

Dewey, Lipman & The Tradition Of Reflective Education

Dewey, Lipman and the Tradition of Reflective Education

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There is a passage near the beginning of Matthew Lipman's *Philosophy Goes to School*¹ that encapsulates the influence of John Dewey upon his work. While relishing the groundbreaking advent of philosophy in elementary schools, Lipman reminds us that it belongs to a tradition—the tradition of 'reflective education'. Socrates, most famously, stands at the beginning of this tradition, while Lipman names Montaigne and Locke as major figures along the way. In the more immediate past, however, it was Dewey who carried the torch for reflective education:

For surely it was Dewey who, in modern times, foresaw that education had to be defined as the fostering of thinking rather than as the transmission of knowledge; that there could be no difference in the method by which teachers were taught and the method by which they would be expected to teach; that the logic of a discipline must not be confused with the sequence of discoveries that would constitute its understanding; that student reflection is best stimulated by living experience, rather than by a formally organized, desiccated text; that reasoning is sharpened and perfected by disciplined discussion as by nothing else and that reasoning skills are essential for successful reading and writing; and that the alternative to indoctrinating students with values is to help them reflect effectively on the values that are constantly being urged on them.²

I will explore the influence of Dewey upon Lipman by elaborating on these remarks. I will show that Lipman's project is an important and direct extension of Dewey's conception of reflective education and marks a point of departure for reflective education in schools today. Lipman not only continues Dewey's work, but in turn points the way toward the possibility of further reconstruction in school education. Through these continuities and prospective developments—by seeing Lipman as working within an evolving tradition—the deeper significance of his work is revealed.

In accord with the passage from Lipman, the topics for discussion will be: (1) the development of thinking as central to school education; (2) inquiry as the method of learning to think, that both teachers and students need to acquire; (3) the crucial importance of distinguishing between the logical and the pedagogical layout of a discipline; (4) the vitality of “living experience” in the process of learning; (5) the central role of disciplined discussion in learning to think; and (6) the need for reflection upon values in school education.

1. The centrality of thinking

Dewey says that fostering good habits of thinking in school is not just a matter of some importance, as everyone will agree, but that “all which the school can or need do for pupils, so far as their minds are concerned . . . is to develop their ability to think.”³ This is a radical claim. Dewey implies that to separate such things as the acquisition of information and the teaching of intellectual skills from the process of thinking undercuts intelligent learning. He tells us that when shorn of its connection with thinking a skill is “not connected with any sense of the purposes for which it is to be used” and “leaves a man at the mercy of his routine habits and of the authoritative control of others”. Again, he insists that “information severed from thoughtful action is dead, a mind-crushing load” and “a most powerful obstacle to further growth in the grace of intelligence”. In contrast, says Dewey: “Thinking is the method of intelligent learning, of learning that employs and rewards mind.”⁴ Through it we rise above the routine and learn to handle information with intelligence. We establish conditions that promote “further growth in the grace of intelligence”. Without being connected to thinking, the traditional attempt to impart information and to teach skills does not utilize the student’s intelligence, and often works against it.

What is this “method of intelligent learning” that Dewey equates with thinking? First of all, by ‘thought’ or ‘thinking’ in its educational sense, Dewey means reflective thought as an *“active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends”*.⁵ This involves such things as considering the grounds of our beliefs, scouting out their consequences, examining our assumptions, exploring the connections between things, scrutinizing the evidence, working out the implications of various hypotheses, testing them against what we know, and reaching reasoned conclusions. In short, such thinking involves the procedures of inquiry. While different kinds of inquiries may have different guiding ideals, may appeal to different standards and employ different specialized procedures, they are all exercises in

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Dewey wrote extensively about this method, both in easily accessible and more elaborate terms.⁶ In short form, we can say that inquiry is a regulated pattern of activity that has the following features: (1) It begins in a questionable or indeterminate situation. The situation may be in some way uncertain, unclear, or doubtful. There may be obviously conflicting possibilities, troublesome symptoms, unanticipated consequences, and the like. These are such things as may call our understanding or beliefs into question. (2) We judge that the situation is problematic. That is to say, for inquiry to begin it is not enough for the situation actually to be problematic. We must see it as such. A situation may be judged to be problematic in terms of our beliefs, as was said above, or in terms of our expectations and desires. For reasons unknown, things may not have gone as we wanted them to, the ends that we were striving for may have unexpectedly eluded us, or we may simply find ourselves in circumstances that we consider undesirable. (3) We attempt to articulate the problem and formulate questions that need to be addressed in the resolution of it, such as together with an understanding of the ends-in-view will help to shape and give direction to our thought. Such formulations establish our agenda. Indeed, by seeing the nature of the problem or by raising pertinent questions, we have already moved some way toward a resolution. Contrariwise, of course, if we have formulated the problem badly, or asked inappropriate questions, then we have taken a step in the wrong direction, and at least temporarily set back the course of our inquiry. (4) We search for relevant details or information that must be taken into account in trying to resolve the situation. These are "the facts of the case," the conditions that any adequate resolution must take into account. (5) We cast around for suggestions or ideas—possible solutions, remedies, explanations

