Cultivating Open-mindedness through the Community of Inquiry

Philip Cam

Abstract: Anyone familiar with Matthew Lipman's Community of Inquiry is likely to acknowledge that it cultivates open-mindedness. Even so, bare recognition of this fact is not the same as having a detailed knowledge of what open-mindedness involves and how the Community of Inquiry helps to foster it. To extend our knowledge of these matters, we will conduct a psychological analysis of the dispositions, abilities and skills involved in open-mindedness and show how the Community of Inquiry helps to develop them. Coming to appreciate what is involved in this way deepens our understanding of what we are doing in the Community of Inquiry and enables us to be more attentive to these matters in practice.

Keywords: Community of Inquiry, open-mindedness, dispositions, abilities, skills, psychological analysis.

Let us begin by thinking about this matter in general terms. The cultivation of intellectual virtues is generally taken to be among the aims of education. In addition to open-mindedness, this typically includes nurturing such things as intellectual courage, rigour, and perseverance. It is natural to think of these virtues as involving dispositions—as ways in which students who display such intellectual virtues are inclined to behave. The exercise of these dispositions also involves skills and abilities. For students to carry out a task with rigour, for example, they must be able to concentrate on it and have the skills required to carry it out in a meticulous and thoroughgoing way. Again, to effectively persevere in the face of difficulty with some subject matter, students must be able to overcome their frustrations and have the skills needed to make headway with it. So, if we are to cultivate intellectual virtues, we need to develop both the relevant dispositions and the associated skills and abilities.

Here, as elsewhere, a well-grounded approach to educational practice depends upon a clear understanding of the things that fall within its aims. To develop an intellectual virtue through the way that we teach the curriculum, we need to appreciate the relationships between the dispositions, skills and abilities involved. Let us briefly explore them.

Dispositions and Abilities

Human actions depend upon being both able to do something and disposed to do it. You may be able to do something, but not disposed to do it; or you may be disposed to do something, but not able to do it. Thus, Jason may be able to improve his performance in mathematics but lack the interest to do

so; or he may desire to join the football team, but not be able to achieve his goal because of having to compete with students of greater ability. In either case, the relevant action will not ensue or be frustrated in the attempt. Clearly, a combination of motivation and capability is key to performance and accomplishment.[1]

Moreover, dispositions and abilities commonly show their connection in the way that they nurture one another. In following your inclinations, your abilities will naturally develop in that direction, just as finding that you have a capacity for something is likely to attract you to it. Given her inclination to learn Spanish, it is likely that Sarah's abilities would blossom, were she given the opportunity to study it. By the same token, had she no prior interest, finding that she was good at Spanish would tend to develop her interest in it. In the absence of their counterparts, by contrast, dispositions tend to wither, and abilities become vestigial. Realising that he is never going to be good enough to be selected for the football team, Jason is likely to turn his inclinations elsewhere. Lacking interest in maths, his native ability will remain undeveloped and of little functional value.

Skills and Abilities

Skills involve the ability to do something well, such as to play a musical instrument proficiently, write a convincing essay, or engage in competitive football. They involve know-how. Such practical knowledge is distinct from knowledge of fact, and not to be equated with "knowledge-that," such as knowing that H_2O is the chemical symbol for water, or that a sonnet is a poem of fourteen lines. This is particularly relevant to education because much of what students are expected to acquire is actually "knowledge-how." In mathematics, for example, students learn to perform mathematical operations, from simple things such as learning how to add, subtract, multiply and divide, all the way through to how to solve simultaneous equations and the like. The same is true in other areas of learning, whether it is learning how to express yourself in a foreign language, how to assemble and evaluate information, how to use a range of digital media, or how to play a musical instrument.

Having the know-how is akin to being able to act in accord with a set of instructions—the kind of knowledge to be gained from a recipe book. Even then, recipes are guides to success only because they are notes extracted from what goes on in the kitchen when those with the know-how are preparing the dishes, and that is a matter of being skilled in the art of cookery. In the same way that being able to follow recipes is not enough to make you a skilful cook, you cannot become adept at a musical instrument simply by reading books about how to play it, become fluent in a foreign language just by reading textbooks, or succeed in football merely by attending to the coach's instructions.

