped under three themes: society-related, teacher-related, and children-related. Figure 1 shows the relevant themes and their subthemes.

Figure 1.

Taboo Sources of Participants



Under the theme of society-related sources, teachers are worried about the reactions of families, school administrations, or other teachers if they discuss concepts that they consider taboo in the classroom. These reactions may manifest as complaints from families, discontinuation of the philosophy course, or parents expressing their discomfort to the teacher. Teachers believe that discussions centered around politics and religion in the classroom may lead children to question dominant ideologies, their families' viewpoints, or their religious preferences. They express concerns that this may not be well-received by families, school administrations, or other teachers. Discussing concepts such as death and pain is also met with resistance as it is thought to potentially upset children. Sexuality, on the other hand, is considered taboo for parents or school administrations due to its association with religious, political, or age-inappropriate topics for children. One teacher exemplifies this viewpoint as follows.

*"Religion is generally perceived as a sensitive area by society. There is a concern that if a child brings up religious questions and the family considers the school as the source of those questions, it may disrupt the education process and the learning environment."*  
(P42)

Teachers indicate that discussing philosophy on taboo concepts, as mentioned earlier, can potentially create problems within families. One of these challenges is that the child may share the discussion with their family in a manner that can lead to misunderstandings, creating an unresolved issue within the family. Besides, teachers think that society is not ready to discuss some concepts, especially death, religion, and sexuality. According to them, society has taboos and families have prejudices; society does not want some concepts to be questioned. Below is a participant's perspective that reflects this viewpoint.

*"Death (concept). Since I work in a private institution, it can lead to complaints from parents." (P20)*

Another theme of the second research question is teacher-related sources. Some teachers stated that it was necessary to have knowledge about taboo concepts, especially death, emotions, and sexuality. According to them, they should know the answers to such questions as "At what ages should these concepts be addressed?", "How should one intervene if one of the children is negatively affected during the discussion?" and they should be experienced in working with these concepts. The following statements exemplify this view.

*"I have reservations about how to fully explain these concepts to children or find the appropriate stimulus to clarify them. Especially if it's a group I've just met, I consider these concepts taboos." (P39)*

*"In my opinion, many topics like death require a strong knowledge of psychology. Since I do not consider myself sufficient in this regard, I cannot delve deeper into that field." (P42)*

Some teachers, on the other hand, think that they cannot effectively guide philosophical discussions on these concepts. The teachers are afraid of influencing children's ideas and are concerned about giving the wrong message. Moreover, they are worried about not being able to ask the right questions or make children approach the subject from different perspectives. Teachers are afraid of not being impartial and not being able to put aside their prejudices or opinions. They also stated that they did not know how to lead the discussion, especially if the children blamed each other for their opinions on political or religious issues. The following statements represent the teachers' views about the anxiety of not being able to manage the discussion.

*"I do not discuss the concept of religion, or any subject based on religious preferences because I am afraid of influencing children in this regard." (P45)*

*"The uncertainty of my position in this matter and the ambiguity of where I stand concern me about how to handle these discussions." (P59)*

*"When I think about the children's ideas and answers, or the questions they might ask, I also worry about not being able to manage the group." (P61)*

Some teachers expressed that the reasons for their taboos were related to themselves. Participants mentioned that they, themselves, are unsure about what they think about taboo concepts like death and religion, and they have doubts. They talked about their anxieties or fears of facing these issues since childhood. All these factors led to the formation of their own taboos. The following opinions are related to the subtheme of having emotional barriers.

*"The concept of fear (taboo). Because of the fears we bring or nurture from childhood."* (P1)

*"Most importantly, to what extent do I accept these concepts? How well did I cope with the deaths of my relatives? How do I react to the wars and fires that occur in the environment we live in? In short, I think we must be at peace with these concepts."* (P58)

Some teachers stated that the reasons for their taboos were related to children. The young age of children (especially in preschool and the first years of primary school) is a determining factor in teachers' selection of topics to discuss in their classrooms. According to them, children do not yet have the ability to comprehend abstract thinking, so they cannot make sense of concepts like God or death. They may also struggle with topics such as gender roles due to their developmental characteristics and not know what to think about them. Besides, since they are young, it is not yet necessary to talk about topics like pain, violence, war, and death. These topics should be discussed when they reach a certain age, considering their developmental characteristics. Below are the opinions of two participants on this subject.

*"Religion is a concept that I avoid because they cannot fully comprehend it as they are still in the concrete operational stage".* (P20)

*"I thought I wouldn't be able to discuss the concept of sexual orientation at the primary education level because in my opinion they are not suitable to understand this concept, considering the developmental characteristics of the age group."* (P44)

Some teachers stated that children develop prejudices over time, which brings some problems with it. When discussing these taboo concepts, children can unintentionally offend or mock one another. This can hinder the discussion and fail to deepen it due to biases. Breaking down these biases can be challenging, and it can lead teachers to perceive topics such as religion and politics as taboos. Below are some participants' opinions on this view.

*"I believe that children are being fed with memorized or subliminal messages, which confuse their minds. At a certain point, they start internalizing the judgments that everyone is trying to dictate and impose on them, and then they begin to dictate those judgments onto others."* (P17)

*"Ethnic origin (taboo). My homogeneous group tends to alienate others rather than understand their differences."* (P52)

Another taboo source concerning children is that teachers perceive them as sensitive. According to teachers, if topics like violence, death, pain, or war are discussed, children may feel afraid, anxious, or emotionally overwhelmed. They may feel embarrassed, hesitant, or fear being stigmatized in the face of these topics and may struggle to cope with them. Two participants express their opinions on this matter as follows.

*"I think working with the concept of death with children can develop a fear in them."* (P12)

*"I have the concern that I might cause emotional harm in children's inner worlds as an adult."* (P57)

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Research Question

We presented summaries of the books *Duck, Death, and Tulip*, *Whadayamean*, and *Tango Makes Three* to the teachers and asked them whether they would use these books in philosophical discussions in their classrooms and why. The responses were gathered under three categories: "I would," "I would not," and "I would under certain conditions." Table 4 below shows these categories along with their reasons.