or hypotheses—that might lead to a resolution. Typically, there will be alternative candidates, different possibilities, rival hypotheses, or competing points of view to be considered. (6) We evaluate these suggestions in light of the facts of the case and against whatever criteria we use to measure the adequacy of the resolutions they supply. Testing and evaluation can be a matter of some complexity. Among other things, it may involve exploring the implications of various possibilities, addressing assumptions, examining criteria, searching for counterexamples, reassessing the facts, and making needful distinctions and connections of all kinds. (7) Having completed the process of testing and evaluation, we adopt a suggestion and act accordingly. This may mean executing a plan of action, implementing a set of recommendations, employing a new working hypothesis, adopting a different conception, or any number of other things, depending upon the nature of the problem that we addressed. (8) Finally, insofar as we are able to carry our inquiry to a satisfactory conclusion, the situation with which we began is resolved or transformed. As Dewey puts it, we will have converted a situation in which the constituents “do not hang together” into one that is a “unified whole”.⁷

Needless to say, the above is a description of a process that is less tidy in actuality than as presented. There are likely to be false starts, missteps, backtrackings, premature closures, and barriers of all sorts—not to mention inquiries within inquiries, inquiries that are overtaken by the press of circumstance, ones that get bogged down or run out of steam. Yet while the picture presented is obviously idealized, it does capture the general features of inquiries of all sorts. From an educational point of view, those who become adept at inquiry will have learnt to think in ways that apply to all sorts of circumstances, wherever a developed capacity for reflective thinking is required. Furthermore, they will have learnt what Dewey says they should have learnt from their school education.

When we turn to Lipman, we find that the topic of thinking is everywhere. From his theoretical treatment in *Thinking in Education*⁸ to the preponderant activity of the children in his novels, we find a career devoted to thinking about thinking and to the development of ways and means to encourage the teaching of it. And what could make clearer the connection that Lipman sees between thinking and inquiry than the idea that he uses to capture the practice through which it is to be taught—the idea of a classroom as a *community of inquiry*? Setting aside the many respects in which both Lipman and Dewey stress the importance of community, Lipman’s classroom community is one in which children are engaged together in various aspects of the inquiry process that we have reviewed.

Just to highlight a few points: The pages of Lipman's novels are provocations. They are designed to help create the kind of indeterminate situation that Dewey identifies as the starting point for inquiry. They are meant to provoke students to ask questions that they want to inquire into. The teacher helps the students to organize their questions into an agenda for discussion, and then assists them to conduct discussion in which we find orchestrated the whole panoply of moves in thinking that we touched upon. Students draw upon their own experience and background knowledge. They make suggestions and test them out with their peers. They explore alternative possibilities and differences in one another's point of view. They think about the implications of what is said. They make distinctions, draw connections, search for counterexamples, and appeal to criteria. In short, they make—or rather learn to make—all the kinds of moves that characterize inquiry.

Lipman provides us with a model of education. It is education that centres on the development of students' capacities to think reflectively—which is precisely what Dewey advocated when he said this is all that the school can or need do for pupils so far as their minds are concerned. Of course, Lipman's work is novel because it uses *philosophy* as its vehicle, and this is certainly not something that comes from Dewey. It is Lipman's own wonderful insight. To have seen this possibility and to have had the courage and ability to bring it to fruition in the way that he did is the genius of the man. It is useful to see Lipman as expanding the horizons of reflective education by taking up from where Dewey left off. It helps us to see Lipman's efforts as part of a larger work in progress. I am speaking here, of course, about the possibilities and prospects of further extensions of reflective education in our schools.

