



Engaged Philosophical Inquiry

A self-directed inquiry group guide

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Using this guide requires you to read several articles and excerpts. If you do not have the required reading, you are invited to contact carbcvan@uvic.ca



Practice reading

Session 2:

John Dewey and the philosophical community of inquiry

I believe that education, therefore, is a process of living and not a preparation for future living. ~John Dewey

Introduction

John Dewey (1859-1952) was an American pragmatic philosopher and educator, and a professor at the Universities of Michigan, Minnesota and Columbia. He was an advocate of democracy and characterized democracy as a way of living and communicative experience. To develop a democratic community emphasizes two factors. First, interests of the whole group everyone is involved and responsible to build the community where all the members share common interests. If some members or groups within the community seek their own advantage private gains, there is no democratic community. Second, freedom of communication open interaction and cooperation between groups essential

In such a community, *knowledge* is public, distributed and shared, and is *part* of a conjoint activity. That is, thinking is a response to uncertainty, *hesitation* that we usually address through communication and dialogue (rather than monologue). It is through thinking/inquiry, communication and interaction with the world around us *dialogue* that we acquire meaning. This kind of communicative interaction is what Dewey sees as education *the kind of education that leads to growth.*

More specifically, Dewey talks about education in relation to experience *does not* mean that all experiences are equally educative. Rather, experience *opens up possibilities* in the future that help us do what we feel like doing in the present that show us *the kind of efforts and perseverance required in overcoming obstacles are educational.* On the other hand, experiences that have the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience, produce lack of sensitivity and responsiveness, promote the formation of a careless attitude *can* to make us repetitive *scattered* when pursuing meaning are *mis educative.*

To Dewey, it is important to develop a critical, inquiring and reflective way of thinking and living. We need to be aware of *thoughts, feelings, and beliefs*. We become aware of our beliefs, prejudices and opinions only when challenged and faced with *difficulties* or when we are asked what we think and have to explain ourselves, i.e., engaged in authentic dialogue.

We gain freedom through others, because public space offers us different ways of *engaging*.
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Practice reading

Cam P. (1998) *Thinking together*. Sidney: Hale & Iremonger.

Discussion questions

1. According to Dewey, a democratic community takes into account *the interests of the whole and creates freedom of open interaction*. How can you create such a democratic community in your classroom? Think of some strategies and explain.
 2. What do you think about the concept of *reflective thinking* proposed by Dewey and Lipman? How important do you think reflective thinking is in learning?
 3. Dewey emphasizes freedom of inquiry, welcoming diverse views, freedom of communication, and active participation of diverse groups in a democratic society. In other words, only when we confront diversity and differences can we become aware of our own prejudices and biases. How can we cultivate such *diversity and inquiry* in our classrooms, school or community?
 4. In the paper, Dewey's definition of education is described as "reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience". In other words, education is described as growth. What do you think about the role of education in a human being's growth?
 5. In a community of inquiry, it is important to engage the members in a dialogue rather than monologues. What can you do to encourage dialogue in your classroom?
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Activity 3: Evaluating a community of inquiry

Develop some questions to evaluate classroom community of inquiry (How well did students listen to each other? Did they stay on track during the discussion?) Share these with your colleagues.

Reflection journal

- What did you find the most interesting, surprising or problematic in this session and discussion?
- How can you integrate John Dewey's or Philip van Parijs's ideas into your own teaching?
- What did you learn from this session and the discussion?
- Is there a question or a thought that is still lingering in your mind? If so, what is it?

Session 3:

The philosophical question

"To be able to question means to want to know, and to want to know means to know that one doesn't know." ~Hans-Georg Gadamer

Introduction

Questions can be categorized in different ways. For example, we might say that there are questions that can be answered and questions that cannot be answered. Another classification involves rhetoric, pedagogical, open and slant questions. In 2006, Philip Cam developed the *Question Quadrant* created by the intersection of two axes: closed to open, and textual to intellectual. Quadrant 1 consists of closed, textual questions or the reading comprehension ones. Quadrant 2, there are textual, open questions that encourage learning from the text. Quadrant 3 consists of open, intellectual questions that encourage critical thinking.

