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A Caring Thinking Analysis of Selected Translated Children's Stories for Age Group C (Ages 9–12) for Use in Philosophy for Children (P4C)

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Abstract

Philosophy for Children (P4C) develops children's intellectual, moral, and social capacities through philosophical dialogue and collaborative inquiry. Within P4C, caring thinking nurtures empathy, responsibility, appreciation, emotional awareness, and ethical judgment. Although children's literature offers a valuable context for cultivating these qualities, little research has investigated how translated children's stories reflect caring thinking components in the P4C framework. This study examined Persian translations of internationally recognized stories for readers aged 9–12, using Lipman's framework. A qualitative descriptive design with directed content analysis was employed. The sample, selected through purposive sampling to ensure diversity in literary style, philosophical depth, author reputation, and publication quality, comprised Persian translations of notable children's stories. Data were deductively analyzed according to Lipman's five dimensions—empathetic, affective, appreciative, active, and normative thinking—using a predefined coding matrix. Trustworthiness was supported by an audit trail and expert review. Results indicated that active and affective thinking were most frequently represented, whereas empathetic thinking appeared less often. Among the stories, *The Composition* exhibited the richest caring-thinking content, while *Il Libro di Dot*, *The Giving Tree*, and *Le génie de la boîte de raviolis* showed fewer elements. These findings suggest translated children's literature has notable potential for fostering caring thinking in P4C. They also imply that teachers should deliberately select philosophically rich stories and complement them with inquiry-based dialogue, reflective questioning, and structured activities to deepen children's caring thinking and ethical understanding.

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

Since its development by Matthew Lipman, Philosophy for Children (P4C) has become one of the most influential educational approaches for promoting children's intellectual, moral, and social development through philosophical inquiry and collaborative dialogue. The program seeks to cultivate multidimensional thinking by integrating critical, creative, caring, and collaborative thinking within a community of inquiry. Among these dimensions, caring thinking occupies a distinctive position because it enables children to make thoughtful judgments grounded not only in rational analysis but also in empathy, responsibility, appreciation, emotional sensitivity, and ethical commitment. Caring thinking contributes significantly to children's moral reasoning, interpersonal relationships, democratic participation, and responsible decision-making. Children's literature has long been recognized as one of the most effective educational resources for stimulating philosophical inquiry because stories expose children to moral dilemmas, multiple perspectives, and complex human experiences. Through literary narratives, children are encouraged to reflect on values, question assumptions, appreciate diversity, and develop emotional understanding. In many educational contexts, translated international stories constitute an important part of children's reading experiences and are frequently incorporated into educational programs. Despite their popularity, relatively few studies have systematically investigated the philosophical potential of translated children's literature from the perspective of caring thinking. Existing research has primarily emphasized literary quality or educational value while paying comparatively little attention to the philosophical dimensions embedded in children's narratives. Therefore, the present study aimed to examine Persian translations of internationally recognized children's stories for readers aged 9–12 using Lipman's framework of caring thinking in order to evaluate their educational potential for implementation within Philosophy for Children classrooms.

Method

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive research design using directed content analysis based on Lipman's (2003) conceptual framework of caring thinking. The analytical framework consisted of five predetermined dimensions: empathetic thinking, affective thinking, appreciative thinking, active thinking, and normative thinking. The research sample comprised Persian translations of internationally recognized children's stories intended for readers aged 9–12. Stories were selected through purposive sampling to maximize variation in literary style, philosophical richness, international recognition, author reputation, and publishing quality. A structured coding matrix derived from Lipman's theoretical framework guided the analytical process. Each story was read repeatedly to identify textual evidence corresponding to the five dimensions of caring thinking. Coding was conducted deductively by classifying narrative episodes, dialogues, characters' actions, and value-laden situations according to the predefined conceptual categories. Throughout the analysis, categories were continuously refined to ensure conceptual consistency and analytical rigor. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, a comprehensive audit trail documenting coding decisions and analytical procedures was maintained. Furthermore, experts in Philosophy for Children reviewed the coding framework, category definitions, and emerging interpretations at successive stages of the study to strengthen the credibility and dependability of the findings.