Unsurprisingly, Lipman himself makes some suggestions that are helpful in thinking about how such a development might proceed. They come from his view that philosophy is the discipline that prepares us to think in the other disciplines. Lipman says that philosophy deals with essentially contestable concepts—concepts that lie at the heart of any discipline when it is presented as a living thing rather than simply as a body of established knowledge or what Dewey refers to as the “mind-crushing load”. This suggests that one way of animating the disciplines with the spirit of inquiry is by attention to the philosophically problematic within them:

Philosophy is attracted by the problematic and the controversial, by the conceptual difficulties that lurk in the cracks and interstices of our conceptual

schemes . . . The significance of this quest for the problematic is that it generates thinking. And so when we encounter those prefixes, “*philosophy* of science,” “*philosophy* of history,” and so on, we are grappling with the problematic aspects of those disciplines. For insofar as academic disciplines take themselves to be non-problematic, the instructional approach they favor is that their students must learn what they are taught, whereas the more problematic the image these disciplines have of themselves, the more they will favor an instructional approach of joint, shared inquiry by teachers and students alike. . . It is when a discipline conceives of its integrity to lie in ridding itself of its epistemological, metaphysical, aesthetic, ethical and logical considerations [the philosophical, in short] that it succeeds in becoming merely a body of alienated knowledge and procedures.⁹

One way of reading the implications of this suggestion is to look at Lipman’s novels and manuals for schools as something of a pilot program. Their extension would then involve systematic attention to the theoretically and conceptually “problematic” in the design of school curricula and to the establishment of inquiry processes in the mode of delivery.

I do not have space to consider what such revised curricula and teaching practices would look like, but I would like to mention one attempt to place thinking at the heart of a rearranged curriculum with which I have been associated. Education Queensland is a state education authority in Australia that has been implementing what it calls a New Basics Project, initially involving a spread of some 38 schools across the state over a four-year trial. The curriculum has been reorganized into four clusters of practices rather than the traditional divisions of subject matter. These practices are those judged to be most needed in the life circumstances of the students. They are grouped around: (1) so-called life pathways and social futures that have to do with who the students are and where they are going; (2) the many forms of literacy and communication through which they can make sense of their world; (3) those practices through which they can help to build and sustain active citizenship; and (4) practices that can help them to analyze and shape their world through science and technology.¹⁰

The reorganized curriculum is designed to go hand-in-hand with new assessment practices and classroom pedagogies. The recommended pedagogies have many points of contact with Lipman’s idea of the classroom as a Community of Inquiry. Let us take just one cluster of what are called “productive pedagogies” in New Basics, those having to do with intellectual quality. These include: (1) the development of substantive conversation and

sustained dialogue in the classroom; (2) attention to higher-order thinking and critical analysis; (3) placing stress on a deeper knowledge of subject matter and (4) a deeper understanding of concepts and ideas; (5) treating knowledge and its construction as inherently problematic; and (6) the appropriate use of metalanguage.

The Community of Inquiry involves these practices. It clearly involves substantive conversation. One reason for this is simply that higher-order thinking is going on within it. Another is that it addresses matters of intellectual substance, such as open intellectual questions, significant social and theoretical issues, and big ideas. Yet another reason is that the conversation takes the form of an inquiry, which by its very nature treats knowledge and understanding as problematic, as something that we are searching after, puzzling over and raising questions about. It also involves students in learning to use the language of inquiry—such as ‘reason’, ‘explanation’, ‘distinction’, ‘example’, ‘inference’, ‘assumption’, ‘hypothesis’, ‘criterion’ and ‘counterexample’—to signal the intellectual moves that they make as they speak and interact with each other. This signaling is metalinguistic. It is the language by which we mark out or make explicit those moves that characterize inquiry. Finally, discussions of this kind are the means par excellence of producing deeper knowledge and understanding. They are the proximate means in relation to the matters under discussion, but they are also distal means in regard to matters generally. This is because in the long run these discussions develop the traits that characterize people who acquire deep knowledge and understanding in any field: inquisitiveness, intellectual adventurousness, open-mindedness and intellectual persistence, together with precision of thought and soundness of reasoning and judgment.

The Community of Inquiry fits right into the framework provided by New Basics’ Productive Pedagogies. For me, the most exciting aspect of the project has been that this framework takes the kinds of practices that are central to the Community of Inquiry as applicable to the classroom quite generally. It is in this respect a framework within which the tradition of Dewey and Lipman can be extended. It is the kind of development that is needed if reflective education is to flourish in our schools.

