

Mathew Lipman was in his late forties when – in 1972 – he took the bold step of quitting his tenured professorship in philosophy at Columbia University in New York.

The story goes that he spent the next few months working from a caravan. But the caravan story may well symbolise his move from the towers of 'higher' education to the schools where 'small' children are educated. The plain truth is that Lipman had a job to go to, and knew there was a job to be done.

He had been invited by Montclair State College, earlier a teacher training college and now a university, to establish the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children on its campus. The aim was to redesign philosophy for children's use.

Philosophy for children

Roger Sutcliffe looks at the work of a man who has influenced educational thinking across the world

Almost immediately this involved reorienting education as a whole – for adults as much as for children. That is why his project has as much relevance and urgency in 2001 as it had nearly 30 years ago.

"If you could get education to centre on thinking," said Lipman, in the 1990 BBC documentary *Socrates for 6 year olds*, "rather than rote-learning, then you'd be preparing for a very different world."

Neither Lipman then, nor advocates of philosophy for children now, would contend that modern education is all rote-learning. Teachers at all levels offer a much more varied and potentially exciting intellectual diet than their predecessors of 100 years ago.

But still there is a big question mark hanging over the emphasis placed on written tests, especially those which place a premium on the gathering of knowledge. Witness the concern in the UK with the 'drudgery' of GCSE or, more positively, the renewed push for 'thinking skills' in the curriculum.

That push comes partly from the DfEE itself, but partly is a response to the fast-changing world we live in – a world which confronts each person with ever more decisions and challenges. Most teachers recognise only too keenly the need to equip children with the skills and attitudes to cope



Harry's discovery

'Conversion', in classical or Aristotelian logic, means reversing the subject and predicate of a sentence.

Typical sentences in Aristotle's scheme would be: 'All humans are animals', and 'No animals are vegetables'. These convert/reverse to 'All animals are humans', and 'No vegetables are animals'.

Such sentences are not, of course, typical of everyday speech. But Aristotle's scheme was never intended to be a substitute for ordinary language.

Rather, it was a way of exploring relationships in the world we perceive. And it began with an exploration of the relationships between the WORDS with which we CONCEIVE that world - between concepts.

These words or concepts can be related to in one of only three ways. They are either quite distinct ("No As are Bs" - type 1) or integral ("All Cs are Ds" - type 2) or partially integrated ("Some Es are Fs" - type 3). Each of these may be represented by a simple (Venn) diagram.



By concentrating on sentences that capture these relationships, Aristotle developed a basic framework for clearer thinking. It is this framework that Harry discovers, starting with the observation that true sentences of types 1 and 3 can always be converted/reversed and remain true, but not so for sentences of type 2.

Further exploration revealed that true sentences of type 2 could be converted in the special case that subject and predicate were different terms for one and the same thing. A clear example would be "All birds are feathered animals." That is a true sentence, and so is its reverse, "All feathered animals are birds."

In such a case we have what amounts to a definition, and indeed checking for reversibility in type 2 sentences is the best way of ensuring that a term/subject has been accurately defined.

This process of checking, moreover, is not merely a play with words. If we ask, "Are there any animals that are feathered but not reckoned to be birds?" the answer to this is determined by observation of the world. If such creatures were found, then the definition of a bird would have to be reviewed and refined.

But learning how to develop, and operate with, clearly defined concepts is not the only benefit that Harry and his friends gain from exploring conceptual relationships. There are at least two other significant benefits.

The first is that being doubtful of the reversibility of type 2 sentences leads to a questioning of the validity of all such sentences. In other words, one develops a healthy resistance to over-generalisation and stereotyping.

Secondly, in the same vein, one becomes more aware of the difficulty of defining many basic concepts, especially in regard to human feelings and relationships. Is all killing murder? Are all children dependent? Are all nurses kind? Is all thinking social? Is all love blind? These are important and controversial questions that need the most careful consideration.

with such change, alongside the knowledge deemed essential for the individual and for society. They will have welcomed the more explicit guidelines in the curriculum in regard to 'teaching for thinking' – the focus on five key skills or types of thinking that cut across subject areas:

- enquiring;
- information-processing – analysing, sequencing, etc;
- reasoning;
- creating – synthesising, imagining, etc;
- evaluating.

Lipman has much to say and offer in these areas.

