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Abstract:

According to Matthew Lipman, the community of philosophical inquiry can be understood as a social matrix generating a variety of social relationships and building up the framework of the cognitive matrices whose outcomes are cognitive relationships. From this perspective, the community, intended both as an existential as well as a social structure, is the ground for the emergence and development of complex thinking involving both critical, creative and caring cognitive processes. A community goes back to a pattern of relationships and interactions built on the recognition and acceptance of a cultural, ideological, religious or social reference with which the members of the group identify, and which represents the reason for them to form as a group. Communities generate relationships of commitment, sharing, and understanding that are the ground of caring thinking habits, but they are also the generative context of a process of continuous building/re-building/validation of shared meanings and sensibilities which is the ground for critical thinking. In a community context the dynamic between individual-individual and individual-community is both the expression and the management of conflict and opposition, and the construction of new existential, expressive and cognitive forms that allow for the emergence of thoughts capable of composition, integration, qualitative leaps, and surpassing and transcending phases therefore generating creative forms of thinking. As such, the community of philosophical inquiry represents a socio-relational matrix that is inseparably both epistemic and existential, and which reverberates along new links that build up between objects, between people, and within the world in a continuous circuit, and in which new senses and meanings are always being generated. For these reasons it can be extended to many other contexts other than those involving the teaching of complex thinking to children and adolescents, including a community development.

Keywords: community; philosophical inquiry; complex thinking; social matrix; social relationships; cognitive relationships

## La comunidad de investigación filosófica como matriz social y cognoscitiva

### Resumen:

Según Matthew Lipman, la comunidad de investigación filosófica puede ser entendida como matriz social que genera una variedad de relaciones sociales y que aumenta el marco de las matrices cognoscitivas cuyos resultados son relaciones cognoscitivas. Desde esta perspectiva, la comunidad, entendida como estructura existencial tanto como estructura social, es la base para la aparición y el desarrollo de procesos cognoscitivos complejos que implican procesos cognitivos críticos, creativos y de cuidado. Una comunidad vuelve a una medida de relaciones y de interacciones construidas a partir del reconocimiento y la aceptación de una referencia cultural, ideológica, religiosa o social con la cual los miembros del grupo se identifican, y que representa su razón para estar formando un grupo. Las comunidades generan relaciones de compromiso, compartiendo, y entendiendo que son la base para hábitos de pensamiento cuidadoso, pero que son también el contexto generativo de un proceso de continua construcción, validación y revalidación de los significados y sensibilidades compartidos que son la base del pensamiento crítico. En un contexto de comunidad la dinámica entre individual-individual e individual-comunidad es tanto la expresión y la gerencia del conflicto y la oposición, como la construcción de nuevas formas existenciales, expresivas y cognoscitivas que permitan la aparición de pensamientos capaces de composición, de integración, de saltos cualitativos, y de sobrepasar y trascender fases, generando, así, formas creativas de pensar. Como tal, la comunidad de investigación filosófica representa una matriz socio-relacional inseparable en lo epistémico y existencial, y que reverbera a lo largo de los nuevos acoplamientos que se construyen entre objetos, personas y el mundo en un circuito continuo, en el que nuevos sentidos y significados se están generando siempre. Por esas razones puede ser ampliada a muchos otros contextos que los que implican enseñanza de pensamiento complejo a niños y adolescentes, incluyendo un desarrollo comunitario.

Palabras clave: investigación filosófica; pensamiento complejo; matriz social; relaciones sociales, relacionales y cognitivas

## A comunidade de investigação filosófica como uma matriz social e cognitiva

### Resumo:

De acordo com Matthew Lipman, a comunidade de investigação filosófica pode ser entendida como uma matriz social que gera uma variedade de relações sociais e desenvolve o marco das matrizes cognitivas, cujos resultados são relações cognitivas. A partir desta perspectiva, a comunidade, entendida como uma estrutura tanto existencial como social, é a base para a emergência e o desenvolvimento do pensamento complexo, que envolve os processos cognitivos críticos, criativos e de cuidado. Uma comunidade volta ao plano das relações e interações desenvolvidas pelo reconhecimento e aceitação das referências culturais, ideológicas, religiosas e sociais, plano com o qual cada membro do grupo se identifica, e que mostra as razões deles para formar um grupo. As comunidades geram relações de engajamento, compartilhamento e entendimento que são a base para o hábito do pensamento cuidadoso, mas elas são também o contexto que gera processos de contínuas construções, re-construções e validações dos sentidos e sensibilidades compartilhados, que são a base para o pensamento crítico. Em um contexto de comunidade, a dinâmica entre individual-individual e individual-grupo é tanto a expressão quanto a administração de conflito e oposição, e a construção de novas formas de existência, expressão e cognição que permitem o surgimento de pensamentos capazes de composição, integração, salto qualitativo, superando e transcendendo fases, gerando, então, criativas formas de pensar. Como tal, a comunidade de investigação filosófica representa uma matriz socio-relacional que é inseparável no epistêmico e no existencial, e que reverbera com novas conexões que se constroem entre objetos, pessoas e o mundo em permanente circuito, as quais permitem a geração contínua de novos sentidos e significados. Por essas razões, a comunidade pode ser estendida a muitos outros contextos diferentes daqueles que envolvem o ensino do pensamento complexo a crianças e adolescentes, incluindo um desenvolvimento comunitário.