2. Inquiry as method

For Dewey, method is not something to be considered in abstraction from subject matter. “Method means that arrangement of subject matter which makes it most effective in use.”¹¹ In other words, method in teaching “exists

only as a way-of-dealing-with-material” which results in its effective use. Among the ills of separating out method as something to be taught to teachers independently of subject matter is that of reducing method to “a cut and dried routine”:

Instead of being encouraged to attack their topics directly, experimenting with methods that seem promising and learning to discriminate by the consequences that accrue, it is assumed that there is one fixed method to be followed. . . Nothing has brought pedagogical theory into greater disrepute than the belief that it is identified with handing out to teachers recipes and models to be followed in teaching.¹²

This does not imply that teachers should be thrown back upon their own resources to simply learn on the job. It means rather that our cumulative wisdom about methods of teaching subject matter should be employed experimentally and not treated as equipping the teacher with a set of rules to be unthinkingly applied. Moreover, what Dewey says here is meant to be consistent with the fact that he advocates an underlying general method, albeit not one that should be treated as a cut-and-dried formula. This is the method of inquiry, seen as a generalization of the means by which historically we have come by knowledge and understanding of our world. For Dewey, then, the fundamentals of teaching method are just the ways of inquiry as applied to the subject matter of the classroom.

Lipman tells us that, according to Dewey, “there could be no difference in the method by which teachers were taught and the method by which they would be expected to teach”. I understand this as a reference to inquiry as the method that teachers will need to have internalized if they are to teach their students to think. I am reminded here of the workshops for teacher-educators in Philosophy for Children that Lipman and his colleagues have held for many years in Mendham, New Jersey. There the participants spend most of their time working with Lipman’s materials in roughly the form in which teachers might be expected to work with them in the classroom. Having assisted in these workshops on many occasions, it is clear to me that the participants were learning to work philosophically in ways that generally accord with Dewey’s paradigm of inquiry. Occasionally participants began with the idea that there was indeed a simple formula that they could follow when it came to their turn to lead a philosophical discussion. Once the discussion was under way, however, it quickly became apparent that the recipe they had in mind did not fit the way that the session unfolded, and they were left, in the words of Socrates, to try to help their fellow participants to follow the inquiry where it

leads. That is to say, they found themselves involved in a live inquiry into whatever question or issue was under discussion and that, except in very general terms, the steps in conducting this inquiry could not be laid out in advance. There was no recipe, but only the business of thinking reflectively together about the subject matter, exercising judgment all along the way about what seemed to be the appropriate moves in proceeding productively.

It is essential for teachers to become familiar with an inquiry-based approach to the subject matters that they teach if they are going to promote thinking in the classroom. Given this, the general lack of such an approach in the formation of teachers provides a great hurdle standing in the way of reflective education. This must change. Experience has shown that the success rate in converting classrooms into communities of inquiry is quite low when established teachers are introduced to such ideas by way of a professional development day or through in-service courses of a few days' duration. That is only to be expected. Unless state education systems are prepared to devote more resources to the professional development of teachers in service, the future of reflective education very much depends upon some serious reconstruction of pre-service training.

Not to be too pessimistic, other efforts may also bear fruit. For example, I am presently involved in the development of an online course in philosophy in schools. While I was initially skeptical of the idea, it soon revealed its strengths. It provides a flexible mode of delivery for the busy classroom teacher and it makes professional development more readily available to teachers in remote locations. The program is interactive and allows teachers to establish networks of shared experience. All sorts of relevant background resources are instantly available through the web. Extensive footage from the classroom is made available on demand, and so on. None of this is a substitute for face-to-face experience, but, in combination with other efforts, it certainly looks to be one way forward.

3. From the logical to the pedagogical

One can identify method with the treatment of subject matter and still produce widely varied schemes of instruction. One way of proceeding is to lay out a subject of study in what we may call its logical form. This involves treating a subject as a body of organized knowledge, analyzing it into its components, and setting them out in a conceptually or logically ordered sequence. Dewey conveys the idea with the example of geography:

Suppose the subject is geography. The first thing is to give its definition, marking it off from every other subject. Then the various abstract terms upon which depends the scientific development of the science are stated and defined one by one—pole, equator, ecliptic, zone—from the simpler units to the more complex that are formed out of them; then the more concrete elements are taken in similar series: continent, island, coast, promontory, cape, isthmus, peninsula, ocean, lake, gulf, bay, and so on.¹³

It may be that no one would be tempted to teach geography in precisely this way, but the presentation of subjects, areas or disciplines as established bodies of knowledge that have a settled logical order to be systematically imparted to the learner is surely a commonplace. So the question is why we are given to thinking that such a logical sequence should be the basis of the sequence of instruction. Dewey sees it as stemming from the assumption that logical form must be impressed upon the mind of the learner from without. Logical form is thus embedded in the layout of subject matter and by acquiring it in this fashion “the mind is supposed not only to gain important information, but, by accommodating itself to ready-made logical definitions, generalizations, and classifications, gradually to acquire logical habits.”¹⁴

