Preparing teachers to 'teach' philosophy for children

Revised article

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Introduction: The training challenge

Like many others, I have resisted the idea that education, in general, is a form of training. We always talk about training *for something*, while an educated person is not educated for any one thing. But for this very reason, I do not wish to abandon the term 'teacher training' in favor of 'teacher education', although ideally I would prefer to speak of 'teacher preparation' (or even 'teacher formation') because the term 'training' always reminds me of monkeys. I shall use the terms 'training' and 'preparation' interchangeably, with both standing in contrast to 'education'. All persons deserve to be educated; there is nothing specific to teachers here.

Teacher training, whether general or specific to a subject or discipline, remains a contentious business. Some regard Pedagogy as a legitimate subject area (I used to teach a subject entitled *The art and science of effective teaching*) and structure training around it; others prefer to see teacher training firmly in the context of the various disciplines that teachers will, in turn, be teaching: mathematics, literature, history and, in this case, philosophy.[1] Indeed, when it comes to training teachers to teach philosophy, the problem is exacerbated by the plain fact that most teachers have no formal background in philosophy. So we are faced with the rather daunting prospect of providing such a background (teaching philosophy) as well as providing whatever is needed in order to teach philosophy to others (e.g. children). Matthew Lipman and Ann Margaret Sharp were well aware of this challenge when they set up the first training programs in Philosophy for Children (p4c) at Montclair State College (as it was then) in the early 1970s; hence the requirement that if classroom teachers were not actually qualified in philosophy (however that is interpreted!), at least those who trained them to do philosophy with children should be.[2] However, this idealistic model was always going to be difficult to apply. The problem, as it developed in countries around the world, was two-fold: teachers with little or no philosophical background were, increasingly, being trained by other educators who were in the same boat (hence the fear that however good the pedagogy, there would be little or no philosophy actually being done in classrooms); and conversely, when professional philosophers did become

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[1] Such different approaches are linked to the issue, noted above, of whether teacher preparation is a form of training or education.

[2] In this paper, I use the letters 'p4c', generically, to refer to all approaches to doing philosophy with children which are linked, whether structurally or just historically, to the work of the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children at Montclair.

involved in teacher training, it quickly became apparent that they (often) lacked any real training in pedagogy, and so were inadequate to the task of modeling the role of the teacher in the (pre-tertiary) classroom.

To look on the bright side, some constructive attempts have been made to resolve these shortcomings. The one with which I am most familiar (being one of those who instituted it) is the Australian model for what is termed 'Level Two training', that is, training those who will, in turn, train and work with classroom teachers. This model recognizes the complementary requirements of philosophical and pedagogic expertise, respectively, by awarding certificates of achievement based on whether those trained have come from the discipline of philosophy, the practice of teaching (children), or both. Ideally, then, training workshops for teachers would be directed by at least one person in the former category, and at least one in the latter.

Teacher training in Singapore

Building on these experiences, various models of training in philosophy for children have emerged, and while the dialogue concerning what constitutes 'best practice' remains robust (as it should, for it is a hallmark of philosophy that it reflects critically on its own practice), it is up to each state, country or society to adopt whichever one(s) fit their own system of schooling best or, alternatively, to come up with their own. From my limited understanding of the philosophical and pedagogical scenarios operational in Singapore, the following strategies should be considered:

- Encouraging local philosophers (and strong graduate students in philosophy), irrespective of whether their backgrounds are in western, eastern or other areas of philosophy, to become involved. Such involvement may consist in offering a few seminars in philosophy for the benefit of classroom teachers, or taking the time to familiarize themselves with schools and classrooms with a view to conducting philosophical conversations with children, or going 'all the way' and undergoing the kind of training that would better equip them to work with teachers (and/or children). In some way, and at some level, the links with the philosophical community need to be built up and maintained if, that is, there is a serious commitment to retaining the 'philosophy' in 'philosophy for/with children'.

- Encouraging teachers, at all levels (preschool, primary, secondary, junior college), to 'have a go' at doing philosophy with their students while simultaneously becoming aware of and involved in whatever local support groups (such as the Singapore Teachers Union or various state authorities might provide) are available.

- Where practicable, drawing upon the expertise in countries with a more established tradition in p4c, at both the teaching and philosophical levels. I am privileged to have been involved in various training workshops and seminars in Singapore since 1989, as well as the truly invigorating experience of conducting

philosophical conversations with students in a number of schools and colleges. It makes good sense for Singapore to join and take advantage of the international p4c community and its resources. As someone with a 'cosmopolitan' disposition, I see the merits of forging and fostering such international connections with, for example, the Federation of Australasian Philosophy in Schools Associations (FAPSA) and the International Council for Philosophical Inquiry with Children (ICPIC). Still, in so far as Singaporeans view themselves as preserving, or at least respecting, a distinctive Singaporean approach to teaching philosophy, the role of such external 'experts' should be seen as advisory; supporting not supplanting those aspects of the project which are distinctive (the writing of philosophical stories from an Asian perspective, for example).

