

The Development of Personhood and Philosophy for Children

To discover yourself discovering a rule about language and how it works is to discover yourself as a person in the world.

By now, I would guess that thousands of teachers and children have read chapter one of *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery* by Matthew Lipman. It is the chapter in which Harry discovers, among other things, the Aristotelian notion of conversion. The students and the teachers have probably talked about truth, conversion, discovery, invention, mind, resentment, daydreaming, and perhaps even the role of Lisa as the one who supplies the counter-example to Harry's theory about language and how it works.

However, I wonder how many teachers have carefully analyzed with their students the concepts that underlie the chapter and which, at one time or another, ought to be clarified. Some of these concepts are thinking, reasoning, reflecting, falsifying, hypothesizing, theorizing, problem solving, inquiry, the nature of classes and the relationship of logic to language and to the world.

Like Descartes, I think that one purpose of thinking should be to become more clear about the concepts and words that we use in our everyday language as our experience broadens. Without earlier confusion to reflect on, Annette Baier points out, our intellects would have no task.¹ Our minds are stocked full with all sorts of confusing ideas from the very early years. "But as Harry walked home, he still felt badly about not having been able to answer when Mr. Bradley called on him. Also, he was puzzled. How had he gone wrong?" Like Harry, the end products of our thinking are often set by their beginnings. Chapter one of *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery* renders a myriad of fuzzy concepts, enough to provide food for thought for years.

This philosophical fodder not only concerns concept-analysis, which, in my view, is a very narrow view of what doing philosophy is all about. The classroom community ought also to encourage/children to reflect upon their own belief structure, the assumptions that they bring to their class about the world. They should be prodded to discuss among themselves the role of doubt in all inquiry, and how one goes about formulating a problem or definition. Harry Stottlemeier certainly brings many assumptions about language and the world to chapter one. These assumptions should not be overlooked. Most of them have to do with language and how it works. He assumes that he already knows what a rule is.

Harry couldn't understand why it hadn't worked. "It worked before . . ." he started to say aloud, but he couldn't finish the sentence.

Lisa looked at him wonderingly. Why had she given him such a stupid sentence, Harry thought, with a flash of resentment. But then it occurred to him that, if he had really figured out a rule, it should work on stupid sentences as well as on sentences that weren't stupid.

But do we know what a rule is and how it works? Further, Harry assumes that he knows what a sentence is, how it is constructed.

"When you turn sentences around, they're no longer true!" Harry said.

Lisa wrinkled her nose. "What's so wonderful about that?" she asked.

"Okay," said Harry, "give me a sentence, any sentence, and I'll show you."

Further, he assumes that he understands compound sentences and how the syntax works in these kinds of sentences. But does he? And what is the relationship of this syntax, how it works logically and the logic that Harry thinks he is discovering?

Naturally, the chapter can be read on many levels. The first time around in the classroom, it is appropriate to take the agenda from the children. One should allow the students to talk about what they found interesting in the chapter, whether it is treated in the instructional manual or not. And talk about it seriously. In most cases, everything that the children will introduce will have a philosophical dimension, and it is the teacher's role to tease out this dimension (perhaps using one of the discussion plans or exercises in the Instructional Manual) and explore it in detail in a dialogical manner. There should be an effort to involve as many students in the discussion as possible, and to encourage the children to listen carefully to what each contributes. There are ideas about friendship, truth, discovery, invention, resentment, non-verbal communication and jumping to conclusions that children find fascinating. There is also the historical and scientific dimension that Mr. Bradley introduces about planets and comets that some children might want to talk about with their peers.

There is also the dimension of mystery in chapter one. There is the mystery of where Harry's ideas come from. "And then Harry had an idea. A sentence can't be reversed. If you put the last part of a sentence first, it'll no longer be true." There is the mystery of the word "mind," what it means and how it works. "His mind just wandered off," or "Suddenly something in Harry's mind went CLICK." One of my most vivid memories is of a class that I visited in London composed of a number of students whose first language was not English. One fifth grader told the teacher that he was very interested in how the word "mind" was used in these two sentences in chapter one. He said he did not understand how they were being used. At this moment, the principal who was observing interrupted and said, "Oh, it's just an idiom. If you knew English better, you'd understand." The child, however, was persistent. Later, during the period, he raised his hand again and said, "I am still confused about about the word "mind." There was some more talk about idiomatic usage in English, this time by the children. However, I just could not help intervening. I asked the child, "why are you confused?" "Well, it's being used as a noun," he said. "What's the matter with that?" I asked. "Well, I usually think of it as a verb." "I find that very interesting," I said. Perhaps we could put that up on the board - whether the word "mind" should be used as a noun or a verb," I indicated to the teacher.