This assumption, says Dewey, overlooks the fact that the logical form of a discipline is the historical outcome of thinking in the discipline. That is to say, it is a successively shaped result of the development of certain ways of thinking. Educationally, this suggests that the natural way for students to come to acquire such logical habits as study of the discipline may afford is to draw upon their beginning attempts to think in the discipline and little by little to bring them toward the condition of the expert. This approach harnesses their preexisting capacities to think about the problems and issues to be covered and to successively shape them to the discipline. It is a very different way of proceeding from presenting the discipline in a ready-made form. It acknowledges that “the real problem of intellectual education is the transformation of natural powers into expert, tested powers: the transformation of more or less casual curiosity and sporadic suggestion into attitudes of alert, cautious, and thorough inquiry.”¹⁵

In Lipman’s novels we find the discipline of philosophy presented through narratives, in which the central characters are children who show a natural curiosity about philosophical problems and issues of all kinds and make beginning moves in inquiry—and sometimes more extended ones. These

children are the fictional counterparts of those in the classroom, and they present the latter with a stimulus and a starting point for their own inquiries. The process that ensues—in which the students inquire into their own questions under the guidance of the teacher, supplemented by a variety of exercises and activities—forms the pedagogical sequence. This sequence is demonstrably of the kind that Dewey commends. The students are not presented with philosophy as a ready-made body of knowledge to learn. The novels stimulate in them the same kinds of curiosity, puzzlement and questions out of which the discipline of philosophy arises. Beginning from their own thoughts and first attempts to address these concerns, they gradually learn to make the kinds of moves that more advanced students make when they have become proficient in the discipline. Under the guidance of the teacher, the logical form of the discipline gradually emerges for the students from their own continued efforts and is internally related to their earlier attempts just as Dewey says it should be. We are looking at students who are learning to think philosophically, and not merely learning what the philosophers have thought.

Lipman provides us with an innovative means of engendering a sequence of discoveries through which students can come to think philosophically. He avoids the error of mistaking a logical for a pedagogical sequence in attempting to impress the intellectual habits of a discipline upon the minds of students. To follow Lipman's lead does not mean to literally repeat what he has done. We need to be equally innovative. What the tradition of reflective education needs to take forward from Lipman is both the understanding that he derives from Dewey of a proper pedagogical sequence and the intellectual adventurousness of Lipman's shining example of how it might be done.

4. Learning thorough living experience

The concept of experience is such a complex and plastic notion in Dewey that no brief discussion can do it justice. We may profitably confine ourselves, however, to two closely related points. First, Dewey defines education in terms of experience: "It is that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience."¹⁶ As Dewey admits, this is a technical definition. In order to understand how the reconstruction of experience can be identified with education we need to explore the connections between experience and thinking. Secondly, then, Dewey tells us that experience "involves a connection of doing or trying with something which is undergone in consequence" and that thinking is "the accurate and deliberate instituting of connections between what is done and its consequences".¹⁷ Thus, thinking is the making explicit of connections that arise in experience.

Let me expand on this. According to Dewey, experience has two interconnected phases:

The nature of experience can be understood only by noting that it includes an active and a passive element peculiarly combined. On the one hand, experience is *trying*—a meaning which is made explicit in the connected term experiment. In the passive, it is *undergoing*. When we experience something we act upon it; then we suffer or undergo the consequences. We do something to the thing and then it does something to us in return: such is the peculiar combination.¹⁸

The connection with experimentation is worth spelling out. Experience, we might say, has the nascent form of an experiment. Experience is an interaction with the world in which we try to see how things are connected by acting upon something and discovering what happens. As Dewey says, the young child who naively sticks his finger into a flame connects up that action with the ensuing burn. It constitutes an episode in his experience. In making this connection he has also learnt from the experience. “Henceforth,” as Dewey remarks, “the sticking of the finger into flame *means* a burn.” Otherwise put, the experience was *educational* in that the child has derived meaning from the episode, increasing his ability to direct the course of his subsequent interactions with the world.

It is easy to see how this relates to Dewey’s conception of thinking as inquiry. The child’s little inquiry or “experiment” involves the discernment of a relationship between what he did and its consequences. That is to say, it takes the form of thought. Not all inquiries are so elementary. The discernment of such relations may be for more detailed, comprehensive, insightful or, in a word, *reflective*. Even so, they all have the same underlying educational form.