These considerations notwithstanding, there are features of training in general, and training in p4c, in particular, that have emerged over, and stood the test of, time, and which should be taken into account in the Singaporean context. The first and most general of these is that good training programs operate on models (for there is more than one) of *reflective practice*. We teach or train others to do X by getting them to do X and then to reflect on their own practice, for without reflection, there is no guarantee that what is practiced will actually improve. It is thus with any practice that relies on a combination of skills and aptitude, but none more so than with good thinking. When it comes to working with those who would assist others to become better thinkers, there is simply no substitute for inviting them to work together to become better thinkers themselves. In the context of philosophy for children, this means engaging with those undertaking teacher training, in both doing philosophy together and (whether simultaneously or subsequently) reflecting on this very process together. Models of reflective practice are applicable in just about any field, but particularly in philosophy which is, itself, a reflective discipline.

A framework for thinking about teacher training: Three dimensions of classroom life

Let me be more specific about how a model of reflective practice might operate in the case of philosophy for children. In so doing, I will invoke a framework which characterizes both the environment of the classroom community of inquiry (CoI)—which is an essential ingredient of p4c—and the specific case of philosophical inquiry (recognizing that not all inquiry is labelled 'philosophical'; there is an argument for transforming science classrooms into communities of scientific inquiry, history classrooms into communities of historical inquiry, and so on). The framework in question proposes three connected ingredients or dimensions of what might be called classroom life. I will articulate these three dimensions and offer some guidelines as to how they might be put to good use in the context of teacher preparation.

D1: The first and, in some ways the most important, dimension is that of the classroom itself, as constituting a particular kind of environment, climate or culture. Any community of inquiry must be—or become—*a certain kind of place*—partly in physical

terms (for example, with participants seated in a circle to facilitate a more egalitarian interaction), but especially in normative and affective terms. The idea of *community* is crucial here: the members of a CoI trust and respect one another as persons, they share a sense of common purpose—namely, settling the inquiry at hand—and they work together to (try and) achieve that purpose. But working together as a collaborative community, while necessary, is not sufficient to achieve the kind of community we are concerned with here. Some communities may not be especially interested in the practice of good thinking (philosophical or otherwise), and some may actually oppose it. Take, for example, such extreme communities as cults or gangs. Demands of loyalty or unquestioning obedience, whether to the group leader or to the group itself, are inimical to the process of inquiry which must always be open to reflection and self-correction according to the criteria on which the members, themselves, agree. In countries such as the USA and Australia (I am less familiar with Singapore in this regard), the cost of belonging to, and being protected by, a gang or even a forceful peer group is to give up the right to protest, to challenge, to disagree or even to introduce a different perspective or viewpoint—a right which is a hall-mark of a genuine CoI. Granted, communities should be *safe* places for their members, but the kind of safety that characterizes a CoI is one which actually encourages risk taking within the community itself. For some, taking a risk might mean speaking up or asking a question; for others it could be having the courage to challenge the prevailing status quo or to modify one's strongly-held view (self-correct) in the face of a reasonable challenge. Here the teacher must take the lead in guaranteeing safety, in the sense of supporting, rather than criticizing students who, for example, come up with wrong answers or admit to a lack of understanding. This is particularly important in Confucian-based societies where the need to 'save face' may inhibit all but the most reckless students from 'standing out'. Much as gymnasts performing in high-wire acts are more likely to take chances if they know there is a safety net to catch them if they fall, students will quickly perceive if the classroom is a 'safe place' for them, and act accordingly.

D2: The second dimension of a CoI captures features which are both general to any CoI and specific to a community of philosophical inquiry. If the key phrase in D1 is 'safe environment', in D2 it could be 'dynamics conducive to *powerful thinking*'. Here I refer specifically to the forms of communication that members of the community use in relation to one another. 'Who does the talking/thinking/questioning?'; 'What kinds of talking/thinking/questioning take place?'; 'Do participants engage in the kinds of dialogue that reflects and promotes what I term *powerful thinking*?'; etc. But there is an important normative or prescriptive component here, which can be highlighted by returning to the situation in which students provide incorrect or incomplete answers. As important as it is for them to feel sufficiently safe to respond in the first place, and for the teacher to encourage and support them, it is equally important for the sake of the inquiry itself that errors and wrong answers be challenged. Safety in this respect is no excuse for intellectual complacency.

D3: The third dimension which, again, can be described both in more generic or more philosophically specific terms, deals with *content*, specifically, content that stimulates and accommodates powerful thinking. Which questions, topics, and themes form the subject of our inquiry and which its outcomes? What are the community's goals and achievements in terms of knowledge (truth-seeking) and understanding (meaning-making)? In a sense, this dimension focuses on the CoI's achievements as they might be appraised by those outside the community, who are more likely to be interested in what has been learned than in how it was achieved.

I propose these three dimensions as each necessary for the classroom to function as an inquiring community and, when taken together, as sufficient also. So, for example, we could not speak of a genuine CoI where teacher-student or student-student relationships were abusive or inappropriate, no matter how impressively those involved argued their point, or how valid the conclusions and judgments arrived at. The same would hold in the case of a caring and mutually respectful community environment which generates a high level of intellectual activity but makes no substantive progress. And again, where an appropriately nurturing environment supports real progress on the questions and topics under investigation, yet the processes undertaken along the way are superficial or strongly didactic (e.g. the teacher tells students the answers).

The three dimensions in practice

How do these three dimensions figure in a balanced approach to teacher preparation or professional development in p4c? It is to this question that I now turn.

