

Creative, Critical and Caring Engagement – Philosophy through Inquiry

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“The child does not become social by learning. He must be social in order to learn”
George Herbert Mead

INTRODUCTION – LETTING THE ARGUMENT LEAD

The guiding principle of Lipman’s Community of Inquiry process is ‘letting the argument lead’. Although the facilitator of the inquiry has a responsibility to guide the discussion procedurally, this is at a level of co-inquirer and he or she should not lead the inquiry down a predetermined path. This paper will address how this process of letting the dialogue unfold through the participants’ own contributions leads to *engagement*. This engagement according to Lipman is critical, creative and caring. Letting the argument lead is a process of engaging with all three of Lipman’s criteria, however I argue in this paper that it is in fact care that leads children to genuinely engage rather than just enlisting critical and creative skills. By caring for the process, they do in fact *become* critical and creative.

Engagement in dialogue comes from a discussion that is not simply a conversation - it is in every sense, engaging. By engaging in philosophical dialogue, children are taken to a level beyond their average classroom participation. But what sets a philosophical dialogue and a mere conversation apart?¹ According to Susan Gardner (1995), the search for truth motivates participants in a dialogue, and is the whole purpose of the Community of Inquiry, and I would argue, of philosophical inquiry in general. There is, as Gardner points out,

an obvious, although relatively superficial sense in which progress toward truth is vital to the practice of inquiry and that if such progress is not made, the term *community of inquiry* becomes a misnomer. Properly speaking, in order to “inquire”, one must not only inquire about *something* ... one must also make some progress – at least if such progress is possible. (p.38)

Gardner notes that if a dialogue is to be productive, then the participants must in fact produce something of substance, which, in turn, would make that dialogue substantive. This product is truth, and without the necessity of trying to reach it, a dialogue would have no direction and there would be no motivation for its participants. It should be reiterated that truth may not in fact result at the conclusion of the dialogue. However, as Gardner points out, having this as a goal gives the inquiry purpose. Justus Buchler also identifies that the conclusion of the dialogue is not as important as the process itself.

¹ For the difference between dialogue and conversation, see also Amir (2001).

Although we may not come to a *conclusion* (or find ‘truth’ in the Platonic sense of the word) he argues that “a product is inevitably established in any given hour of discussion” (Lipman 1991, p.231). He says “(s)tudents may have no right to demand final answers, but they certainly have the right to expect some sense of intellectual motion or some feeling of discernment” (p.231).

So how does engagement occur through this process? We are not trying to identify what engagement is in this paper, moreover, we will identify how it occurs through the process of critical, creative and caring thinking. Undertaking a conceptual analysis to find a conclusive definition of the term ‘engagement’ will bring us no closer to understanding how children engage through philosophical inquiry. However, perhaps Gardner offers some definition by way of claiming that the progress towards truth makes the dialogue substantive. Because the dialogue has a particular purpose rather than being unstructured talk, the substantive nature of dialogue and its meaningfulness leads to engagement. Perhaps the ‘substantiveness’ of inquiry is what we mean when we refer to engagement – connecting with substantive ideas. Perhaps if we look towards the commonsense use of the word engagement this may also give us a better idea. To engage is an ‘interlocking’ of two or more entities. Typically, when we think of engagement as a betrothal of marriage between one person and another, this is the bringing together of two individuals to one union (or marriage). This is important to our working definition of the term ‘engagement’. Interlocking occurs between children in an inquiry, between a child and a creative idea, a critical idea or a caring idea, and the interlocking of all of these elements. In other words, this interlocking may occur between people or between a person and an idea, or the interaction of all of these things. Bringing together is what we hope to do when we aim for engagement in an inquiry. The nature of ‘intersubjectivity’ in the Community of Inquiry is perhaps what we mean here as a certain interlocking between the individual idea and the community thought.² Vygotsky offers us some further explanation of what intersubjectivity is when he discusses the process of internalization as the individual interacting with the community and how the thoughts of the community interact with the individual’s own thoughts. The nature of intersubjectivity and internalization require further explanation, but for the purposes of this paper, they will help to inform our working definition of engagement. This process of engagement can occur because children must engage with each other rather than being directed by a teacher (at least, that is the aim of the Community of Inquiry).