Knowing how to do these things, and do them well, takes practice. In mathematics, teachers follow up the introduction of new operations by setting problems that require it, providing students with the practice needed for proficiency. Similar kinds of exercises are common in language learning for the same

[1] It is worth noting that someone may be unable to do something because of a want of opportunity, rather than a lack of aptitude. It may be that Sarah would like to learn Spanish, for instance, but it is no longer offered at her school. She may well have the intellectual ability needed to learn Spanish but is unable to do so because she is not afforded the opportunity. Whether or not you can do something in the sense of having or lacking the opportunity to do it, is a matter to which we will return when we consider how the Community of Inquiry provides opportunities for the development of open-mindedness. For now, however, let us use the word 'ability' to refer to a capacity that resides in students.

reason, and the golden rule in learning to play a musical instrument is practice, practice, practice. In all such cases, the know-how that undergirds competence involves skill gained through practice.

There is a good deal of talk about "skills and abilities" in education, and the two are often mentioned together without bothering to make clear the distinction between them.[2] While there are various ways in which we may think about their relationship, here we are regarding it as a matter of *what* students can do and the *quality* of their performance. While Roberto can throw a pot on the potter's wheel, he is not as proficient as Ingrid—which is to say that her performance is more skilful. While Melanie can play *Für Elise*, Rolf's performance shows greater skill in that his fingering is more dextrous and there is greater subtlety of expression. While Melanie and Roberto can do these things, the art and the music teacher will be looking for them to make further efforts to improve the quality of their performance.

The Dispositions of Open-mindedness

Having briefly explored the relationship between dispositions, abilities and skills, we may return to open-mindedness. First, let us think about what open-mindedness involves. That is not as straightforward as might be assumed, given the range of traits and proclivities that have been associated with it. Among them are the following:

1. *A tendency to withhold judgment, and a willingness to reconsider matters, if there is room for doubt.*[3] Being open-minded does not preclude having firm views about things. It is a matter of whether you are inclined to withhold judgment until you have solid grounds for it; and whether, in having formed a view, you remain sensitive to the possibility of error and contrary evidence. On this account, a closed-minded person is inclined to prejudge things rather than wait for evidence and is disinclined to acknowledge the facts when they go against them. An open-minded person is the opposite.[4]

2. *A habit of looking at what is to be said for other possibilities and points of view.* This conception of open-mindedness goes beyond the tendency noted above of being willing to withhold judgment when the evidence is lacking and to change your mind when presented with good reasons for doing so. It involves an actively inquiring attitude toward alternatives.

[2] In terms of the educational objectives of the Community of Inquiry, see the articles dealing with thinking skills and the ability to reason in Chapter 11 of *Thinking Children and Education*, as well as Matthew Lipman's discussion of them in Chapter 2 of *Thinking in Education*. For a wide-ranging philosophical exploration of skill and ability, see *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Skill and Expertise*.

[3] This is the conception of keeping your mind open that we associate with Socrates. To choose just a couple of characteristic remarks: When in the *Laches*, Laches suggests that Nicias must be talking nonsense, Plato has Socrates respond to him by saying "Let us ask him to explain what he means, and if he has reason on his side, we will agree with him." (*Laches* 196c); and when, in discussing what forms of poetry are fitting for his Republic, Socrates says to Adimantus "For I certainly do not yet know myself, but withersoever the wind, as it were, of the argument blows, there lies our course." (*The Republic*, 394d) All quotations from the Platonic dialogues are from the translations to be found in Hamilton and Cairns (1999).

[4] While normally expressed in terms of a preparedness to question your own commitments, Jason Baehr (2011) points out that this disposition can extend to a position that is not necessarily one's own. It may be a matter of being prepared to question one that has wide social support, for example, or to carefully scrutinise one that you are tempted to adopt.

3. *Being disposed to be impartial.* To be open-minded you need to approach matters in an even-handed way, without prejudice or bias. Only then will you be able to consider them dispassionately and give due weight to the case for and against them. This sense of being open-minded contrasts with 'closed-minded' as synonymous with terms such as 'bigoted,' 'dogmatic,' and 'blinkered.'

4. *Willingness to entertain new ideas and try them out.* An open-minded person is receptive to new ideas, in contrast to being bound by conventional wisdom and established ways of doing things. John Dewey equates it with "alert curiosity and spontaneous outreaching for the new,"[5] while also making the point that being receptive to new ideas is not to be equated with an uncritical acceptance of them. As Dewey says, it is not like putting up a sign that says, "Come right in; there is nobody at home."[6] It is a matter of being prepared to give them due consideration.