When it comes to D1, the affective and social dimension of the CoI, it is clear that there can be only one way to proceed: we must take the time to construct our own (adult) community environment, in which the qualities of mutual care, trust, respect and empathy are modeled and exemplified in our own practice. In most professional development situations, some if not all the participants will be unfamiliar with one another (whether or not they are familiar with philosophy) and may never have been in an environment where others have sought and challenged their opinions, been prepared to ask for reasons, presented counter-opinions, etc. Accordingly, the trainer(s) or facilitator(s) needs to be sensitive to the kind of climate that is being established which, while safe and comfortable for her, may be far from safe for others. If one person is allowed to dominate, or another feels too unsafe to contribute, then the trainer must take responsibility, at least initially, for seeking to overcome these obstacles. I say 'initially' because one key test of good training is to see the effects, over time, in the behavior of the community. Through careful modeling, other members of the community will also become sensitive to the need to create a safe environment.

Even with D1, the reflective component is crucial. Indeed, this dimension should be among the topics for discussion by the community (in the sense of D3 above): how to cultivate it (both with children and other adults), what we mean by such structural

conceptions as 'safe place', 'risk taking', 'respect', 'empathy' and so on. To take just one example where issues of cultural sensitivity are especially important, in my early work with Chinese and other Asian teachers, it took me a while to realize that such procedures as openly challenging the teacher (who, in the case of children, is both older and a figure of authority), or even asking a challenging question, were often regarded as showing a lack of respect. It has not been my role to direct people to change their traditions or values in such situations, but I have often proceeded by asking the following question: 'Suppose you heard a view expressed that you did not agree with. Would you show more respect to the person by sitting there silently, pretending to agree (or, worse, convincing yourself that you must be the one who is wrong!), or by finding a way to raise your concern (with the utmost courtesy, of course)?' You might find it uncomfortable, at first, to have your opinions challenged (who would not?) but, over time, you might come to realize that it is actually more respectful to have someone who has listened carefully raise their concern. It shows that this person respects you sufficiently to feel that your views are worth engaging with.

Such concepts as *respect* and *empathy*, among many others (*dialogue, inquiry, truth, knowledge, meaning* …) are appropriate topics for a community of inquiry because, as with philosophical concepts generally, they are *common, contestable, central* and *connected*. I shall return to this idea of the '4Cs' later, but encouraging students to discuss them—in the sense of treating them as genuine subjects of inquiry—is especially important because it acknowledges both that the key structural concepts defining a CoI—as with any learning environment—should not be taken for granted; and that anyone capable of belonging to an inquiring community, at whatever age, has a right—perhaps a responsibility—to think seriously about the implications of so belonging.

Both in the regular classroom and in the professional development environment, it is important to monitor these aspects of community, with a view to reflecting on and improving our practice. We can, for example, ask ourselves if we are progressing in cultivating appropriate forms of respect, trust and care. And we should encourage those who feel that we could be doing better to say so.

D2 deals with the processes and dynamics of inquiry. The members of a CoI need to examine, 'from the inside' as it were, their own thinking and—thereby—the thinking of the community as a whole. Many writers, both within and outside the p4c community, have come up with their favored lists of thinking strategies, tools and skills. These are likely to include reasoning, probing questions, active listening, explaining, self-correcting, identifying assumptions, detecting inconsistencies and fallacies of reasoning, using analogies, imagining other possibilities, and so on. Of course we use these tools in our daily practice but now we are in the business of paying careful attention to them so that we may both improve our own practice and assist those in our charge to do so. A good teacher-trainer will take the time to ask (and encourage others to ask) questions, particularly those 'higher level' questions which are designed to make people think carefully about their own ideas and contributions: 'Why do you say that?', 'What does

that really mean?', 'Do you agree with her?', 'What follows from that?', 'Can someone put that in their own words?', 'Can you give an example/counter example?', 'Is that consistent with what she said?', and so on. Whether or not all the members of the community realize that such questions (or, as I prefer to say, such *questioning*, for I believe that it is the whole context in which such questions arise that constitutes the kind of open inquiry we are seeking to model) belong to an ancient tradition of (Socratic) inquiry is less important than making sure that everyone gets plenty of practice in asking and responding to them. Again, it is important to allow time to raise, as topics of inquiry in their own right, what we mean by good questioning, how such questions as those listed here function in the ongoing inquiry, and so on. A favorite topic of mine (on which I still do not feel totally clear), is how we should properly characterize the intuitive distinction between *closed* and *open* questions; another is whether the kinds of questions raised above are content-or context-neutral (i.e. purely procedural).

I have dwelt on questioning, because it is such a vital component in building and managing a CoI in any discipline (since any inquiry is a *quest* of some kind). But I would urge that due consideration be given to all the various ways in which we think and talk together. We focus on giving good reasons, but what constitutes good reasoning? What is the difference between reason and evidence? Does everything we believe or hold dear need to be justified or explained? We encourage children to use analogies to illuminate their thinking, but what exactly is an analogy and how do we judge its effectiveness as a strategy in the process of inquiry? We encourage children to 'stick to the point' but how do we reconcile this advice with another favored directive from such thinkers as CS Peirce and John Dewey, to 'follow the inquiry where it leads'? And how do we know if we are really inquiring, as opposed to just talking or sharing ideas? We see judgment formation as a key goal in any CoI, but what is a (good) judgment and what criteria do we need in order to make one?

