

Teacher Behaviors Which Must be Modeled to Successfully Nurture a Community of Inquiry in the Classroom

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The assumption in this study is that a teacher who has been trained in traditional methods of classroom instruction will find it necessary to modify his or her behaviors in order to successfully nurture the community of inquiry which must exist for the implementation of a Philosophy for Children program, and that this change is not an easy one to make or to internalize.

THE IMPACT OF TEACHER BEHAVIOR IN A COMMUNITY OF INQUIRY

A. T. Lardner, in his article "The Real Behavioral Demands of a Community of Inquiry," noted that the concepts of higher order thinking and philosophical discussions among children are not new. It is the process by which these concepts are introduced within a community of inquiry that is

new. He goes on to note that if teachers participating in a community of inquiry are not aware of what is expected of them within the community, they may be exhibiting and modeling behaviors which are detrimental to the community. He believes that a community of inquiry is not an easy forum to accomplish and wonders if educators and intellectuals value their own ideas too much to be open to the behaviors required by a community.

Lardner questions the assumption of the Philosophy for Children ideology that children are very capable of exhibiting behaviors appropriate to a community of inquiry and adults who have had some experience in the concept are even more capable of such behavior. He believes that it can be very difficult to modify the behavior of adults, especially professionals, because adults may not be capable of the self-sacrifice necessary for participation in a community of inquiry.

Tony Johnson, in his article "Teaching as Translation: The Philosophical Dimension," notes that the mimetic tradition of teaching, which emphasizes transmission and regurgitation of facts, dominated education in the late nine-

teenth and early twentieth centuries. Teachers were to be "efficient technicians capable of transmitting the kind of prepackaged information, skills and values that students need in order to adapt to the present social order."

Johnson suggests that this approach relies on a knowledge base which is fixed rather than ever changing. He suggests the alternative to the mimetic approach is the translation approach which not only enables students to understand their world but gives them the desire to improve it. Teachers using the translation approach encourage their students to ask questions, to look for evidence, to seek and scrutinize alternatives and to be critical of their own ideas as well as others. Johnson believes that teachers who are educated in the mimetic tradition will not easily take to the translation approach.

In another article, "Philosophy for Children and its Critics — Going Beyond the Information Given," Johnson states that the teacher's role is crucial for the development of a community of inquiry to teach Philosophy for Children. Teachers must understand the concepts introduced in the Philosophy for Children novels and must be skilled in conducting philosophical discussions. Otherwise, students are not likely to connect reasoning with their daily lives. He further notes that teachers need help in transforming their classrooms into genuine communities of inquiry.

In "The Study of Teaching and Curriculum," Joseph Malanga writes that every teacher wants his or her students to have the best possible thinking skills. However, he agrees with Johnson that not all teachers are capable emotionally or technically to teach this unique program to their students. Mathew Lipman has also stated that some teachers have more of an inclination toward the desired attributes than do others.

M. Mark Wasicsko, in "Becoming a Teacher: A Personal Journey," asserts that the degree of teacher effectiveness in general is determined by the human qualities inherent in the teacher and is not necessarily a function of subject matter knowledge or the extent to which the teacher strives to change student behaviors or student self-concept. In other words, it may not be the teaching methods as much as the teacher's personal qualities that affect learning outcomes.

DESIRED TEACHER BEHAVIORS

Lardner asserts that members of a community must avoid behavior which discourages arguments that conflict with their own. They must not be entrenched in their beliefs but open to having their beliefs questioned and perhaps revised. A teacher

in a community of inquiry must act as a group dialogue facilitator rather than a disseminator of information and must relinquish her role as the center of attention in order to be an equally respected member of the group.

An example of the opportunities missed when an instructor refuses to set aside his personal agenda was made apparent recently during an interview with an instructor of 7th and 8th grade students in the North Texas area. The instructor teaches survival skills and fire arm safety. These skills are ones which he values highly, and he takes great pleasure from his role as a teacher of this subject. It was pointed out to him that he had the unique opportunity of being able to discuss with students important issues such as recent handgun legislation, the right to bear arms, and the steady increase in deaths of young people by gunshot, which is now second only to traffic accidents. He was asked how often these issues were brought up in the classroom and how he modeled his behavior in order to allow various opinions to be freely discussed. The teacher stated that he never discusses those issues and would not allow them to be discussed in his classroom because he wouldn't want to inflict his belief system on someone else.