Let us now look at what we mean by ‘letting the argument lead’. Lipman took this to be the guiding principle of his process of inquiry. He took this direction from Socrates who believed that by following the dialogue where it naturally leads will enable a greater exploration of the argument (and perhaps, according to Plato, the arrival at truth). It is with this principle in mind that Lipman formulated the process of inquiry. The role of the facilitator in the inquiry is particularly important in letting the natural process of argument unfold with very little or merely procedural influence. The facilitator merely plays a clarifying and questioning role so that the discussion is guided by the children’s own contributions. While there is more thinking to be done by the children themselves, there is also a deeper level of engagement in thinking than can be expected from normal

² See also Allen (1998).

non-participatory classroom routine. Children not only have to think, but they have to think on their own. As we will explore later on in this paper, thinking for oneself is an intrinsically creative process. The argument that leads the discussion has come from the children and their own abilities to invent arguments, but this is also coupled with a critical process of thinking. As we will explore further, engaging in classroom inquiry and engaging with arguments of others requires critical consideration of the argument as well as looking critically at the arguments of others to identify any falsities or fallacies.

CARING AS ENGAGEMENT IN A PROCESS OF CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING

We have looked briefly at two types of thinking but according to Lipman, there are three elements of engagement in a Community of Inquiry. Ann Sharp emphasizes a third type of engagement that is overshadowed by Lipman's main concentration on critical and creative thinking. She argues that while Lipman recognizes care in the inquiry, it is not given the same level of explanation in Lipman's curriculum. Sharp (2004) devotes an article entitled *The Other Dimension of Caring Thinking* to bring caring thinking to the forefront in the Community of Inquiry. Caring thinking she argues,

“suggests a certain view of personhood and a pedagogical process. It also suggests a particular environment for the cultivation of such thinking. I am referring to the process of communal inquiry and the democratic environment of the classroom community of inquiry. It is as if you can't have one without the other, if you are interested in cultivating caring thinking among children on a large scale”(p.9).

Sharp relates her theory of caring thinking as a pedagogical process to the Community of Inquiry. She says that “as we become more conscious of the social and aesthetic dimension of the inquiry process, we find that it takes on more and more meaning if we truly care about its process and its outcomes”(p.10).

Sharp reflects Nel Noddings' approach to caring explained below, in that it is more of a 'pedagogical care' than an emotional, popular view of care³. She argues that “knowledge is the growth in our capacity to care”, and that “(w)hat we care about reveals to others and to ourselves what really matters to us” (p.10). However, from this particular view about caring being our capacity to care about outcomes and processes which is particularly helpful in this paper, Sharp precariously moves her definition of care in the pedagogical sense to a more emotional, popular view of care that has its basis in friendship and love. We are not concerned about this view of care in this paper, however, the perils of friendship and the Community of Inquiry is discussed in a larger paper entitled *Consensus, Community and Care* (Davey 2004, p. 18-51). It is important to define care as a pedagogical caring rather than emotional insofar as we can see its benefits to the inquiry process rather than its personal and emotional value. We do not discount the importance of an emotional caring to children and adults, but the focus is on building a caring community rather than the cultivation of friendships. Suffice it to say,

³ For more on 'pedagogical care', see Hutt (1979).

there is a larger argument that can not be dealt with in this short paper. From this point onwards, when I refer to ‘caring thinking’ in the Community of Inquiry I am referring to the pedagogical form of caring rather than the emotional view.

Noddings (1984) describes caring as having a regard for the views and interests of others (p.9). Moreover, it also requires reciprocity. For caring to be fulfilled, the “one-caring” must receive some sort of validation from the “cared-for”, in order for the act of caring to be complete. Caring, argues Noddings, “must somehow be completed in the other if the relationship is to be described as caring” (p.4). Lipman’s Community of Inquiry also requires reciprocity, as well as a regard for the views and interests of others, which entails trust, tolerance, and fairmindedness.⁴ Opinions or points of view can be truly received only when others engage with those opinions or points of view. Regardless of disagreement, if the relationship is a caring one, then a commitment to the process of inquiry becomes paramount. Caring is, as Noddings says, integral to the success of the dialogue, as it is this element that helps participants to accept different views.