In my own practice, I have encouraged both adults and children to become familiar with what I term 'the vocabulary of thinking', because such terms as 'reason', 'criteria', 'question', 'assumption', 'analogy', 'distinction', 'example', 'counter example', 'consistent', 'justification'—all of which are mentioned in the previous few paragraphs—serve as *sign-posts* for directing our thinking and helping us to improve it. And so, yet again, we see the value of insisting upon reflection as part of the practice of inquiry. When that inquiry is directed toward working out how to facilitate a classroom community of inquiry, such terms and concepts as those mentioned here should, themselves, be the focus for sustained discussion and deliberation. Notice that as with the key concepts underlying our understanding of D1, when we turn our attention to the meaning and significance of terms in our vocabulary of thinking, we are focusing on concepts, questions and topics that are very much part of the subject matter of our professional concern as educators. Anyone who insists that inquiry in general, and philosophical inquiry in particular, are mere processes, empty of content, has failed to grasp this point.

As a corollary, I note that here is one place where we can see the value of including philosophy as a specific area of the curriculum, with its own slot in the regular timetable. Notwithstanding the merits of seeing all disciplines and subject areas as structures of powerful thinking and inquiry, it is philosophy which invites questions about the meaning and significance of key concepts, and thus makes room for the kinds of reflective deliberation mentioned here. I am not saying that students in a science classroom should not take the time to reflect on the nature of scientific explanation, or the difference between a hypothesis and a theory, for example—far from it—but in so far as they do take that time, then the classroom is engaged in doing philosophy, as well as science.

The thinking which is characteristic of a CoI, both in classrooms with children, and in professional development environments with adults, is *complex thinking*, a term introduced by Matthew Lipman (2003), because it takes place at different levels of conceptual awareness. Mindful of such theories as Bloom's (1956) taxonomy of learning objectives, we engage in first order thinking whenever we think about something, no matter how mundane or ordinary. But as soon as we invite someone else to comment on, evaluate, or ask a question about what someone has said, we move to a higher level of thinking, because we are now asking that person to 'think about thinking'. In attempting to explain this point to my own students, I usually draw a graph that shows the 'ups and downs' of thinking. At 'ground' level, we think in (relatively) concrete terms about things that we have seen, heard or otherwise directly experienced. But at a higher (or deeper, if you prefer) level, we build on our ground level thinking by offering reasons, hypotheses, generalizations, connections to other ideas, and so on. Then we proceed to examine these components, and so the process of inquiry begins to build. Notice that it does not have to proceed in a linear way to ever-higher (deeper) levels; indeed, both children and adults inevitably find that they need to 'touch base with' the ground level of common experience (by offering a supportive example or anecdote, say) from time to time. On the other hand, there can be no genuine inquiry (as I see it) if students remain stuck at the level of the purely experiential and anecdotal. This is where our capacity for *conceptual thinking* becomes crucial, as I shall shortly explain.

Needless to say, focusing on imparting the skills and processes of good thinking tells only part of the story. Those who know how to ask good questions, to listen actively, to engage in reasoned discussion, etc. will not do so unless they are *moved* to do so. Being moved is a matter of *disposition* rather than skill (although these two dimensions are complementary: neither the skill in the absence of the disposition, nor the disposition in the absence of the skill will result in worthwhile action or behavior). And when we begin to think about dispositions, we see that the *attitudes* we hold and convey are just as important as the skills that we possess and implement. Members of a CoI need to be skilled at reasoning, to be sure, but they also need to be *open to being reasoned with*, that is, open- and fair-minded, intellectually curious, persistent, and so on. As I have previously noted, perhaps the biggest single hurdle blocking student engagement is not lack of skill, but lack of *caring*. Teachers, needless to say, are only too well aware of the

challenge of cultivating positive dispositions in their students. I will have something to say shortly about how a CoI works to promote and cultivate the kinds of dispositions that make good thinking and inquiry possible.

Everything I have said about the role of thinking in a CoI stands for nothing if we—specifically, teachers, but also other students—cannot have access to the thinking that goes on 'there'. There are many ways to convey our thoughts, and teachers devote considerable time and effort to teaching skills of literacy and communication. But in the CoI, it is *dialogue* which stands as the pre-eminent mode of communication and exchange. Dialogue represents *the community thinking out loud*; it comes as close as can be to revealing to others what we are thinking (and, often, feeling). But the relationship between thinking and dialogue is more intimate still, for we should not think of the latter as a mere by-product or echo of the former. We do need to ask one another 'What are you thinking about?' but we also need to appreciate that what we say to one another has a direct impact on what we think about. Dialogue not only reflects thought, it *produces* and *constructs* thought. Thinking is a wondrous phenomenon, albeit one made more and more accessible through the discoveries of neurology, cognitive science, etc. But thinking—or, at least, that species of thinking which can be called 'inquiry'—can also be understood as *internalized dialogue*, as the great Russian philosopher and psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1987) was at pains to emphasize. It is no doubt true that young children internalize a great deal through their everyday interactions with others, but it is the very essence of the community of inquiry that it be not only an environment for articulating our thoughts, but one in which we are *learning to structure our thinking through dialogue.*[3]