Lardner stresses that the teacher must foster an atmosphere that encourages students to take seriously their own ideas and the ideas of others. He believes that students must learn not to be concerned about whether or not his or her ideas are supported by the teacher.

Lardner further notes that adult community members often find it difficult to stifle a desire to force the conversation to return to a previous point in order to state an opinion which he or she did not have the opportunity to give earlier. This behavior cannot be justified when, according to Ann Margaret Sharp, a characteristic of a community of inquiry is that the members follow the inquiry where it leads. Lardner asserts that is often difficult to listen attentively, concentrating on the inquiry in progress instead of following one's own thoughts. It is logical that a member's contributions to the conversation be kept to less than a minute as long as someone else is talking. It is obvious that one must be self-correcting in light of a good argument until the argument threatens a fundamental belief.

Lardner states that the most essential qualities among community of inquiry behaviors are humility, self-denial and restraint and that the behaviors which these qualities produce are the basis of a community of inquiry. Equally as important is the fact that the teacher must ensure that the members of the classroom community exhibit these behaviors and that anyone who wishes to en-

ter the discussion can do so.

Mary I. Yeazell, in "What Happens to Teachers Who Teach Philosophy to Children," quotes Lipman's assumption that teachers who have participated in the community of inquiry process will be able to "understand the content and model the method of philosophical discussion," and that the "teacher's thinking processes should be models for children's thinking."

Yeazell believes that a method should be found to determine which teachers would be more likely to be successful in fostering a community of inquiry. She completed a study to determine if teachers' critical thinking skills and self-perceptions changed as a result of teaching Philosophy for Children. The reason for this approach was that teachers should be modeling thinking skills and behavior conducive to a community of inquiry and that teaching Philosophy for Children should enhance the teacher's behaviors in this regard.

Yeazell used two standardized instruments, the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal, and the Personal Orientation Inventory, to measure the logical thinking abilities of teachers as well as their personal attributes, noting that Lipman's desired teacher characteristics are similar to Maslow's self-actualized person. Yeazell directed ten reading teachers in a program where they used *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery* in their classes. The test results of the seven teachers remaining at the end of the study were evaluated. The teachers had completed an intensive workshop and participated in monthly seminars. They used *Harry* once a week for 45 minutes. The test results showed that although the teachers' critical thinking skills were not changed, their self-actualization did increase. The conclusion was that teachers who exhibit self-actualizing values might be more able to foster a classroom atmosphere which enables the self-development of their students than those teachers who do not have those attitudes.

Linda Sartor is a Sixth grade teacher in California, and Kate Sutherland is a teacher's apprentice in Scotland. In their article, "The Consensus Classroom," Sartor describes her efforts to institute a consensus classroom, turning over all the teacher decisions to the class to be made as a whole. Topics for discussion were decided by the class as well as homework assignments and classroom rules. Problems Sartor encountered with her own behavior included the desire to look good to parents and administrators and exhibiting her need for more control through anger and authoritarian behavior.

During this experience, Sartor learned to stay in the present, responding to whatever circumstances prevailed. She began to trust that every-

thing is perfect just the way it is, no matter how it looks. Free of the need to please others or to control the class, she was able to react differently to each situation and to live with uncertainty.

Tony Johnson says that children who will both understand the world and want to change it must be taught by teachers who are committed to philosophizing. He believes that such teachers will not be produced without a radical change in teacher education. They will need to do more than accept the ideas and principles of the subjects they teach. They will need to understand the origins of the subjects they teach.

Johnson suggests that communities of inquiry should investigate the intellectual structure of various fields of knowledge and investigate how we learn, what should be taught and what it means to be educated. Teachers must respect the student's right to question, to challenge and to demand reasons and justifications for what is being taught.

Joseph Malanga asserts that the qualities which must exist include open mindedness, technical knowledge about methods of inquiry and reason and a firm grasp of teaching concepts, curriculum and the teaching of thinking skills. He also writes that the teacher is not only the authority but also a student who learns through his or her students.