Later, I talked to the teacher about this incident and he

much more interested in having the right answer than in thinking about the process itself.

The following is a portion of a dialogue between a teacher, Jerry, and a number of adolescents who were invited to Montclair State College in 1975 to participate in the first teacher-education seminar in Philosophy for Children. It is the twelfth day of the children's meeting together and it is the first day that one of the girls, Rene, speaks at any great length. Up till this time, the dialogue had for the most part been conducted by white children from middle class homes. Rene, a black girl from the inner city, speaks up quite clearly this day. From her expression, we can see that whatever problems she might have, problems that have been reflected in her academic work, she has a strong sense of her own personhood. One might not agree with her apparently essentialistic position, but one cannot help but recognize her recognition of herself as a person.

Jerry: When you're very old, will you still be the same person you are now?

Child: No.

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Child: You will so be the same person.

Alana: You'll just have more wrinkles.

Jerry: You'll have more what?

Alana: Wrinkles. When you're old, you don't look the same like you did before.

Jerry: Oh! Does that make you a different person? In other words, are you a different person when you look different?

Child: No.

Walter: You're still the same. You still have the same mind.

Rene: You're still the same person.

Jerry: Yes, but are you the same person?

John: I don't know.

Rene: You'll still be John Christian.

Jerry: But will John stay the same person all his life?

Rene: Yes.

Jerry: Always? You'll never change?

Rene: You just don't know as much as you did when you were younger, but you're still the same person.

Jerry: Hmm.

Rene: You can't change. I mean you can't change into someone else and she can't change into me.

Jerry: No. You're right, but are you the same Rene?

Walter: Right.

Jerry: The same Rene?

Rene: Not exactly.

Jerry: All you life?

Walter: As you get older you get bigger and then you get littler. As you get bigger and then you get littler, you're getting older.

Jerry: Uh Uh.

Walter: Right.

Jerry: But when we were talking before, we were talking about your ways and your personality and your mind and your thoughts.

Rene: That's what doesn't change.

Jerry: Do your ways and your personality and your mind make you you? I mean just what is you?

Rene: A person.

Jerry: Before you told me that it was your mind and your thoughts. Can they change?

Rene: Yeah.

Jerry: But you don't change?

Rene: No, I'm still the same person.

Becoming a person does not conflict with becoming a participant in a community of inquiry. As Collingwood has said in *Principles of Art*, "The discovery of myself as a person is also the discovery of other persons around me." To live in such a community is to experience many things: traditions, ideas, feelings, doubts and inquiry. They come to not only express their own thoughts, but take other people's thoughts into account and at times change their minds about many assumptions they held prior to the speaking. As one student in Red Bank, New Jersey said, "now that I'm saying it, I'm no longer so sure. I have to think about it some more." If the group is functioning as a community, their actions are future oriented, even though they often reflect upon the past and the present. One of the most characteristic traits of such a group is their ability to endlessly engage in self-correcting inquiry. Thus, they become a group who share experiences, memories, hopes, linked by a common procedure, the procedure of inquiry.

Persons have a sense of time and they can express this sense in their language. They have watches. They keep diaries and know how to read calendars. They celebrate birthdays and weddings. Time is an important factor in the forming of a classroom community of inquiry. One cannot expect it to happen in a week, or even in a month. It is time that provides the framework of references that allow for the intellectual and social experiences that eventually lead to the commitment to open inquiry. Such a community eventually becomes a way of life. Children learn how to proceed in a rational inquiring way because they have formed the habit of living their daily lives in this mode. When something goes wrong, they are able to discuss the problem in a public rational manner using the same method of discourse that they used when discussing *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*. As one child put it as a fight was about to break out with a peer, "do you want to box it out with our fists or should we do it the Harry way?"

One could wonder why Harry, when given Lisa's counter-example, did not just give up. In other words, does not Lisa's counter-example, "No eagles are lions," falsify Harry's theory?

Harry pounced on the sentence the way his cat, Mario, would pounce on a ball of string that had been rolled towards him. In an instant, Harry had the sentence reversed: "No lions are eagles." He was stunned. The first sentence "No eagles are

lions," had been true. But so was the sentence when reversed, for "No lions are eagles," was also true!

A counter-example is a testing device towards falsifiability.

"You tried it out?" she asked. Her grey eyes, set wide apart and serious.

"Of course, I took sentences like 'All planets revolve about the sun,' and 'All model airplanes are toys,' and 'All cucumbers are vegetables,' and I found that when the last part was put first, the sentences were no longer true.

"But the sentence I gave you wasn't like yours," Lisa replied quickly. "Every one of your sentences began with the word 'All.'

But my sentence began with the word 'No.'