(1960, p. 307) In other words, it means to go beyond what is close by. As one moves, one's horizon changes too.

It is essential that one becomes aware of one's horizon and knows that by inquiring and moving toward something unfamiliar, the horizon changes. He or she can see things beyond what is nearby and encounter others. But it is not easy to push the boundaries, put one's beliefs on hold, be vulnerable and open to new experiences and meanings.

Activity 2: Developing different types of questions

From *Lunch with Lenin and other stories* by Deborah Ellis, read the short story “The cactus people” (2008, pp. 151-169) and do the following:

- Develop a few questions for each quadrant of the Question Quadrant. Share your questions with another teacher.
- Can you turn one (or more) of the closed questions into an open one?
- What is your biggest question in life (an open question)?

Reflection journal

- What did you find the most interesting, surprising or problematic in this session and discussion?
- What implications do this session's readings have for your teaching?
- What did you learn from this session's readings and the discussion?
- Is there a question or a thought that is still lingering in your mind? If so, what is it?

Session 4:

Philosophy of childhood

Introduction

Gareth Matthews (1929-2011), born in Argentina, was an American philosopher specialized in ancient philosophy and philosophy of children. He was a professor at the University of Minnesota and Massachusetts Amherst. Matthews had a high respect for young minds and wrote stories for children that would facilitate discussion around philosophical concepts. His stories usually have an open end, allowing children to finish them by themselves according to their own thoughts and solutions.

Matthews challenges common assumptions and dogma about children. He demonstrates that children have the capacity to think about questions that deal with knowledge and life. He wants to encourage adults to craft such philosophical questions that they can reflect on with children. Matthews argues that children are interested in asking philosophical questions of the kind of questions that do not have a definite answer and to which adults cannot provide answers. He takes children's questions very seriously and believes that children's uncertainty is much like the philosopher's.

Matthews disapproves Piaget's theory of cognitive development that states children develop slowly according to a pre-established schedule. There is no doubt that Piaget was one of the most influential psychologists of the 20th century and his theory freed us from the narrow vision of children espoused earlier psychologists. But the problem is that his developmental theory does not leave any room for children's philosophical thinking. The theory underestimates children's mental ability and assumes that young children are unable to think about abstract concepts or engage in complex reasoning. This ignores children's real capacity to do philosophy.

Theory reading

Matthews G. (1994) *Philosophy of childhood*. Cambridge: University of Massachusetts Press, chapters 3 & 4: pp. 30-53.

Practice reading

Aries E. P. (1962). *The discovery of childhood: Centuries of childhood (33-49)*. New York: Vintage Books.

Discussion questions

1. What do you think about

7. How can we deepen our interactions with children?
8. In a discussion with grade 6, a student asked, "What is my power? Why do adults have more power than children?" Think about the question and explain some of the things that make children think of themselves as powerless, helpless or weak.

Activity 1: Being a child

Sit down in a comfortable position and try to reflect on your childhood memories. Take a piece of paper and write down your ideas after reflection

- What do you remember? When was it? What was the situation? Were you interacting with someone?
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Session 5:

Critical thinking and sound arguments

Introduction

This session's reading focuses on critical thinking and judgement in inquiry. Critical thinking is applied thinking. That is, it includes both the process of understanding and the product. Critical thinking refines the end product or the meaning that a discipline produces. In general, we define critical thinking as thinking that 1) facilitates judgement because it 2) relies on criteria, 3) is self-correcting, and 4) is sensitive to context.

The *criteria* are reasons or a basis for comparison. Good reasons are relevant and strong. By means of reasons, we can justify and defend our thinking. Good critical thinkers aim to discover the weaknesses of their own thinking and then resolve what the problem is. Thus, critical thinking is self-correcting. It is also sensitive to context, particularities and uniqueness. In critical thinking we need to be aware that each situation or *should* our be examined on its own terms and not forced into some general rules and regulations.

