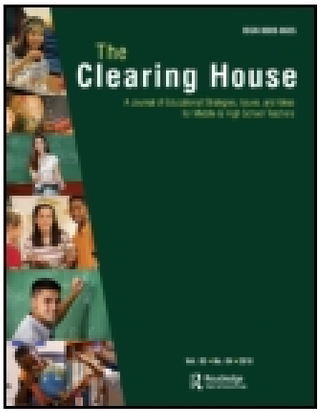
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Publisher: Routledge
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The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/vtch20

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Published online: 03 Apr 2010.

To cite this article: Matthew Lipman (1998) Teaching Students to Think Reasonably: Some Findings of the Philosophy for Children Program, The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas, 71:5, 277-280

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00098659809602723

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Teaching Students to Think Reasonably: Some Findings of the Philosophy for Children Program

MATTHEW LIPMAN

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More than a quarter-century has gone by since the educational approach known as Philosophy for Children was first experimented with in a classroom situation. Much has been learned in the intervening years about the preparation of teachers competent to deliver the program to elementary and secondary school students. What follows is a summary of some of those lessons, with particular attention to the cultivation of "distributed thinking" in the classroom. It is especially important to recognize that philosophy in the school curriculum can directly improve the quality of life in a democratic society. That is, philosophy produces higher-order thinking among students, and it does so by relying on distributed thinking in the classroom. That combination of distributed and higher-order thinking is also characteristic of the citizens in those societies that exhibit higher-quality democracy.

A higher-quality democracy is not achieved merely by attracting to it a plurality of individuals capable of higher-order thinking. It must itself engage in the cultivation of such thinking. (One would not have to look for long to find communities—often suburban—in which the intellectual level of the residents considerably outstrips the intellectual level of the schools.) Nor is education for higher-order thinking merely the education of a privileged elite, whether the basis of that elitism be wealth, power, or intelligence. Education for higher-order thinking is quality education for all, and the criteria by means of which it is identified are critical thinking, creative thinking, and caring thinking.

Thinking and Democracy

What about "higher-quality democracy"? Again, that term does not refer to the wealth or power or intelligence of the citizens in a country. Some of the most powerful countries in the world today are only lower-quality democracies, and some of the weakest countries can nevertheless be said to possess democracy of a very high quality. What is more to the point is the prevalence in the better democracies of representative government and due process, the protections afforded human rights and the guarantees of personal liberties, as well as the cultivation of rational social institutions that enable the members of those societies to share such values as health, justice, and friendship.

Distributed thinking is sometimes also referred to as "shared cognition." If we consider thinking to be composed of various kinds of mental acts causally or logically connected with one another, then a particular instance of thinking is distributed if those connected mental acts are spread out among a number of different individuals. Thus, a classroom discussion can be a good example of distributed thinking, because the members of the class answer one another's questions, emulate others' questions, build on one another's inferences, furnish each other with examples and counterexamples, help others construct definitions, and so on.

Obviously, it should not be assumed that higher-order thinking is complete once the members of a group have engaged in the sorts of segmentary behaviors just described. That is a fairly primitive stage of distributed thinking. It needs to be followed by *internalization*, whereby participants introject the behaviors of others whom they wish to emulate, and by *externalization*, whereby participants synthesize what they have introjected and offer these newly created syntheses to the group.

Cognition in the Classroom

Much depends on the cognitive quality of a classroom discussion. A conversation is a fairly innocuous form of discussion. Conversations generally exhibit a rather low level of reasoning or investigation and as reflection can be considered fairly superficial. Dialogue, on the other hand, can be thought of as deliberative inquiry, for it contains a definite effort at cognitive exploration, together with specific and very complex reasoning moves.

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"Imaging" is a self-corrective practice. It is this essential self-correctiveness, this humble fallibilism, that ensures that the forward movement of inquiry is always in the direction of meaning, if not truth.

Education as inquiry represents an insistence that education begin with what students find problematical and that it build upon what they continue to find interesting, intriguing, and important. Education that is not conceived of as an inquiry response to a problematical situation cannot expect to have much student thinking to cultivate.

Philosophy for Children

The generalizations just noted are drawn from work in connection with the Philosophy for Children program, as well as from the theoretical conclusions of John Dewey, Lev Vygotsky, and George Herbert Mead. Philosophy for Children consists of a K–12 curriculum of more than 3,000 pages, much of which is available not only in English but in twenty other languages as well. Since its inception in 1970, Philosophy for Children has employed a pedagogy called "the community of inquiry," which has its roots in Socrates and whose title is borrowed from Charles Peirce. The community of inquiry involves the claim that deliberative and collaborative communities are exceptional in their ability to foster critical, creative, and caring thinking, leading to sounder reasoning, understanding, and judgment. That claim is supported by a growing amount of experimental evidence.