**Table 4.**

*Using Stimuli with Difficult Concepts*

Use	The quality of the stimulus	Readiness of the group	Family and School's attitude	Readiness of the teacher
<b>I would</b>	Suitable for philosophy	The group is ready	Suitable for the family and school	Teacher feels ready
<b>I would not</b>	Not suitable for philosophy	The group is not ready	Not suitable for the family and school	Teacher does not feel ready
<b>I would under certain conditions</b>	If adaptable for philosophy	If the group is ready	If the family and school approve	If the teacher feels ready

Teachers who expressed their intention to use the book(s) found the stimulus suitable for several reasons like including a philosophical question, concretizing the question through storytelling, allowing for discussions from different angles, and being designed for the age group of the children. Some of the teachers who stated that they would engage in philosophical discussions using these books specifically mentioned the concepts that the stories focus on and emphasized the importance of introducing these concepts to children. They believe that it is essential for children to contemplate and confront these concepts at an early age since they are already present in their lives, and avoiding discussions about them is not feasible. Also, it is important to address children's questions, alleviate their concerns, and increase their awareness regarding these topics. According to some teachers, children need to reflect on these concepts, and they are

ready for it. They are more flexible thinkers than adults, unburdened by prejudices, and free from taboos. When required, it is possible to bring these concepts into the classroom by collaborating with the family. Below are the opinions of some of the teachers who stated that they would use one or more of these stimuli.

*"...death is a concept that frequently appears in children's lives and sparks their curiosity while also confusing them. Especially when they witness the death of pets or loved ones, working with this book can be beneficial for them." (P4)*

*"I have no hesitation in using this stimulus because even at a young age, children already have value judgments about God that come from their families, and the name "God" is mentioned in their homes in different ways. Even if it is not explicitly mentioned, the child is already aware of or has thought about this idea. So, I believe that children are already prepared for this topic... In the philosophy class with children, we can think about and discuss this topic, and they can defend different ideas." (P7)*

*"I would use it. I believe it is important to break the stereotypical judgment of the mother figure with children. In nature, there should be no judgment of gender identities in any way." (P31)*

Some teachers set certain conditions for using one or more of these stories. Some of these conditions were related to the stimuli. These conditions include not showing the illustrations (due to finding them disturbing, for example), reading only up to a certain point, or removing certain words from the story. On the other hand, some teachers would use these stories for philosophical discussions when they felt prepared, acquired knowledge about the relevant concepts, improved their skills in facilitating discussions, or had enough experience conducting discussions. Other conditions include obtaining permission from and informing families, as well as having an appropriate school climate. The readiness of the group to engage in discussions on these concepts is also highlighted as an important factor. For some teachers, the preschool or early years of primary school are not suitable for discussing these concepts. According to the participants, it is more appropriate to discuss these concepts if the age group is older, if children do not have negative experiences (especially about death), if they have sufficient inquiry-based experiences, if they emotionally prepare themselves to discuss these concepts, if the children's socio-cultural level allows for such discussions, and if they have questions or are curious about the relevant topics. Below are some examples that emphasize the importance of the readiness of the group.

*"Yes, I can use it with children starting from the second grade of primary school onward. I believe that the concept of God had not formed in their minds before that age." (P36)*

*"...I do not find it appropriate to directly talk about the topic of death without asking for permission or without the children expressing their interest in it. It would be more beneficial to assess the readiness of the group and then engage in thoughtful discussions and deepen the understanding." (P8)*

The teachers who do not want to use these stories in philosophical discussions mentioned the following reasons: pressure from parents and schools, a lack of readiness by them or by the children. Their justifications are consistent with the taboo sources mentioned earlier. Below are some examples of these teachers' opinions.

*"I would prefer not to use these stimuli in order to avoid receiving negative feedback from parents or administrators, who may have concerns about students asking too many questions related to sexual orientation and the potential confusion it may cause after the lesson."* (P18)

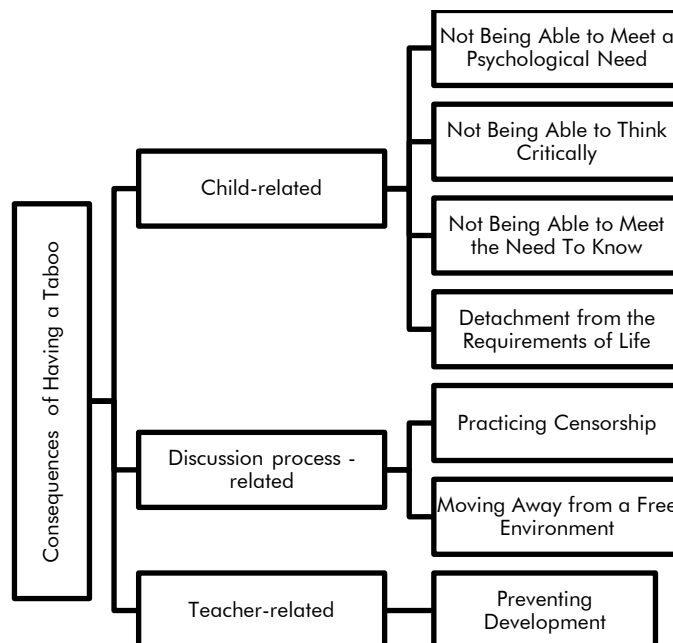
*"I would not use this book to engage in philosophical discussions with children because I feel that I don't have enough experience. Death is quite an abstract concept, and it can be somewhat scary as well. Besides, I believe that my own thoughts on death are not mature enough yet."* (P49)

#### 4<sup>th</sup> Research Question

The data for this research question relied heavily on individual interviews, where teachers with and without taboos expressed concerns about the potential negative consequences of avoiding philosophical discussions with children on certain concepts. Figure 2 shows an overall depiction of these results.

**Figure 2.**

*Participants' Views about the Consequences of Having a Taboo*



Based on the interviews, some teachers emphasized that not discussing taboo concepts like death, war, pain, fear, love, politics, religion, etc. could lead children to suppress their fears and anxieties related to these subjects. This can ultimately result in unmet psychological needs. These teachers highlighted the importance of creating an



environment where children feel supported and are not alone in discussing these topics. They also emphasized the need for children to have the opportunity to interpret and understand these concepts, helping them overcome confusion and uncertainty. Evasive attitudes by teachers can contribute to higher anxiety levels among children. They also added that discussing such challenging topics strengthens the group and brings the joy of overcoming difficulties together.