Thus Lisa has not falsified Harry's theory about reversing sentences. Her counter-instance has forced him to reformulate his theory, which he is quite able to do.

"That's it!" said Harry, excitedly. "That's it! If a true sentence begins with the word 'No,' then its reverse is also true. But if it begins with the word 'All,' then its reverse is false.

It was Kant who taught us that although everything in nature works in accordance with laws, only persons have the ability to act in accordance with their own laws. They can become self-governing, they have the ability to frame principles and to rule their own conduct by laws that they themselves have figured out within the context of a community of inquiry. But underlying this ability is the ability to think well and then apply this reasoning to our actions in the world. We see this relationship between reasoning correctly and acting in a just manner at the end of chapter one of *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*.

He made a bee-line for the kitchen, but when he got there, he found his mother standing in front of the refrigerator talking to her neighbor, Mrs. Olson. Harry didn't want to interrupt, so he stood there for a moment, listening to the conversation.

Mrs. Olson was saying, "Let me tell you something, Mrs. Stottlemeier. That Mrs. Bates, who just joined the PTA, every day I see her go into the liquor store. Now, you know how concerned I am about those unfortunate people who just can't stop drinking. Every day, I see them go into the liquor store. Well, that makes me wonder whether Mrs. Bates is, you know . . ."

"Whether Mrs. Bates is like them?" Harry's mother asked politely.

Mrs. Olson nodded. Suddenly something in Harry's mind went "CLICK".

"Mrs. Olson," he said, "just because, according to you all people who can't stop drinking are people who go into the liquor store, that doesn't mean that all people who go to the liquor store are people who can't stop drinking."

"Harry," said his mother, "this is none of your business, and besides, you're interrupting."

But Harry could tell by the expression on his mother's face that she was pleased with what he'd

said. So he quietly got his glass of milk and sat down to drink it, feeling happier than he had felt in days.

Having the cognitive skills to reason well is a prerequisite to framing the principles and ideals and rules with which we want to govern our lives.¹¹ It is this ability that is the foundation of what we call personal autonomy. It is senseless to talk about helping children to think for themselves if we do not give them the tools that they need to do so. Some of these tools are cognitive. Some of these tools are social, more intuitive - "a matter of 'having a feeling for' the other individual experiences and point of view, rather than of seeing him as a 'type'. It is in short the human interactions in which all parties concerned display the highest degree of conscious sensitivity to the detailed and specific actualities of one another's positions and feelings . . . that most represent interactions between persons."¹² It is just these cognitive and social skills that the formation of the community of inquiry aims to accomplish for each of its participants.

If one looks carefully at chapter one of *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery* one can see, as I said at the beginning, much philosophical fodder. Harry certainly could have given up when Lisa presented him with her counter-instance and turned his attention to something else. He certainly is feeling very badly, and he admits that he had failed twice that day. But with her encouragement, he perseveres and eventually discovers a broader rule that becomes the foundation of a whole new way of looking at thinking, language and the world. What emerges eventually is self-reference. Such self-reference implies that a person has, as George Herbert Mead puts it, "become an object to himself." He has the ability to correct his own thinking. The development of reflection grows out of such a social dialogical process. Children slowly become aware of themselves through the reactions of others to their actions. At the same time, they learn how to evoke the positive response to those in their daily lives. Thus, the development of a person involves the internalization of logical, as well as ethical, cultural and social norms. The awareness of oneself as a person who can act effectively and constructively on the world eventually develops into an awareness that one is responsible for one's own behaviour.¹³ One learns how to take into account broader and broader social contexts before acting and to consciously take upon oneself the responsibility for all of one's actions. At some point, one ceases to act in a certain way because of some external social rule or norm, and starts to think that is how one ought to act. The norms are internalized, overcome, and eventually evolve into self-regulating rules of procedure for guiding one's daily life. This is not a subjective process; rather it is an intersubjective one. It's at this point that self-awareness has become fully critical and one can talk about an autonomous person.

Of course, the question can be asked, "is the non-self-aware, non-autonomous person a person?" I would answer that such persons are potential persons and as such have the right to be treated *as if* they were autonomous, self-aware persons, even though they are still developing these characteristics of what it is to be a person. Thus, if the end

of education is to produce autonomous persons, it is up to educators to make sure that the social interactions that children engage in during their daily lives are such that encourage self-critical autonomy within a social consciousness. The environment must be such that the child learns very early that one is expected to give reasons for one's views, to take other person's views into account, to anticipate the consequences of one's actions in light of the social framework in which one finds oneself, to concern oneself with the feelings and growth of others, and whether what one is about to do to another is how one would want to be treated oneself. From a very early age, the children should be in an environment that encourages them to look at the assumptions of what they say, and to consider what kind of world they would want for themselves and for others in the future. In a word, children must be treated as rational autonomous persons if they are to become reasonable, autonomous citizens. Making sure that children get the tools they need is the task of the adults of the society.