What do these considerations mean in the context of formal education? How do they translate, in particular, into the teacher’s approach to subject matter? In a passage from *The Child and the Curriculum*, Dewey draws upon the tie between experience and education to make it plain that the teacher should view classroom subject matter “as representing a given stage or phase of the development of experience”.¹⁹ As we have seen, this means seeing the

subject matter in connection with the child's experience and as provoking an appropriate series of efforts on the part of students which are likely to have readily intelligible consequences that make each episode meaningful. He says of the teacher:

His problem is that of inducing a vital and personal experiencing. Hence, what concerns him, as teacher, is the ways in which that subject may become a part of experience; what there is in the child's present that is usable with reference to it; how such elements are to be used; how his own knowledge of the subjectmatter may assist in interpreting the child's needs and doings, and determine the medium in which the child should be placed in order that his growth may be properly directed. He is concerned, not with the subject-matter as such, but with the subject-matter as a related factor in a total growing experience.²⁰

Such "vital and personal experiencing" is surely what Lipman has in mind when he says that "student reflection is best stimulated by living experience, rather than by a formally organized, desiccated text." Formally organized textbook tend to be prime examples of logical sequences parading as pedagogical ones, and as such they fail to take into account the internal connection between the process of thinking and its intellectual product. They fail to build an understanding of the subject matter upon the child's own attempts to think about it. As Lipman says, "the textbook is a didactic device that stands over against the child as an alien and rigid other. It has this obdurate nature because it represents the final end-product of the received or adult view of the discipline."²¹

As indicated earlier, Lipman's alternative to the standardized text is the philosophical novel. Here there is an ordered treatment of the subject matter, but it is seeded into a narrative. Rather than presenting the subject matter as material to be learnt from the pages of a book, we find issues and themes that are to be systematically explored through the process of inquiry. This very process is also modeled in the narratives themselves. There we find children of roughly the same age as those in the classroom thinking about the problematic aspects of their experience. Because they are puzzled or curious, and sometimes perplexed, they inquire together into the meaning of things. By connecting up with the life experiences of the children in the classroom, these narratives present their subject matter to them as a constant invitation to inquiry. The children in the classroom make headway in the subject by learning to inquire into it. The subject matter becomes part of the students' own experience in Dewey's sense. Through their own efforts the students

make meaningful connections between all sorts of suggestions and their consequences. This persistent reorganization of their experience, which adds to the meaning of it, and which strengthens their capacity to deal with the subject matter as they move along, reflects Dewey's definition of education. And so we have education as experience, experience as thinking, and thinking as inquiry, all wrapped into one—a thoroughly Deweyan conception.

Much of the knowledge that students derive from their schooling can be called knowledge only by courtesy. Genuine or effective knowledge is gained from experience as Dewey understands it. It comes about through that “vital and personal experiencing” which lies at the heart of reflective education. Unless, like Lipman, we foster such experience, we are only adding to the “dead load” that students are all too often made to bear throughout their school years.

5. The role of discussion in learning to think

Dewey claims that thought comes to fruition only through communication, and that its realization is most complete when we think together in “face-to-face relationships by means of direct give and take” by sharing our experience through dialogue:

Signs and symbols, language, are the means of communication by which a fraternally shared experience is ushered in and sustained. But the winged words of conversation in immediate intercourse have a vital import lacking in the fixed and frozen words of written speech. . . Logic in its fulfillment recurs to the primitive sense of the word: dialogue. Ideas which are not communicated, shared, and reborn in expression are but soliloquy, and soliloquy is but broken and imperfect thought.²²

Dialogue rather than monologue is the natural form of linguistic thought. This is because language is essentially a means of communication and problem-solving in social life. Dewey is right to claim that the private interludes of soliloquy are imperfect. Lacking a proper interlocutor, they are linguistically derivative and incomplete. They beg for a respondent, someone who listens to what is said and who offers advice or consolation. Little wonder that soliloquy so easily gives way to those even more obviously derivative episodes where we become our own interlocutor and converse inwardly with ourselves. Plato was half right when he said that in thought the soul communes with itself. What makes this image misleading, however, is that language is primarily a

social phenomenon and that linguistic thought, in its primary mode, is not communication with ourselves, but with others.

We can more easily appreciate that thought finds its basis in dialogue when we reflect on the fact that in everyday contexts—whether in our families, in our workplaces or in public life—most of our thinking takes place not in isolation, but as part of conjoint activity. Discussion and dialogue carry much of the constructive and reflective burden of doing things together. In its various phases, it involves such things as stopping what we are doing in order to discuss problems or difficulties (that is, stopping to *think about* what we are doing), dealing with our disagreements, helping each other to interpret the troublesome actions and uncertain intentions of third parties, and helping to give each other guidance in deciding what to do when we are in doubt.