The relationship between 'thought' and 'talk' has been a focus of attention in recent analytic philosophy of language which has taken up anew the age-old challenge of explaining how shared knowledge of a public (objective) world is possible, given that each person's construction of knowledge seems to be essentially private (subjective). Prominent in this field is Donald Davidson who, for many years, focused on the relationships among those who seek to *interpret*—i.e. make sense of—both the linguistic utterances of their fellows and the world which they share. In broad schematic terms, this relationship is one of *triangulation*:

> … the basic triangle of two people and a common world is one of which we must be aware if we have any thoughts at all. If I can think, I know that there are others with minds like my own, and that we inhabit a public time and space filled with objects and events many of which are … known to others. In particular I, like every other rational creature, have three kinds of knowledge: knowledge of the objective

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[3]   Elsewhere I characterize dialogue as conversation (or other means of exchange) which:

- is driven by a desire to solve or understand that which is puzzling;
- is structured by its own internal logic, managed by participants, including critical reflection and self-correction, and following the dialogue where it leads;
- is appropriately egalitarian. (Splitter 2010)

world ... knowledge of the minds of others; and knowledge of the contents of my own mind. None of these three sorts of knowledge is reducible to either of the other two, or to any other two in combination. (Davidson 2001, pp. 86-87)

This epistemological model builds on ideas previously explored in great detail by Davidson, notably, that although ('subjective') belief is embedded in what constitutes knowledge of the ('objective') world, one cannot be a believer unless one has the concept of belief which, in turn, involves grasping the distinction between what is claimed to be true and what is actually true (i.e. the concept of *error*). Where, Davidson asks, 'do we get the idea that we may be mistaken, that things may not be as we think they are?' His response, crucial to my purpose here, is 'that we would not have the concept of getting things wrong or right if it were not for our interactions with other people' (Davidson 1999, pp. 12-13). Such interaction is, first and foremost, through *language*; we share our observations and beliefs about the world with others, and we note that from time to time, these do not correlate; therefore, one of us must be mistaken. I have discussed these ideas and their implications in greater detail elsewhere (Splitter 2011, 2014), so I will just highlight some key features here:

(i) Language and the associated ability to *interpret* and communicate thoughts are distinctive among the various properties that demarcate personhood, because language is an observable, measureable and naturally accountable phenomenon (unlike, say, self-consciousness) that applies to those creatures (in the most familiar case, human beings) whose brains are sufficiently large and complex;

(ii) I follow Davidson (and Socrates) in highlighting the importance of *speech* which, when located in a community of interpreters, becomes *dialogue*:

> Writing may portray, but cannot *constitute*, the inter-subjective exchanges in which meanings are created and firmed. Socrates was right: reading is [also] not enough. If we want to approach the harder wisdom we must *talk* and, of course, listen. (Davidson 1994, p. 432, emphasis added)

Davidson rejects any reductionist account of how thought and language are related (as part of his broader rejection of a semantic or linguistic materialism of the mind). But he strongly defends the idea that our capacity for thought is linked, inextricably, to our capacity for language in general, and speech in particular;

(iii) It may be that the side of the triangle representing the link between myself and others requires merely the existence of one other speaker with whom I can communicate (as Davidson sometimes suggests). But a more reliable base for knowledge involves a larger number of such speakers. In practice, we play off a range of assertions and beliefs as we work out which ones stand up to standards of reason, evidence, and justification. Such a range is provided within a cooperative *community* of thinkers, all of whom are inquiring after truth by way of determining, interpreting, and evaluating what is presented to them. Interestingly, while it is not clear that he intended to make the shift from a single interlocutor to a community, Davidson writes: 'A community of minds is the basis of knowledge;

it provides the measure of all things' (2001, p. 218). Here, I suggest, is a link, hitherto unremarked upon, between Davidson's holistic views on mind, language and the world, on the one hand, and a distinctive concept of *community* which has important implications for how we think about such key aspects of education as classroom organization and pedagogy, on the other;

(iv) When such a community is contextualized within the classroom—or any teaching and learning environment—and turns its attention to investigating aspects of the world in which its members live and with which they interact, it becomes a community of inquiry, in the sense I have been considering in this paper;

(v) While Davidson did not (as far as I know) apply his semantic theories to education, to take seriously the idea of triangulation is to realize that there is no contradiction between a 'traditional' view of education as a process of *learning about the world*, and a 'progressive' view of education as a form of *personal (and interpersonal) development*. Indeed, they merely reflect different *perspectives* on the same holistic enterprise of *being*—or better, *flourishing*—in the world. A well-functioning community of inquiry accommodates the growth and depth of knowledge among its members while acknowledging its own fallibility. This process of accommodation involves its members continually moving among their different modes of awareness as the latter expand over time: each student's growing self-awareness, awareness of the thoughts of others, and awareness of the external world mutually interact, not merely contingently, but as a matter of necessity. Here, after all, is the whole point of Davidson's triangulation model: the three modes of awareness are irreducibly linked to each other, with the upshot that the transformation of classrooms—as teaching and learning environments— into communities of inquiry offers a genuine and powerful alternative to both a more subject-centered approach and a more student-centered approach to teaching and learning;