While it may be tempting to whittle these suggestions down to a set of necessary and sufficient conditions that define open-mindedness, we should not assume that it can be meaningfully captured in this way.[7] Indeed, it gives every appearance of being a concept that can be variously applied to a range of traits. For educational purposes, in any case, it is more helpful to subject it to a *psychological* rather than a *logical* analysis. This involves classification of the tendencies that open-mindedness involves and an analysis of their relationship to the skills and abilities that we need to develop if we are to nurture it. The utility of that approach is obvious. It provides educators with an analysis of open-mindedness in terms of a family of familiar skills and abilities to cater to through classroom activities.

On the broadest psychological analysis, the kinds of dispositions involved in open-mindedness can be divided into *receptive* and *reflective* tendencies.[8] On the receptive side, the open-minded person tends to welcome new ideas, fresh possibilities, different points of view, and other ways of doing things, as opposed to being dismissive or intolerant of them. Nor should we think of such a person as taking an interest in such things when they happen to come along, rather than, as Dewey says, actively reaching out for them. On the reflective side, there is the habit of thinking things through and not rushing to judgment. This includes not only being prepared to explore new ideas, consider other points of view, and examine alternative ways of doing things, but extends to the tendency to be mindful of your own presumptions and partialities. All this contrasts with being dismissive of new ideas, ignoring other points

[5] Dewey (1933), p. 31. While saying that these things form the essence of an open mind, it is worth noting that Dewey runs them together with the third of the traits listed above. In the same passage he says that open-mindedness "may be defined as freedom from prejudice, partisanship, and other such habits as close the mind and make it unwilling to consider new problems and entertain new ideas." (p. 30) In sum, Dewey draws a contrast between being curious about and receptive to new ideas and having your mind turned against them through close-minded attitudes.

[6] Dewey (1933), p. 30.

[7] For an introduction to ways of analysing of the concept of open-mindedness, see Hare (1979) and (2004), Riggs (2010), and Baehr (2011).

[8] While the combination of receptive and reflective tendencies is evident in the family of traits noted above, it is also implicit in many attempts to define open-mindedness. For example, Baehr (2011) takes open-mindedness to be a willingness "to transcend a default cognitive standpoint in order to take seriously the merits of a distinct cognitive standpoint." (p.202) To be willing to seriously consider the merits of alternative standpoints is to be prepared to both receive them and reflectively evaluate them. Similarly, Hare (1979), claims that someone who is open-minded "is disposed to revise or reject the position he holds if sound objections are brought against it, or, in the situation in which the person presently has no opinion on some issue, he is disposed to make up his mind in the light of available evidence and argument as objectively and impartially as possible." (p.9) Here again, the open-minded person is characterised as someone who is prepared to reflectively engage with whatever possibilities present themselves.

of view, doggedly insisting on doing things the way they have always been done, and being oblivious of any partisanship or bias on your own part.

Further, open-mindedness involves a combination of these receptive and reflective tendencies that may be summed up in terms of *generate and test*. An open-minded person tends to welcome new ideas, fresh perspectives and different points of view, but not uncritically. New ideas are things to be explored, knocked into shape and tried out. Fresh perspectives on a problem are not merely sought for, but examined to see whether they can help resolve it. Arguments for opposing viewpoints in a conflict are welcomed and then judged on their merits. An open-minded approach to problems and issues of all sorts involves such combinations. Whether it is being mindful of other possibilities, willing to look at what is to be said for a different point of view, or to cast around for fresh ideas, the open-minded person is inclined to do these things, but not to accept what they find without question. Open-mindedness involves a predisposition toward open mindful engagement.

We may also think of this as integrating *critical* and *creative* tendencies. It combines a tendency to look at things afresh, engage in creative imagination, and entertain new ideas, with a readiness to assess their utility, comparative value, reliability, or feasibility. It involves summoning up and examining, reimagining with a critical eye, or taking on a new idea and knocking it into shape. It is this combination of creative and critical attributes that stands in opposition to unquestioning adherence to whatever is familiar or generally accepted.

Associated Abilities and Skills

This analysis of the dispositions associated with open-mindedness provides a framework for examining the abilities and the skills that support them.[9] To begin with abilities, open-mindedness is associated with being able to:

1. discern possibilities
2. appreciate other points of view
3. assess evidence and apply reason
4. recognise and take account of your own limitations
5. exercise speculative imagination
6. generate and explore ideas.