Since thought is first and foremost a matter of communicated experience, and since experience is supposed to take the form of inquiry, we can conclude that, for Dewey, thought finds its natural home in conjoint inquiry. This is a conception very much at odds with the idea that thought is primarily a matter of private in-the-head ratiocination, which permeates so much of school education. And it has significant consequences for the ways in which thinking is to be engendered in the classroom. If we believe, along with Dewey, that education should focus upon developing students' abilities to think, then we need to make inquiry through dialogue and discussion central to what we do.

A rough idea is put forward and then worked upon. We can describe these as the interplay of the creative and the critical movements of thought. Since this kind of interplay is inherent in dialogue, classroom discussion and dialogue provides a natural basis for students to learn to think at once critically and creatively. (2) To temper our experience by submitting it to the judgment of others is to become more reasonable. I have in mind such things as learning to listen to other people's points of view, to concede the implications of our own opinions, to learn to explore our disagreements reasonably, and to change our minds where that is warranted on the basis of reason and evidence. Reasonableness and associated traits (such as fair-mindedness, openmindedness and tolerance) are the hallmarks of a thoughtful person, one whose thinking is socially well developed. (3) By extension, exploring different points of view, discussing disagreements reasonably, and keeping an open mind, all develop forms of regard and practices of open intellectual exchange that sustain an open society. They are the ways of thinking and forms of regard desperately needed if we are to achieve a more deeply democratic way of life.

(6) Reflection on values in school education

Life in society is replete with values. Values are what separate creatures of mere habit and happenstance from ones that reflectively judge and actively construct their world. Personal choices, interpersonal relations, codes of conduct, religious beliefs, political practices, educational policies, and institutional arrangements—all are expressions of values. Values are therefore not something set apart from the concrete circumstances of our lives. They shape the whole of the social domain, which enfold our life and being. Nothing therefore could be of greater educational significance than attention to values.

John Dewey says that judgements of value are central to a person's character and development:

There is nothing in which a person so completely reveals himself as the things that he judges enjoyable or desirable. Such judgments are the sole alternative to the domination of belief by impulse, chance, blind habit and self-interest. The formation of a cultivated and effectively operative good judgment or taste with respect to what is aesthetically admirable, intellectually acceptable and morally approvable is the supreme task set to human beings by the incidents of experience.²³

Notice that Dewey takes the educational task to be the cultivation of effective practical judgment. This stands over against the idea that society can set out in advance what is admirable, acceptable and to be approved, as things to be learnt by heart. It also cuts across the claim that values education should be seen as an attempt to cultivate and strengthen the will to side with the beautiful against the ugly, the true against the false, and good against evil. The problem is not that people knowingly choose the ugly, the false and the evil because their wills are weak, but rather that they choose such things because they lack discernment. As Dewey says:

All the serious perplexities of life come back to the genuine difficulty of forming a judgment as to the values of the situation; they come back to a conflict of goods. Only dogmatism can suppose that serious moral conflict is between something clearly bad and something known to be good, and that the uncertainty lies in the will of the one choosing. Most conflicts of importance

are conflicts between things which are or have been satisfying, not between good and evil.²⁴

The distinction between the more or less valuable is one that needs to be made by comparing live options in the circumstances in which they occur. Any such intelligent comparison is likely to require some investigation into the contingencies that face us—into the facts of the case. We will need to think about the range of possibilities—of possible actions, conclusions, results, goals, or resolutions. We must try to discern the relevant connections between things—between an action and its consequences, between a proposition and what follows from it, between an aesthetic choice and artistic satisfaction. In short, it is to the ways of inquiry that we should turn in dealing with life's perplexities. Here is Dewey making the point in relation to moral deliberation:

A moral situation is one in which judgment and choice are required antecedently to overt action. The practical meaning of the situation—that is to say the action needed to satisfy it—is not self-evident. It has to be searched for. There are conflicting desires and alternative apparent goods. What is needed is to find the right course of action, the right good. Hence, inquiry is exacted: observation of the detailed make-up of the situation; analysis into its diverse factors; clarification of what is obscure; discounting of the more insistent and vivid traits; tracing of the consequences of the various modes of action that suggest themselves; regarding the decision reached as hypothetical and tentative until the anticipated or supposed consequences which led to its adoption have been squared with the actual consequences. This inquiry is intelligence.²⁵

Now we are back on familiar ground. The education of values is of a piece with education as a whole. Attention to moral and other forms of value is not something to be set apart from the rest of education. Students need to learn to think in the various contexts in which questions of value arise. They need to learn to reconstruct their experience by developing their powers of inquiry through the discussion of problems and issues that richly connect with their lived experience. Dewey even goes so far as to say that the education of values is as broad as education itself. He tells us that “the educative process is all one with the moral process, since the latter is a continuous passage of experience from worst to better”.²⁶ More broadly, the educative process is one that expands the meaning of experience and improves judgment, without which our ability to appreciate and to choose would not continue to develop.