In school, we want students to not only think but also exercise good judgment so that they are able to weigh and grasp what a text states, assumes, implies or suggests. This needs good reasoning and inquiry skills. Such critical thinking enables students to both draw meanings from a text and impart meaning to what they write and say. Moreover, it is equally important that other kinds of thinking such as *creative* thinking are practiced along with *critical* thinking.

Theory reading

Lipman, M. (2003) Education for critical thinking, In *Thinking education* (205-243). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Practice reading

Gardner, H. *embe*

Activity 1: Exercising critical thinking

Choose a topic (e.g. taking turns, as discussed in *Education for Critical Thinking*, pp. 224-225) and develop an exercise for your students to practice critical thinking. The exercise can display the *sensitivity to*

Session 6:

Eckehard Martens and the Five Finger Model

“...the philosophical questions which are at stake are not just pseudo-problems, but rather questions that deeply influence the way we think, act and treat others.” ~Eckehard Martens

Introduction

Eckehard Martens is a German philosopher who studied Ancient Greek and Latin as well as pedagogy. He was a high school teacher for several years and then got his PhD in Philosophy and taught at the University of Hamburg. Martens discusses the notions of philosophical content, philosophical attitude and philosophical methods. In terms of *philosophical content*, he says that philosophical questions explore on beliefs or “doxa.” Such questions do not have a single answer. *Philosophical attitude* is a disposition that one acquires and is about creating a space of openness and wonder, sensitivity for ambiguity or situations of conflict, readiness and courage to follow uncommon or unusual ways of thinking, the “itch” caused by unexpected trains of thought, being humble about one’s own “believed knowledge” and living with preliminary answers.

Martens believes that everyone is capable of posing a basic philosophical question about things that matter in life such as happiness, justice, creation, death, and the like. However, what is lacking is “the capacity for pursuing such questions and their possible answers while increasing understanding, in order not to arrive at an opinion just *somehow*, but to make it *as comprehensive, clear, and well founded as possible*” (2007, p.33). To address this problem, he suggests philosophical methods and his Five Finger Model. In this model, he explains that philosophizing with children can use either of these five methods or a combination of them. The five methods are:

1. Phenomenology: to perceive and describe how something appears to us – describing the problem precisely and thoroughly with as little interpretation as possible
2. Hermeneutics: to try to understand how someone else thinks and *feel as to understand oneself* – making oneself aware of their own and others’ preconceptions while interpreting a problem and yet trying to create shared space of understanding
3. Analytic: to think critically, look for criteria, logical *they*, clarification of thoughts – examining the interpretations in order to better comprehend the problem
4. Dialectics: to evaluate different perspectives and through this process to attain an overarching synthesis – while analyzing, be engaging in a dialogue (rather than monologues) and search for the very best grounded solution that can still be revised
5. Speculation: to imagine and go beyond the *cap* and practical experiences during the dialogue, imagining, inventing or creating alternative thoughts, ideas or solutions; going beyond methodology or mere instrumental reasoning in order to create space for new and unusual thoughts

Theory reading

Martens E. (2007). Can animals think? The five most important methods of philosophizing with child. *Thinking: The Journal for Philosophy for Children*, 18(4), 323-5.

Session 7: Phenomenology

Introduction

2. In her paper on phenomenology, she states that Philosophy for Children should not be limited to critical thinking in a way that logic is the focal point nor should it be practiced as a good time. What do you think about this? How do you think philosophical inquiry with children should be practiced?
3. One of the important criteria in practicing philosophy with children is to develop a philosophical attitude, i.e., “the readiness and courage to follow uncommon or unusual ways of thinking, the toleration of the kind of irritation

Activity 3: Lifeworld

Our implicit knowledge of the world

community, we need to stand face to face with children in nonhierarchical encounter (we both don't know) and be open to new possibilities where beliefs hinder us from the unfolding of new possibilities.

Readings and references

Aries, P. (1962). *The discovery of childhood*. New York: Vintage Books.

Cam, P. (1998). *Thinking together*. Sydney: Hale & Remonger.

Cam, P. (2000). Philosophy, democracy, and reconstructing Dewey. In Suk Cha (Ed.), *Teaching philosophy for democracy* (158-181). Seoul: Seoul University Press

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