In the 1960s, his long-time interest in art – signalled by

his 1950 doctoral dissertation *Problems of Art Inquiry* – drew him into a series of conversations about children, art, and education with Joseph D Isaacson of the Child Study Association. These talks continued through the Columbia University riots of 1968.

Those riots undoubtedly sent shock waves through the educational, as well as political, establishment. The university authorities were seen in no better light than the students. Lipman characterised both parties as bewildered and unreasonable. Since they had all passed through the same school system, he took to wondering whether that system did enough to develop reasonable and reasoning citizens.



The two epithets are related, of course, but the latter introduces the vital element of a willingness to reason as well as a capacity to do so. Anyone schooled in logic, reasoning or any of the other skills of thinking can attempt to school children in the appropriate procedures – how to analyse data or test arguments, how to map concepts and ask searching questions, how to establish criteria or imagine consequences.

The challenge is to help children see the point of it all – with respect to their own lives – so they become habitual critical and creative thinkers.

At the time Lipman was teaching an adult evening course in logic and critical thinking. He wondered if the course could be redesigned for pre-university students – or even children – to enable them to think more reasonably, more reflectively, and more critically.

Initially he doubted it, as have philosophers and educationalists who have judged more from the name of “philosophy for children” than from its practice.

A pragmatist by nature as much as by philosophy, Lipman decided it was worth experimenting. In fact, his progress in this matter presents a classic practice of the theory of American philosopher John Dewey as outlined in the book *How we think*.

After the initial discomfort or “felt difficulty” of the riots themselves, and the growing doubt in the system out of which they came, there had come a formulation of the problem and suggestions of possible ways ahead.

One specific suggestion came from a colleague, who wondered whether the lessons of logic and critical thinking might be embedded in a story rather than a textbook. So Lipman began writing a story about a middle-school boy who discovers the logical principle of conversion – and, more importantly, its application or the lack of it in real life.

Even then there were doubts in Lipman's mind: after a couple of chapters he felt that the story, *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*, needed a range of more provocative ideas if his audience of 11 – 12 year olds was to latch onto it. His main aim was to stimulate reasoning, reflection, and critical judgement in children.

The best way to do this, he felt, was to present them with ideas and situations that challenged them to formulate questions of their own, which they would then want to discuss in a serious, deliberative manner.

Philosophy itself was a treasure house of contestable and important ideas, and Lipman drew from its various rooms to serve his immediate purpose: the philosophy of education, of mind, of science, of religion, and of the social sciences, as well as ethics and aesthetics. Of all the stories for children that Lipman has written, *Harry* is still the richest and most varied in its philosophical content.

For three years it remained unpublished. But Lipman continued his Deweyan approach and trialled the story with a random group of fifth-graders – year six – who showed a gain in reasoning, using tests before and after, that outstripped those of a control group. Gains in other achievement areas were also measured, and shown to last for at least two years.

This was enough to encourage him – and eventually Montclair – to continue with the experiment, and from 1972, with assistance especially from Ann Margaret Sharp, of Montclair's education department, he constructed a model philosophy programme for schools. Initially focussed on *Harry*, this programme now covers the full age range from five to 16 year olds and is used in more than 30 countries – all represented on the International Council for Philosophical Inquiry with Children.

John Dewey was Lipman's first influence. Lipman was introduced to his ideas at Stanford college in the year before he crossed the Atlantic with Patton's army. He was sufficiently inspired to carry a collection of Dewey's writings in his backpack and read them as he yomped across Europe from 1943 to 1946.

After a spell at a temporary American University in England, he returned to enrol at Columbia – Dewey's own college. He met Dewey, corresponded with him, and remained, in his own words, ‘a loyal Deweyan.’

Dewey's name is well-known in British educational circles, but it is probably fair to say that his educational theories have not always met with sympathetic understanding. The former Tory education secretary Sir Keith Joseph told a distinguished professor that he held Dewey's advocates responsible for virtually all the problems that were facing his department.

In his recent book, *Liberal Anxieties and Liberal Education*, Professor Alan Ryan of New College, Oxford, argues

persuasively that our schools would benefit from: "Dewey's emphasis on children working in groups to identify problems and work out co-operative solutions".

There is evidence – quoted in respect of a mathematics class – that such methods lead to better thinking and grades. Encouraging children to learn in this collaborative way lays the foundations for a healthy democratic society.

