The Deweyan Background in P4C

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Introduction

In a 1992 interview, Matthew Lipman affirmed that P4C was "a Deweyan way to go beyond Dewey" thereby explicitly acknowledging the Deweyan inspiration of his project but also asserting his own original contribution to the creation and development of a new educational approach. This achievement was the outcome of his effort to overcome what he later described as "the apparent inconsistency in Dewey's formulation of the relationship between philosophy and education" (Lipman, 2008, p. 147). This inconsistency had been, indeed, the leading motivation for Lipman's educational inquiry to the point that finding the solution to this problem would be his "life's work" (p. ivi).

Starting from this acknowledgment, I will try to highlight the Deweyan background of the P4C pedagogy, showing how Dewey's ideas constitute a strong educational framework, which grounds and organizes both the curriculum and the device of the community of philosophical inquiry (COPI). However, I will also identify the original contributions offered by Lipman in the development of a new pedagogical framework, which successfully operationalizes a "practical" understanding of the educational role of philosophy.

In my analysis I will focus in particular on three elements within the P4C pedagogy, that represent Lipman's original contribution to the development of the Deweyan legacy in accordance with a new pedagogical framework: the idea of teaching for thinking; the pattern of the process of inquiry in a P4C session; and the "reconstruction" of a new understanding of philosophy and its educational value, which constitutes the effective overcoming of the inconsistency that Lipman had found in Dewey's educational thought.

1. The Idea of Teaching for Thinking

In a 2005 interview, Lipman states that "Philosophy for Children didn't just emerge out of nowhere. It built upon the recommendations of John Dewey and the Russian educator, Lev Vygotsky, who emphasized the necessity to teach for thinking, not just for memorizing" (Naji, 2005, p. 23). Here Lipman points out that one of the main points of contact of P4C and Dewey's educational ideas is the focus on thinking and, in particular, on the peculiar relationship that Dewey identifies between thinking and education.

As Andrea English points out, the common association of Dewey's educational theory with the idea of "doing" has caused educational scholars to overlook his understanding that "thinking is both the aim and the condition for the possibility of education" and has, therefore, limited their exploration in depth of the Deweyan vision of the nature and function of thinking within a pedagogical framework (English, 2016).

This is not the case with Lipman, who refers to Dewey focusing explicitly on the relationship between thinking and education, and identifies thinking as a peculiar form of agency, overcoming the false dichotomy between thinking and doing, theory and praxis, that has often misled educational scholars in their understanding of Dewey's pedagogy. Lipman refers to Dewey's vision of thinking as a reflective process strictly interconnected with his understanding of the life associated with it, according to a democratic perspective. However, he also focuses on the social elements embedded within individual thinking processes from a psychological and pedagogical point of view. In so doing, he makes explicit the latent influence of George Herbert Mead on Dewey's thought and defines a clear pedagogical framework for his educational project.

Choosing as a scientific reference the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky, who explores the development of individual thinking capacities according to a socio-cultural approach, Lipman successfully highlights the intersubjective matrix of individual thinking, which would lead him to identify the "community of philosophical inquiry" as a "social matrix" that generates a variety of social relationships, building up the framework of the cognitive matrices which, in turn, generate fresh cognitive relationships (Lipman, 1991, 2003). The reference to Vygotsky is essential for Lipman as his main pedagogical focus is not only on the structure of thinking and on its functioning, but also on the educational context within which it would be possible to teach for thinking, a process which involves multiple actors, interactions and moves.

Lipman refers to Dewey's idea of thinking with a strong pedagogical focus, and this leads him both to explore the conditions that promote it but also to look for the educational contexts, tools and methodologies that are most suitable for education for thinking, thereby operationalizing what he identifies as the pedagogical "criteria" implicit in Dewey's writings and work (Lipman, 2008). In fact, the title of Lipman's masterpiece, *Thinking in Education*, is an intentional quotation of the title of chapter twelve of Dewey's "Democracy and Education," highlighting how the relationship between thinking and education should be understood, focusing on the cultural, political and social conditions useful for the improvement of educational models and practices in order to make them more respondent to the needs of a democratic society.

