

A Behavioral Pedagogy for the Community of Inquiry

This paper was presented at the North American Association for Community of Inquiry (NAACI) conference held in La Crosse, Wisconsin, USA, in July, 1998.

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BEHAVIORISM

Behaviorism is an ominous term, in philosophy and in education, so let me disclaim a little. Anthony Flew's handy Dictionary of Philosophy gives us three uses for behaviorism, all psychological. There are metaphysical behaviorists, who deny the existence of consciousness (so there exist only things, behaving). Methodological behaviorists are willing to be agnostic about consciousness, but say that still, if psychology is going to make it all the way from philosophy to science, then we have to stick to studying behavior, since that can be observed. And finally, analytical behaviorists only ask us to notice that it's possible to analyze psychological concepts in just behavioral terms. But of course once you admit that, it's hard to see psychological concepts as referring to anything else.

ANALYTICAL BEHAVIORISM

So what I'm doing is behavioral analysis: explaining concepts in terms of behaviors, procedures, and habits. Of course, this is something lots of people do, other than psychologists. In using behavioral analysis in the areas of education and philosophy, I am guided by two thinkers who did this: Aristotle and Charles Sanders Peirce. Aristotle's approach to ethics was essentially behaviorist. He defined virtue as temperate behavior that has been practiced long enough to have become habit (ethos): a disposition to behave in that way. So a courageous person is one who does courageous things, as opposed to one whose psyche is informed by Courage. Charles Peirce constructed a behaviorist semiotics, in which the ultimate meaning of «courage» and every other concept (and in fact the ultimate meaning of every kind of sign) is some difference in habits of behavior. He said:

The entire intellectual purport of any symbol consists in the total of all general modes of rational conduct which, conditionally upon all the possible different circumstances and desires, would ensue upon the acceptance of the symbol. (Peirce 1940, p. 290)

To read a symbol, to interpret it, to take its meaning, is to act differently, and if a word doesn't make any difference in how we act, it's meaningless.

Consider some of the concepts that confront people who are introduced to the community of inquiry: concepts like inquiry, reasonableness, open-mindedness, critical thinking, creativity, caring, self-correction and democracy. To formulate behavioral conceptions of these terms is to concretize them into matrices of specific behaviors, procedures and dispositions. For example, what does impartiality mean in the context of CI? What are the behaviors of impartiality? How can we *practice* impartiality, or *act* on it? What do impartial people *do*? We have to describe impartiality as a set of specific actions that can be practiced until they become habitual.

In fact, most of us already talk this way some of the time, don't we? We discuss the thinking that goes on in CI in terms of making certain kinds of *moves* and following certain *procedures*? Take these lines from Matthew Lipman:

A dialogue that tries to conform to logic, [inquiry in community] moves forward indirectly like a boat tacking into the wind, but in the process its progress comes to resemble that of thinking itself. Consequently, when this process is internalized or introjected by the participants, they come to think in moves that resemble its procedures. They come to think as the process thinks. (Lipman 1992, pp. 15-16).

I suggest that in general, behavioral analysis is a tool we need to examine and improve the behaviors and procedures of our communities of inquiry.

INQUIRY VIRTUES

In talking about normative behavior, I'd like to keep Aristotle's term *virtues*, which I use to mean dispositions to behave in certain ways that are useful, or that would constitute the otherwise vague quality we're talking about. So, for example, Ann Sharp once described impartiality, consistency, reasonableness, and a few other behaviors as 'cognitive virtues' meaning habits of cognitive behavior that are useful for rational deliberation. (Sharp 1992, p. 300) Of course, impartiality, consistency and reasonableness aren't yet *behavioral* terms. But in my mind they do stand for sets of behaviors. So again, in order to really make them virtues, we have to spell them out in terms of specific actions that can be practiced.

Of course, if we're going to talk about cognitive *virtues*, democratic *virtues*, etc., it isn't enough to think of them as behavioral habits: we have to have some teleology in mind. We have to recognize some good (telos) that these virtues are conducive of. And what I'm interested in is evolving the concept of good inquiry as the telos toward which cognitive and other virtues aim. In the last part of my paper I will begin this work of analyzing, in behavioral terms, what are the virtues that constitute good inquiry.

Let's say, for now, that these virtues are open sets of dispositions to behave in ways that further inquiry. I prefer to think of them as open sets because I believe that although many cognitive virtues are useful in many contexts, like all human habits they evolve in response to particular, contingent circumstances, and there is nothing to guarantee their broader usefulness. With this behaviorist understanding we can also identify non-cognitive virtues of inquiry, such as affective, somatic and democratic virtues. And we should consider cognitive and other kinds of vices, meaning habits of behavior that tend to block inquiry.

