Reflecting and Looking Forward: Inquiring into Inquiry, Philosophy and Community[1]

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Introduction

I trace the beginnings of my journey in both P4C and p4c[2] to my first encounter with Matthew Lipman, in his "office" which was, in fact, a caravan parked on the campus of Montclair State College. That was in August 1982, just prior to my oral examination at Oxford, in which I managed to persuade the examiners that my thesis in the philosophy of biology warranted the award of a doctorate degree. Over the next few years – and I admit, with mixed feelings – my intellectual (and physical) energy took me out of theoretical philosophy and into philosophical practice, i.e., philosophy for children, although my work in the philosophy of biology had already convinced me that philosophers could make important contributions beyond their own field. As someone long interested in exploring the connection between philosophy and education, P4C "hit the nail on the head": it was precisely what I had been looking for. I hasten to add, however, that I never lost my interest in, or love for, philosophy itself. Indeed, notwithstanding the historical features of P4C that linked it to a specific "curriculum" and pedagogic structure, I have always seen p4c (lower case intended here) as a way of bringing philosophy and young people together, rather than a self-contained discipline in its own right. After all, we don't refer to "Maths for children" or "Science for children", because we want to preserve the idea that what we are doing in schools really is maths and science. This is somewhat ironic, given that the practice of teaching these subjects in schools often bears little resemblance to what actually goes on in their parent disciplines. To what extent is that also true for philosophy, it might be asked?

By way of moving toward an answer to this question, I make two contextual points. First, while I do think that we need a clear sense of what "philosophy" means in the context of p4c, I don't find it helpful to insist that it refers to Pragmatist philosophy alone just because (i) Lipman, Sharp and subsequent generations of scholars identify with this particular tradition, and (ii) the same tradition has emphasized key aspects of the practice of p4c, including those connected with the pedagogical environment called "the community of inquiry." Speaking from experience, I have found children of all ages happily and productively drawing on and applying (if inadvertently) aspects of the Anglo-American analytic tradition, even if this does happen to match my own philosophical predilections. Indeed, and this is my second point, I am prepared to assert that philosophy, generally, exemplifies certain elements that lie at the heart of education itself, including a commitment to "getting to the bottom of things" while realizing that the bottom is rarely, if ever, reached and, accordingly, there is always more work to do. This commitment is neatly captured by the term "inquiry" (see Gardner, 1995). In this essay, I am engaging in a meta-level inquiry into the nature of inquiry.

It is tempting to cite stereotypes of teaching and learning where the chief dynamic is the transmission of "stuff", along the lines of Freire's (1970) "banking" model of education, in which case

philosophy may seem to offer an attractive alternative on the grounds that there is no "stuff" – in the form of accepted content – to be transmitted. However, as appealing as this may be as a marketing ploy for p4c, it misrepresents teaching and learning both generally and in the specific case of philosophy in schools. On the one hand, good teachers in any subject area understand the importance of focusing more on inquiry – as characterized above – (even if their efforts are undermined by rigid models of assessment and accountability); and on the other hand, the practice of teaching and learning in philosophy does not always qualify as inquiry-based. Think, for example, of philosophy courses offered at senior secondary level in Australia, where the sheer amount of textual content ("stuff") leaves little room for genuine inquiry; or of philosophy classrooms at any level where – perhaps due to lack of experience or philosophical expertise on the part of the teacher – questioning, discussion and other activities remain superficial at best. These two examples represent a tempting but false dichotomy that needs to be exposed: that between (objective) "fact" and (subjective) "opinion". Both have their place but, taken together, they squeeze out the crucial domain of *inquiry* which lacks the finality of facts, on the one hand, and the flimsiness of opinions, on the other.

I have long supported the idea that classrooms and other learning environments should be transformed into *communities of inquiry*, regardless of the subject or discipline being taught. While the origins of this concept predate P4C (it being one of Lipman's and Ann Sharp's greatest insights to infuse the latter with the former), [3] I believe, nevertheless, that we can learn a great deal about what such a transformation involves by taking as paradigm the model of the community of *philosophical* inquiry. Freed from the accountability requirements associated with finding the "correct" answers, philosophy teachers use "open questioning", among other strategies, to encourage inquiry – what I term "powerful thinking" – in their students.[4] More precisely, these strategies encourage "powerful talking", i.e., dialogue (I shall have more to say about this below). However, it does not follow that the absence of correct answers is a necessary condition of either open questioning or powerful thinking/dialogue. It does not follow unless we are prepared to rule out the possibility of inquiry in domains like science where, for all intents and purposes, there are well-established answers or, at least, well-understood empirical procedures for arriving at them. Indeed, neither the presence nor the absence of "answers" (pre-determined or otherwise) is necessary for inquiry.