(vi) The community of inquiry and the triangular network of awareness, taken together, represent a fundamental shift in the way we think about teaching and learning. To set knowledge up as something on the side of teachers and curriculum (in the heads of the former and embedded in the latter), needing to be transmitted to otherwise ignorant students, is to court a host of familiar pedagogic, epistemological and psychological difficulties. The shift to more constructivist models of teaching and learning has certainly been helpful here, but it has been dogged by residual concerns about how to reconcile the 'subjectivity' (or relativity) of students' perspectives with the 'objectivity' of genuine truth and knowledge (with such misleading expressions as 'Students must construct their own realities', etc.). What I am proposing, building on the ideas of Davidson and others, is that we *banish the subjective/objective dichotomy* from the domain of education altogether, thereby eliminating the need for reconciliation in the first place. Like the most knowledgeable adult, the youngest child (certainly by the time she is in school) has a perspective on the world; she sees it through the lens

of her own understandings, beliefs, values and attitudes. These are the ingredients which will allow her to develop more fully as a person, becoming more aware of and knowledgeable about those around her and the world itself. In coming to see herself as *one among others*, she will both realize (cognitively) and appreciate (affectively) that her own way of seeing things is (i) valuable in its own right as one possible source of truth, knowledge and wisdom, and (ii) open to refinement by being exposed to the views of others (which includes learning which others are to be relied upon).

I have deliberately placed this brief analysis of Davidson's triangulation model under the heading 'D2: The processes and dynamics of inquiry'. The model, which links awareness of self, of others (i.e. others who, like me, are self-aware) and of a common world in a non-reducible network designed to shed light on how it is possible to think and communicate about (our experience of) the world, puts a new slant on the familiar idea that each person must construct knowledge for her/himself—but note, not *by* her/himself. Reflecting on the kinds of moves made in a dialogue (certainly a philosophical dialogue), we observe participants moving, with increasing skill and confidence (albeit also with a sense of intellectual humility) among these three modes of awareness. Those who may be very much 'in touch' with their own ideas and thoughts (self-awareness) come to understand the importance of finding out what others think (in relation to the subject matter in question), while those who may have learned to suppress or devalue what they themselves think, in order to accept, uncritically, what they are taught, come to appreciate the value—to themselves and to the broader community—of their own ideas and perspectives in the process of coming to know.

I come now to the third dimension of inquiry, D3, characterized above as the focus on content. It is a common-place that thinking—in whatever form it is elaborated (the list above provided a sample list of thinking strategies)—cannot be merely procedural. When I reason, infer, predict, hypothesize, explain, doubt, reject, and so on, there must be *something* about which I reason, infer, predict, and so on. It is true that the objects of thought may not be—perhaps cannot be—those things in the world to which ordinary grammar so misleadingly points (a truth illustrated by the fact that when I think of a nine-headed dragon, there is no nine-headed dragon of which I am thinking); still, a content-less or empty thought is no thought at all.[4] Moreover, even our most inward-directed thoughts are thoughts of or about something.

The reliance of our thinking on some kind of content is even clearer when we consider the thinking that involves two or more participants, typically through dialogue. As I noted earlier, what gives dialogue its impetus is the presumption of something which is

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[4]   This may not be true for *feelings*: I might feel afraid or hopeful without there being any thing that I fear or feel hopeful about, although as soon as I transform the feeling into a thought—a feeling of hopefulness into hoping, for example—the need for some kind of content seems to arise. I cannot hope without hoping for *something*.

puzzling or unknown, and of which we share some common experience or understanding. That *something*, whatever its ultimate status, belongs to the world of our shared or common experience.

This discussion reminds us that some kind of content is inevitably involved when we think. But what of the converse relationship? Of course, we may posit the existence of things in the world without committing ourselves, in Berkeleyan fashion, to the existence of a perceiver of those things, but consider what is involved in a typical classroom context when students are confronted with new or unfamiliar content which they are required to learn. How does this content impinge on the three modes of awareness which make up the triangulation model? The answer to this question depends largely on how effectively the pedagogy being used integrates and ultimately assimilates the content into the existing cognitive structures and belief systems students bring to the classroom. This is a familiar (if politically divisive) notion, reflecting a perspective according to which learners construct knowledge—and, I would add, understanding or meaning—only out of ingredients which they already possess in some sense. Along similar lines, such notable writers as AN Whitehead (1929), John Dewey (1916) and contemporary philosopher Richard Paul (2012) have warned of the dangers of presenting to students (of any age) predetermined content as the outcome of (previous) inquiry or thought, and expecting them simply to 'learn' it. There are several errors in such thinking, including the idea that content can be taught independently of the thinking and inquiry processes with which it is intertwined, and the idea that new content can be 'imposed' on students without taking any account of the beliefs (knowledge claims), values and attitudes that they bring to any new learning situation.[5]

In this paper, I will not delve any further into the vexed question of how 'new' content may be taught in ways which are consistent with the epistemological model being proposed here.[6] Such a question cannot be ignored when considering the prospects for

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[5] Seixas, reinforcing similar comments from Dewey's (1956) *The child and the curriculum*, points out that if we remove the products of scholarly inquiry from the inquiry-based contexts which produce them, and then attempt to 'teach' the former to children, we turn 'living science' into 'non-science, flat and commonplace residua of what was gaining scientific vitality a generation or two ago—degenerate reminiscence' (Seixas 1993, p. 313). Philosopher Richard Paul, acknowledging similar comments from both Dewey and AN Whitehead, has also criticized the idea that knowledge can be *presented* to students without engaging them in the process of constructing it. Such 'knowledge' is *inert* or lifeless because, while it may well be distilled from the great traditions of our culture and society, it is not seen by students to be connected to what they deem to be of value and significance to them (Paul 1993).