While not exhaustive, this list focuses on key competences associated with open-mindedness. The ability to see possibilities and take in other points of view is central to its receptiveness. Being able to assess evidence and apply reason goes with its tendency toward critical reflection, as does the ability to take account of the limitations of your own knowledge and understanding. The generative tendencies of open-mindedness depend upon a capacity for speculative imagination and an ability to work with ideas, just as its inclination to test them out has need for powers of rational assessment. Again, the creative character of open-mindedness depends on an ability to discern possibilities, exercise your

[9] As with Baehr and Hare, writers on open-mindedness commonly identify it with various dispositions, rather than with skills and abilities. As was said earlier, however, the exercise of dispositions to respond in various ways require the ability to do so, and the extent of our abilities is a function of skills that we bring to the task. It is therefore a pity that the scholarly literature on open-mindedness and that devoted to the development of skills and abilities in an educational context have had so little contact. Even in the Philosophy for Children literature, with its extensive discussion of the skills and abilities that the Community of Inquiry is supposed to confer, there have been only occasional references to open-mindedness, and nothing much in the way of connecting the two.

imagination, and generate ideas, just as its critical propensities rely on being able to assess ideas, weigh evidence, and draw appropriate conclusions.

The repertoire of skills follows suit. The following are typical of the kinds of expertise that enhance these abilities:

1. sharpened curiosity and a keen eye for possible meanings
2. attentive listening and thoughtful solicitousness
3. methodical questioning, competent reasoning and circumspect judgment
4. intellectual modesty and scrupulous self-discernment
5. disciplined imagination and guesswork
6. well-conducted conceptual exploration and analysis.

Honing your curiosity into a focussed intellectual attention enhances your ability to absorb new ideas, which is akin to the attention with which the keen and practiced eye can detect those features of a situation that suggest its possible meanings. The ability to appreciate other points of view is of the same ilk, being fostered by attentive listening to and sensitive engagement with others. Focussed intellectual attention, skill in observation, attentive listening, sensitive engagement—these are the kinds of skilled performances that support the receptive dispositions of open-mindedness.

Again, the ability to assess reasons and weigh evidence involves skilful questioning about the matter, competence in reasoning about it, and a circumspect approach to judgment regarding it. Careful questioning, competent reasoning, and judicious decision-making are therefore indispensable to the critical reflection that is involved in open-mindedness. The same can be said of how adept we are at self-discernment when it comes to recognising the limits of our own knowledge, as well as our blind-spots and leanings. That kind of insight enhances our ability to take account of our limitations and be more open-minded.

Finally, productive speculation is an ability to project beyond what is given, to things that it suggests or implies. To be good at it, you need a disciplined imagination and intelligence in your guesswork—a reminder that creative deliberation is not a case of unrestrained fancy, but of exploring the possibilities inherent in what is already to hand. The same can be said more generally of the ability to generate and explore ideas. To be fit for purpose, an idea must end up satisfying the constraints that its use demands. In that respect, generating and exploring ideas is akin to a craft. It requires a workmanlike approach and skill in handling ideational materials.

The Community of Inquiry

Having seen what is involved in open-mindedness, let us turn our attention to Lipman's conception of the Community of Inquiry. Examination of its main features will allow us to see how well it nurtures the kinds of dispositions, abilities and skills identified above.

To put Lipman's conception into perspective, we will begin with some intellectual background. He traces the germ of the idea back to Charles Sanders Peirce's discussion of how a community comes to affirm its beliefs.[10] Peirce points out that, while individuals may cling to their own beliefs through sheer

[10] See Lipman (1991), p. 15. He particularly references Peirce's 1887 essay 'The fixation of belief,' available at https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Fixation_of_Belief

tenacity, it is religious, state and other authorities that have been the traditional arbiters of belief in the public arena. Admittedly, there has also been a long tradition of appealing to reason rather than to official sanction. The truth be told, this appeal has been used as much to bolster the dictates of authority as to challenge them. Arguments that "stand to reason" can always be found in support of pre-established conclusions, especially when they are supported by well-entrenched assumptions. As against all this, Peirce highlights the long struggle to develop scientific methods of settling beliefs. These forms of inquiry are motivated by genuine doubt, or a knowledge of ignorance, rather than socially sanctioned conviction, reliance on faith, or arguments for preapproved conclusions. They attempt to settle matters, or provide some measure of certainty, through systematic observation, prediction and testing, that could be confirmed by anyone with the means required to carry them out. While members of the wider community may take these things on trust, as bearing the authority of science, scientific methods provide an independent evidence-based warrant for those beliefs.