The term *distributed thinking* is of fairly recent vintage, but it is familiar enough to participants in philosophical dialogue. Philosophy, unfortunately, is virtually unknown in American elementary and secondary school classrooms. It therefore cannot readily be shown to teachers and students as an example of distributed thinking. It must be acknowledged that discussion has not been unknown, but seldom as a form of inquiry; it has generally been considered to have little or no academic merit. Some would remark, "After all, it is not thinking." Thinking is supposed to take place only within individuals, not among them. Who cannot still hear his or her teacher's grim commandment, "Do your own work!" as if conferring together about some problem were a form of immorality?

Teaching Distributed Thinking: Text-as-Model

If distributed thinking is not identified as such in the classroom, how do we teach children to engage in it? Certainly not by trying to explain it to them and asking them to do likewise. It is much more promising to *show* them what has to be done and then ask them to emulate what they have just seen and heard. What is therefore needed is a *model*, and the usual model in Philosophy for Children is the novel-as-text and, within the novel, a fictional community of inquiry. As children read the novel, they may not note that different children have different thinking styles or modes of intelligence, but they do notice that the fictional children do things that they themselves have not been doing but *can do*, such as *asking* questions instead of waiting to be called on to answer them or such as noticing and calling the attention of others to analogical relationships, ambiguities, or other logical structures in the episode under investigation.

As the students read the text (aloud, by the way, so that they can take turns expressing what the fictional characters have to say), they note that while the spoken contributions emanate from different corners of the classroom, they may deal with a single problem. This is even more evident when the teacher has the episode script-read, with different students assigned the parts of individual characters in the story: the members of the fictional community can be envisaged as coming to intellectual grips with something problematic in their experience. Each student's comment is seen as arising indisputably from that student's perspective and, at the same time, as a segment of the totality of meaning at which the students wish to arrive.

And so the fictional children are portrayed as listening to one another (being listened to can be an intoxicating experience in some classrooms), and their comments are put on the blackboard and identified by name (another exhilarating experience). The children find themselves drawn to one another the more they recognize that their experiences are shared experiences and that their values are shared values.

In all of this, the distinctive voice of the author is virtually inaudible. Seldom does a God's-eye point of view that is simultaneously the standpoint of the narrator come through. Instead, most of the fictional texts consist of dialogue, so that the fictional children can be portrayed as taking responsibility for what they themselves say, rather than acting as the puppets of an off-stage interlocutor. (In the last four books to be published in the curriculum, the fictional children are themselves the narrators.)

Promoting Discussion and a Community of Inquiry

When the first stage of the session, the reading of the text, has been completed, the students in the classroom propose discussion topics or questions that will occupy the group until the reading of the next episode. Each contribution is written on the chalkboard and identified with the name of its contributor. A rereading of what has been written will confirm that the statements or questions represent a circle of points of view regarding the selection. But some points are emphasized much more than others, suggesting that the comments of the group reveal what it thinks is important. In short, the emerging agenda for the discussion suggests both a variety of perspectives and a sense of proportion.

Some teachers complain that discussions are difficult to hold because students are reluctant to participate in them. Our experience with the text-as-model technique and the community of philosophical inquiry pedagogy is that the first comments or questions offered function as a kind of incomplete schema whose "demand-quality," as the

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Gestaltists would call it, has the effect on the remainder of the class of drawing out their contributions. Even the weaker or more reticent students realize quickly that the ability to question is related not to ordinary academic competencies but to experience, thoughtfulness, and imagination, so that they soon vie with one another to have their points of view included with the others.

The dialogue moves in the direction of two kinds of wholeness. On the one hand, the mental acts form logical connections with one another. On the other hand, those who perform such acts form social relationships with one another. The first kind of wholeness is a completeness of meaning. The second kind, the interpersonal kind, moves toward a communal solidarity. Participants find this dual form of fulfillment highly gratifying and much to be preferred to the benefits of traditional pedagogies.

Distributed thinking, then, is a principal mechanism employed by the community of inquiry to ensure that rationally connected thinking behaviors are available in the classroom for internalization. The fictional text-as-model is another. Still another is the selection of philosophy to provide a paradigm of deliberative inquiry.