Whether implicitly or explicitly, inquiry is preceded and driven by questions, whereby the process of inquiry may be construed as a search for solutions or answers to these questions. Generally, we ask questions when there is something which (i) we do not know or understand and (ii) we wish/seek to know or understand. Wishing and seeking, like asking, reflect a motivation driven by curiosity, puzzlement or wonder. But while questions – whether asked explicitly or lying in the background – are essential to any inquiry, their presence does not, by itself, signal that some kind of inquiry is occurring, or is about to occur. I may ask you whether or not it is raining outside, or to account for your whereabouts at the time of the burglary or, in more pedagogically familiar terms, to prove a mathematical theorem (i.e., to ask you for the solution in the expectation that it will require you to produce a proof), or generate a hypothesis about the results of mixing sodium and chloride (i.e., to ask you what happens when you mix them). In all such situations, my questions reflect curiosity on my part although they may not produce much by way of inquiry. Notice that this curiosity might be "first-order" or "second-order": the former when someone is genuinely curious as to the answers to the questions being asked; the latter – characteristic of the "question-response-evaluation" scenarios commonly employed in classrooms – when that curiosity is focused on whether or not *those being asked* know, or can work out, the answer. My contention is that the potential for genuine inquiry is inversely proportional to the expectation, on the part of those being asked (students, typically), that

those asking (teachers) already know the answers on account of their expertise, reputation or status. This expectation, in turn, feeds the desire to satisfy the questioner by providing the correct answer.

What emerges so far, then, is that (i) many questions, whether first or second-order, are not aimed at provoking inquiry; (ii) inquiry is not ruled out by asking questions that have determinate answers [in any discipline], nor is it guaranteed by asking questions that have no determinate answers (as in philosophy); and (iii) over and above the desire to know or understand something new, the potential for genuine inquiry depends upon the absence of the expectation that someone else – the teacher, the text-book, the computer – already knows the answer. To what extent does this summary capture both the nature of inquiry and what actually drives inquiry? Not greatly, it must be said, but it does, at least, point us in the right direction, namely, away from a narrow focus on subject matter and content, toward specific dispositional characteristics of those who engage in inquiry (Splitter, 2010a). Regarding the latter, we should not ignore the connection between what may be termed "professional inquiry" – i.e., inquiry engaged in by (adult) inquirers such as scientists, historians, mathematicians, philosophers, etc. – and "student inquiry" – i.e., inquiry engaged in by students who may be novices with respect to the subjects in question. I have already stated that inquiry is a process aimed at answering questions or solving problems which precede and drive it. The detailed nature of this process depends upon the subject matter, discipline or field of inquiry, be it philosophy, science, history, social studies, literature, mathematics, etc. I am assuming that each of these disciplines can indeed be associated with a certain *discipline* of thought and activity, i.e., a body of rules and procedures which guide its followers and practitioners to make certain kinds of moves and avoid other kinds. Further, those who hold that the *community of inquiry* provides an appropriate framework for effective teaching and learning are proposing that students acquire and enact collaboratively *the same disciplines of inquiry* as those modelled by their more expert counterparts, albeit at a suitable level of complexity in relation to their age, maturity, knowledge level, etc. In short, at the heart of student learning in science, philosophy and history lies their own reflective and self-correcting practice in and of these disciplines. This idea, aimed at reducing the gap between *learning* x and *doing* x is hardly new; it serves as a reminder that a community of inquiry is, at least ideally, an *authentic* environment in which novices, as well as experts – with teachers placed somewhere between these extremes – regard themselves as thinking scientifically, mathematically, philosophically, and so on (Splitter, 2009; Taylor, 1991).[5]

The Idea of *Settlement* [6]

Irrespective of one's commitment to something called "the truth," I share the Pragmatist view that the process of inquiry involves moving from a state of "unsettlement" to one of (relative) "settlement" (judgment), while realizing that the latter is, itself, a "resting place" from which, in due course, further inquiry may be launched (just as a plateau represents a resting place on the way to the mountain peak) (Dewey, 1938, 1956).[7] I also agree with the central place that open questioning plays, both in *initiating* and in *furthering* the inquiry. But what precisely is *open* questioning? I have rejected the view that open questions are questions with no settled answers, on the grounds that it sets too high a standard for inquiry as an activity that can realistically be pursued by students. There ought to be room for (open) inquiry irrespective of the state of settlement, at least if the latter refers to what is known or understood by relevant experts (notably, scientists and other scholars). And, indeed, there is room, if we shift the focus of what counts as settled from the experts to the students, who may or may not be on their way to becoming experts. In so doing, we also focus on both the type and the level of

motivation that moves them to search for answers (or explanations). I hold that:

> The *feeling* or *belief* that matters are unsettled, in so far as it determines the dispositional states of those inquiring, is the crucial ingredient needed for sparking an inquiry, irrespective of the state of settlement among relevant experts in the field.