Another idea was that teachers' avoidance of discussing taboo concepts is considered to distance children from thinking critically about these topics. This leads to children being unable to think or question accurately, or to put aside their prejudices regarding these concepts. Another aspect was the potential dampening of children's desire to know. Children naturally have questions and are curious about these concepts in their daily lives. According to teachers, avoiding discussions on these topics hampers their learning and desire to know, suppressing their curiosity. Moreover, living as if violence, war, or death do exist and avoiding talking about them will disconnect children from the realities of life and leave them vulnerable to the outside world. However, school is meant to be an experiential space. One teacher expressed her viewpoint on this matter as follows.

*"...we cannot isolate students as if they are in a separate world. In my opinion, we leave them unprepared. By not discussing or thinking about these concepts we send them to the next level of education ill-equipped. Thus, these concepts are being suppressed and pushed into the subconscious without proper thought and discussion, relying on hearsay and incomplete information. For example, homosexuality is one such concept...." (P17)*

Avoiding discussions on these concepts has consequences for the quality of philosophical questioning. It can also impact the proper understanding and implementation of P4C. Another viewpoint that emerged from individual interviews was that refraining from discussing certain topics and inhibiting or disregarding children's questions and comments on these topics would hinder the creation of a free and open environment for discussion. One teacher expressed the need for P4C to disrupt the power dynamics between the teacher and the student in traditional education, emphasizing the importance of an approach that considers children's needs and recognizes them as individuals. Furthermore, the teacher described the act of imposing restrictions on stimuli or philosophical questions in the discussion environment or avoiding certain topics as a form of censorship. She stated the following.

*"...When a teacher starts deciding which topics should be discussed and which ones should be avoided, they enter the realm of legislating..." (P32)*

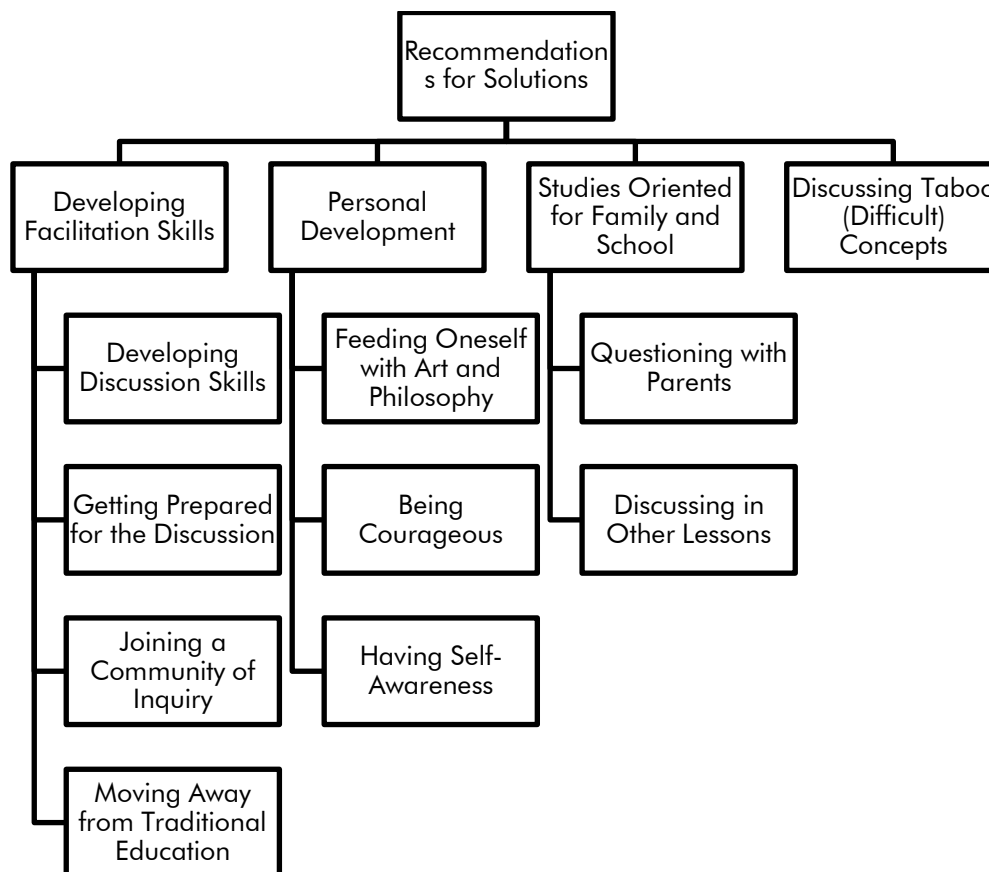
In the interviews, another teacher expressed that avoiding discussing the mentioned concepts can hinder the teacher's personal development and reflection on these topics.

### 5<sup>th</sup> Research Question

The data for this research question was based on individual interviews. Teachers perceived the existence of taboos as a problem in terms of understanding and spreading the use of P4C. Moreover, participants provided solutions and suggestions for teachers to de-taboo or eliminate some of these concepts. These suggestions were categorized into three main themes and their subthemes, as depicted in Figure 3.

**Figure 3.**

*Participants' Solutions for De-Tabooing Some Concepts*



The suggestions above also appear to be necessary for being a good teacher, the most prominent being developing facilitation skills. Participants emphasized the importance of teachers gaining more experience by facilitating more discussion sessions and receiving feedback through observations by experts. The suggestions offered during the discussion include being flexible, being as interested as the children, being curious, and maintaining an equal distance from every viewpoint. One participant expressed the belief that teachers should possess reasoning skills as follows.

*"...we are living in a world where the content of everything is being emptied. It is not just about forming a circle; we must know the reasoning there; a teacher should understand the difference between consistent reasoning and valid reasoning." (P32)*

Another recommendation was for teachers to engage in preparation prior to the discussion process. This includes conducting readings on the concepts to be discussed (such as death, violence, love, war, etc.), exploring philosophers' views on these subjects, engaging in independent thinking, and questioning the philosophical questions at hand. An encouraging option to empower teachers, particularly when discussing taboo concepts, is to participate in a community of inquiry. Observing an experienced teacher can expose them to different perspectives and provide the flexibility to stretch and potentially change their own viewpoints. A participant expressed their view in this regard as follows.