In the above-mentioned chapter, Dewey clearly states that "the sole direct path to enduring improvement in the methods of instruction and learning consists in centering upon the conditions which exact, promote, and test thinking." Moreover, he is also very explicit in the definition and description of what should be understood as thinking, stating that: "thinking is method, the method of intelligent experience in the course which it takes" (Dewey,1916, MW, p. 9). Indeed, in *Democracy in Education*, Dewey is contextualizing and finalizing the ideas developed in *How We Think* (1910, 1933), where he highlighted the necessity to achieve, through education, a discipline of cognitive processes according to a reflective pattern, within which reflection can be seen as a process aimed at sustaining the development of conceptual understanding.

As Megan Laverty notes, this procedure is at the basis of the formation of concepts, a factor which is of paramount importance as these concepts have the function of "introduc(ing) permanency into an otherwise impermanent world," working as "established meanings, or intellectual deposits" useful for the founding of a better understanding of individual and collective experiences. The capacity to form and transform concepts can be achieved only if people are in the condition of being reflectively engaged in a sustained communication with others (Laverty, 2016).

Here it is necessary to point out that we should consider Dewey's understanding of thinking in connection with his understanding of education, intended as a practice which can direct and facilitate activities leading to an organized and reflective use of inner forces and potentialities. Accordingly, in a Deweyan perspective, the main objective of education is to sustain and enhance the "power of the mind," which emerges from a continuous mental discipline, through activity and reflection. The "discipline of the mind" is, first of all, a discipline of thinking, understood as a reflective process which develops through different stages, and can be educated according to socially acknowledged criteria and values. Therefore, Dewey develops what we could define as an "educational theory of reflective thinking," within which thinking is explored in its emergence and unfolding within different fields of human experience. Within this framework, the emergence of thinking derives from a condition of uncertainty and perplexity, which is at the core of individual and collective experience.

Indeed, from a pedagogical point of view, the most interesting aspect of Dewey's idea of thinking, a feature which has significant educational consequences, is, as Vasco D'Agnese points out, the disclosure of an "inescapable uncertainty" at the core of human thinking. This realization is particularly challenging given "Dewey's firm faith in the power of intelligent action, and in education as the means by which human beings grow and create meaningful existence." In this perspective education must be conceived not so much as the attempt to master and control experience but as the means to create new, unpredictable experience, introducing new forms of transaction with the environment in which individuals live (D'Agnese, 2017).

This understanding of education is particularly interesting since it focuses on the necessity to design educational contexts within which individuals can be exposed to uncertainty in order to acquire the ability to cope with new experiences through multiple thinking paths in accordance with a reflective approach. For his part, Lipman acknowledges the necessity to disarticulate reflective thinking (understood as "complex thinking"), identifying the different threads and cognitive postures embedded within reflective processes. What he defines as "complex thinking," is a kind of thinking that is "aware of its assumptions and implications as well as [....] of the reasons and evidence that support this or that conclusion." This articulated thought structure takes into account the various angles and points of view assumed in different contexts and situations and is "prepared to recognize the factors that make for bias, prejudice, and self-deception" by including within itself recursive, meta-cognitive and self-correcting dimensions (Lipman, 1991; 2003).

As Peter Paul Elicor points out, Lipman's idea of thinking contrasts with a linear and unidimensional vision of human thinking, which has frequently dominated the whole practice of education; instead, he proposes a multidimensional understanding, within which critical, creative and caring dimensions are strictly interwoven (Elicor, 2016). It is the interplay or the "transaction" between these three dimensions that allows thinking to explore in depth, through a reflective process of inquiry, the various aspects of human experience, taking into account different epistemic positions and contrasting different perspectives.

Lipman acknowledges the educational value of pluralism and looks for an educational context within which complex thinking can sustain a multi-perspectival exploration of individual and collective experience, within which different cognitive patterns and epistemic positions can emerge and be appreciated and compared. Accordingly, he understands educational practice as a facilitating device useful to promote the emergence and development of reflective processes sustained by multiple reasoning threads.