Dewey, says Ryan: "Redefined democracy in the way that recent theorists of 'deliberative democracy' have done. Democratic government is deliberative government. An illiberal democracy is not a democracy – even if there is universal suffrage and majority rule."

Lipman puts it this way: "I don't think you want a sodden

good judgement.

As to how mature or deliberative American democracy was in the late 1960s, perhaps outsiders should be cautious to judge. What seems pretty clear is that the conception of democracy that inspired Lipman to take philosophy into the elementary school was fundamentally Deweyan and had been articulated by him at least 50 years earlier.

"Democracy," said Dewey in *The Need of an Industrial Education in an Industrial Democracy*, "has to be reborn anew every generation, and education is its midwife. Moreover, it is only education which can guarantee widespread community of interest and aim. In a complex society, ability to understand and sympathise with the operations and lot

ICPIC

The International Council for Philosophical Inquiry with Children was established in 1985, to provide an international network for the development of *Philosophy for Children* and other approaches to doing philosophy with children.

Over 30 countries are represented in the council, whose current President is Professor Walter Kohan, of the University of Brasilia. Society for Advancing Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education was registered as a UK charity in 1993 and shares the following aims with ICPIC. To:

- Co-ordinate and encourage the efforts of those trying to introduce such approaches into primary (elementary) and secondary school curricula, or into the lives of children outside of formal schooling
- Assist in the development and implementation of teacher education programmes in the field
- Stimulate and sustain dialogue among educators, philosophers, and others concerned with fostering children's development through philosophy.
- Maintain such dialogue through organising conferences, workshops, newsletters, journals, etc.
- Promote research into practice, and the development of appropriate curriculum materials

Since its foundation, ICPIC has organised Biennial International Conferences, the last of which was in Brazil. SAPERE has run annual conferences since 1991, and is hosting the next ICPIC conference from July 12 to 17.

The venue is King Alfred's College, Winchester, and the title is "Citizenship, Thinking and Philosophy for Children". There will be a special focus on developments in the UK on the weekend of July 14-15 and UK teachers/educators interested in attending the full conference or just at the weekend will be warmly welcomed.

For further information go to www.sapere.net or send an email to rogersutcliffe@compuserve.com

mass of citizens who accept whatever they're told without reflection. I think you want them to judge what they're told in a critical way – not be uncritical. That's a terrible notion of democracy, an uncritical citizenry."

It is a bold thing to urge the raising of critical awareness amongst citizens – and perhaps especially amongst young citizens – even in a mature democracy. Criticality could lead directly to the sort of ill-feeling and conflict witnessed in those 1968 riots.

This is a matter of socio-political interpretation as well as interpretation of the notion of criticality. Lipman's perception was clearly that, whatever else the university students and authorities displayed, it was not any sort of critical thinking that improves reasonableness and leads to

of others is a condition of common purpose which only education can procure."

Lipman set about tailoring education better to achieve this ideal of democracy, grounded on respect and empathy for others in the community – what Dewey called a social and moral democracy as well as a political one. Of course community was a key notion from the start, but it assumed added significance when Lipman revived and made new use of a concept first attributed to the 19th century American philosopher Charles Peirce – 'community of enquiry'.

Originally applied to the community of scientists in whose circle Peirce himself moved, the phrase lends itself to appropriation by any group of enquirers. For Lipman the

idea of enquiry was naturally linked with philosophical and conceptual enquiry, though anyone familiar with Dewey – or indeed the history of natural philosophy – would have appreciated its equally strong association with scientific enquiry. Nor should one ignore the place of enquiry in other disciplines such as history.

In *Thinking in Education* Lipman says: “By ‘inquiry’ I mean any form of self-critical practice whose aim is more comprehensive understanding or more expert judgement. In this sense, scientific inquiry is only one among many forms of inquiry that are to be found in the crafts and arts, in the humanities and professions, and indeed wherever human beings are engaged in making, saying, or doing.”

This linking of enquiry with critical thinking, and beyond that with understanding and judgement, may well be stretching the limits of common usage, but it is not wildly out of keeping with Peirce’s original coinage. Understanding and judgement must surely be prime aims of education, and the role of critical enquiry in attaining them can hardly be underestimated.