Becoming an autonomous person is an important aim of education because it is our only hope of preserving and improving democracy. However learning to think for oneself is powerful. Once students have gained this ability within the structure of a community of inquiry, they have the ability to question, evaluate and reform the institutions that effect their daily lives. This change might not take the direction that we might expect. The next generation may see things very differently than we do. But, we as adults, certainly have a lot to learn. Things are far from perfect.

What did Harry discover in Chapter One of *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*? That he is a person. That he is a person beginning the wondrous development of intellectual autonomy. To discover yourself discovering a rule about language and how it works is to discover yourself as a person in the world.

Ann Margaret Sharp

Footnotes

1. Annette Baier. *Postures of the Mind: Essay on Mind and Morals*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985) p. 56.
2. On this point of connectedness, see E.M. Forster's novel, *Howards End*. (Penguin Book, first published in 1910. Penguin edition is 1984). "She would only point out the salvation that was latent in his own soul, and in the soul of every man. Only connect! That was the whole of her sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its highest. Live in fragments no longer. Only connect, and the beast and the monk, robbed of the isolation that is life to either, will die . . . But she failed. For there was one quality in Henry for which she was never prepared . . . his obtuseness. He simply did not notice things, and there was no more to be said. He never noticed that Helen and Frieda were hostile, or that Tibby was not
- interested in currant plantations; he never noticed the lights and shades that exist in the greyest of conversations, the fingerposts, the milestones, the collisions, the illimitable views." p. 188.
3. Gilles Fauconnier, *Mental Spaces*. (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1985), chapter one.
4. Paul Ricoeur, "On Interpretation," *Philosophy in France Today*. edited by Allan Montefiore. (New York: Cambridge Press, 1983), p. 187.
5. Israel Scheffler, *Of Human Potential: An Essay in Philosophy of Education*. (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, p. 22.) See whole chapter on Human Nature and Value, pp. 10 - 33.
6. R. S. Peters, "Personal Understanding and Personal Relationships," in *Understanding Other Persons*. Edited by Theodore Mischel. (Totowa, Rowman and Littlefield, 1974), pp. 37 - 65. Also see D. W. Hamlyn "Person-perception and Our Understanding of Others," *Ibid*. pp. 1-36.
7. J. H. Flavell, "The Development of Inferences about Others," *Ibid*. pp. 66-116.
8. Annette Baier. *Postures of the Mind: Essays on Mind and Morals*. op. cit. p. 43.
9. D. Dennett, "Conditions of Personhood," *The Identities of Persons* edited by Amelie O. Rorty (Berkeley, Un. of California Press, 1976), pp. 175 - 196.
10. D. W. Hamlyn, "Person-perception and Our Understanding of Others," *Ibid*. p. 34.
11. J. H. Flavell, "The Development of Inference about Others," Op. Cit. p. 79. Also, see Matthew Lipman and Ann Margaret Sharp, *Philosophy¹ in the Classroom* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), Matthew Lipman, "Ethical Reasoning and the Craft of Moral Practice" In Press. For further insights the relationship between reasoning and morality, see "Thinking Skills in Religious Education," *Educational Reporter* (January, 1985); "Philosophy and the Cultivation of Reasoning," *Educational Leadership*, September, 1984 and "Philosophy for Children and Critical Thinking," *National Forum*, 1985, All of these papers are by Matthew Lipman.
12. S. E. Toulmin. "Rules and Their Relevance for Understanding Human Behaviour," *Understanding Other Persons*, edited by Theodore Miscel (Tolowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1974), pp. 185-215.
13. See Amelie Oakesen Rorty. "A Literary Postscript: Characters, Persons, Selves and Individuals. The Identities of Persons. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 310. Also see Frederick Olafson, *The*

Dialectic of Action, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979) and Bernard Williams, "Persons, Character and Morality" in Amelie O. Rorty's *The Identities of Persons*, pp. 197 - 216. In the same book, consult David Wiggins for his fascinating article on "Locke, Butler and the Stream of Consciousness: and Men as Natural Kinds," pp. 139 - 174.

The book referred to throughout this paper is only one of the philosophical novels in the Philosophy for Children curriculum. However, in many ways, it is the central one. Matthew Lipman, *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*. (New Jersey: First Mountain Foundation, second edition, 1982.) The manual referred to is *Philosophy Inquiry: Instructional Manual to Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery* by Matthew Lipman, Ann Margaret Sharp and Frederick S. Oscanyan. (Co-published by IAPC and University Press of America, Lanham, Maryland, 1984.)