2. The Pattern of the Process of Inquiry in a PFC Session

The emergence of reflective thinking occurs when thinking encounters a particular kind of situation, which Dewey defines as "indeterminate" and describes as "disturbed, troubled, ambiguous, confused, full of conflicting tendencies, obscure (LW12: p. 109). Explicitly disavowing categorical divisions between emotion and reason (a distinction which is also rejected by Lipman, who understands emotions as a form of thinking) in "Logic, the Theory of Inquiry," Dewey describes the genealogy of reflective processes and identifies the different phases of their unfolding within the field of individual and collective experience, pointing out that, wherever he uses the term "inquiry," he could just as well have used the term "reflective thinking."

According to Dewey, the process of inquiry unfolds in five phases. The initial phase of inquiry begins with a *feeling* of something amiss, which endures as a pervasive quality within the whole process. This feeling grows out of the encounter with an "indeterminate" situation, which is explored by elaborating a number of "suggestions" in order to devise and formulate, through a process of "intellectualization," a specific "*problem*" which will become the focus of the inquiry.

In order to address the problem, a *hypothesis* is constructed, utilizing both theoretical ideas and perceptual facts. Next, this is tested through imaginative actions and forms of "reasoning," which explore the reasons sustaining the hypothesis and the meanings involved, sizing up the implications or possible contradictions, and thereby reformulating the hypothesis or even the problem, if this is necessary.

Finally, the process of inquiry comes to a close with an evaluation and testing of the effectiveness and validity of the hypothesis. in this final phase, it is revealed whether or not the process of inquiry has converted an "indeterminate situation" into a "determinate one" and has transformed the experience into a meaningful one.

Donald Allan Schön wrote that the most important legacy bequeathed by Dewey to education is his "theory of inquiry" (Schön, 1992) since it grounds the development of a reflective approach to educational processes and practices and gives birth to what Cam identifies as the "tradition of reflective education" (Cam, 2008). Dewey's "theory of inquiry" focuses on the context, on the conditions and on the process of the emergence and development of thinking in terms of its frames of reference, its norms, and its rules. Moreover, it also concentrates on the best conditions for its development within human experience, shedding light both on the relationship between thinking and experience within human formation processes, as well as on the educational conditions necessary to promote the development of reflective processes.

Inquiry is explored by Dewey both in its cognitive and logical structure, also considering its cultural and social implications, and is understood both as an educational device and as an educational model. Thus, it supports an educational process of growth and understanding, both at an individual and at a social level. Indeed, as Lipman points out in *Philosophy goes to School*:

> Just as scientists apply the scientific method to the exploration of problematic situations, so students should do the same if they are ever to think for themselves. Instead, we ask them to study the end results of what the scientists have discovered. We neglect the process and fixate on the product. When problems are not explored

> at first hand, no interest or motivation is aroused and what we continue to call education is a charade or a mockery. Dewey had no doubt that [...] the educational process in the classroom should take as its model the process of scientific inquiry. (Lipman, 2003, p. 20).

The outcome of this process is the acquisition of a specific method which is the epistemic grounding of the different disciplines interwoven in the educational curricula.

As Zongyi Deng points out, in Dewey's pedagogy subject matter has a central role in teaching thinking. It is a very important intellectual resource for conceptual understanding, an assertion which is also consistent with current advances in cognitive psychology (Deng, 2001). According to this framework, as Lipman puts it, "it is not enough to learn the events of history, we must be able to see and think historically" (Lipman, 2003, p. 24). This happens progressively through the acquisition, mastery and dissemination of the method of inquiry with the support of educational practices aimed at promoting the acquisition and development of attitudes and competences which favour inquiry. These attitudes and competences can be achieved through the engagement with inquiry experiences, which are the only contexts within which they can be developed and fostered.