*"...it would be beneficial for me to witness how another teacher manages this process. I see myself as rigid or close minded. I feel the need to participate in a few sessions to see how it is managed." (P36)*

One of the taboo sources is engaging in discussions that involve concepts like death, love, and violence. The suggestions above can be meaningful in addressing these concerns. According to a participant, another taboo source is the traditional educational approach. This approach contradicts the student-centered understanding on which P4C is based. P4C does not imply knowledge transmission; instead, it aims to improve their thinking skills. Stimuli are merely tools for discussion. In line with this explanation, the teacher expressed the below views.

*"...teacher candidates often struggle to understand the difference between the stimulus and the content. A story can serve as a stimulus. Our concern is not merely discussing the story with closed-ended questions but addressing the underlying issues. It can be about topics like the apocalypse, death, violence, or friendship. We are not specifically discussing the friendship between two LGBT individuals; we are discussing friendship itself. Do you understand what I'm trying to say? Behind this censorship are the codes of traditional education..." (P32)*

The participant who made the above statement emphasized that stimuli, such as texts used in philosophical discussions with children, should be seen by teachers as mere tools. According to the participant, teachers tend to view the perspectives and ideas within these texts as content that should be transmitted and focused on, based on their habit of traditional education. Hence, the content overrides the process of discussion. However, the aim here is to discuss the problem presented in the text through questioning, considering the text as a means. In fact, some statements led to the belief that teachers engaging in philosophical discussions with children operated from a perspective rooted in traditional education. Teachers may have perspectives that do not align with the process of engaging in philosophical discussions with children, such as answering their questions and providing information about the relevant concepts. An example that reflected these perspectives was as follows.

*"...If a child has watched a movie or witnessed a same-sex couple holding hands and asks, "I saw them. How does this happen?", I would explain it to them in an age-appropriate language, even if they were young. I would explain that it is a natural thing, that people can love each other in this way... I wouldn't hesitate to do so. But would I bring it up out of the blue?... I don't think so, as I don't see the need for it." (P56)*

When engaging in philosophical discussions with children, the teacher's primary task is not to explain but rather to ask questions that encourage children to think and engage in discussions with each other. Also, the teacher should refrain from expressing their own opinions during the discussion process and should not attempt to steer children toward the right answer. Such a concern can lead teachers to avoid discussing certain concepts (due to not wanting to convey a biased viewpoint or having uncertainties or question marks about the subject matter), thus contributing to the formation of taboos.

One of the solutions included teachers' personal development. Being brave in questioning concepts like death, politics, and religion with children was one of the recommendations in this regard. Moreover, engaging with literature and cinema can enhance teachers' perspectives and writing down their emotions, thoughts, and experiences will raise their awareness. Furthermore, the participants suggested that before engaging in discussions with children, teachers should be aware of their own thoughts regarding philosophical questions, critically examine their own views, become aware of their biases, and confront themselves, especially regarding challenging concepts like death, religion, and sexuality. These steps can help teachers overcome their taboos. The following statements reflect these recommendations.

*"I believe it should be like this: first, teachers should overcome their own limitations. Some teachers may feel inadequate or avoid engaging in such discussions because they don't know how to handle them, how to lead the discussion, or how to navigate the conversation. Here, in fact, they deflect the problem, saying the parents do not approve. It is essential for teachers to first address their own taboos and barriers as adults." (P17)*

Conducting studies on families and schools can facilitate parents' and schools' acquaintance with P4C and, in turn, facilitate the discussion of taboo subjects. Engaging in philosophical discussions with parents and adopting a holistic approach by addressing taboo topics in other subjects were also among the suggestions. One participant expressed the following statements.

*"I agree with the idea that it is important to discuss these topics, but they should not be limited to a specific time frame of 40-45 minutes dedicated to children. If these subjects are to be discussed, they should be integrated with other subjects." (P55)*

Participants emphasized that teachers should also discuss taboo concepts, but they need to be sensitive when engaging children in philosophical discussions on these topics. There were some similarities and differences in the identified sensitivities. As expressed by some participants (P5, P71), taboo concepts can be considered difficult topics that should not be avoided in discussions. However, certain considerations should be taken

into account before, during, and after the discussion. According to the teachers' perspectives, these considerations can include the following.

- Knowing the group: it is important for the group to ask questions about these concepts, be curious about them, ensure that no child has experienced any trauma related to these concepts, acknowledge that these concepts are present in children's lives and they may need to discuss them, pay attention to the socio-cultural characteristics of the group, be aware of their fears, interests, etc., and have knowledge about the developmental characteristics of the children's age.
- Managing discussions: the teacher should avoid expressing their own views, remain neutral, listen to the children, and allow them to set the boundaries of the discussion based on their own needs and questions. Also, they can allow the children to determine the questions based on the stimulus and encourage critical thinking rather than directing them towards a specific viewpoint.
- Selecting and using the stimulus: the teacher should select thought-provoking stimuli and adapt or modify them as needed to fit their own culture and the characteristics of the group, utilize some of the stimuli, and grasp the stimuli within a philosophical questioning framework.
- Collaboration with parents: the teacher should get to know the parents, engage in dialogue with them, when necessary (regarding children's traumas, interests, questions, etc.), and provide book recommendations on difficult topics if needed.

## Results and Discussion

We asked 73 teachers across various disciplines who engage in philosophical discussions with children if there are any concepts, they avoid discussing with children. Most teachers indicated that they avoided taboo concepts while engaging in philosophical discussion with their students. The taboo concepts that ranked highest were death, religion, and sexuality, followed by emotions (love, fear, etc.) and politics. The most prominent concepts were in line with the taboos identified by Haynes and Murriss (2009) as well as Gregory (2008).

We asked teachers about the reasons behind the existence of their taboos. These reasons were grouped into three themes: society-related, teacher-related, and children-related. Teachers expressed that they did not want to discuss these concepts because they were worried about the reactions of parents and the school. They also added that when such classroom discussions are brought home, it could potentially lead to certain problems. In Gregory's (2008) article titled "On Philosophy, Children, and Taboo Topics," he mentions two main reasons for this. The first is that parents may believe that school could influence their children's views when discussing these topics. According to families, schools should not have the authority to shape children's moral values. The

second reason is that children may start questioning these subjects and abandoning the ideas adopted by their families.