[6] I say 'vexed' because of a familiar but difficult dilemma facing teachers, especially in the traditional subject areas that make up the school syllabus in most countries. On the one hand, as noted above, there is the prospect of presenting predetermined 'second-hand' content to students who feel no real connection to it. But on the other hand, if we take seriously the Pragmatist imperative to 'follow the inquiry where it leads', in the context of schools and students, rather than the more idealized one of discipline-based inquiry undertaken by experts in the field, there is no guarantee that the outcomes of a student-led inquiry will match those that are regarded as *objectively* correct, when judged by the standards of those leading experts and scholars just referred to. This concern has been raised by a number of commentators (e.g. Seixas 1993; Gregory 2002; Splitter & Sharp 1995); their proposed solution puts the spotlight on the *teacher* to find ways to bridge the gap between student levels of knowledge and understanding, and those which constitute scholarly expertise in the respective disciplines.

transforming classrooms into communities of inquiry across the disciplines and subjects being studied; but in the particular case of philosophy, matters are, ironically (given the common perception of philosophy as remote and irrelevant), more straightforward, because of the nature of the *content* of philosophy. Philosophy does not deal in facts, information or empirical data (although it may well be informed by such material), so the very idea of getting things right or wrong (as determined by 'the experts') is questionable. The proper currency of philosophy (as I see it) is the realm of *concepts* (or ideas, but without the subjective baggage normally associated with mental objects), and here the normative ideal of *meaning* or *understanding* is as important as truth or knowledge. Not that the search for truth—as answers to our questions—is absent in philosophy; rather, we cannot appeal to any external standard of *right* or *wrong* when appraising a philosophical dialogue or argument, although we may well ask whether or not it *makes good sense*. It is this higher-order feature of philosophy which renders it so appropriate among both mature and immature thinkers; the latter—or, rather, their teachers—are not constrained by the prior determinations of the former.

In fact, the challenge of identifying philosophical subject matter that is both interesting and intriguing to children is not difficult, at least in principle. The key here is to locate those items which best encapsulate or represent the great themes, topics and questions of philosophy. These items are, to repeat, *concepts or conceptually focused*. Among other functions, concepts help us to organize, connect and categorize our thoughts, ideas and experiences. With one key proviso, children from a young age, as well as adults, make use of concepts in their thinking and can be encouraged to think about and reflect on their importance in their lives. Furthermore—and this is one of Matthew Lipman's (2003) greatest insights—those powerful and venerable concepts which make up so much of the content of philosophy (truth, beauty, wisdom, reality, goodness ...), are well within the limits of what children can deal with. The proviso, which is very much part of the training agenda for philosophy in schools, is to ensure that the concepts which are presented to children (or, rather, which are brought to their attention, since most children are well aware of them, if only implicitly or vaguely) are made *accessible* to them. Children can relate to questions about the meaning and value of fairness versus justice, of truth versus falsehood, of reality versus fantasy, etc. as long as the concepts underpinning these questions are reflected in accessible contexts and situations. It is for this reason that Lipman (2003) fostered the tradition of writing philosophical stories for children, in which not only is there a wealth of philosophical concepts and questions embedded on every page, but recurring examples of (fictional) children engaging in dialogue, reflection and other classic philosophical activities.

In my experience, and at the risk of sounding somewhat condescending (which is not my intention), one area in which education generally, and teacher education and training in particular, have been sorely lacking, is the domain of concepts and conceptually-based thinking. While some are comfortable with generating and responding to conceptually-focused questions, many are not. Take, for example, the

familiar dichotomy between 'fact' and 'opinion', which encourages the belief that if something cannot be proven empirically or quantitatively, then it falls in the realm of subjective opinion. But this dichotomy leaves out what is arguably the most important dimension of thinking: between fact and opinion, there lies the domain of *concepts* and forms of thinking that include inquiry, reasoning and judgment formation. Giving explicit attention to the philosophical dimensions of thinking is one response to this shortcoming, because *philosophy can be characterized as reflective inquiry into key concepts or ideas, that is, concepts and ideas that matter*. For this reason, it is crucial that teacher preparation in philosophy devotes considerable time to becoming familiar with concepts, and with how we can best think about, discuss and work with them.

I have found it convenient to pinpoint what is most important about concepts, in the context of building a community of inquiry, by way of the following four dimensions, which I term 'the 4Cs'. As a general rule, the concepts that provide the content for philosophy are:

- *Common*, in two senses. First, they are, by and large, familiar and in common usage. Secondly, these concepts are common in that there has to be a shared, if superficial, consensus as to what they mean. Without such a common base of understanding, we cannot even begin to think about them together.