Mark Wasicsko wrote that a teacher must think beyond his personal agenda and attempt to identify with his students, and in doing so will do more toward connecting with that student than if they worked harder to convey subject matter or a respect for rules. According to Wasicsko, in order to be an effective teacher, or colleague, you must be able to put yourself in the other person's shoes, try to understand why they behave the way they do and facilitate an environment which will allow that person the opportunity to open herself up to new ideas and viewpoints.

Wasicsko identifies five areas of perception that can assist in determining whether or not a teacher is effective.

1) Perceptions about the subject matter subject matter — knowledge alone is not sufficient for effective teaching. While knowledge is important, it is more important that an interest in the subject matter be nurtured.

This perception is supported by Tony Johnson's definition of teachers as translators.

2) Perceptions about self — how one views one's self is probably the most important factor in effectiveness. Effective teachers believe they will succeed. They are comfortable enough with themselves as to not be threatened by different cultures or different points of view. They identify with all kinds of people, not just other teachers or people of similar beliefs, race, social, cultural or economic status. An effective teacher relishes the

differences in the world and is in a continual state of learning as well as teaching.

This perception is supported by Mary Yeazell's study regarding teacher's perceptions of self.

3) Perceptions about others — the way in which a teacher views students will be apparent in how they communicate with them, and the student's behavior will subsequently be affected. *Pygmalion in the Classroom* (Rosenthal and Jacobsen, 1969) was a reality check for teachers when students who were pretested for achievement potential post tested according to their pre-test scores, although the pre-test scores initially shown to the teachers were fabricated. Students, as well as colleagues, do pick up on teachers' signals and will behave accordingly.

This perception may be associated with Lardner's contention that students must learn not to be concerned about whether or not his or her ideas are supported by the teacher.

4) Perceptions about teaching — the way in which a teacher sees her job is an important indicator of effectiveness. A teacher who is more concerned with allowing her students to discover themselves, to express their feelings and ideas and to help them realize their potential will be more effective than one who is concerned more with daily classroom behavior and timetables. Allowing students the opportunity to express their ideas and to discuss larger topics related or unrelated to the subject matter will provide an atmosphere conducive to learning not only the subject at hand but life issues and how to communicate with others.

5) A teacher who is more concerned with rules than with people cannot be effective. Focusing on the students as people and their emotional well-being supports the non-threatening atmosphere that enables student to be comfortable with learning.

An example of how teacher behavior more than subject matter knowledge may be a large factor in the outcome of the learning experience could be witnessed when Dr. Ron Reed conducted an adult Analytic Teaching class in the summer of 1993.

During the Analytic Teaching class, with a room of professional educators and administrators, there was a period of uncertainty before the communication began to flow freely. If the instructor had been more concerned with management of the discussion, or with conveying his own beliefs, or had expressed concern about whether or not the group would be able communicate, the group would have been more inhibited and the learning process, learning from each other as well as from the instructor, would have been significantly impeded. Although he is an expert in his field, Dr. Reed's knowledge would not have been

successfully imparted had his behaviors not served to enhance the process.

Students are conditioned to seek approval from the teacher by giving answers that they think the teacher wants to hear rather than forming their own opinions or discovering an answer through logical thinking. Even adults in group situations are tempted to look to the group leader for approval of their answers. They may spend some time trying to evaluate the leader's method of group management and personal beliefs before attempting to offer an opinion. The result is an opinion which is a product of what the group member feels will be met with approval from the leader.

Ann Margaret Sharp, in an article in "Studies in Philosophy for Children," advises that students must see in the teacher a person who doesn't think he knows it all, really loves ideas, respects them as persons, takes what they have to say seriously, and demands logical rigor of them.

In "What is a Community of Inquiry", Ann Sharp points to the following list of behaviors which might indicate to the teacher that students are learning what it is to be part of a community of inquiry.