In referring to feeling *and* belief here, I have in mind two aspects of unsettlement which are mutually reinforcing. When we are genuinely puzzled or intrigued by something (a question, problem, scenario), we both *feel* a sense of unsettlement that yearns to be resolved (psychological or subjective unsettlement) and, within the context and boundaries of our current state of knowledge, *believe* that the answer really is unknown or unresolved (epistemological unsettlement). Of course, when those inquiring happen to be, or include, relevant experts, then their sense that things are not settled may be taken as definitive of the state of knowledge in the field itself. But since my concern here is with the conditions underlying student-based inquiry, we do need to distinguish between questions that students find unsettling and those that relevant experts find unsettling.

The following is a list of dispositions or attitudes that are involved in the inquiry process which, taken together, elucidate the role played by the transition from "unsettlement" to "settlement":

1. An awareness – including self-awareness – that we (i.e. the group or community which is asking or responding to the initial question or confronting a puzzling scenario) either don't know the answer to the question or do not understand something which is needed for its solution (epistemological unsettlement);
2. First-order curiosity or puzzlement (psychological unsettlement) which motivates us to look for answers, understanding, explanations…[8]
3. A belief or expectation that we *can* find a satisfactory – and satisfying – answer/response/ explanation [settlement] or, at least, make some progress toward one (relative settlement);
4. More general dispositions such as patience, persistence, confidence, thoroughness, respecting the procedures appropriate to the mode of inquiry (e.g. scientific or historical method, reasoning, conceptual thinking…), and a commitment to self-corrective thinking. These dispositions are known as "intellectual virtues".

The rationale for adding 3 (the belief or expectation that settlement is possible) is that it motivates us to proceed, and reinforces the general dispositions described under 4. Conversely, in the absence of such a belief or expectation – which can also be described in terms of *hope* – any attempt to move forward may well be viewed as pointless. Still, it is worth pointing out that in the right circumstances – an inspiring teacher who invokes trust, a supportive community of fellow inquirers – we might be moved to proceed in the absence of such a belief or hope.

The "Illusion of Unsettlement"

In practice, the dispositional sequence I have outlined does not always run smoothly. Earlier I proposed that the potential for genuine inquiry is inversely proportional to the expectation, on the part of those being asked (students, typically), that those asking (the teacher) already know the answer on account of their expertise, reputation or status. This expectation, in turn, motivates students to satisfy the teacher by providing the correct answer (or, at least, the answer she is looking for). It also motivates the teacher to provide an appropriate evaluation or confirmation in response ("Right!"; "Not quite!", "Anyone else?"…). Such expectations and motivations distract from, if not subvert, the

inquiry process; after all, there is a difference between getting to the bottom of things and arriving, expeditiously, at solutions which have been pre-determined. In these situations, which are all-too familiar to students and teachers alike, the first-order curiosity about the original question or puzzle, outlined in 2 above, is replaced by the motivation to get the right answer and "move on".

Fortunately, this scenario is not inevitable, even when teachers are confident that they do know the answers to, and understand the issues behind, the questions that are asked. Good teachers know how to keep the spark of curiosity alive in their students, to fuel their desire to find the answers for themselves (albeit collaboratively and under her guidance), and to persuade them that solutions are, indeed, within their reach. They do this by distracting students from playing the familiar "Can you tell me the answer that I am looking for?" game *by acting as co-inquirers* and *facilitators* rather than *experts* with respect to the subject matter involved. This, in turn, requires teachers to engineer a different kind of game which may be termed "entertaining the illusion of *unsettlement*"; that is, simulating in the classroom the same kind of environment as might be found among scientists or other experts (including philosophers) working at the epistemological boundaries of their disciplines. Assuming that the questions at issue do arouse the curiosity of students so that they experience a sense of intellectual unsettlement and a corresponding desire to find a solution (1 and 2 above), teachers can demonstrate, by their own practice and attitudes, that there will be no inevitable "short-cuts" to resolution and that the only way for students to relieve their sense of unsettlement is to think about the issues for themselves. The following comment nicely captures what I have in mind here: "Good teachers…know the set curriculum outcomes, but suspend desire for these… allowing them to be rediscovered through [genuine] inquiry…" (Metcalfe and Game, cited in Scholl 2010, 6).