Keeping to the philosophers who influenced Lipman, we find a reworking of Peirce in Dewey's account of the development of what he calls 'logical thought.'[11] Dewey sees Peirce's ways of inculcating belief reflected in the development of thought in Western civilization, as evidenced by the kinds of thinking that characterise various periods from antiquity to the modern day. He begins with the forms of thought that entrench fixed ideas, associating them with very ancient and traditional societies, moving on to discursive thought, where bodies of law and different opinions run up against one another, leading to the appeal to reason, and especially logical demonstration, which was held to be the high road to knowledge among the learned in both the classical and medieval Western world.[12] From there, he makes his way into the modern era, characterised by an increasing emphasis on empirical methods of settling belief and the kind of thinking that leads to scientific discovery.[13]

Dewey went on to explore the inquiry mode of thought in numerous writings as a matter of what he called *logical theory*. Logic, for Dewey, was the theory of inquiry, and he took both scientific inquiries and everyday ones to share the same underlying logical pattern, which he was intent on bringing out. He did so not just as a matter of theory, in writings of interest only to specialists,[14] but also in a more accessible form, which he applied to education.[15] Dewey held that thinking in this fashion ought to lie at the heart of school education, which should aim to develop students' powers of logical thought, rather than merely passing on some of the knowledge that has been gained through the inquiries of others. Were it to be fully implemented, this Deweyan shift would have revolutionary consequences, not only for the way in which science-based subjects are taught, but for teaching and learning across the curriculum.

Finally, mention should be made of the philosopher Justice Buchler, under whose influence Lipman fell at Columbia University. At the time, Buchler was writing about judgment and issues in education. Of especial interest is Buchler's essay 'What is a discussion?'[16] There he tells us that the foremost task of the teacher should be "to implant the spirit and experience of inquiry" and attempts to

[11] See Dewey (1900).

[12] According to Plato, for example, beliefs achieve the status of knowledge only through being tied down by reason. See *Meno* 98a.

[13] In parallel with his historical narrative, Dewey appears to be tempted by the rather contentious *recapitulation thesis* that the development of thought in the individual goes through much the same stages as those through which their civilization evolved. Were it to be accepted, this thesis would have significant educational consequences, but I will not deal with that here.

[14] See Dewey (1938), pp. 101-19.

[15] See Dewey (1910) and (1916), especially Chapter 12.

[16] See Buchler (1954), reproduced in Lipman (1993), pp. 523-532. Page references below refer to the Lipman volume.

show why engaging students in discussion as a "community of query" is the best method of doing so.[17] Here we come to the most direct forerunner of Lipman's Community of Inquiry. Indeed, Lipman has Buchler say that the "spontaneity of children discussing fairness or friendship or personal identity is very much the beginning of query."[18] In contrasting discussion as a community of query with expository methods of teaching, Buchler goes on to make many points that foreshadow Lipman. Among them is his emphasis on the collaborative nature of the activity, the need for the teacher to model inquiry, and not seeing educational outcomes merely in terms of the acquisition of demonstrable knowledge. What he says about the last of these is worth quoting, by way of contrast with the learning outcomes of more conventional teaching:

> For the product need not take the form of an assertive conclusion. It may be an enumeration of possible views, or a fuller definition of the problem, or a growth in appreciative awareness. It may be more of an envisioning or an exhibiting than of an affirming. [19]

It is of note that Lipman cites this passage, adding that it is "the kind of transformation that philosophy provides."[20] Here, then, is the final step that brings us to the philosophical Community of Inquiry.

Lipman's work is so thoroughly dedicated to the Community of Inquiry, in terms of both theory and practice, that we are faced with a plethora of possible starting points for our analysis of it. For current purposes, I will concentrate on his characterisation in the chapter 'Thinking in community' in *Thinking in Education*.[21] There he lists four basic characteristics of the Community of Inquiry:

1. It aims at some kind of settlement or judgment
2. It moves where the argument takes it
3. It is dialogical
4. It combines rationality with creativity through critical and creative thinking.

First, the Community of Inquiry is to be distinguished from other forms of discourse that do not have this aim. Casual conversation, an exchange of news, of pleasantries and the like, are generally ways of passing the time of day, rather than attempts to resolve some matter. Even an exchange of views need not be directed to that end. It may be nothing more than an opportunity for people to express their opinions or vent their feelings. To satisfy Lipman's first criterion, there must be something in question that the discourse aims to settle. On that score, turning to an educational context, we have the common exchange of question and answer, as when the teacher answers a student's question about some matter of fact, or the student is asked a question to see whether they know the answer. This differs from attempting to answer a question that is up for discussion in the Community of Inquiry, as the matter is regarded as already settled in the former case, but not in the latter. While the matter in question is not normally being raised for discussion in a standard classroom question-and-answer exchange, that is the whole point of placing questions on the agenda in the Community of Inquiry. School debates come closer to the mark, in that the proposition up for debate is taken to be open, and the debaters argue in favour of or against it. Their aim, however, is to win the debate, while in the Community of Inquiry the