- Accepts corrections by peers willingly*
- Able to listen to others attentively*
- Able to revise one's views in light of reasons from others*
- Able to take one another's ideas seriously*
- Able to build upon one another's ideas*
- Able to develop their own ideas without fear of rebuff or humiliation from peers*
- Open to new ideas*
- Shows concern for the right of others to express their views*
- Asks relevant questions*
- Verbalizes relationship between ends and means*
- Shows respect for persons in the community*
- Shows sensitivity to context when discussing moral conduct*
- Asks for reasons from one's peers*
- Discusses issues with impartiality*
- Asks for criteria*

This seems to be an appropriate check list for the teacher, as well as for students, to determine if his or her own relationship to the community enhances or stifles the sharing of ideas.

Dr. Sharp notes that the effects of changes in a teacher's behavior which occur in order to accomplish the qualities listed above have implications outside the classroom, with members of the community undergoing shifts in attitudes which change them for the better. She gives the follow-

ing examples of statements made by community members:

I find I am no longer pressured into accepting views that I suspect are harmful.

I can tolerate ambiguity more.

I am no longer in need of pretending what I feel or what I think.

My taste in many things is changing.

I'm beginning to experiment with patterns of behavior that make more sense in my daily life.

What other people say can make a difference in what I finally think.

I find myself listening more.

I'm beginning to understand how very little I really know.

I find myself holding my own views far more tentatively.

I think I'm becoming more careful in how I think about things.

I don't admire sloppy thinking.

Dr. Sharp sees this as a process by which one becomes less preoccupied with self and is thereby able to find meaning in the world and in other people.

SUGGESTIONS FOR STRENGTHENING DESIRED TEACHER BEHAVIORS

Suggestions for strengthening behaviors which are conducive to fostering a community of inquiry include the following:

1. Evaluation by Peers

Informal classroom observation by another teacher could assist in identifying strengths and weaknesses in teacher behavior. An observer might be able to pinpoint where modification is needed in how the teacher relates to students, whether he or she exhibits the need to control through inordinate attention to rules, whether or not he or she attempts to understand the reasons for various student behaviors, whether the teacher acknowledges the rights of children to express their opinions and feelings and whether or not the teacher seems to be more concerned with classroom or curriculum productivity than with how the students will apply their classroom experiences to their lives outside the classroom and their future progress.

This method assumes that the observer is effective in community building and can identify the successful or impeding traits in another teacher.

2. Support Groups

Informal discussions with peers concerning everyday classroom events and frustrations may give teachers an opportunity to identify problems with their own behavior which they are not aware of during daily classroom activity. This method assumes that within the peer group are individuals who are effective community builders and who can model and identify necessary community building traits. It also assumes that the peer support group is a true community in itself and exchanges of opinions and ideas are freely given and readily received.

3. Self-Evaluation

An article entitled "What Educators Can Learn from Listening to Children" outlined a method which Vivant Paley, a kindergarten teacher, found highly successful in identifying and correcting her own behavior when conversing with her students. Tape recording her daily classroom activities allowed her to play the role of classroom observer. She noticed for the first time instances of discrimination stemming from her own discomfort with children who come from backgrounds different from her own and she was able to correct her mistakes. This exercise made her want to be more aware of her behavior and more sensitive to others. Taping classroom conversation, especially video taping, allows the teacher to evaluate her performance privately.

In order for this method to be effective, the teacher must have some knowledge of the traits of effective community building.

4. Outside Evaluation

Classroom evaluation by individuals specifically skilled in community of inquiry could be an invaluable source of information for the classroom teacher. This type of evaluation could be incorporated into the teacher education curriculum. Such periodic evaluation would be standard.

5. Changes in Teacher Education

Another method by which a teacher can determine and correct any limitations is his ability to build a community of inquiry, and one which would naturally lend itself to the outside evaluations described above, is the incorporation of the community of inquiry concept in all teacher education classes. For instance, essential elements methodology currently taught by what Johnson described as the memenic method would be a time of discovery for future teachers, instilling in them not only the wonder and excitement of the subject but a true understanding of its origins and why it is an important topic for today's classrooms.

The method by which this type of instruction is given to future teachers would not only provide first hand experience in how to participate in a community, but would also provide a bond between the teachers which should act as a support mechanism for venting frustrations and obtaining feedback. This is the type of support group needed for peer evaluation described above. Included in the teacher education requirements would be some period of observation and evaluation by an authority on community of inquiry, for instance a faculty or staff member from the teacher education program. Observers would not only evaluate and give feedback, but would periodically serve as guest teachers in the classroom in order to model desired behaviors for the resident teacher as well as for the students and to enhance his or her own experience with community building in the classroom.