Now, when I do this, I confess I become a real analytical behaviorist: that is, one who thinks that these moves and procedures we're able to identify are not merely illustrative of, say, impartiality, or conducive of it, but that they *constitute* it, and that in fact, they are all there is to it.

META-LEVEL INQUIRY

All good inquiry involves two levels of inquiry. There has to be a primary topic of inquiry, whether it's science or history or philosophy or the guilt or innocence of a defendant. But at the same time there should be a meta-level inquiry going on: an inquiry into the inquiry we're doing. And we have to interrupt our primary inquiry every so often to take a look at the quality of our procedure, and make changes, so that the inquiry can improve. Meta-level inquiry includes but is not limited to meta-cognition, because there's more to inquiry than cognition. Democracy, for one thing.

Now, the behavioral virtues of inquiry that we identify are the tools we select to conduct our inquiry, and these tools will become the objects of our meta-level inquiries. So as we go along in our primary inquiry, from time to time we stop and evaluate the inquiry tools we've been using, and ask ourselves, are these the right tools? Do we need to work on using them better? Do we need other tools? We continually examine our inquiry behaviors, and we revise them as we need to. So the two purposes of the meta-level inquiry are: to see which behaviors we need more practice in, and to see which behavioral ideals we need to remake. We should constantly redefine the behavioral virtues we set out for ourselves. This, in turn, will help us do a better primary inquiry, which will help us be more sophisticated about our inquiry procedures, and so on: each level of inquiry will inform the other.

The notion of virtue I am employing here is clearly a pragmatist and not an essentialist notion (and so not really an Aristotelian notion). I would expect different communities of inquiry, engaged with divergent problems, to select and/or emphasize different combinations of inquiry virtues, to guide their work. But I would expect all communities of inquiry to adopt procedures¹ for good reasoning and for democracy, because these virtues are central to the identity of inquiry itself.

CONCRETENESS

Here I want to point out a few more benefits of behavioral analysis. The first is concreteness, which is the opposite of vagueness. I owe also to Peirce my understanding of the principle that every sign

(including words and concepts), is inherently vague, meaning that it requires being interpreted; and that this interpretation can only be accomplished by means of other signs, which themselves require interpretation by other signs, and so on. And again, for Peirce, the ultimate sign that interprets a word is not another word, but an action of some kind - a behavior. So behavioral analysis is a useful way to make concepts less vague. Take any five nations or five classrooms that claim to follow the same set of democratic principles; if we look at how those principles are applied or practiced, we may see that we in fact have quite different notions of these principles. This is the point, after all, of giving these terms operational definitions before we do a survey and ask each other how many of us practice critical thinking or democracy in our classrooms, because we all know that if we don't give operational definitions we already know the answer to our question without doing the survey: everybody does critical thinking and democracy. I do, don't you?

And not only procedural concepts like impartiality and critical thought (concepts instrumental to inquiry) may be concretized by means of behavioral analysis, but also substantive concepts central to the disciplines. In philosophical communities of inquiry, for example, behavioral analysis is often used in the construction of concepts like justice, personhood and mind. This is not to say that behavioral analysis captures the entire meaning of such terms, without any remainder of vagueness (particularly if the analysis always stays verbal and never includes acting on, practicing, or experimenting with a concept). A concept is always relatively vague: relative to how far it has been interpreted. Signs only need to be made concrete enough to get the job done, and no further. There's no such thing as absolute concreteness. So the job of behavioral analysis is never done. For instance, to say that one of the tasks of being reasonable is to fairly consider the views of others, is to make the notion of reasonableness less vague, but it isn't yet at the level of behavior. What does it mean to consider others' views? Is it enough to institute a procedure whereby others can voice their views, or must I solicit those views, and even help others articulate them?

Another benefit of this kind of analysis is pluralism. Different communities may come up with different procedures for considering other views, and still call themselves reasonable. And such differences can be very illuminating. Finally, working out behavioral interpretations is a useful way to relate the meanings of vague and diverse things like ideas, emotions, values, ethics, desires, relationships, commitments, and such, because it trades them all for the same currency: actions, procedures, and habits.

COLLECTIVE BEHAVIOR

The next benefit is that behavioral analysis is a tool we can use to examine not only how concepts like reasonableness and democracy animate our *own* behavior as individuals, but how they animate the organization and functioning of communities. And this can quickly turn into political criticism. Peirce and Lipman have pointed out that many times the behavior we study - the behavior that's designated by some of our favorite terms, like reasonableness - is *not* individual but collective behavior - behavior that requires collaboration. Groups of people develop habits of *interactive* behavior, such as distributed thinking, in which different members of the community make different thinking moves that advance the inquiry

toward its goal. When we look at the transcript of a community of inquiry dialogue, we see cooperative discernment, collective reasoning, interactive care, etc.