Nonetheless, while the experience of inquiry is always an on-going experience which stems from "indetermination and uncertainty," normal educational situations are very often predetermined and oriented, and therefore do not offer the possibility to think reflectively and to be engaged with meaningful processes of inquiry; as a consequence, it is necessary to design dedicated educational situations which reframe what happens in the average classroom.

As Lipman points out in *Thinking in Education*, "Dewey had no doubt that what should be happening in the classroom is thinking—and independent, imaginative, resourceful thinking" which unfolds and develops within a context aimed at enhancing and promoting inquiry (Lipman, 2003, p. 20). However, he did not explore the educational conditions which could orient and sustain the emergence and development of reflective inquiry processes.

Accordingly, a session of philosophical inquiry starts with the reading of a short story describing an indeterminate situation from which different kinds of "suggestions" stem in the form of inquiry questions collected within an "agenda." The questions and suggestions are analyzed according to a process of "intellectualization," which helps in the identification of one or more specific "problems" and dedicated inquiry paths aimed at exploring these questions in depth, organized into a "discussion plan." The following step is the construction and comparison of several hypotheses through a process of conversational "reasoning" within which the reasons sustaining each hypothesis and the meanings involved are explored in depth. The culmination of the process of inquiry consists in a close testing of the effectiveness and validity of each hypothesis. The effectiveness of the process of inquiry itself is represented by the transformation of the "indeterminate situation" into a "determinate one."

Moreover, Lipman refers to Dewey's understanding of reflective thinking as a form of inquiry and acknowledges the organization of the inquiry process in different steps. However, his operational model is not, as it is for Dewey, scientific inquiry. He refers, instead, to philosophical inquiry, which aims to address particular kinds of questions and is focused on logical, aesthetic and ethical dimensions of human experience. Therefore, Lipman reproduces the pattern of the process of Deweyan inquiry, but organizes it in the form of a "philosophical inquiry," and embeds it within a

social dimension, which facilitates the emergence of, and encounter between, different epistemic positions and inquiry threads.

The interplay of the pattern of scientific inquiry with philosophical questions and issues is the first epistemological move which contributes to the overcoming of the apparent dichotomies and inconsistencies which Lipman had identified in Dewey's thought. The second epistemological move is the acknowledgment of the educational value of philosophy, introduced within educational contexts in the form of philosophical inquiry, in accordance with Dewey's legacy. This move is based on an in-depth analysis of the cultural and educational scenarios within which philosophy could have a significant role, if it is understood not as a discipline, but as a process of individual or collective inquiry into different dimensions of human experience.

The Development of a New Understanding of Philosophy and Its Educational Value

Dewey was particularly interested in reframing curricular subject matter in the form of scientific inquiry and focused essentially on the subject matter available within primary or junior high school curricula. Therefore, he did not refer to philosophy as a curricular subject matter. Moreover, as Lipman pointed out in *Getting our Thoughts Together* (Lipman, 2003), Dewey did not consider that philosophy could be used as a transdisciplinary tool to ground the school curriculum and make it more meaningful.

Lipman addressed this issue more clearly in the essay *Philosophy for Children's Debt to Dewey* where he writes:

> [S]o, what of philosophy? What could Dewey tell us about how it was to be employed? Dewey minced no words, when he said that philosophy would be 'the general theory of education.' He meant that it was to be the exception to the rule. In every other discipline, there had to be an interpenetration of theory and practice, but in the case of philosophy, not so. Philosophy, like Victorian womanhood, was to be put upon a pedestal, where it could receive 360 degrees of respect, but where it would be fully set apart from educational practice. Nowhere in his writings does he refer to the practical use of philosophy in education. It was for him, I believe, unthinkable (Lipman, 2008, 148).

Stefano Oliverio (2012) argues that what prevents Dewey from "mobilizing philosophy in education" is what Dewey himself defined as the "permanent Hegelian deposit" in his own thought, which leads him to understand the task of philosophy as cultural rather than educational. In his life experience and in his writing, Dewey did have the opportunity to investigate also the educational value of philosophy and to discuss the reasons why philosophy should be studied, but he did not consider philosophy as a part of the primary school curriculum and did not explore in depth its educational potential. Dewey's experience as a teacher of philosophy both at high school and at university level led him to strengthen and clarify the cultural and social necessity to study philosophy. We can see this analysis in his early essay "Why Study Philosophy" (Dewey, EW, p. 4) where he describes the study of philosophy as a "deliberate and reflective overhauling" of ideas that need to be extracted from the cultural tissue grounding human experience and explored in their meaning.