The first reason is already contrary to the nature of P4C because P4C focuses on fostering critical thinking in children and does not aim to impose any particular view on them. Considering the assumptions underlying P4C, the second reason is not relevant either. This is because the attempt by parents to instill their own ideas or values in children is not a democratic attitude. It hinders children's independent thinking. Furthermore, children need more than just how their family thinks when explaining the reasons behind their own opinions.

Another taboo topic among the teachers is about themselves. They believe that they lack sufficient knowledge and experience regarding such concepts and anticipate difficulties in conducting discussions about them. They also mention question marks, concerns, and challenges in areas that they find difficult to confront in their minds. Stokell et al. (2017) conducted a case study on personal, social, and health education courses in England. They found that teachers struggled to talk about sensitive topics with children. The authors suggested that teachers needed training to deal with more sensitive and challenging subjects, and they should be confident enough to address these issues with children. Teachers need a tool that encourages critical, creative, and compassionate thinking within themselves but also one that can help them improve their confidence, alleviate their stress, and ease their concerns when discussing such issues with children. For this purpose, the teachers received P4C training and conducted their first philosophical discussion on gender, relationships, and the role of motherhood. While this initial implementation indicated some progress, it was clear that both the children and the teachers required more experience. P4C provides an opportunity for both children and teachers to think about challenging concepts, but the teacher's competence in facilitating the discussion is also crucial. Teachers who do not feel ready to discuss taboo concepts respectfully and reasonably or who are not sufficiently skilled in facilitating philosophical dialogue should postpone such discussions and work on developing their own competence (Gregory, 2008).

In our research, some teachers considered concepts like death and God taboo because they believed that children were not mentally or psychologically mature enough to discuss them. The concept of God may not be suitable for discussion with children (especially in the early years of preschool and primary school) as they may have difficulty grasping abstract concepts. Similarly, discussing death may be sensitive and should be approached with caution. Besides, children may tease or label each other during these discussions. According to teachers, these children can disrupt the process of inquiry. Teachers' attitudes toward children create a barrier to the proper understanding, implementation, and spread of P4C. Lyle (2017) suggests that these attitudes stem from teachers' perceptions of childhood. Certain models of childhood in their minds, such as "innocent," "rebellious," "blank slate," or "developing," serve to limit children's participation in philosophical discussion and lead them to view children as "incomplete."

They see adults' roles as trying to tame the rebels, protect their innocence, and fill their blank slate minds with knowledge. Sometimes teachers perceive rebellious children as potentially destructive and disruptive to the process of questioning. Teachers often take on a protective role during the discussions and take their roles quite seriously. In this research, many teachers considered certain concepts taboo in order to emotionally protect children. Koyuncu and Demircan (2022) reported that preschool teachers expressed certain barriers to implementing P4C. The socio-cultural barriers category highlights the perceptions of children held by society. Some preschool teachers stated that the perception of children as inadequate in society could be a barrier to the use of P4C. In order to implement P4C effectively, teachers should view children not as incomplete, vulnerable, and in need of protection compared to adults, but as individuals whose rights are respected, whose thinking capacity is trusted, and whose interests and needs are valued.

The concept of death was one of the taboos that stood out in the current study. Among children, death serves as a starting point for various discussions, including topics such as God, evolution, creation, sexuality, and the origins of humanity. These concepts are thought-provoking for adults as well. Furthermore, they encompass the views of philosophers on appearance and reality, identity and difference, and growth and transformation. Children engage in discussions about questions such as "Does God exist?", "Does the devil exist?" "What happens when we die?", and "How can God be everywhere at the same time?" just as passionately as their parents. In philosophical questioning, the teacher's role is not to express their own views on these matters; rather, their role is to guide children in clarifying their own thoughts and ideas when these questions arise. The emergence of children's thoughts on these topics will largely depend on the cultural and sociological context, but they will inevitably arise one day. It would be irresponsible for teachers to dismiss these questions or provide cliché answers to them (Kennedy, 2022). In the present study, some participants expressed that topics such as death, God, and war are present in children's lives and it is impossible to avoid them. They also added that disregarding these questions would dampen children's curiosity and increase their anxieties. Lone (2017) states that children, like adults, experience a range of concerns triggered by questions about identity, the meaning of life, and the nature of death. One of the ways to alleviate children's concerns is to think of these difficult questions together. It is important to engage children in philosophical discussions on these topics in order to ensure that they do not lose their curiosity, motivation for thinking, and questioning. The process of questioning is valuable for children in terms of facing and accepting different aspects of life.

In this research, the taboo concepts under the category of religion included beliefs, God, worship, fate, creator, etc. Engaging in regular philosophical discussions with children on these topics, despite the pressures from families or society, can help children develop the ability to engage in respectful dialogue with other children who have different religious or cultural backgrounds. Children learn to listen carefully to all the arguments presented in a constructive manner while showing respect to others. Thus, they will be

prepared to handle the multicultural or pluralistic realities of societies more effectively. P4C provides more opportunities to discuss different religious or cultural perspectives and exposes participants to various viewpoints on specific topics. It teaches children to prioritize freedom of expression in all circumstances and to demonstrate empathy toward the affected group when uncomfortable conversations arise. Also, the school is a safe environment consisting of teachers and students, so it is more suitable for discussing sensitive and controversial questions (Minette, 2014). P4C provides a safe space for teachers as well. Teachers generate questions based on children's responses and they are not obligated to provide answers to the questions that children ask in order to acquire knowledge or learn their side. Children's needs and curiosities determine the boundaries of the discussion. Hence, there is no room for a discussion environment that exceeds the limits of the community of inquiry and overwhelms its members. Furthermore, since P4C does not rely on the teacher expressing their own views, it can be preferable for schools and families. Su (2022) examined the changes in the religious commitments of 9th grade students after 12 weeks of philosophical activities. The researcher's findings support the claim that Lipman's P4C approach does not have a destructive impact on religious commitments. This finding contradicts the perspective that P4C has a negative effect on children's religious development.