Results

The analysis demonstrated that all selected stories contained identifiable elements of caring thinking, although the representation of Lipman's five dimensions varied substantially across the

texts. Active thinking and affective thinking emerged as the most dominant dimensions, indicating that the stories strongly encourage emotional engagement, responsible action, participation, and reflective involvement in meaningful situations. Appreciative thinking and normative thinking were represented with moderate frequency and generally appeared in narratives involving ethical choices, interpersonal relationships, respect for values, and reflective judgment. In contrast, empathetic thinking was considerably less prominent, suggesting fewer opportunities for readers to engage deeply with diverse emotional perspectives or develop sophisticated empathic understanding through narrative experiences. Comparative analysis also revealed meaningful differences among the selected stories regarding their philosophical richness. *The Composition* demonstrated the most comprehensive integration of caring-thinking components and provided the greatest potential for philosophical dialogue. By contrast, *Il Libro di Dot*, *The Giving Tree*, and *Le génie de la boîte de raviolis* contained comparatively fewer explicit opportunities for developing caring thinking within Lipman's framework. Overall, the findings indicate that translated children's stories differ substantially in their capacity to promote caring thinking and that careful pedagogical selection is essential when integrating literary texts into Philosophy for Children programs.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that translated children's literature represents a valuable educational resource for cultivating caring thinking when selected and implemented according to explicit philosophical and educational criteria. The predominance of active and affective thinking suggests that many internationally recognized children's stories effectively encourage emotional engagement, responsibility, participation, and reflective action. However, the comparatively limited representation of empathetic thinking highlights an important educational gap that teachers should address through carefully facilitated philosophical dialogue, reflective questioning, and collaborative inquiry. Rather than relying solely on the inherent philosophical richness of literary texts, educators should actively design learning experiences that encourage children to examine multiple perspectives, explore moral dilemmas, and develop deeper empathic understanding through classroom discussion. From a theoretical perspective, this study extends existing scholarship by demonstrating that Lipman's caring thinking framework provides a systematic analytical lens for evaluating the philosophical quality of children's literature beyond conventional literary criticism. The findings further suggest that the educational value of stories depends not only on narrative quality but also on their capacity to stimulate ethical reflection, emotional awareness, appreciation of values, and responsible judgment. From a practical perspective, the proposed analytical framework offers useful guidance for curriculum developers, teachers, translators, publishers, and educational policymakers in selecting and utilizing children's literature for Philosophy for Children programs. Future studies are recommended to compare translated and indigenous children's stories, investigate additional dimensions of philosophical thinking such as critical and creative thinking, and evaluate the effectiveness of philosophically enriched literary instruction across diverse educational and cultural contexts.

Author Contributions: The first author was responsible for data collection, implementation of the content analysis process of the stories, and preparation of the initial draft of the manuscript. The second author, as the corresponding author, supervised the research direction, designed the methodology, and performed the final revision and organization of the manuscript. The third author provided expert insights regarding the theoretical framework of the research and contributed to the analytical review of the findings. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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Data Availability Statement: All analytical documentation, coding tables, and raw data extracted from the stories will be made available by the corresponding author upon reasonable request from researchers or interested parties.

AI Use Statement: In the preparation of this manuscript, the authors utilized ChatGPT solely for the purpose of improving the linguistic structure and enhancing the readability of the text. All outputs generated by this tool were carefully reviewed, revised, and edited by the authors, and the authors take full responsibility for the accuracy of the content, scientific originality, and the final version of the manuscript.

Ethical Approval: All stages of this research, from story selection and analysis to the reporting of findings, were conducted in accordance with ethical principles including scientific honesty, citation integrity, and transparency in reporting results.