[17] Ibid., p. 523-25. Buchler generally uses 'query' in place of 'inquiry' because the latter is often thought of as aiming at ascertaining the facts of the case to the exclusion of those inquiries that accompany making or doing something.
[18] Ibid., p. 526. My thanks to Maughn Gregory for pointing out that Lipman took the licence to recast Buchler in these terms when he reproduced the essay, saving me at the last minute from straightforwardly attributing these words to Buchler.
[19] Ibid., p. 529.
[20] Lipman (1991), p. 231.
[21] Lipman (1991), Chapter 14.

discourse is collaborative rather than competitive, and not about winning. Rather than trying to best each other, its participants attempt to come to a reasoned judgment by working together.[22]

So, the Community of Inquiry is a form of discourse where students work their way together towards some kind of settlement or judgment by thinking things through, instead of merely voicing opinions or arguing for a set proposition regardless of what they think. Rather than asserting their opinions or setting them aside, they offer them as suggestions for the consideration of their peers, in the hope that they may help to forward the discussion. This way of trying to work things out encourages open-mindedness. As what they have to say comes under consideration, and they hear what others think, they become more self-discerning, mindful of their own presumptions and partialities. They become better at questioning one another and listening attentively to see what is to be said for other points of view, while recognising the limitations of their own. Over time, this will become a familiar way of approaching all manner of issues and problems, and they will get better at it. This makes them more likely to withhold judgment or reconsider matters in other contexts when there is room for doubt or for a gain in understanding.

Secondly, discussion in the Community of Inquiry moves forward by means of reasoned argument. In common parlance, an argument is a heated verbal dispute. Its participants may aim to settle some matter between them, but they are as just as likely to shout each other down as to listen to one another, and to use their words to attack one another rather than to appeal to reason. Nothing could be further from the attempt to settle some matter in the Community of Inquiry. There an argument is an appeal to reason. Participants do not engage in verbal attacks but do battle with the issue. Among other things, this involves sizing up the issue, asking pertinent questions about it, proposing possible answers, canvassing a range of views, gathering evidence, assessing its relevance and seeing what it implies, as well as considering counterarguments and remaining open to the possibility of error. In coming together to consider matters in this way, participants in the Community of Inquiry neither stick to their guns nor rush to judgment. Rather, they reason their way forward taking all these things into account, withholding judgment while they consider the matter, following the argument where it leads, and drawing their conclusions accordingly. They are, as it were, judges of the cases that come before them, impartial to all but the rule of reason.

Here there are countless opportunities to develop the critical reflective aspects of open-mindedness—the tendency to think things through rather than rushing to judgment, to probe and question, examine the evidence, explore alternatives, and especially the habit of relying on reason and competence in its execution. To concentrate on the last of these, the appeal to reason distinguishes open-mindedness from such things as indecision and an indiscriminate interest in alternatives. To habitually vacillate between alternatives is not a sign of open-mindedness, but of an inability to make up your mind, just as to be inclined to uncritically indulge the latest thing to come along is to be weak-minded rather than open-minded. The appeal to reason underpins the Community of Inquiry at almost every turn. To rationally consider alternative possibilities and points of view, for example, means to properly take them into account. You cannot do that unless you can make well-argued comparisons and draw proper conclusions. The evaluation of just about any suggestion involves reasoning as to its implications, as well as the consideration of arguments that may be made against it. Even making decisions about what questions need to be addressed, or what issues or problems should be investigated, demands a reasoned response. In all these cases, the Community of Inquiry involves a process of making a judgment by appeal

[22] As was indicated earlier, these judgments should not be thought of only in terms of reaching an outright conclusion. It may be that a variety of views are judged to be plausible, that a problem's seemingly more obvious solutions are themselves problematic, or that insight has been gained into the complexities of the matter.

to reason—including an open finding if that is where the argument leads. Nothing could better establish the habit of keeping an open mind until due consideration gives one good reason to decide the case; and given the ample opportunity to engage in deliberations of that kind, nothing could do more to develop skill in reasoning and arguing your way through a wide range of matters than the Community of Inquiry.