I take it that suspending desire for predetermined curriculum outcomes is akin to both suspending desire (on the part of students) to gain the teacher's approval by obtaining the "right" answer, and suspending desire (on the part of the teacher) to push students toward a known outcome. How, in practice, do teachers suspend such desire (their own and their students')? Not by insisting that there *is no* outcome to be obtained; such insistence is likely to drain the potential inquiry of much of its interest. Nor again by requiring teachers to pretend that they do not know the likely outcome; this threatens to make the whole activity even less authentic than it may seem already. Teachers suspend the desire for predetermined outcomes by embedding questions and problems into contexts which students find intrinsically enticing, intriguing, puzzling, etc. The expectation here is that such intrinsically motivating factors are sufficiently powerful as to subdue or divert the extrinsic desires described above. This is why teachers in a community of inquiry, instead of introducing a topic with specific questions that are likely to provide only extrinsic motivation (whereby students will ask themselves "What answer is she looking for?"), usually begin by sharing a scenario or context (story, video, activity, media article, etc.) which both has a strong likelihood of puzzling, intriguing or otherwise capturing the interest of students and is linked, in appropriate ways, to the subject matter that they intend to cover.

The Case of Philosophy and the "Illusion of Settlement"

Many children, like many adult philosophers, are content to discuss philosophical questions indefinitely, without the expectation that at the end of the day, they will have arrived at – and, presumably, agreed upon – any solutions. Others, however, may not relish the prospect of an inquiry which never ends, preferring either to give up in frustration ("This is going around in circles"; "There are no answers so what's the point?"…) or not to begin in the first place. Again, pointing out to students that the questions about which they are deliberating have been around for thousands of years

and never satisfactorily answered is likely to appeal to some ("Wow! We are really having a dialogue with Plato (etc.) here") but not others. It is easy to dismiss the negative side by pointing out that this is what happens when students are spoon-fed solutions or spend their school lives answering questions and solving problems that, as they well know, have been answered and solved by thousands before them. However, such a response is not altogether convincing because, irrespective of the epistemological status of questions that really do not have settled answers, there is a separate expectation – and corresponding belief – on the part of those engaged in an inquiry that if we just keep trying, we will, indeed, find a solution and, thereby, conclude the inquiry. Why bother asking questions in the first place if we are already convinced that there are no answers?

I had long thought that the only decent response to the conundrum posed by this last question was to advise inquirers to adjust their cognitive expectations and beliefs away from the unrealistic prospect of *the* right or final truth of the matter, toward more modest objectives. Two such objectives come to mind; one substantive, the other procedural. On the one hand, student inquirers should celebrate those occasional "light bulb" or "aha!" moments that signify both a breakthrough in their *understanding*, and a resting point or plateau on their journey toward finding a solution ("So there are at least three types of reality," "I can see now how the mind can exist without being an actual object," "So both intention and outcome are important elements to consider when making ethical judgments", ...). On the other hand, they can celebrate mastering a new *procedure* (argument by analogy, identifying hidden assumptions, even asking a philosophical question...) that will likely assist them in future inquiries. Needless to say, such objectives tend to be complementary: mastering a new procedure leads to a new and important substantive realization, etc.

While I stand by these ways of modifying our original expectations when faced with philosophical questions, I now think that something further may also be needed – or, at least, helpful. It brings us back to the idea, expressed in condition 3 above, that a key aim of any inquiry is to arrive at some kind of *settlement* which, as I have explained, has both psychological and epistemic aspects. For, surely, the settlement aimed for refers to the original question itself, i.e., as a *whole*, not just in part, and not just some procedural gains along the way. In this respect, philosophical inquiry with students is not so different from that which engages professional philosophers (and, needless to say, teachers of philosophy). When embarking on a philosophical inquiry, we may need to play a different *game* which can be called "entertaining an illusion of *settlement*"; that is, we proceed with the same kind of dispositional state of mind as we would in an area such as science, where there is a clear assumption that if only we had sufficient time, energy, patience, etc., we *would indeed* come up with a solution. That we do not, in fact, find it does not dent our commitment to ongoing inquiry, as long as we continue to entertain the same illusion. Moreover, we deem the inquiry to be justified and worthwhile because, when we look back and see what we have achieved, we realize we have made real progress on procedural and/or substantive grounds, as discussed above.

Upon further reflection, I do not think that characterizing the philosophical questions as questions with no settled answers is particularly helpful. I am thinking here not just of the need for an illusion of settlement to make the inquiry seem worthwhile, but also because it is simply not clear that no philosophical questions have settled answers. If we think of such familiar philosophical puzzles as those concerning the concept of identity (*The Ship of Theseus* and Heraclitus' claim that "You cannot step into the same river twice"), it does seem that once we become clear about the meanings of the key concepts involved, the puzzles can be resolved. In my terms, *conceptual clarification and analysis can, at least sometimes, relieve the sense of unsettlement, both psychologically and epistemologically*. In this respect such

philosophical problems are akin to those in science and other disciplines, yet warrant being described as "philosophical" because of the manner in which we seek to solve them.