In the present research, some teachers perceived gender roles, sexuality, sexual orientation, and sexual identity as taboo topics. These subjects are interconnected with many important issues today, such as gender-based discrimination, gender stereotypes, prejudices, family dynamics, parenthood, self-identity, human nature, rights, and inequality. Taboos associated with the concept of sexuality will impose limitations on discussions related to these topics. As the teachers expressed, these concepts already exist in children's lives. Children have a need to hear others' perspectives, express their curiosity and questions, and clarify any confusion in their minds. A similar perspective applies to emotions. Viewing emotions such as fear, anxiety, and love as taboo and avoiding discussions about them will encourage children to suppress these emotions, which is not a healthy coping mechanism.

Some teachers who do not want to use children's books that focus on death, God, or sexuality in their classrooms cited societal pressure as their reason. Some believe that children are not ready to discuss these topics, while others do not feel ready themselves. Some teachers, on the other hand, have found one or more of these stimuli suitable for engaging in philosophical discussions on the relevant concepts. The varying opinions on the appropriateness of books depend on teachers' experiences, discussion skills, their own taboos, and their perspectives on P4C. Besides, teachers tend to choose stimuli or topics that they feel more comfortable with or that have explicit moral messages when engaging in philosophical discussions with children (Lyle, 2017). However, the stimuli in P4C serve certain functions, like supporting thinking skills, stimulating thinking by developing arguments within the story, and fostering students' willingness to engage in conversation and discussion (Wartenberg, 2018). Furthermore, children may be hesitant to provide examples from their own lives, but they may find it easier and more



comfortable to give examples based on characters in stories (Akkocaoğlu Çayır, 2021). Children's books that tackle difficult concepts such as death, war, violence, and belief systems can also serve as safe and effective tools for engaging in philosophical discussions. According to Goering (2014), talking about death with children through a story allows them to form close relationships with the characters while maintaining a certain distance from the experience of mortality. This way, books can nurture children's natural curiosity in a safe environment. Goering (2014) states that through stories like *Duck, Death, and the Tulip*, we can engage in discussions about the injustice or inevitability of death and how it shapes our choices and moral attitudes. Unlike adults who may have anxieties about the topic, children are often open to discussions about death. These inquiries prompt children to reflect on the importance of living in the present moment, the meaning of life, and the natural cycle of existence.

According to our participants, avoiding engaging in philosophical discussions with children about certain concepts can have negative consequences. By disregarding children's questions and confusions about certain concepts, children's psychological needs will not be met. Also, it deprives them of the opportunity for critical thinking about these concepts, neglecting their needs for recognizing and knowing them. Ultimately, children are being disconnected from the realities of life. Avoiding these concepts in discussions, refraining from talking about them, or not using the stimuli that contain them imposes a kind of censorship and hinders the environment's freedom. These consequences align with the arguments put forth by Haynes and Murriss (2009) against such censorship in P4C practices. One of these is the pragmatic argument. Children bring up controversial topics and these need to be explored through reasoning and dialogue. A sterilized curriculum is not realistic, even if desired, and it widens the gap between school and life outside of school. The legal argument asserts that children should enjoy their rights to freedom of thought and expression in accordance with human rights. The socio-philosophical argument points to the need for children to engage in discussions on all topics, critically examine dominant discourses, and develop alternative perspectives. The literary argument suggests that children have a need to explore and contemplate all themes (including topics such as death, religion, etc.) that are presented in the full range of children's literature.

The teachers that we interviewed considered the presence of taboos a problem that needed to be solved. The existence of these taboos indicates a problem in how teachers perceive philosophy and how they bring it into the classroom. Therefore, teachers with taboos should first focus on developing their facilitation skills. Becoming proficient in leading discussions is crucial in this context. Moreover, teachers must move away from traditional educational approaches. They should distance themselves from an approach that is protective of children, does not focus on their interests and needs, and is teacher-centered, relying primarily on knowledge transmission. In fact, Koyuncu and Demircan (2022) reported that preschool teachers drew attention to institutional barriers to implementing P4C, including the traditional education system. According to them, the

education system in Turkey, in some respects, may not support the use of P4C in preschool education and may create obstacles to its implementation.

Research indicates that P4C brings about changes in teachers' traditional educational approaches and prompts them to question their dominant roles in the classroom (Boyras, 2019). Furthermore, research shows changes in the former prejudice that teachers cannot engage in philosophy because they are young (Kayaalp, 2021). Kabil (2021) compared preschool teachers who received P4C training and those who did not in terms of pedagogical competencies related to thinking skills. The author observed that teachers who received P4C training preferred inquiry-based methods, while those who did not receive such training tended to rely more on traditional methods.

Our participants suggested that teachers should take steps to overcome their own taboos in order to ensure their personal development and organize philosophical discussions with parents in order to break their resistance. Teachers should strive to address taboo concepts while also empowering themselves. However, there are some points to consider when bringing these concepts into the discussion environment. The developmental characteristics, interests, and needs of the group should be taken into account, as well as their socio-cultural background. Moreover, effective guidance is necessary to facilitate discussions. Actively listening to children is important in this guidance process. In this regard, Haynes and Murriss (2012) draw attention to philosophical listening. Listening is an element that enhances the depth and meaningfulness of philosophical discussions. Listening to children means accepting their right to exist. It helps us understand their priorities, interests, and concerns. It is also a vital part of building respectful relationships with children (Clark, 2004). Knowing the group is an important determinant in the teachers' decision to work on taboo or difficult/sensitive topics and listening to children is a crucial prerequisite for recognizing them.

According to Clark (2004), listening to children and working with them in a democratic manner can free practitioners from the obligation of knowing all the answers. This is also important in the process of philosophical discussion. Children's responses and questions will determine the boundaries of the discussion, serving as a compass for the teacher. It will also relieve teachers from the pressure of knowing everything or providing answers to everything, especially when it comes to taboo concepts. Teachers can allow children to decide on the questions by presenting relevant stimuli (whether it involves taboo concepts or not). Some children may request to discuss a philosophical question related to taboo concepts. In this case, teachers can offer them a choice; one option is to continue the process with those who wish to engage in the discussion.