Thirdly, Lipman thinks of discourse in the Community of Inquiry as dialogue disciplined by logic. By *logic* he means the method of inquiry à la Dewey, rather than merely adherence to the principles of reasoning to be found in a standard logic textbook. In seeking to convert the classroom into a Community of Inquiry, Lipman also shares Dewey's vision of inquiry-based thought as the thing to aim for in school education. Etymologically, *dialogue* comes from the Greek *dia*, meaning *through*, and *logos*, variously meaning *word*, *speech*, *thought*, or *reason*. In short, dialogue in the Community of Inquiry is inquiry carried out by means of exchanges of thought in reasoned speech. As Lipman points out, this need not preclude arguments through which participants attempt to persuade one another to adopt their beliefs and opinions. What matters is whether they do so by appeal to reason rather than, say, by using rhetoric or peer pressure. Nor does it preclude the personal element of showing respect for one another as persons, such as listening attentively to the views with which you may not agree, thoughtfully engaging with them, and being prepared to concede their merit, or even to adopt them, if they have reason on their side.

Once again, we are presented with the opportunity to develop some of the key characteristics of open-mindedness. Collaborative Inquiry into issues and problems that is carried out by way of reasoned speech cannot help but engage with different points of view and develop an appreciation for their merits. By listening attentively to a range of opinions and engaging with them through dialogue, students become more aware of the limitations of their own knowledge and understanding, as well as their own partiality and biases. Nothing could be a better antidote against unwarranted self-assurance, in which you tend to cling to what you think, come what may. Nothing could do more to encourage students to keep an open mind when dealing with matters over which there is collective uncertainty and room for disagreement. Becoming more inclined to listen to and thoughtfully engage with other points of view, to give them due weight, taking account of your own predilections and biases—here we have the kind of intellectual engagement and self-discernment that contributes to open-mindedness.

Finally, we come to the mixture of rationality and creativity, where Lipman tells us that the Community of Inquiry is used to "operationalize and implement the definitions of critical and creative thinking."[23] According to Lipman, critical thinking can be defined as "thinking that (1) facilitates judgment because it (2) relies on criteria, (3) is self-corrective, and (4) is sensitive to context."[24] While creative thinking also aims at judgment, Lipman claims that it differs from critical thinking in being self-transcending rather than self-corrective, sensitive to criteria rather than governed by them, and governed by context rather than merely sensitive to it. In addition, the two differ in that the overriding criterion for critical thinking is truth, while for creative thinking it is meaning.[25] It is important to note that these contrasts are not to be thought of as absolute but matters of priority and degree. Legal documents are constructed with close attention to meaning, for example, just as authenticity is a mark of truth in fiction. Neither the critical deliberations of the lawyer or legislator, nor the creative explorations of the novelist or scriptwriter, wholly lack the characteristics of the other's thought.

[23] Ibid., p. 229.
[24] Ibid., p. 116.
[25] Ibid., p. 193.

Thinking that bears both sets of characteristics is to be found throughout the Community of Inquiry. In respect of critical thinking, for example, students who develop an argument are using it to *facilitate a judgment* in favour of its conclusion. In doing so, they *rely on the twin criteria* of the truth of their premises and the validity of their argument. The argument may be perfectly good in its own terms, but it will be out of place unless it is *sensitive to the context* of discussion. If the argument turns out to be faulty, other students may point this out, providing the discussion with a *self-corrective*. To take an example on the creative side, students may imagine a solution to a problem and offer it as a *tentative judgment* on how to deal with the matter. Insofar as they have generated something novel, they will have *transcended*, or gone beyond, any of their previous ideas. In doing so, they need to be *sensitive to the criteria* that a solution was supposed to satisfy, although it is always possible for a novel solution to have so transfigured the nature of the problem that some of the criteria no longer apply. Regardless of whether the problem is transformed or remains the same, the problem provides *the context that governs* any imagined solution.

It is of note that the Community of Inquiry encourages combinations of critical and creative thought, working together to make headway of one kind or another. Consider, for example, its tendency to explore a range of possibilities that may be suggested by various members of the group. Conceiving of such possibilities is an exercise in speculative imagination or guesswork, and essentially a creative act. In reasoning as to what these suggestions assume and imply, thought then takes a critical turn, as the various possibilities are criticised and judged against one another in terms of how well they satisfy whatever criteria are to be met. The same can be said of conceptual exploration. Students may begin with the characteristics that they associate with an idea. These then serve as the raw ingredients from which to begin to construct the concept. The generation of these materials and use of them as building materials is fundamentally a creative activity. Even so, much of what needs to be done along the way calls for a critical frame of mind. The students' initial thoughts need to be put in order, by such things as examining the relationships between the various characteristics that have been suggested, judging their centrality or relative lack of importance to the concept in question, and deciding, where appropriate, which ones are necessary, or collectively sufficient, for the application of the concept in the context in which it is being used. These considerations all call for students to exercise their powers of critical thought. In short, any well-conducted conceptual exploration involves the interplay of creative and critical thinking.

