



Putting The Community Back Into Inquiry Based Learning. Why Inquiry Based Learning Should Look Back As Well As Forward.

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ABSTRACT: *The current quest to implement inquiry based learning would be all the better for some philosophical enrichment. The emphasis of successful enquiry lies in developing the classroom environment into a true community of inquiry. This community has its roots firmly planted in the traditions of philosophy.*

INTRODUCTION

Philosophy for children has been around for over 30 years and is not new. What is new is schools implementing inquiry based learning programmes, values programmes, and social discussion circles. It's all been done before and in a way that incorporates all of these additions to a crowded curriculum. So before we reinvent the wheel lets look back and ponder how we can move forward.

Philosophy is the open-minded search for truth through inquiry and dialogue. It is the ability to reason, to pose and solve problems through thinking with fluency and originality. Fluent thinking involves the ability to: wonder, analyse, criticise, question and create (Brenifer, 2003: 31). Philosophy is the process of questioning the assumptions of supposed certainties about those things that we consider to be of most value and importance in life. It is the ability to know when, what and how to ask the questions that inspire us and others to think about the ethical dimensions of human life. Philosophy invites the open dialogue and examination of these questions in order 'to explore possibilities, to discover alternatives, to recognise others perspectives and to establish a community of inquiry' (Lipman, Sharp & Oscanyan, 1980: 14). Philosophical questioning and dialogue relies on the ability to observe, use one's current knowledge, ponder, pose questions, and a possible starting point for the solution. Inherent in this process is the assumption that there is a logical, rational sequence of thought.

Philosophical thinking is not merely random wondering; it is a unique branch of learning and relies on thoroughness. Wondering does not stand alone in philosophical thought, rather, it is wondering engaged in the search for meaning (Gregory, 2002: 22). The precision and thoroughness of questioning and thought is epitomised by Socrates and what has become in recent times Socratic questioning. This style of questioning enables us to understand the power of philosophical questions based on critical and creative reasoning and therefore more about the nature of philosophy. Socratic questions are underpinned by: logical sequencing, engagement in dialogue, and based on experience. The social aspects of dialogue are an important attribute in the value of teaching philosophy to children.

In learning philosophy children will learn to think for themselves and be able to participate and engage autonomously in the world. Children who have the ability to think philosophically will be more liable to question the rights and wrongs of life as they encounter more complex situations and experiences. They will have the ability to answer for themselves how to live a good life, and do so with more imagination and more thought for the consequences of their actions. To give children the understanding of philosophy is to enable them to bring wisdom to bear on their own lives (Kekes, 1993). The way in which schools teach philosophy will have a significant influence on the enthusiasm children have for it.

There is value in teaching children philosophy; the value is intrinsic, and this intrinsic value supersedes the benefit to the individual and becomes valuable to the community of learners as a whole. The nature of philosophical dialogue within a classroom enables children to independently learn the art of hearing and thinking about others values and ideas and in turn sharing their own values and ideas. This sharing leads to an environment where children are encouraged to think beyond the obvious and pursue meaning for themselves (Gregory, 2002: 24). There is more to philosophy than inquiring and more to questioning than asking 'What do I want to know?'

The Philosophy for Children programme, also known as P4C, was founded by Mathew Lipman in the late 1960s (Reed & Johnson, 1999). Lipman, concerned by what he perceived as a decline in children's ability to reason and problem solve, sought to remedy the situation by creating a programme that invited children to engage in the art of thinking. He began with a novel, *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*. This novel, written for twelve year olds, draws on the adventures of a group of children who inquire into a range of diverse philosophical and logical issues. It was the basis of the P4C programme and was intended to emphasise the validity of thinking as an educationally relevant instrument. The learning environment is commonly created through well thought-out discoveries aided by an assortment of narratives found in story, myth, poetry, news, drama, music, painting, and photography (Haynes, 2002).

The focus on meta-cognition is embedded within a philosophy programme as an instrument to investigate the nature of: mind, thought, knowledge, truth and reality (Haynes, 2002). The P4C programme was and is intended to be more than an incidental programme fitted in around 'real' curriculum. It was intended as a pedagogical tool to introduce philosophical thinking into the core curriculum (Lane & Jones, 1989). This is similar to how schools are integrating inquiry based learning and ICT; the difference with a philosophical underpinning is that the philosophy base includes a focus on morality and values and one where the classroom operates as a community.

A philosophy programme is more than a thinking skills programme. It is a cohesive blend of dialogue, meta-cognition, questioning and reasoning. Traditionally, philosophy is the discipline primarily concerned with logical, critical and reflective thinking, the development of reasoning competence and the analysis of meaning. Philosophy, then, is thinking dedicated to the improvement of thinking. A philosophy programme offers children the opportunity to learn to value thinking in a way that is both open-ended and rigorous.