Follow-up, *Probing* or Socratic Questions

Thus far I have aligned my discussion of the dispositions conducive to inquiry with the kinds of questions that initiate or spark inquiry. But there is another type of question which is highly relevant to the structure of inquiry, namely, those questions we often term "procedural" or "follow-up" questions (as noted in the above heading, I also associate the terms "probing" and "Socratic" with this type, because these are the questions characteristically employed by Socrates in his dialogues with scholars and students in ancient Athens). In our 1995 book, Ann Sharp and I constructed a graph consisting of two axes: "Procedural-Substantive" and "Closed-Open" (Splitter and Sharp 1995, 58). Examples of procedural questions include "Are you implying that…?", "What assumption is being made here?", "Do you agree with her reasoning?", "If you are right about that, what would follow?", "Can you find a counter-example to this rule?" and so on. What role do such questions play in inquiry and how well do they qualify according to the dispositional aspects I have been considering?[9]

It is no accident that procedural questions of this type are invariably context-dependent (or *indexical*), as indicated by the open-ended "…" and use of the terms "here", "this", "that", "her", etc., whose actual references can be suppled only by tracing them back to specific items (statements, persons, etc.) previously referred to. Whatever substantive content they have is drawn from those items and contexts. In presenting them in an abbreviated or schematic form as shown, we focus attention on their primary purpose, which is to explore or probe the logic, direction and shape of the inquiry as it unfolds. But the inquiry itself derives its content from more substantive questions and responses. Likewise, for the dispositional conditions I have been discussing. We do not need to be overly concerned with whether or not inquirers are aware that they don't know the answer to specific procedural questions or if they induce a sense of unsettlement, etc., so long as the substantive elements of the inquiry meet these conditions. Of course – and this is an important qualification – if it should turn out that students do not understand a particular procedural move (looking for a counter-example, identifying the argument structure used, etc.), then the procedure may become the subject of a separate inquiry. Indeed, it is a merit of *philosophical* inquiry that in the course of asking about the meaning of substantive terms like "truth," "real" or "mind," we may find it necessary to digress (as it were) in order to consider what such procedural terms as "counter-example" or "valid argument" mean. *All* concepts (and associated questions) are potential topics for philosophical inquiry. By contrast, teachers of science, history or literature who discover that students do not grasp the meaning or significance of certain procedural elements may find it more difficult to devote time to clarifying the latter because to do so would take them beyond the substantive boundaries of their own discipline or subject matter, and so may exceed either their own capabilities (basic logic is not a regular subject in teacher education) or the time allocated for the subjects in question. Of course, such boundary problems would be less troublesome if (i) teacher professional development were more inclusive of the philosophical dimensions of teaching and curriculum, and (ii) school curricula and timetables were more fluid and integrated, reflecting the epistemological reality that human inquiry and experience are not neatly carved up according to subject area.

Inquiry as *Self-corrective* Thinking

Matthew Lipman wrote that inquiry can be characterized as "self-correcting practice in which a subject matter is investigated with the aim of discovering or inventing ways of dealing with what is

problematic" (Lipman 2003, 184). Good inquirers are willing to temper their passion and enthusiasm for their subject matter by exhibiting those attitudes or dispositions – intellectual humility, persistence, self-effacement, sense of fallibility, etc. – which make it relatively easy for them to self-correct, that is, to acknowledge the power of a counter-argument or objection made by a co-inquirer (or perhaps themselves) and *rethink* their point of view – perhaps even their entire line of inquiry. In the absence of such dispositions, the inquiry may not even get off the ground because those involved will be reluctant to admit that there is something of concern which they do not know or about which they are less than certain. To the extent that certainty excludes the possibility of being mistaken, it, as much as indifference, is the enemy of all genuine thought and inquiry. Conversely, as can be corroborated by studying the history of scientific inquiry, the path of progress toward greater understanding and knowledge allows for – and, arguably, necessitates – making, acknowledging and repairing mistakes. In the terms of the present discussion, dogmatic and authoritarian thinking lacks the crucial sense of *unsettlement* which drives inquiry.

Dogmatism – including all forms of fundamentalism and extremism – is not the only obstacle to inquiry. To be unsettled by a question, in my sense, presupposes that we *care* about it – and, in turn, we care about finding an answer or solution or, at least, making some progress toward one. Accordingly, one avoids the sense of unsettlement simply by *failing to care*, a condition often manifested by disillusioned or alienated students who feel that regular schooling has nothing to offer them. Needless to say, we cannot compel others to care but here we find one important merit of the classroom when it functions as a community of inquiry: its members develop a multi-dimensional sense of care which embraces caring for one another as persons, caring for the procedures of inquiry (i.e., for the quality of those skills and strategies in which they engage and which they seek to master as *powerful thinkers*), and caring for the questions, topics, concepts and other elements which make up the content of their inquiry. It is this pervasive sense of care which, in turn, underlies the key dispositions of inquiry that I have been discussing. Needless to say, students also care about other aspects of their school experience, including gaining appropriate recognition from teachers and peer group, and progressing through the various grade levels that lead to "success." It is unrealistic to imagine them not caring about these things; still, the prospects for genuinely powerful thinking and inquiry depend upon cultivating in them the more intrinsic sense of care to which I have been alluding (Splitter, 2010b; also, Noddings, 2002).