However, he did not explain according to which educational approach and within which educational context this could be properly done.

Hints and suggestions regarding the educational potential of philosophy are disseminated throughout Dewey's works, but they are not organized within a clearly defined pedagogical framework. In "The Child and the Curriculum," Dewey explained how no form of knowledge can be inserted into human life "from without" since "learning involves reaching out of the mind" and "involves organic assimilation starting from within" (Dewey, MW, 2, p. 277). For this reason, any kind of study should have its starting point "from within" one of the different fields of human experience.

According to Dewey, we should take into account the fact that individual and collective experience "already contains within itself elements —facts and truths— of just the same sort as those entering into the formulated study; and, what is of more importance, of how it contains within itself the attitudes, the motives, and the interests which have operated in developing and organizing the subject-matter to the plane which it now occupies" (Dewey, MW, 2, p. 278). This requires an exploration of the complexity of human experience and the discovery within this of the ideas, issues and problems that have generated the construction of a specific form of knowledge, considered as the by-product of a process of inquiry, deeply embedded in these fields.

Within this framework, according to a Deweyan approach, the study of philosophy also should be conducted through the identification of philosophical motivations and interests emerging within individual and collective life, and through the recovery and reconstruction of ideas, problems and themes from the past, which can be actualized within current experiences in order to make them more meaningful. As Dewey will later point out in "The study of philosophy" (MW, p. 6), philosophical studies are extremely powerful since they "acquaint the student with the forces that create ideas and make them potent" and endow her/ him with "some increase of expertness in the use of the tools by which the leading ideas of humanity are worked out and tested" (Dewey, MW, 6, p. 138). In this perspective, the study of philosophy provides individuals with cultural, intellectual and linguistic tools which enable them to become part of a process of creation, implementation and validation of ideas which are not abstract entities, but concrete realities that can be operationalized into actions and practices aimed at promoting individual and collective growth. The emphasis here is upon philosophy as an activity rather than upon the products of such an activity: those distinctions, canons, theories, and systems which have advanced to become the content of philosophy as an academic discipline and a historical tradition.

Lipman's merit is to have developed Dewey's intuitions within a consistent and clear educational framework, thereby operationalizing the educational potential of philosophy, focusing on its epistemic structure and functioning. In *Thinking in Education* he points out that "It should not be forgotten that Dewey makes a strong case in Experience and Nature for a conception of philosophy as criticism" (Lipman, 2003, p. 37). Moreover, he explains that Dewey locates philosophy as "a special non-scientific form of cognition that is concerned with the judgment of value as a unique form of inquiry: a judgment of judgment" (Lipman, 2003, p. 38).

We can say, then, that Lipman shares with Dewey the understanding of philosophy as a particular form of inquiry but goes further, trying to identify the educational context and the pedagogical guidelines according to which it would be possible to promote and sustain individual and collective engagement with multiple forms of philosophical inquiry. On this basis he elaborates the

idea of a "philosophical community of inquiry" whose logic, is, as Kennedy points out, "Deweyan and Pragmatic," since "it is based on problematization in the interest of the improvement of a lived situation"(Kennedy, 2012, p. 41) which is explored through a process of inquiry that, as we have seen, follows the Deweyan pattern of inquiry.

"Inquiry" within a community of philosophical inquiry (COPI) begins, as Kennedy states, "when the relationship between a concept and the lived experience and narratives to which that concept relates shows enough dissonance," and when "the automatic steering and control mechanisms of the vehicle of communicative culture no longer assure a stable meaning to the social values and qualities" that "saturate" our experience" (Kennedy, 2012, p. 41). According to Lipman, the process of inquiry experienced in a COPI is of a particular kind, as its focus is on the philosophical, conceptual and linguistic tools used in its performance. It refers to the diverse dimensions of philosophical thinking, which, as we have seen before, allow us to develop inquiry paths useful to explore the logical, aesthetic and ethical dimensions of human experience. This is consistent with Dewey's description of the different types of philosophical thought that can be cultivated within an academic context.