The linking of the idea with that of ‘community’ points again to the fact that a healthy democracy depends upon a sense of wide community in the hearts of its citizens. And a child’s immediate community can play a significant role in their personal and intellectual development.

Dewey was not the only one in his day to recognise the social aspects of how – and why – we think.

George Herbert Mead, an American psychologist who published *Mind, Self and Society* in 1934, wrote an article as early as 1910 maintaining that: “The consciousness of self depends primarily upon social relations.”

Long before the modern fashion for mediation, he was agreeing with Dewey that: “Instruction should be an interchange of experience in which the child brings his experience to be interpreted by the parent or teacher. This recognises that education is interchange of ideas, is conversation – belongs to a universe of discourse.”

He summarises his own article as follows: “I have sought to indicate that the process of schooling in its barest form cannot be successfully studied by a scientific psychology unless that psychology is social, ie unless it recognises that the processes of acquiring knowledge, of giving attention, of evaluating in emotional terms must be studied in their relation to selves in a social consciousness. So far as education is concerned, the child does not become social by learning. He must be social in order to learn.”

How close the Soviet philosopher Lev Vygotskii’s cultural-historical theory (see *Teaching Thinking* issue 1) came to fulfilling Mead’s particular vision of a successful scientific psychology is a matter of some debate at the edges. But at its core it does recognise the importance to the learning child of the surrounding culture and community with special emphasis on the role of speech in conveying socially determined meaning.

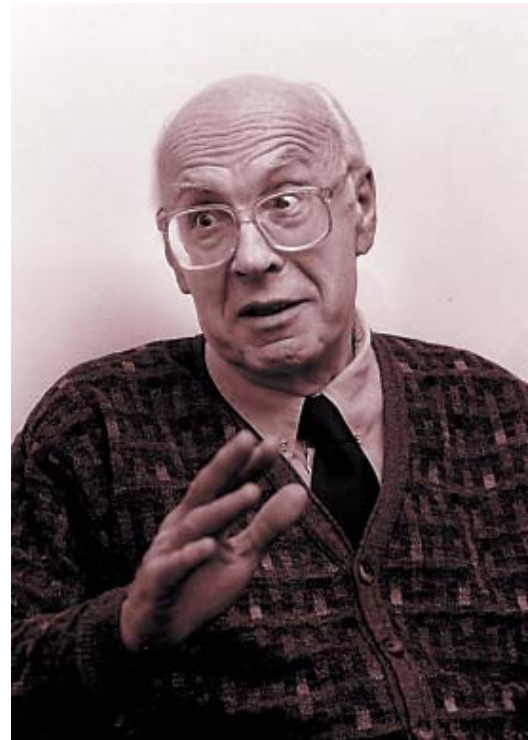
In developing the theory and practice of a ‘community of enquiry’, Lipman turned to the Vygotskiiian ‘social’ model of cognitive development, and celebrated the extent to which children in such a community taught each other to think

and feel better through internalising each other’s speech patterns and values.

Not every speech pattern of children is conducive to better thinking and feeling in their peers, and Lipman recognised that every community of enquiry needed to develop an appreciation of good, critical, and creative patterns of questioning and reasoning. In the early stages of developing such an appreciation, the teacher has a guiding role to play, encouraging patterns of speech such as “I agree (or disagree) with ...”; or “Could you explain ...”; or “For example...”

In the longer term the best thing a teacher can do is allow the children to grow in responsibility themselves – to ask questions that open up enquiry and allow pupils to develop arguments, experiments, and evaluations of their own.

One way of encouraging the growth of independent responsibility and learning is to let the children realise that you are as interested in their questions as they should be in yours.



There must something to stimulate the children’s thinking – generally a story, read aloud so it is a shared experience – from which their interests, puzzles, or concerns can be drawn and formulated into questions.

Once an enquiry is under way, various experiences, data, and perspectives are aired and processed, with a frequent call for reasons to justify particular interpretations.

New interpretations or resolutions are being created all the time, both publicly and privately, and the community moves towards public evaluation of the most prominent of these.

That is an ideal pattern of discursive development, not one that is always attained. But it has been witnessed in enough classrooms doing philosophical enquiry to be sure that it is attainable, even by very young children.