Philosophical Inquiry

So far, I have defended several claims, including: that inquiry, as a practice which involves and cultivates powerful thinking, is not restricted to philosophy; and that philosophical inquiry is not adequately characterized in terms of having no (settled) solutions. These claims lead naturally to the question: "What constitutes *philosophical* inquiry?" I wrote earlier that "In this respect [namely, in being resolvable] such philosophical problems are akin to those in science and other disciplines, yet warrant being described as 'philosophical' because of the manner in which we seek to solve them." The underlying point here is that the procedures which characterize philosophical inquiry are not (i.e. not solely) empirical or narrowly logical (e.g. deductive), or linguistic (e.g. textual analysis). They are *conceptual*, given that the questions and problems which move us to do philosophy are, primarily, conceptual in nature, where these concepts form the fundamental building blocks of our understanding of the world and ourselves. Concepts are not merely classifiers; they are vehicles for *meaning-making* (or *sense*-making). The capacity to form and apply concepts of varying degrees of abstractness is part of what it means to be a *person*. As persons we are each aware of ourselves as *one among others who are, jointly, aware of a common world*. We use concepts to make sense of the world to

ourselves and one another. In this collaborative process of *making sense*, we also find ourselves needing continually to construct and reconstruct these concepts. We see this process at work in a community of philosophical inquiry even with young children, when they attempt to make sense of terms such as "friend," "fair," "right," "mind" – terms which may well be familiar to them, but whose accepted meanings require rethinking in light of new experiences (whether real or imagined) on which they reflect together. In practice, it is a hallmark of philosophical inquiry that its participants can readily identify one or more concepts whose meanings are the subject matter of their deliberations. It bears reiterating that conceptual agreements and resolutions should be regarded as temporary resting places rather than final solutions and, accordingly, further inquiry always beckons to us. Granted, this is a feature of all forms of inquiry, but where students in subject areas such as science and mathematics must, ultimately, defer to the expertise currently available, students in philosophy are free to transcend the limits of what they, or anyone, claims to know or understand.

Finally on this point, notwithstanding my preference for a more integrated syllabus which leaves room both for improving the tools of powerful thinking, and for deliberating on the meanings of key concepts – *including* those which lie at the heart of the disciplines (*number* and *function* in mathematics; *mass*, *force*, *energy*, *causality*, in science; *change* and *agency* in history;...) – I am skeptical of the view that in such a syllabus, there would be no need or place for philosophy itself. Its venerability among disciplines should be respected; but its importance to young people who have an opportunity to engage in and with it, is even more salient. Philosophy matters to children, and they have a right to do it.

Remembering the *Community* in "Community of Inquiry"

Inquiry, like thinking itself, is internalized as a *social* practice in which forms of linguistic expression and communication – notably, dialogue – are essential ingredients. Elsewhere, I have cited both empirical and conceptual factors in defense of this thesis (in line with the thinking of a broad range of scholars, including Peirce, Mead, Vygotsky, Bakhtin, Dewey, Habermas, Gadamer, MacIntyre, Ricoeur, Appiah, Taylor, Lipman, and Davidson[10]). These social and inter-personal dimensions of thinking and inquiry are needed to make sense of the psychological, affective and epistemological elements of questioning, including the sense of settlement/unsettlement, self-awareness and self-correction to which I have given attention. While scholars from many disciplines (including various schools of philosophy) have articulated and defended various elements of this thesis, I will not resist the temptation to cite Davidson who, among those mentioned, stands out as an analytic philosopher *par excellence*. While never – to my knowledge – writing about education specifically, his celebrated theory of mind makes clear reference to the social origins of thought and knowledge: "A community of minds is the basis of knowledge; it provides the measure of all things". (2001, 218). Again, "Writing may portray, but cannot *constitute*, the intersubjective exchanges in which meanings are created and firmed. Socrates was right: reading is not enough. If we want to approach the harder wisdom we must talk and, of course, listen" (1994, 432).