Through such a dialectic, we are led beyond the intense, and particular feelings accompanying our deeply held values and beyond the particular beliefs to which these feelings are attached *to a realization that the other who feels intensely about that which I do not believe is still to be received.* (p.186, *emphasis my own*)

In sum, caring helps participants value and accept different points of view.⁵ Instead of placing importance on common interests, caring accommodates for differences. In an inquiry where participants may not share the same beliefs or values, they can still follow the dialogue from their own perspective and from the perspectives of others. In such cases, while participants acknowledge disagreement, they also are learning that the beliefs and values of the participants must be given equal respect and attention. Being accepted for having different beliefs or values is integral to Noddings’ notion of caring.

CARE IN THE INQUIRY

The idea of care as a form of thinking in the Community of Inquiry is twofold. It is both an act and a disposition. Noddings looks at the metadialogue and the processes of caring as being such things as listening, turn-taking, respecting, accommodating difference and so on, whereas Sharp recognizes caring as an attitude of caring for the process – what Gardner talks about when she identifies a dialogue as being particularly philosophical. Because the argument itself leads, the care for the process is paramount in an inquiry. As Sharp notes, the Community of Inquiry is intrinsically based on caring thinking as it, “calls forth [children’s] care: their care for the tools of inquiry, their care for the problems they deem worthy to be inquired into, their care for the form of the dialogue, and their care for each other as they proceed in the inquiry itself”. The caring for the process and the outcomes is paramount to a successfully engaging inquiry. With only limited facilitation in the inquiry and with the children themselves being responsible for the dialogue, they must care for the process to make it substantive or it would simply be a

⁴ See Lipman (1988); Cam (1995).

⁵ See also Thomas (1997).

conversation (without purpose of finding truth). It is hence my assertion that in order for participants in the dialogue to engage fully, then they must care for the outcome of the dialogue and most importantly they must care for the process of philosophical inquiry; this process is a process of critical and creative thinking.

ENGAGING THROUGH CRITICAL THINKING

Engagement can occur through critical thinking if it is not simply approached as a skill or activity. Lipman notes that when we think of critical thinking we often think of outcomes such as finding conclusive definitions or universal definitions. Lipman (1991) rather presents critical thinking in the Community of Inquiry as a process. It is not simply engaging in an activity that will give us a solution or make a decision. It is “*thinking that (1) facilitates judgment because it (2) relies on criteria, (3) is self-correcting, and is (4) sensitive to context.*” (p.116).⁶ To Lipman, being a critical thinker is much more important than the simple activity of, for example, conducting a conceptual analysis. While this activity does enlist critical thinking, being critical involves a process of being self-correcting in the creative process. It does involve, however, the narrowing down of certain concepts and the making of criteria. This forces participants to be concise in their thinking. Although Lipman does not have a Platonic view of finding a universal or absolute truth, he views that the aim for truth in some sense leads children to avoid “error and falsehood” (p.193).

We have drawn on the fact that engagement in the Community of Inquiry comes from letting the argument, and not the facilitator, determine the path of inquiry. The critical thinking element of this engagement occurs when students have to examine their *own* arguments and the arguments of others in the dialogue. Because the inquiry rests on participants being reflective, this method naturally adopts a process of critical thinking. Like care, being critical can be both an activity and a disposition. One can *do* critical thinking insofar as partaking in an activity of conceptual analysis. Lipman is vocal in his program not becoming a skills program, rather he promotes the program as creating dispositions.⁷ So, one can do a critical thinking activity, but engagement is what makes a participant *be* critical. Caring for the process of the inquiry and its critical process takes an activity in critical thinking away from being a skill and further towards being a disposition.