There is evidence from trials that the community of

enquiry process assists cognitive development at all ages. After Lipman's early experiment with fifth graders, numerous assessments were made in America which showed significant gains in reading comprehension and mathematical attainment, as well as in general reasoning skills. Trials have produced similar results in different countries, including a full scale evaluation of year one children in 18 schools in Wales.

In the UK teachers who use a community of enquiry find the approach carries over into other parts of the timetable: children ask more and better questions, and engage with each other's thinking more critically and creatively. This has been remarked upon in at least two OFSTED reports.

Perhaps this is not surprising. The opportunities for empirical exploration at school are bounded by many physical constraints. But the opportunities for conceptual and philosophical exploration are virtually boundless. More and more teachers are appreciating that such exploration pays dividends – in increased involvement and motivation for the children and in developing vital skills.

Fear of not covering the syllabus prevents teachers from opening such enquiries more often with their children. Happily the emphasis in our curriculum has shifted a little more towards thinking.

There is growing evidence that good thinking paves the way for better attitudes towards, and attainment in, information processing – even of the sort involved in written exams.

There are a few remarkable, and probably very significant, similarities between philosophy for children, cognitive acceleration through science education (see *Teaching Thinking* issue 1), and the thinking to learn project based at Newcastle University.

They start with what is generally called a cognitive challenge – an observation that runs counter to intuition, a historical or geographical mystery, or a story that, as Lipman puts it, has 'problematicity' built into it.

Lipman says: "A problematicity in the subject-matter is likely to breed perplexity in the student, and that perplexity is likely to express itself in the form of a question. But now it is the student questioning the text directly, rather than the teacher raising questions about the text and directing them in class, thereby doing their thinking for them."

Each of the thinking skills models encourages the children to deliberate about the problem in groups – to discuss each others' ideas. This process can involve a rich variety of thinking strategies: the ability to note differences among things that are fairly similar, or similarities among things that are fairly different; a sensitivity to particular context and to general uniformities; the capacity to form and analyse concepts and arguments.

As Lipman has put it: "Reasoning is sharpened and perfected by disciplined discussion as by nothing else."

Each process values reflection, albeit with slightly different emphases. In CASE the emphasis is on metacognition – explicitly reviewing the process of solving a problem and consolidating the lessons to be learned. TtL has a regular procedure of debriefing but looks to make wider connections with existing knowledge in the subject

area. In philosophy for children there is a continual emphasis on reflection during the course of discussion – on correcting one's own conceptual structure or argument, as well as others.

There is no attempt at closure as such, since often the issue remains open at the end, even whilst its greater complexity is appreciated. There is often an opportunity for all individuals to clarify where their thinking has reached by the end of the discussion, and what questions remain for them.

Through these processes, thinking and learning become challenging, engaging, and meaningful activities. The processes should be central to any national or school philosophy and plan of education.

For Lipman the remaking of education required that the classroom be converted into: "A community in which friendship and co-operation would be welcomed as positive contributions to a learning atmosphere, rather than the semi-adversarial and competitive conditions that prevail in too many early classrooms."

Lipman is interested in: "The cognitive role of the emotions, particularly those that are social in character, such as trust, considerateness, and compassion. A recognition of the thinking that actually takes place when we appreciate a work of art, survey a landscape, examine a snail's shell, discriminate barely distinguishable differences, and examine our own mental acts and state.

"I have proposed that the third leg of the tripod be called caring thinking, with the understanding that caring thinking here encompasses thinking that is concerned (with the predicaments others are in), appreciative (of every arrangement of parts and wholes), normative (suggestive of what ought to be done in moral situations), and deliberative (in that it seeks to weigh all the factors and take the context into account before judging).

This notion of caring thinking spreads naturally into that of collaborative thinking, and I often refer to the four Cs of philosophy for children as critical, creative, caring, and collaborative thinking. If the ideal of a discourse-based ethics is attainable, or even that of a discourse-based society, it is hard to see how they could be based on anything very different from the practice of this sort of thinking. And it is a practice that must start, not at university, nor even at secondary school, but at primary school or even before.

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Further reading

How we think by John Dewey. Published by Southern Illinois Press
Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery by Matthew Lipman. Published by IAPC.

Liberal Anxieties and Liberal Education by Alan Ryan. Published by Profile Books.

The Need of an Industrial Education in an Industrial Democracy by John Dewey. Published by Southern Illinois Press.

Thinking in Education by Matthew Lipman. Published by Cambridge University Press