This kind of thinking also conforms to the operations of "generate and test." To search for possible solutions to some problem or issue and examine their plausibility is a process of that kind. The same applies to gathering students' initial thoughts about the meaning of a concept and then examining them to see what place they have in a more fully articulated account of its meaning. In fact, working with your fellows to generate all kinds of suggestions, and putting them to the test of reasoned discussion, is precisely the way that problems and issues are dealt with in the Community of Inquiry. As with the critical and creative thinking that this involves, it is part of its core business, and you are likely to find them richly interwoven into any classroom discussion which assumes that form.

It hardly needs mentioning that these combinations of critical and creative thinking and patterns of "generate and test" are ones that we met with earlier in our analysis of the dispositions required for open-mindedness. The open-minded person is prepared to entertain fresh possibilities, new ideas, and novel ways of doing things, but not uncritically. They tend to be curious, to use their imagination and probe around, but not in an unquestioning manner, without discernment. They are not so wedded to their own opinions as to not give a fair hearing to other points of view, but this means being prepared to consider them and judge them on their merits. In short, the Community of Inquiry provides an abundance of opportunities for students to develop the dispositions, abilities, and skills required for

coming to look at the world and engage with your fellows in an open-minded fashion, and to do so with intelligence and discernment. Once again, the Community of Inquiry shows itself to be a robust means of developing open-mindedness.

Concluding Remarks

Regardless of whether attempting to provide a watertight definition of open-mindedness is a fool's errand, it is of comparatively little value from an educational point of view. By contrast, as we have seen, much is to be gained by identifying the family of dispositions, abilities and skills associated with it. For this kind of analysis enables us to translate open-mindedness onto an array of things that we can encourage, nurture and teach.

We may have high-minded objectives in education, but they do not amount to much without practical ways and means of achieving them. Indeed, with all the demands placed upon teachers, what they really require are pedagogical practices that by their very nature help to promote these objectives. That is what we have here when it comes to open-mindedness. The burden of this paper has been to show that Matthew Lipman's Community of Inquiry is an exemplar of good practice in that regard. It is far from the only educational virtue of the Community of Inquiry, of course, but the fact that it provides a natural means of developing open-mindedness is yet another reason why teachers should make the Community of Inquiry a regular part of their practice.

My hope is that even those practitioners who needed no convincing that the Community of Inquiry is a means of encouraging open-mindedness may more fully appreciate why that conviction is well-placed. If nothing more, they may have a greater awareness of how they are supporting open-mindedness as they guide and conduct discussion with students. That is not nothing. To have that kind of grasp on what you are doing as a teacher lifts the art of teaching to a whole new level.

Bibliography

Baehr, J (2011). The Structure of Open-Mindedness. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 41 (2): 191-213.

Buchler, J (1954). What is a discussion? *The Journal of General Education* 8 (1), October 1954: 7-17.

Dewey, J (1900). Some Stages in Logical Thought. *The Philosophical Review* 9 (5): 465-489.

Dewey, J (1910). *How we Think*. Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath; Rev. ed. (1933) as *How We Think: A Restatement of the Relation of Reflective Thinking to the Educative Process*.

Dewey, J (1916). *Democracy and Education*. New York: Macmillan.

Dewey, J (1938). *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*. New York: Henry Holt & Company.

Fridland, E and Pavese, C (2021). *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Skill and Expertise*. New York: Routledge.

Hamilton, E and Cairns, H (eds) (1999). *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Hare, W (1979). *Open-Mindedness and Education*. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press.

Hare, W (2004). Education for an Unsettled World: Dewey's Conception of Open-Mindedness. *Journal of Thought* 39 (3): 111-127.

Lipman, M (1991). *Thinking in Education*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Lipman, M. ed. (1993). Thinking Children and Education. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company.

Menand, L (ed) (1997). *Pragmatism: A Reader*. New York: Vintage Books.

Peirce, C S (1887). The Fixation of Belief. *Popular Science Monthly* 12 (1): 1-15. Available at https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Fixation_of_Belief

Riggs, W (2010) Open-mindedness. *Metaphilosophy* 41 (1-2): 172-188.

Send Correspondences to:
Philip Cam
School of Humanities and Languages, UNSW, Sydney, Australia
Email: p.cam@unsw.edu.au