Learning to Do Philosophy

Philosophy is a discipline that is highly self-conscious with regard to the thinking moves it employs. Not uncommonly it articulates itself in the form of argument, and it tries to call attention to the ways in which it marshals reasons in support of its conclusions. Like invertebrates, it keeps its logical structure always on display, and fallibilistically invites criticism of its coherence and rationality. To learn philosophy is to study these structures and systems by means of which philosophy examines its huge repertoire of extremely general and ill-defined ideas.

To learn to *do* philosophy entails a dialogue, in which a group of people engage together in deliberative inquiry, thereby providing a model instance of distributed thinking. It is exemplary because the moves made by the participants have a logical as well as a persuasive aspect. That is, philosophers generally accept logic as the canon of the procedural rules of inquiry, and they do not find novel the notion that a group, in doing philosophy, is engaged in distributed thinking. This is not to claim that only philosophy is eligible to engage in the shared cognition that is characteristic of the community of inquiry. Many disciplines conceive of their own articulations as explanatory rather than argumentative, and therefore wholly unlike philosophy. On the other hand, there are those who, like Stephen Toulmin, would claim that all explanation is fundamentally argument and is designed to win the acceptance of the audience to which it is addressed. Be that as it may, disciplines other than philosophy generally begin with what is problematic and move along into what is controversial. So long as they contain differences of opinion, their proponents will engage in discussions that are terminological or conceptual or logical, just like philosophical discussions.

Philosophy—its actual *doing* rather than its learning—can serve as the model for getting elementary and secondary school students to engage in thinking. Philosophy meets all the requirements: children find the concepts it examines to be important, they are delighted to discover the power of logic as a discipline for their inquiries, and it helps them, as no other discipline can, with the intricacies of reasoning and judgment. Indeed, schoolchildren are not at all inclined to draw a line between thinking in everyday life and thinking philosophically; rather, they are inclined to recognize the profound affinity between those two modes of cognition. They are delighted to discover that the interactive verbal behavior they have all along been engaged in can be understood as discursive inquiry of a kind that links together the other disciplines rather than pushes them still further apart.

Education that is not conceived of as an inquiry response to a problematical situation cannot expect to have much student thinking to cultivate.

Philosophy and Judgment

But now it will be asked, "What is the connection between philosophy and judgment?" One cannot think of the relationship between deliberative inquiry and judgment as one thinks of the relationship between questions and answers. Judgment may well be a kind of settlement or a discrimination that makes a settlement possible. But, as Gilbert Ryle (1971) has said,

> A philosopher's genius lies not in his giving one new answer to one old question, but in his transforming all the questions. He gives mankind a different air to breathe. But the differences that he makes are as hard to describe as the differences made by growing up. The adolescent cannot realize what these changes will be like; the adult cannot recollect what they had been like. (160)

In Philosophy for Children, students are exposed to thousands and thousands of questions with virtually never an answer. Pretty soon they begin to realize that answers are not what is being sought. What is needed is that, confronted with such philosophical queries, one exercises judgment by weighing all the considerations, and if it is a compromise that is to be proposed, one formulates it in such a way that the disputants can preserve their integrity.

Cultivating Reasoning and Judgment: The Teacher's Role

Reasoning and judgment—these are ideally what the educational institutions of our ideal democracy should cultivate, for reasoning and judgment together add up to rea-

sonableness: to be able to reason and to be open to reason; to be able to make sound judgments and to be respectful of the judgments others have made. This is a tall order, and getting students to engage in distributed thinking is but one short stride along the way.

Citizens of a democracy need to acquire the ability to judge the advice of the expert with regard to information. This strongly suggests that, in the future, the formation of teachers should keep in the forefront the role of the teacher as a model of cognitive self-defense.

The community of deliberative inquiry—its formation and operation in the classroom—has been put forward as a method of teaching students to engage in shared cognition, and philosophy has been proposed as the optimum subject matter for the use of this method. As for the preparation of teachers, the same method should be used, and for the preparation of professors to train the teachers, once again, the same method should be used. If this symmetry is rejected, so that disjunctions are allowed to creep in as one seeks to transfer the method from generation to generation, the result will be to pass along to the students a procedure studded with unintelligibilities. It is a profound and ancient adage that reminds us that teachers should be taught to teach in the same manner as that in which we expect them to teach. To ask them to do what we cannot do is unreasonable; to ask students to do what their teachers cannot do is unrealistic and self-defeating.

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