## Suggestions

One of the reasons teachers cannot bring taboo concepts like death, religion, politics, love, and fear into philosophical discussions is that they do not feel competent or experienced enough to engage children in philosophical discussions. Teachers need effective P4C training to properly implement P4C. In this regard, it is important to include P4C in in-service training programs or as a course in teacher education faculties. Based on this research, we suggest the following for the content of these training programs:

- Teachers should observe a practitioner in a questioning process.
- Teachers should engage in the classroom practices of P4C and receive feedback on their implementation.
- Programs should touch on taboo concepts, their formation, strategies to overcome them, and ways to incorporate these concepts into philosophical questioning.
- Programs should contain information about the relationship between P4C and the perception of childhood, and the impact of different perspectives on children.
- Programs should discuss the relationship between P4C and traditional education approaches, and the barriers created by traditional education when conducting philosophical discussions and asking questions.
- Programs should deal with how to select children's books that include taboo concepts and how to use them as stimuli for philosophical discussions.

On the other hand, it is crucial for teachers to evaluate themselves as members of a community of inquiry or as practitioners conducting the inquiry, encouraging them to reflect on their own thinking processes. In this regard, teachers can keep a journal where they write down their feelings and thoughts. This way, they can identify areas that need improvement and strengthening and determine their specific needs, particularly when addressing challenging topics. This can help them improve their questioning skills and increase their awareness.

Models of childhood that are based on protection or discipline and that do not prioritize the needs, interests, and rights of children must be replaced with approaches that view children as individuals. The history of childhood, the sociology of childhood, and childhood models can also be included in teacher education and in-service training programs. These training programs can serve as powerful tools to understand children's inquisitive and curious natures and their tendency toward engaging in philosophical discussions. Moreover, these programs can help transform learning environments that are dominated by teachers and lack democratic principles.

According to teachers, the views of families and society influence the formation of taboos. We suggest that teachers organize inquiries with school administrators and parents to enhance a better understanding of P4C. Furthermore, addressing topics like death, emotions, religion, and politics can be challenging not only for P4C but also for many other lessons. Further research should investigate the difficulties of addressing these topics in other courses. Research should also focus on engaging children in philosophical discussions on taboo concepts. Such studies can focus on the impact of these inquiries on children's perspectives on these concepts.

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## Genişletilmiş Türkçe Özet

Çocuklar için felsefe (ÇİF), bir rehber eşliğinde çocukların felsefe yapmalarına işaret eder. Öğretmen ya da kolaylaştırıcı çeşitli uyarıcılardan yola çıkarak çocukların, bir felsefe sorusunu tartışmalarını sağlar. Bu sorulara genellikle bir metinden yola çıkarak cevap aranır. Metinler aracılığıyla mutluluk, dostluk, bilgi, adalet gibi kavramlar üzerine felsefe yapılır. Bu araştırmanın amacı, çocuklarla felsefi soruşturma yürüten öğretmenlerin, felsefesini yapmaktan kaçındıkları tabu kavramları ve bu kavramları sorgulama süreçlerine taşımamalarının nedenlerini farklı açılardan ele almaktır. Uygulayıcı öğretmenlerin gözünden bu konuyu derinlemesine incelemek, ÇİF uygulayıcılarının yaşadıkları sorunları anlamak, ÇİF'in doğru bir şekilde anlaşılmasını, sınıfa aktarılmasını, yaygınlaşmasını ve kurumsallaşmasını sağlamak açısından önemlidir. Bu çalışmada elde edilen sonuçların hem alanyazınla ilgilenen araştırmacılara, hem de ÇİF uygulayıcılarına katkı sağlayacağı söylenebilir.

Bu çalışmada nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden fenomenoloji deseni kullanılmıştır. Araştırmada derinlemesine araştırılmak istenen fenomen, çocuklarla felsefe yapan öğretmenlerin tabu kavramlarıdır. Burada tabu kavramların var olup olmadığı, varsa bunların neler olduğu, tabu kavramların oluşma gerekçeleri, tabu kavramlara sahip olmanın sonuçları ve tabu kavramları, tabu olmaktan çıkarmaya yönelik öneriler çocuklarla felsefe yapan öğretmenlerin deneyimleri çerçevesinde ele alınmıştır.

Katılımcılara kartopu (zincir) örnekleme yöntemi aracılığıyla ulaştırılmıştır. Beş soruyu içeren açık uçlu bir soru formu e-posta aracılığıyla ÇİF uygulayıcısı olan ve Milli Eğitim Bakanlığına bağlı devlet ya da özel okulda çalışan 73 öğretmene ulaştırılmıştır. Açık uçlu soru formunda öğretmenlere, çocuklarla felsefesini yapmaktan kaçındıkları tabu kavramları olup olmadığı, varsa bunların neler olduğu sorulmuş ve gerekçelerini yazmaları istenmiştir. Ayrıca alanyazından yola çıkarak tartışma odağında "zor/tabu kavramlar" olan 3 resimli çocuk kitabının özeti verilmiş ve bu kitabı sınıflarında felsefe yapmak amacıyla kullanıp kullanmayacaklarını nedenleriyle birlikte açıklamaları istenmiştir. Araştırmanın ikinci aşamasında soru formlarına verdikleri yanıtlardan yola çıkarak 7 öğretmenle yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Veriler araştırma soruları çerçevesinde içerik analizi aracılığıyla analiz edilmiştir.

Öğretmenlerden 8'i herhangi bir tabusu olmadığını, 65 öğretmen ise bir ya da birden fazla tabusu olduğunu belirtmiştir. Ölüm, inanç (din, Tanrı, ibadet, kader, yaratıcı...) ve cinsellik (cinsel yönelim, cinsel kimlik, cinsiyet rolleri) öğretmenlerin tabu kavramları olarak ön plana çıkmaktadır. Bunları, duygular (aşk, korku, acı, kıskançlık), siyaset (adalet, milli değerler, demokrasi), şiddet (savaş, zorbalık), ahlaki yargılar ve aile (boşanma, anne baba rolleri) takip etmektedir. Bazı öğretmenler, yalnızlık, özgür irade, özgürlük, etnik köken, kültür, göç, iyilik, varlık, bireysel farklılıklar, hastalık, gerçek, benlik, zaman kavramlarını da tabu olarak belirtmişlerdir. Katılımcılar soru formuna tabuya sahip olma gerekçelerini yazmışlardır. Öğretmenlerin tabu kaynakları "Toplumla İlişkili Kaynaklar", "Öğretmenle İlişkili Kaynaklar" ve "Çocuklarla İlişkili