In the "Syllabus: Types of Philosophical Thought" that he prepared for his students at Columbia University (Dewey, MW, 13, pp. 349-395), Dewey identified logic, aesthetics and ethics as the three features of philosophical thought, thereby introducing philosophy as a multidimensional and multi-logical method of inquiry. Lipman agrees with Dewey in acknowledging the different dimensions of philosophical inquiry, but adds to this vision the idea, grounded in the Socratic and Platonic tradition, that philosophical inquiry is essentially dialogic. In the essay "The Educational role of Philosophy," he writes:

> Philosophy may begin in wonder and eventuate in understanding, or even, in a few instances, in wisdom, but along the way it involves a good deal of strenuous activity. This activity generally takes the form of dialogue. When one engages in such dialogue about traditionally philosophical matters — abstract or generic concepts such as truth and justice and friendship and personhood; methods and procedures of inquiry; criteria as the opinions of criticism or justification, and so on — it could reasonably be said that one is doing philosophy" (Lipman, 2014, p. 7).

This focus on the dialogic structure of philosophical inquiry is consistent with Lipman's own experience as a professor of philosophy. He was teaching Logic at Columbia University when he had the intuition to introduce philosophy into the primary school curriculum, and made the first move toward the design of the P4C curriculum, aimed at engaging junior high school students with a process of inquiry into logical and linguistic structures. P4C involves students in the exploration of ideas and problems emerging from individual and collective experiences and is strictly connected with agency and practice, through a process of shared inquiry that highlights multiple dimensions and unfolds through multiple logical paths.

As we have seen, for Dewey the study of philosophy involved the exploration, but also the deconstruction and reconstruction, of the leading ideas to which individuals and communities refer. Accordingly, Lipman develops the P4C curriculum around "leading ideas," which become the focus of the processes of philosophical inquiry. In the P4C curriculum, the "leading ideas" are approached and explored within various contexts and are embedded within a narrative framework.

As Lipman pointed out in *Getting our Thought Together,* the manual accompanying the novel "Elfie" dedicated to primary education, the P4C curriculum unfolds at different levels of complexity. At the elementary and junior high school level the "leading ideas" around which the narratives can be identified are defined, simple, and directly connected to lived fields of experience. At the high school level, they become increasingly organized and interconnected with the cultural texture from which they have been extracted. In fact, at high school and university level, "philosophical inquiry" offers the possibility of engaging students both with philosophical problems emerging from their areas of experience, but also with philosophical ideas and problems culturally embedded in the philosophical tradition.

Within the context of the COPI it is possible to explore the ideas "from within", reproducing and recovering the process of inquiry that has generated them, by making it explicit and visible. The students are therefore accompanied in acquiring a growing expertise in the use of conceptual tools, thinking skills and language skills, that sustain the working out and testing of leading ideas at multiple levels. The teachers, who act as facilitators of the process of inquiry, progressively introduce further ideas, questions and problems in the context of what is being explored by the students, who in turn are actively engaged and learning within this process of inquiry.

Finally, the pattern of inquiry is slowly interiorized by the participants and becomes what Dewey would define as a "habit," a frame of mind that accompanies and sustains individuals in the engagement with their own life experiences. Individuals learn to explore philosophically their own experiences, to make meaning of them and to reconstruct them according to new and different frames of reference. This long-lasting outcome can be considered, according to a Deweyan perspective, the most effective educational achievement that P4C can produce over time in different contexts. It should therefore be explicitly identified as an educational objective and be constantly pursued as what Dewey would define an "end in view," collectively shared and transferred from one educational context to another, in order to create the conditions that favor the development of critical, creative and caring individuals and communities.

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