Do We Have A Problem Or Does The Problem Have Us: Comments On *Lisa's* Chapter One

This question is asked by Harry's father at the end of *Lisa's* first chapter. To make its point quite clear, Mister Stottlemeier gives this example to Harry:

> *"Look, if you were finished with school and you weren't sure what you are going to do next, you'd be puzzled and you'd start asking questions. But if there's unemployment, then that's a problem and it's not just your problem." (1)*

For a better understanding of this question about problems, I will briefly refer to John Dewey's approach, as stated in: *Essays in Experimental Logic* (2).

According to Dewey, when a situation becomes: "tensional" (3), reflection appears as the dominant trait. It will then have two main goals:

1 - To locate the difficulty
2 - To devise a method of coping with it (4)

1 — To locate the difficulty

This means in Dewey's terms, to analyze all the components of a problematic situation, just as a scientific experiment when one resolves an object in all its chemical elements. For instance, if we analyze the unemployment stated by Mister Stottlemeier, one will ask such questions:

What do I want to do?
Where will I find that kind of job?
Who may help me to find that job?
etc. etc. etc.

But those are individual questions that are just "the tip of the iceberg" as pointed out Harry's father. What about these other big problems:

10% unemployed workers in the whole country
High tech industrialization creating more and more unemployment
40% of the young adults actually unemployed

When stating those facts, we locate the difficulty not only at the individual level, but we begin to figure out the whole social, political and economical aspects of the problem; then we may say with Harry's father that the problem has us.

2 — To devise a method of coping with it

Dewey wrote that the activity of reflection is always bound to a particular, concrete, empirical situation. Its purpose is not only to understand the problematic situation but also to re-organize its factors in order to solve it. The solution won't be a theoretical one, but a concrete, physical applied solution. Dewey argues that knowledge is not completed until the problem is solved. Frustration and inquiry will continue as long as no solution has been found.

The community of inquiry - as proposed in Lipman's pedagogical approach - may help to locate the difficulty and to devise a method of coping with it. Through dialogue, based on logical argumentation, not only are we thinking by ourselves but also we are thinking about our own interests. The community of inquiry helps people to have an outside look of the inside situation. We still have a problem, but the community takes its share of it; so that the problem no longer has us ... completely.

Gilbert Talbot

Footnotes

1. Lipman, Matthew: *Lisa,* chapter one, p. 9 lines 3-5.
2. Dewey, John: *Essays in Experimental Logic,* Dover Publications Inc. N.Y. 1906, 444p.
3 Id. p. 11.
4. Id. p. 12.

Bibliography

Lipman, Matthew: *Lisa: Ethical Inquiry.* NJ: IAPC, 1983.

Dewey, John: *Essays in Experimental Logic* NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1906, p. 444.