Democracy is largely a set of collective behaviors, and to make a parallel with distributed thinking we might call our democratic practices in the community of inquiry *distributed governance*, which means that we share the power, we set our own agenda and guide each other through it. In a mature community it means there isn't one facilitator, because noticing who in the room isn't getting to speak or who needs help articulating a point, and who is talking too much or being aggressive, and then making judgments about how to make the participation more equitable - these are democratic muscles that everyone needs to exercise. Otherwise, at the end of the semester the teacher is the only one with a practiced democratic awareness and judgement, and the students' democratic awareness and judgment have atrophied.

Self-correction is another set of collective behaviors. I mean besides something we do individually - learning from the group and modifying our own conceptions, thinking habits and social habits toward self re-creation - self-correction is also something the community does, or something we do as a community. We re-construct the interactive habits of the *community* to make them more democratic, more reasonable, more empathetic. This enables a maturation process for the community that may be evaluated separately from the maturation of each of its members. And ideally, a strong community will come to practice cognitive and social virtues that none of its members have practiced individually.

ACTION

One of the most important benefits of behavioral analysis is that it helps us move from reflection to action. Behavioral analysis leads us to think of both the philosophical concepts we develop and the cognitive and social virtues we use to develop them as behaviors. Ideally, then, it not only gets us thinking and talking about action, but it gets us *acting*: it moves us to *alter* our behaviors, experiment with them, practice the ones we find more useful, and make them into new habits. It makes action and new habit-formation the *meaning* of the concepts we construct. In this regard, I would agree with Lipman that the aim of inquiry - of critical, creative and caring thinking - is always some kind of judgment, so long as we understand that the judgment that results from creative thinking, say, is an act of creation; the judgment that results from caring thinking is some kind of ethical behavior. In that regard, behavioral analysis is a tool of self-creation we can't do without.

What are the two most common stereotypes about philosophy that we encounter when we try to bring it into the schools? That it makes people lose their religion and that it turns perfectly likable people into useless intellectuals - coffee-house fixtures and academic types who can argue for hours about things like determinism but who can't summon enough religious or political or romantic convictions to live a meaningful life. When I tell students that for me philosophy is the first phase of activism, I see them trying to put that together and coming up blank. But it follows from the understanding that philosophical concepts and tools have behavioral meaning, that the ultimate aim of philosophical inquiry is some kind of activism. Peirce said that ideas mean actions and habits, and that communities

need to test their ideas in real experience. What if we talked about all our ideas in terms of action, practice, experiment, movement, and activism? It might turn out that we would think of philosophy as something that happens not merely and not primarily in academic journals and conferences, or even in coffee houses, pubs and progressive classrooms, but also, and in a sense more essentially in soup kitchens, picket lines, community gardens, congressional committees, and other such places that insightful teachers and students sometimes lead each other.

PEDAGOGY

The last benefit of behavioral analysis is pedagogical. The process of doing a behavioral interpretation of what makes good inquiry - of doing the meta-level inquiry and altering our behaviors as we go along, is the best pedagogy I have found for establishing new communities of inquiry, and for the maturation of existing communities. And children can do behavioral analysis. They can discuss questions like: What does reasonableness look like? How can I show that my community is tolerant? How does close-mindedness get acted out? What kinds of things does a fair person do? If that's what justice means, shouldn't we try to get this school policy changed? I know this is a safe place when

A BEHAVIORAL ANALYSIS OF THE *COMMUNITY* OF INQUIRY

Here is one, somewhat simplistic way I've used behaviorism to start a new community of inquiry with college students.

First, we talk about different kinds of communities. We make a list of communities of different kinds: military groups, families, religious communities, the KKK, AA, Queer Nation, MADD, the Utah Jazz, the Boston Symphony, Congress, AA, e-mail groups, fan clubs, whatever, but including the community of inquiry.

Then we try to name an over-riding purpose for each: why do these groups of people come together?

Next, we match virtues to each of the communities - not in behavioral terms yet, but the generalized virtues that each community would have to espouse and practice, in order to fulfill its purpose. For instance: loyalty, mutual respect, obedience, self-correction, open-mindedness, participation, reasonableness, justice/fairness, love, productivity, profit, intimacy, piety, courage, honesty, etc. We also notice some vices.

Then we work on behavioral analyses of some of these virtues.