6. Teachers as Scholars

Perhaps the most important method for fostering behaviors conducive to community of inquiry is by encouraging teachers to be scholars and to come together on a regular basis for philosophical inquiry. By establishing their own community of inquiry they will encourage each other to pursue knowledge and evaluate ideas which they can take into their classrooms.

7. Dr. Wasicsko offered the following suggestions to improve the perceptions he believes are necessary for effective teaching:

a. Improve self-perception by treating yourself kindly and rewarding yourself daily. Avoid self-defeating thinking. Be aware that mistakes are unavoidable, but not permanent. Practice identifying with students remembering that although teaching is not easy, neither is being a student

b. Improve perceptions of others by having faith in students' abilities. Assume that they are capable. Allow them to discover for themselves what they can do. Don't teach helplessness. Enable them to meet and overcome their own challenges to give them the self-confidence they need to tackle larger issues.

c. Improve perceptions of the task of teaching by seeing the larger purpose of teaching. Ask yourself "Will these kids be better ten years from now because of what we're doing today?"

d. Improve the frame of reference by placing more importance on students and their problems and feelings than on the subject matter.

8. More Suggestions

Survey respondents were asked for advice on fostering positive behaviors in teachers. Responses included the need for a period of apprenticeship

before beginning the process of community in their own classrooms, or other opportunities to observe other teachers. Also, it was stressed that continuing to work toward a community, learning from and correcting mistakes, will be a rewarding experience.

In his response to the survey, Mathew Lipman stressed that modeling was the most effective way to foster positive behaviors. This would lend itself to the changes in teacher education classes suggested above as well as the apprenticeship suggested by another respondent.

Interviews with various education professionals revealed the following:

a. **Tony Johnson** — When asked for his solution to correcting teacher behavior in a philosophy for children setting, Mr. Johnson stated that a teacher whose authoritarian behavior has consistently been rewarded will not change the behavior.

b. **Ron Reed** — According to Dr. Reed, all conceivable methods of teaching appropriate behaviors to teachers who will be doing Philosophy for Children in the classroom have been tried, including experts sitting in judgment in a training center classroom while teachers role play leading inquiry. With all methods, there is still only 15% to 20% success rate. Dr. Reed's comments would indicate the need for continual support of these teachers, perhaps through the peer support and expert observer suggestions noted above.

c. **Teresa de la Garza** — Dr. de la Garza stressed the importance of peer support in the nurturing of teacher behaviors. This would support the suggestions regarding peer support described above.

d. **An instructor for TU Electric's "In Concert with the Environment" program** — This gentleman works for TU Electric teaching educators how to implement TU Electric's "In Concert..." program in their science classrooms. During a recent seminar he touched on a wide variety of issues while he showed the differences in electric wattage usage of various light bulbs and the differences in water usage when simple shower heads and faucet extensions were used. While the students participated in these and other science projects, conversation in the room touched on conservation and the rights of people vs. the rights of animals, energy sources, and the opinions each participant held on various conservation issues. Since he had been a high school science teacher for many years, he was asked if he typically had these types of conversations in his public

school classrooms. He replied that he had, indeed, although it was very unpopular with the school administration who thought it very dangerous to encourage students to consider subjects which might be construed as teaching moral values or subversion.

It was his contention that the support of school administration was a very important factor in the fostering of a teacher's desire to pursue the philosophical concepts underlying their disciplines.

CONCLUSION

Teacher behavior is a crucial factor in the successful implementation of Philosophy for Children. The behaviors necessary to foster a community of inquiry have not traditionally been included in teacher education programs and seem to run contrary to the highly structured curriculum with which today's educators must contend. However, the underlying premise is an ancient one, rooted in the Socratic notion that, while one can make progress toward truth, there is no absolute truth. What has been lost over the past decades has been the nurturing of classroom teachers as scholars. The continued nurturing of teachers as community builders and the ability of teachers to come together to discuss philosophical ideas are of vital importance in the success of teachers who model and foster philosophical pursuits in the classroom.

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