How does the kind of community, *qua* environment for powerful thinking and talking, referred to in the previous paragraph, bear on the more common-place sense of community as used in the social sciences and media? At one extreme, the term "community" serves as an innocuous place-holder for just about any group of people who are connected by a common attribute or quality: the Australian community, the LGBTQI community, the community of Christians and Jews, the left-handed community, the world community... , i.e., virtually *any* group at all! At another extreme, it connotes the kind of collective or institution which generates a strong sense of belonging and moral

purpose for its members. Examples include the nation/state, religion, ethnic group, tribe, culture, and so on. Elsewhere I have criticized this view, largely on the grounds that it is based on a confused notion of *identity*, and has given rise to populist modes of thinking by which individuals seek to identify with others who are "like them," at the exclusion of those who are not. I shall not attempt to revisit this issue here, although, given the political realities currently confronting us around the world, resolving it remains a matter of great significance. My point in mentioning these uses of the term "community" is to contrast them with the sense intended when we speak about the *community of inquiry*.

A clue to this intended sense is found in the inter-dependence of thinking and talking, more specifically, of *powerful* thinking – i.e., *inquiry* – and *powerful* talking – i.e., *dialogue*. While I hold that both inquiry and dialogue – which are really two sides of a coin – have specific features beyond those of everyday thinking and conversation (including the sense of unsettlement and commitment to self-correction discussed above), what I wish to emphasize here is that those engaged in inquiry and dialogue are *persons* and, conversely, that persons are those entities who engage – or, at least, who *strive* to engage – in inquiry and dialogue. To be a person in the world is to regard (in the sense of awareness) oneself as *one among others*, where "others" refers both to other persons (i.e., those who also regard themselves …) *and* to those objects in the world of which we have common experience. According to this conceptual thesis of triangulation, as articulated and defended by Davidson among others, these forms of awareness are mutually irreducible and interdependent. My own self-awareness is inextricably linked to my awareness of others, as my awareness of the world is inextricably linked to theirs. But the links in question are not made in some mysterious mental realm ("mind-melding"); they are made in the ordinary material world in which we co-exist and of which we have shared experience (for Davidson, there is no other world). These links are "the intersubjective exchanges in which meanings are created and firmed" (Davidson, above) and, while these exchanges can take many forms, they are, in their most full-blooded and richest sense, *linguistic*. There need not be – indeed, there must not be – any constraints, boundaries or limitations placed on those eligible to participate in such exchanges (differences of language, culture and tribe notwithstanding), other than those that constitute what we mean by *being a person*. Indeed, and to complete the circle, to be a person just is to be eligible to participate.

The sense of community which captures this conception of personhood is, somewhat paradoxically, both crucial and ultimately redundant. Crucial, because as a dialogical environment, it brings us together inter-subjectively. Redundant, because unlike those groups and associations which all too often impose extrinsic conditions of existence and morality on their members, the community of inquiry (or of dialogue) is nothing other than a relational network of its own members, bound by whatever existential and moral commitments *they* bring to it. As such it is a means to an end (we might describe the latter as *becoming a person*) and is, inevitably, left behind as its members move on.

Concluding Comments: What Does a Philosophy *Curriculum* for Young People Look Like?

To what extent does a focus on concepts, together with reflective practice in the tools that make for powerful thinking, provide the structure for a *curriculum* in philosophy, i.e., a sequence of lessons/activities that form a coherent whole for children and adolescents over a specified period of time (a semester, a year, several years, etc.), while corresponding, if loosely, to different philosophical styles and subdisciplines? I recently addressed this question in the context of p4c in Australia, which moved away from the original IAPC curriculum model during the 1990s (Splitter 2019), a move

echoed in other English-speaking countries. I noted there that while every generation faces new benefits and challenges brought about by increased knowledge (and information) and technological expertise, "our stock of concepts, by which we seek to classify, organize and make sense of our knowledge and experience is relatively enduring and resilient." (76). We may not yet fully understand the ethical and epistemological implications of globalization, social media and the growth of *AI* (with driverless vehicles just around the corner, so to speak), to take some familiar examples, but the underlying concepts that are involved will "continue to be reflected in questions about what is the right thing to do, how we should treat others, [whether] our claims to knowledge [can] be justified, and so on." (76). Inquiries in the history of ideas reveal that these very concepts and questions have been around for thousands of years, kept alive, in part, by their application to changing circumstances and new experiences, but also by their intrinsic contestability.