Virtues of Inquiry Necessary for a Community of Inquiry		
Cognitive Virtues	More Specifically	Behaviors
Reasonableness	giving and asking for reasons	(same)
	checking inferences	(same)
	using criteria	(same)
	uncovering assumptions	(same)
Open-Mindedness	consider other points of view	Ask what points of view are missing
Clarity	define terms	
	using criteria	
	making good distinctions	
Creativity		
Fallibilism, Self-correction	active listening	Look at each other instead of at the teacher Paraphrase Avoid side conversations Ask questions Nod; gesture attentiveness
Affective Virtues	More Specifically	Behaviors
Empathy, Care	Examine feelings	Share the feelings, hopes, memories, etc., that arise in our discussion
	Notice whom your actions affect	
	Notice what others care about	
Respect	Politeness	Use polite voicetone and word choice, avoid aggression and dismissal
	Equity	Don't dominate the conversation
Democratic Virtues	More Specifically	Behaviors
Shared power	anti-hierarchy, distributed governance	taking turns reading all can put questions on the board sitting in a circle dialogue instead of lecture
Tolerance	non-censorship	no views are off limits to discuss
	non-coercion	teacher is careful about sharing opinions no bullying others no deceitful reasoning
Pluralism		
Universal Participation		taking turns reading don't talk too much don't talk too little
Cooperation over competition		
Somatic Virtues	More Specifically	Behaviors
Body awareness	posture	Use good posture
	fatigue	Use good posture drink water get up and move around
Gesture and body language	gesture	
	body language	

And we save the community of inquiry for last, and do a detailed behavioral analysis of its virtues. Finally, we choose one or two virtues at a time to work on until either we're getting pretty good at them, or we decide to throw them out.

The following chart presents a scheme in progress from one of my classes.

ACTUALIZING BEHAVIORAL VIRTUES

Once this kind of analysis is done, as well as it can be done on a conceptual level, there are several ways to incorporate the behavioral virtues that have been identified into our inquiry sessions:

1. We can get in the habit of announcing our moves, saying things like, «I want to ask Shakisha to clarify what she meant by 'sexually ambiguous.'» Or, «I have a counterexample of Tyrone's statement that women are more nurturing than men.» Identifying the kinds of moves we make as we go along makes it easier to move into a meta-level inquiry because it makes the structure of our inquiry more visible.

2. We can take turns tabulating the kinds of moves made in the discussion, e.g. asking for clarification, giving reasons, examining inferences, etc., according to categories we decide on beforehand, so that we get an interesting procedural map of our inquiry, which we can analyze for procedural strengths and weaknesses.

3. We can assign a number of people to record and report on instances of different kinds of moves, like making analogies,

drawing distinctions, etc., so that one person only listens for one kind of move.

4. We can assign a number of people to *make* certain kinds of moves during the discussion.

5. We can decide on a set of virtues to work on, and make them into criteria for evaluating each discussion session. We take five or ten minutes at the end to put our thumbs up or down on each item, and discuss what we did well and not so well.² Here is an example of some general discussion criteria developed by another of my classes. Notice that many, though not all of the notions are spelled out in behavioral terms.

COMMUNITY DISCUSSION EVALUATION

(criteria for helping us mature as a community of inquiry)

1. Were we actively listening to each other? (make eye contact, look at each other instead of at the teacher, nod, sitting in different places, avoid side conversations, paraphrase, ask questions)

2. Were we responding to each other or did we just take turns speaking? (announce what you're going to do and how it relates to someone else's contribution)

3. Did most of us participate or did just a few dominate? (allow wait time before responding; after you speak, wait until five others have spoken before you speak again)

4. Did our discussion open up the topic? Did we construct a rich understanding of the texts? (refer to text, summarize at the end)

5. Was the discussion relevant/meaningful to us? (ask for help making the discussion more relevant)

6. Were we self-corrective, as individuals and as a community? (notice and correct thinking mistakes, look for missing points of view, ask for help)

7. Were we respectful of each other? (respond, use polite tone of voice and word choice, avoid aggression, avoid dismissal, avoid making the discussion too personal).

NOTES:

1. A note on procedures. Procedures are rules for behavior, so sometimes a good way to start a behavioral analysis of an institution's values is to examine its procedural rules. This works well with democratic institutions, for example, in which case the behavioral analysis becomes a political tool. The fact, that formal procedures are written down, so that sometimes in discussing' them we make reference to texts rather than to actual human conduct does not make them any less appropriate to behavioral studies, as long as the procedures are rules for how to act and not for how to think or what to believe. Of course the democratic communities we belong to should continually monitor the democratic quality of both their formal procedures and the actual habits of human interaction that form within them.

2. This technique was developed by Dr. Tom Jackson at the University of Hawaii.

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