CREATIVE THINKING AND ENGAGEMENT

Likewise, care for the process provides a basis for engagement in creative thinking. It is important to note that in this paper, creative thinking and creativity are not the same thing. Lipman shows us that while creativity is also important in thinking, creative thinking is central to philosophy inquiry. Creative thinking according to Lipman is involved with making meaning through claims.

⁶ For critical thinking activities, see Splitter (1991) and Wilks (1995).

⁷ See Burgh (2003).

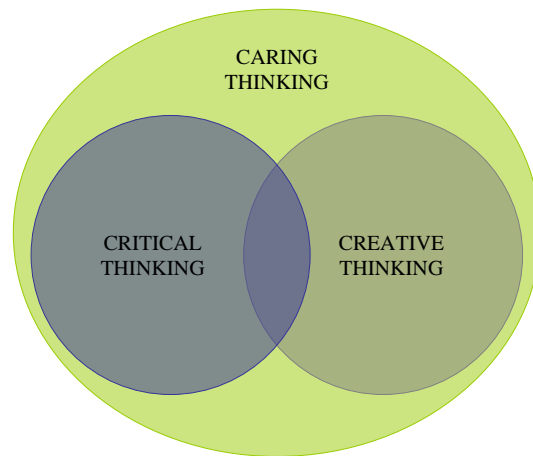
We have already stipulated that Lipman (1991) sees letting the argument lead as engaging participants in the inquiry. This is intrinsically creative, as Lipman suggests when he says “I suspect it is, that thinking for ourselves is the most appropriate paradigm of creative thought” (p.204). Perhaps Lipman describes it best when he points to ‘invention’ as being at the heart of creative thinking (p.193). The dialogue is based on the ideas of the children and the argument that leads from it. Generating these ideas requires inventiveness on the children’s part and also such other elements as “originality, novelty, generativity, uniqueness, breakthrough, capacity, surprisingness, ..., liberating quality, productivity, freshness, imaginativeness, inspiredness, capacity to synthesize” (p.205). Engagement of a creative kind occurs when we let the argument lead because the ideas must be developed by the participants themselves and cannot be predetermined.

AN INTERSECTION OF CARING, CRITICAL and CREATIVE THINKING

This paper does not assert that critical and creative thinking are mutually exclusive categories. If we look at the diagram below, we can see that they are interrelated. Critical thinking does rely on a process of creativity. For example, in an inquiry, thinking of a creative counter-example is a critical thinking activity. It enlists both critical and creative thinking although it relies mainly on the participant being critical. Also, creative thinking relies on participants being critical of their own ideas before they contribute them to the dialogue. While making meaning is mainly creative, there is a level of critical thinking involved in coming through this process. Lipman (1991) similarly acknowledges that in his process of inquiry creative thinking should not be uncritical or irrational (p.193) and that,

there is no creative thinking that is not shot with critical judgments, just as there is no critical judgment that is not shot through with creative judgments. We can, of course, construct abstract ideal types in which pure forms of thinking are delineated, but in actuality admixture is the rule. (194).

This paper does assert however, that it is care that envelopes these categories in a Community of Inquiry as shown below:



CONCLUSIONS

We can argue that the idea of letting the argument lead the discussion is in fact a creative process. Because the dialogue relies on the inventiveness and creativity of the participants in an inquiry to shape the arguments and hence the dialogue itself, we can assert that the inquiry rests on engagement in creative thought. However, even if making meaning in the dialogue is a process of creative thinking, participants must also enlist critical thinking in order to make such meaning. Applying criteria and being self-correcting are all critical thinking processes. Lipman recognizes that these two forms of thinking provide a basis for the philosophical Community of Inquiry. But *engagement* in dialogue happens through caring thinking. Caring for the process of inquiry means enlisting the processes of critical and creative thinking to further the dialogue. While having both critical and creative approaches to thinking are fundamental to the dispositions that Lipman hoped to integrate through his pedagogy, children must first care about becoming both critical and creative driven by their natural propensity to care for the process of philosophical inquiry and the outcomes that result from inquiring communally together.

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