COMMUNITY OF INQUIRY

The central pedagogical tool and guiding ideal of a philosophy programme is the community of inquiry. Inquiry is interpreted as going beyond information to seek understanding; intentionally bringing about significant changes of thought and action through active reflection. In the community of inquiry, students work together to construct and then answer their own questions about the philosophical issues that draw on intentionally written materials and resources. The community of inquiry model is an integral part of the process of exploration in thinking because it relies on dialogue. The social aspects of dialogue are an important attribute in the value of teaching philosophy to children. Dialogue enables children to experience what it is to part of a mutual distribution of ideas. This in turn becomes a shared responsibility for those ideas, manifold points of view, and the preservation of veracity (Gregory, 2002). This process is ultimately good for children because they learn that: people see things differently; different points of view may ultimately bring about a change of view as more information is acquired; or conversely, offer assurance that the view point is correct having explored layers of questions and avenues of thought (Gazzard, 2000).

A positive attribute of P4C is that it provides a platform for children to learn the art of hearing and thinking about others values and ideas and in turn sharing their own values and ideas. This sharing leads to an environment where children are encouraged to think beyond the obvious and pursue meaning for themselves and the opportunity to revise their thinking (Gregory, 2002). The development of emotional intelligence is dependent on children having affirming experiences where they are able to express what they are thinking in freedom and safety. They need to know what effects, consequences and reactions these feelings and thoughts engender so as to make sense of them and to develop tolerance and empathy for the thoughts and feelings of others (Gazzard, 2000). Discussion in the community of inquiry is not just a process of swapping opinions. Classroom discussion is aimed at the construction of the *best* answer to the questions raised. This best answer is not provided or validated by the teacher. Instead, the class has the responsibility for both constructing and evaluating the range of possible responses to a question. It is a certainty that the ability to act collectively in finding best answers to society's questions is fundamental to future quality of life. Philosophy is not based on the assumption that there are no right or wrong answers. Rather, it is based on the belief that, even if final answers are difficult to come by, some answers can reasonably be judged better and more defensible than others (Haynes, 2002).

AWARENESS OF ETHICAL AND MORAL DIMENSIONS

Philosophy taps children's natural curiosity and sense of wonder; children are the originators of relentless questioning (Murriss, 2000). Philosophy is about harnessing this natural curiosity and guiding the contours of human thinking (Gregory, 2002). It engages them in the search for meaning and enriches and extends their understanding. Philosophy encompasses a broader view of what counts as intelligence. Traditionally intelligence has been viewed through a scientific, factual lens that values the ability to prove what is known through the

recall of facts and the application of that knowledge. Philosophy validates the artistry of wonder and inventiveness, and seeks to foster these attributes on a par with scientific or rational knowledge (Lipman, 1998).

As a consequence, it strengthens thinking and reasoning skills and builds self-esteem. It helps to develop the qualities that make for good judgement in everyday life. Philosophy builds on students' wonder and curiosity about ideas that are vitally important to them (Levine, 1983). As the Philosophy programme emphasises a dialogue-based process of inquiry, it increases children's ability to hear and consider the views of others. All participants share their own ideas so each individual must consider many different perspectives. Many students have the experience of seeing that what they thought was obvious is not obvious to people who have different perspectives. Encouraging tolerance of diversity is a prerequisite to successfully navigating a world where the political and educational emphasis is on global communications and economies. Whilst we may not agree with this international market-driven focus, equipping our children with the skills to question and think independently may be the antidote to inert acceptance of it.

There are universal, central and contestable concepts that underpin both our experience of human life and all academic disciplines, such as truth, reality, freedom, justice, rights, mind, rules, responsibility, action, logic, reason, existence, possibility, meaning, God, infinity, human nature, and thought. Philosophy provides a conscious space in the school curriculum to discover, question and explore these concepts in a community of inquiry which appropriately values autonomy and critical awareness (Lane & Jones, 1989).

Moral dilemmas such as poverty, wars about religion, incarcerating wrongdoers, and a multitude of other dilemmas are seemingly ever present. The answers to which are still unresolved, not because people haven't tried to logically reason and solve them but because there are complex reasons for them to exist and therefore complex answers to their resolution. Creative solutions that employ the use of imagination and alternative solutions are imperative to the continuation of trying to provide a better, safer world. P4C provides the scaffolding for such thoughtful and imaginative thinking, enabling our children to wrestle with these kinds of moral dilemmas in a new and constructive way (Lipman, Sharp & Oscanyan, 1980).

CONCLUSION

Philosophy programmes offer a means by which children become better thinkers; able to apply logical patterns of reasoning, harmonise the facts before judging, classify, make distinctions and analogies, and synthesise information. More importantly, teaching children philosophy gives them the capacity to interpret the world around them. Being able to distinguish between what is good and what is bad is a gift that is powerfully enhanced through philosophical thought and one which is essential to dealing with life's critical survival problems (Lindop, 1997). The ability to think independently, answer for themselves some of life's questions, and to live a good life with imagination and discernment is a laudable legacy for the education system to hand to a child.

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