- *Contestable*, in that there is no real consensus as to what they mean. To an extent, then, we are free to interpret them as we wish; however, there is an expectation that as members of a CoI, we will think carefully about them and be prepared to discuss them with others (who may have different ideas about them). A key objective in teacher professional development is to problematize key concepts that are of concern to teachers (many of which have been mentioned in this paper), in order both to stimulate their own thinking and inquiry, and to provide a model of inquiry-based teaching which might be used in their teaching.

- *Central*, in that their meanings matter to those who use them. Children are naturally interested in questions about what makes something real, or good, or true, and while it is true that people can go through life with little or no awareness of the role that concepts play in the way they conduct themselves, perceive the world, relate to others, and so on, their lives are likely to be more impoverished as a result ('not worth living', as a famous Greek philosopher once mused). In the context of teacher training, it is surely part of being a professional teacher that we reflect upon the key concepts and ideas of our profession.

- *Connected*, in the sense of being connected, in some way, to our experiences. Concepts themselves are abstract but, in order to be understood—and this applies to adults as much as children—concepts need to be grounded in what we can see, hear, touch, etc.

In practical terms, the more abstract the concepts we are examining, the more careful we need to be to ensure that our students are able to move between lower and higher

levels of conceptual thought. To give one example, children love to talk about what's real and what's not, but I would not walk into a classroom and ask them, from scratch as it were, 'So, what is real?' Instead, I might make use of one of the narratives in philosophy for children, where this concept is embedded in questions and scenarios that are grounded in children's experience. One character declares that her thoughts are not real ('I can pat my dog but I cannot pat the thought of my dog'), and another responds by pointing out that 'They are real thoughts'. A classic exercise in the philosophy for children teacher resource set asks children to distinguish among four categories: things that seem to be real and are real, things that do not seem to be real but are real, things that seem to be real but are not real, and things which neither seem to be nor are real. But here too the approach is to select for consideration, from the realm of children's everyday experience, such items as monopoly money, a pressed flower, a fluffy toy, my love for my parents, the memories of my summer vacation, my imaginary friend, and so on.[7] It may be that in the course of inquiring into such questions and problems, students begin to work out for themselves (albeit not without effort and the likelihood of ongoing disagreement and uncertainty), what they think 'real' means.

A note on the role of the teacher

It is timely to clarify the role of the teacher in a community of inquiry generally, and in the philosophy classroom in particular. In fact, I see two complementary roles: to *encourage* students to engage substantively in the dialogue by seeking their views, reasons, questions and judgments, *and* to *empower* them to engage in the dialogue by teaching them how to make the very interventions that *he has been making on their behalf*, as it were. Empowerment, in this context, comes through a process of internalization: just as the dialogue is internalized as dialogical thinking over time, so too the procedural moves which structure the dialogue are internalized. After all, this is the reason why the teacher strives to serve as a *model* of the inquiry process.

The crucial, albeit obvious variable here is *time* itself. There is no conflict between seeing the teacher as both a model of the inquiry process *and* as a co-inquirer (who may contribute substantively from time to time), because one leads to, and enables, the other. Where the emphasis lies depends upon where in the process of becoming a mature community of inquiry the classroom is at any given time. And that is a matter of judgment on the part of both teacher and students.

I have noted that one key indicator of a successful and maturing community is the internalization of procedures by members of the community. This gives substance to

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7   These and many other examples and exercises are found in the philosophy for children curriculum written by Lipman and Sharp (1980; Lipman & Sharp 1984, 1986) and published by the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children at Montclair State University in New Jersey. I would encourage philosophy teachers to familiarize themselves with these exemplary materials, even if they subsequently prefer to use alternative or more culturally-attuned resources in their classrooms.

the idea of teaching students to *think for themselves*. We see evidence of internalization in the emerging dialogue, in so far as it is increasingly democratic, more focused and less teacher-centered (changing from 'T-S-T-S-T-S-T...', to 'T-S-S-S-S-T-S-S-S-S-T-S...'). It also becomes more meta-cognitive and reflective, as students realize that they are ultimately responsible, not just for *what* they think, but also for *how well* they think about it.

Concluding comment: Passion and humility

My reference to uncertainty calls to mind a crucial aspect of philosophy and, indeed, inquiry generally. Notwithstanding our desire to find answers to the questions that come up in the course of our deliberations (why would we want to ask them if we did not desire to find answers for them?), we should resist the temptation to stamp the imprimatur of absolute certainty on our findings. All too often, the conviction of certainty reflects and encourages dispositions which are inimical to inquiry—specifically, closed-mindedness, dogmatism and intolerance of difference. Let me be clear on this point. I am not advocating that we or our students adopt a kind of artificial neutrality or indifference to matters of importance. Indeed, if there is anything more alarming than the person who declares that he could not possibly be wrong about what he believes or values, it is the person who does not care enough to believe or value anything. No, we should encourage our students and one another to be *passionate about thinking*, and to care about the difference between right and wrong, sense and nonsense, etc. Still, as inquirers—even more so as teachers of inquiry—we should always allow room for that small voice that whispers to us, even in the face of our strongest convictions, 'Yes, but I might be mistaken'.

In practice, most people know how to juggle these complementary feelings of passion and humility, but in a world in which short sound-bites, and 'tweets' predominate, we need to work hard to remind ourselves and our students that most issues of importance are complex and difficult to solve, and that today's convictions and solutions have yet to be tested by tomorrow's challenges. After all, nobody said that good thinking should be easy.

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