Kaynaklar” olmak üzere üç tema altında toplanmıştır. Bu noktada bazı öğretmenler, okul ve velilerin tepkisi nedeniyle bu kavramları kullanmaktan kaçındıklarını, bazılarının ilgili kavramların ele alındığı tartışmaları yürütmek için yeterli hissetmedikleri ya da ölüm gibi konularda kendilerinin de kafalarının karışık olduğunu ifade etmişlerdir. Bir kısım öğretmen ise çocukların ölüm, din, cinsellik gibi kavramları pek çok sebeple tartışmaya hazır olmadıklarını söylemişlerdir. Öğretmenlerin, ölüm, cinsellik ve din kavramlarını içeren 3 kitabı sınıflarında felsefe yapmak amacıyla kullanıp kullanmayacaklarına yönelik yanıtları “Kullanırım”, “Kullanırım ama” ve “Kullanmam” başlıkları altında toplanmıştır. Gerekçelerinin tabu kaynaklarıyla büyük oranda örtüştüğü söylenebilir.

Katılımcılar, öğretmenlerin bazı kavramlar üzerine çocuklarla felsefe yapmaktan kaçınmalarının olumsuz sonuçlar doğurabileceğinden söz etmişlerdir. Onlara göre çocuğun bazı kavramlara ilişkin sorularının ve zihinlerindeki bulanıklığın göz ardı edilmesiyle psikolojik ihtiyacı karşılanmamaktadır. Aynı zamanda bu kavramlar üzerine eleştirel düşünme şansları ellerinden alınmakta; bunları tanımaya, bilmeye ilişkin ihtiyaçları karşılanmamaktadır. Nihayetinde çocuklar yaşamın gerçekliğinden koparılmaktadır. Öğretmenlere göre tartışmalarda bu kavramları kullanmama, bunları konuşmaktan kaçınma gibi nedenlerle özgür bir sorgulama ortamından uzaklaşmak ve bu kavramları ya da bunları içeren uyarıcıları seçmeyerek bir çeşit sansür uygulamak da söz konusudur. Çocukların sorgulamalarını, meraklarını ve düşünme konusundaki motivasyonlarını bırakmamaları için bu konularda onlarla felsefe yapmak önemlidir. Sorgulamalar, çocukların hayatın tüm evreleriyle yüzleşmeleri ve kabullenmeleri açısından kıymetlidir.

Katılımcılar, öğretmenlerin ilgili kavramları tabu olmaktan çıkarmaları için çözüm önerileri de sunmuşlardır. Burada ön plana çıkan, tartışma yürütmede yetkinleşmektir. Aynı zamanda öğretmenler geleneksel eğitim anlayışından da uzaklaşmalıdırlar. Öğretmenler, çocuğa korumacı yaklaşan, onun ilgi ve ihtiyacına odaklanmayan, öğretmen merkezli ve bilgi aktarımının esas alındığı bu anlayışın etkilerinden sıyrılmalıdırlar. Öğretmenlerin tabularını, tabu olmaktan çıkarmaları, kişisel gelişimlerini sağlayacak adımlar atmaları ve özellikle ailenin direncini kırmaları için velilerle felsefe tartışmaları düzenlemeleri de öneriler arasındadır. Öğretmenler bir yandan kendilerini yetkinleştirirken diğer yandan tabu kavramları ele almak konusunda çaba göstermelidirler. Bunun yanı sıra ilgili kavramlar, tartışma ortamlarına taşınırken bazı noktalara dikkat edilmelidir. Grubun gelişim özelliklerini, ilgi ve ihtiyaçlarını, sosyo-kültürel özelliklerini bilmek ve tartışmaya etkili bir şekilde rehberlik etmek gerekir. Bu rehberlik sürecinde çocukları etkin bir şekilde dinlemek önemlidir.

Tüm bunlardan yola çıkarak öğretmenlerin çocuklar için felsefeye yönelik aldıkları eğitimlerin içeriğinin güçlendirilmesi gerektiği söylenebilir. Öğretmenlerin sınıf içi uygulamalar gerçekleşmesi ve bunlara geribildirim verilmesi, tabu kavramlar ve bunların üstesinden gelme yolları, geleneksel eğitim anlayışının çocuklarla felsefe yapma sürecine olumsuz etkileri, ölüm, din gibi kavramları içeren kitapların nasıl seçileceği ve kullanılacağı içerik önerileri olabilir.



Yukarıdakilere birlikte bu eğitimlerde, öğretmenlerin bir soruşturma topluluğunun üyesi ya da soruşturma yürüten bir kolaylaştırıcı olarak kendilerini değerlendirmeleri, kendi düşünme süreçleri üzerine düşüncelerini sağlamak önemli olabilir. Bu çerçevede öğretmenler günlük tutabilir, buraya duygu ve düşüncelerini yazabilirler. Özellikle zor konuları ele aldıkları soruşturma süreçlerinde eksik ve güçlendirilmesi gereken yönlerini belirleyebilir, buna yönelik ihtiyaçlarını tespit edebilirler. Bu hem soruşturma becerilerini geliştirebilir hem de ilgili konulara yönelik farkındalıklarını artırabilir.

Öğretmenlere göre tabuların oluşumunda ailenin ve toplumun bakışı da etkilidir. Öğretmenlerin çocuklar için felsefenin daha iyi anlaşılmasını sağlamak için okul idarecileriyle ve velilerle soruşturmalar düzenlemesi bir öneri olarak sunulabilir. Ayrıca ölüm, duygular, inanç, siyaset gibi konuları ele almak sadece ÇİF için değil pek çok ders için de sorun olabilir. Başka derslerde bu konuların ele alınmasındaki sorunlar üzerine araştırmalar yürütülebilir. Çocuklarla tabu kavramlar üzerine felsefeye yapmaya yönelik araştırmalar düzenlenebilir. Bu çalışmalarda, sorgulamaların çocukların ilgili kavramlara yönelik bakış açılarındaki etkisine odaklanılabilir.

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