In light of the recursive and cyclical nature of the concepts and questions which form the building-blocks of philosophical inquiry, how realistic is it to believe, as Lipman and Sharp did, that a "core curriculum" in philosophy could be constructed for children and adolescents? In addressing this question, we need to acknowledge that philosophical inquiry, even – perhaps especially! – in the hands and minds of children, quickly takes on a life of its own, as new circumstances and challenges to old solutions (points of settlement) arise; accordingly, any attempt to limit or constrain a philosophy curriculum in terms of content ("stuff") to be learned is doomed to failure. Concepts, as the bearers of meaning, cannot be defined by any specific set of examples or instances. We understand or grasp concepts such as *right* by *linking* them, both to instances or exemplars (e.g. right or wrong actions…), and to other concepts whose meanings may be related or contrasted (*right* seems related to *just* and *fair*, but quite different from *wrong* and *power*…). Such links cannot be limited or predetermined by teachers or other "experts". But teachers can guide students as they seek to forge these links for themselves, based on their own experiences and dialogical exchanges. Guidance in this sense has several dimensions, including modelling and assisting with the *procedures* of inquiry (notably, thinking procedures), and experience with forging such links themselves, based on *their* experiences and dialogical exchanges. There are clear implications here for the kinds of teacher professional development required for teachers of philosophy. But there are also implications for a well-structured curriculum which provides a framework or model for students as they gain mastery of the appropriate conceptual links and procedures. The IAPC curriculum stands as exemplary for several reasons: its novels and teacher manuals correspond roughly to different age groups and class levels; they provide models of inquiry, via fictional characters who grapple – both dialogically and by themselves – with a broad range of familiar but contestable concepts – notably, those which have featured throughout the history of philosophy in their attempts to make sense of their experiences;[11] this process of grappling is not resolved by the imposition of an adult or "expert" viewpoint – indeed, it is often not resolved at all; it involves the reflective use of thinking or inquiry procedures (critical, creative and "caring") to construct and evaluate chains of reasoning and the conceptual links by which the characters expand and deepen their understandings of familiar yet puzzling scenarios and problems.

While these exemplary features may be open to challenge or modification, they support the claim that teachers of philosophy – and even more specifically, those who train these teachers – benefit from understanding and appreciating what the IAPC attempted to do (by spending time doing p4c *as* P4C!). They will, then, be in a stronger position to create or utilize alternative approaches and curriculum materials.

The above considerations suggest, to me at least, that the very idea of a core curriculum in p4c is, if not misguided or unrealistic, then not the primary area of concern for those of us who are

committed to bringing philosophy and children together. What matters more – apart from finding room in a crowded timetable – is ensuring that schools, teacher educators, teachers and, in due course, students themselves, are committed to the *integrity* of philosophy as an age-old tradition of conceptual thought, inquiry and, as appropriate, action. In simpler terms, what matters is that they are actually *doing philosophy* as opposed, say, to merely bouncing opinions around or resting content with what others have come up with. Earlier, I suggested that our grasp of concepts depends on our capacity to *link* them, in appropriate ways, to other concepts that matter to us, and to exemplars (including those we encounter in our lives). But as I have noted elsewhere, we need also to attend "to the links and threads that bind philosophical issues of contemporary concern with those that have generated philosophy inquiry and dialogue for thousands of years. P4c invites children of all ages, abilities and backgrounds to join this dialogue…" (2019, 84). In response to the question "To whom does 'we' refer here?", I repeat my insistence that while it includes young people and teachers, it is not their responsibility alone: on the one hand, children are moved more by what is philosophically *present* to them than by what, or who, has gone before; and on the other hand, most teachers do not have the kind of background that would give them mastery over the links and threads to which I have referred. This responsibility must also be embraced by the academy, and shared by members of the academic philosophical community. Forging and sustaining links among young people, teachers, teacher educators *and* professional philosophers remains, perhaps, our greatest challenge.*

Endnotes

[1] I use this terminology to distinguish between the specific curriculum created by the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children ("P4C"), and the broad range of alternatives developed and used in many parts of the world ("p4c").
[2] For an excellent discussion of the origins of "community of inquiry" and its role in historical inquiry, see Seixas, 1993. Also, Sharp, 1987, 1996.
[3] "Powerful thinking," in my terminology, includes what has become known in p4c as "critical, creative and caring thinking". See, for example, Lipman, 2003, Thayer-Bacon, 1993, Noddings, 2002.
[4] There is an extensive body of research on the ideas of authenticity and inquiry in the mathematics classroom. See, for example, Lampert, 1990; Cobb, Stephan, McClain & Gravemeijer, 2001; Yackel & Cobb, 1996.
[5] Some of the material in this and subsequent sections is taken from Splitter 2016.
[6] A useful discussion of how both early and later pragmatist philosophers (e.g. Peirce, James and Dewey; and Putnam and Rorty, respectively) dealt with issues of truth and inquiry is in Capps, 2019.
[7] These two aspects of unsettlement do not always go together. I/we may agree that we do not know the answer or understand the problem, but be uninterested in finding a solution.
[8] The importance of "Socratic" questioning in promoting critical thinking is a key theme in Richard Paul's work. See Paul, 1993, Paul & Elder, 2006.
[9] Splitter 2015 Chapter 7 includes a detailed discussion of this issue, together with references to the writers named in the text.
[10] It will surprise many to learn that the IAPC constructed detailed bibliographies linking the novels and teacher manuals to parts of the philosophical tradition.
[*] I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers assigned by the Editor for their very helpful comments and suggestions.

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