Lipman echoes Dewey's plea for the development of effective judgment instead of teaching customary values and rules by the book. "Some parents," he tells us, "are inclined to think that the improvement of children's judgment can be achieved by more effectively implanting in them strict codes of traditional values." To which he imagines someone to respond:

Perhaps, but the nub of the matter is judgment, and this is where we have to do better... If the schools could do more to teach our children to exercise better judgment, it would protect them against those who would inflame them with prejudice and manipulate them through indoctrination. It would make them better producers and consumers, better citizens, and better future parents. So why not educate for better judgment?²⁷

Judgments of value, he goes on to tell us, are those that result when "things or matters are contrasted with one another with respect to value (e.g., 'is better than,' 'is nicer than,' 'is more lovely than,' 'is more noble than'), using criteria such as originality, authenticity, perfection, coherence, and the like".²⁸ Such critical judgments express relationships that enable us to distinguish better from worse efforts, outcomes, social arrangements, policies, dealings, plans and courses of action—better from worse life choices, in short. As Dewey says, judgments as to the value of a situation need to be made when we are faced with perplexities and situations the practical meaning of which has to be searched for. In other words, when we have need for inquiry.

Whether in the large or the small, inquiry is the process through which intelligent practice grounds our ideals. We see this in the professions: "The dynamic forward movement that steers the actual process of medicine in the direction of health or science in the direction of truth or art in the direction of beauty is *inquiry*."²⁹ The same applies when inquiry steers us toward better decisions in everyday life, thus narrowing the gap between the actual and the ideal. In terms of school education, to teach students to reflect on matters of value is to strengthen their judgment and thereby to assist them to achieve better outcomes in their own lives. In the process, of course, they also become more able to access the values that are constantly being urged upon them. This is Lipman and Dewey's educational alternative to bypassing their intelligence by indoctrinating them with values.

There is a further line of thought in Dewey that is worth considering in relation to Lipman's project of philosophy in schools. Dewey suggests that philosophy

may have a special role to play in integrating our empirical understanding with our values:

Man has beliefs which scientific inquiry vouchsafes, beliefs about the actual structure and processes of things; and he also has beliefs about the values which should regulate his conduct. The question of how these two ways of believing may most effectively and fruitfully interact with one another is the most general and significant of the problems which life presents to us. Some reasoned discipline, one obviously other than any science, should deal with the issue. Thus there is supplied one way of conceiving of the function of philosophy.³⁰

Dewey is surely right to think that the lack of integration between our empirical and scientific knowledge with our values systems is a problem of considerable proportions. And we should not be adding to this burden when we teach science and technology, or history, or about society, the environment, and so on. Instead we need to introduce our students to ways of thinking that develop their values in conjunction with their other understandings. There are, of course, more or less widespread efforts to do just that, but the question is how it might best be done. Dewey suggests that philosophy is the discipline to take on this task. If so, this means that philosophical inquiry needs to be woven through the curriculum, in order that students may come to think as whole human beings, whose various understandings are not divorced from one another but support more integrated, coherent, judgments, where all relevant things are considered.³¹

Lipman says that he is fully in agreement with such remarks.³² We might even say that he has taken Dewey's vision of philosophy—as the discipline through which we can integrate our knowledge with our values—and made it an educational reality. It is, of course, just an exemplar of the work that needs to be done. To extend this vision to actual programs of work and teaching practices throughout our schools is an immense task. Yet it is all of a piece with generally developing the practice of reflective education. To place values education at the heart of what we do in schools where it belongs, and to see it as continuous with all of our other efforts to educate our students to think, is to place what we do firmly in the tradition of reflective education. It is not something that can be done all at once or once and for all. It requires an experimental outlook and continuing effort.

Conclusion

I am all too aware that my discussion of these matters has been brief, and that many other topics might have been taken up in considering Dewey's influence upon Lipman. I am particularly conscious of the fact that I have said next to nothing about community in Lipman and Dewey, which is a matter of great moment for them both. I can only hope that these shortcomings will be rectified by others. Additionally, however, I would like to encourage my readers to go back to Dewey, in order better to appreciate the genius of Lipman's project and the lasting significance of his work. It is to see Lipman and Dewey as part of that great endeavour—the tradition of reflective education.