Palavras-chave: comunidade; investigação filosófica; pensamento complexo; matriz social; relações sociais; relações cognitivas

THE COMMUNITY OF PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY AS A SOCIAL AND COGNITIVE MATRIX

Maura Striano

In perhaps his most important work, *Thinking in Education* (1991, 2003), Matthew Lipman identifies the community of philosophical inquiry as a “social matrix” that generates a variety of “social relationships” and builds the framework of the “cognitive matrices” which in turn generate fresh “cognitive relationships” (Lipman, 1991,2003).

In the Lipman model--which owes an obvious debt to Mead and Vygotsky--the type of *social link* established in a formative social context constitutes the epistemic and cognitive links that form there. This is to say that thought and the building up of knowledge assume different forms and modalities according to the forms and modalities individuals employ to enter into and maintain social relationships.

In his identification of the cognitive matrix generated and fuelled by participation in a “community of philosophical inquiry” Lipman refers to a dynamic structural phenomenon defined as a “complex thinking,” a “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 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 maintaining recursive, meta-cognitive and self correcting dimensions (Lipman, 1991; 2003). Awareness and reflection are certainly necessary functions of participation in a network of interactions that impose and solicit constant scrutiny, not only and not so much of ones epistemic positions, arguments, or “reasons,” but also of the assumptions and beliefs that support them.

From this angle, complex thinking as described by Lipman works in reference to a model of inquiry that is very close to the one proposed by Charles Sanders Pierce, in which every investigative process (scientific and/or philosophical) comes to revolve primarily around the construction/deconstruction of “beliefs” that direct individual or shared actions and choices, and which exercise a strong influence on

individuals and social groups (Peirce, 1877). Even in this case, every cognitive configuration reflects a relational and social configuration.

Peirce's inquiry, in fact, necessarily occurs within a community that constitutes a functional socio-epistemic matrix dedicated to examining the meaning of beliefs, the shared terms within a cultural or social context, and their impact on actions, behaviours and practices that occur there. For Peirce, the most convincing way to deconstruct and reconstruct beliefs is the "inquiry" method, proposed as a test of the validity and efficacy of such beliefs in a multiplicity of contexts and situations. No other method in fact permits the analysis, evaluation, and also the dissemination and validation of ideas, hypotheses, theories, in a manner that is conscious, free from indoctrination, critical, and reflective (Peirce, 1877).

Consequently, inquiry so understood requires a type of thought that is fuelled by a genuine and constant doubt, which is dedicated to the revaluation of every type of authority, prejudice, and pre-concept, and which is aimed at contributing to the construction and establishment of beliefs – which, however, cannot and must not constitute a point of universal convergence for any group or individual

In this way, Peirce recognises the difference between scientific and philosophical inquiry, in that the latter are not based on shared beliefs, but are rather constantly tending towards a larger picture, recognizing the limits and partiality of every acquisition. For both Peirce and Lipman, the "community" is essentially the generative context of a process of continuous building/re-building/validation of shared meanings and sensibilities, employing thought to go beyond every apparent certainty or static reference, and exercising a systematic cultivation of doubt as the principal investigative tool. In this sense the community is the matrix of a form of deeply critical, self-correcting thought, sensitive to the contexts in which it is generated, and constantly employed in the search for criteria, reasons, justifications, and the foundations for arguments and for individual and collective actions.

Through the formulation of judgments, the critical function of thought moves self-correctingly, and becomes open to meta-cognitive and meta-linguistic regions, inside of which it becomes possible to examine and review the cognitive, epistemic

and communicative structures that underlie the processes of attribution and the building up of sense and meaning.

These are extremely complicated processes, that cannot, however, be expected to be unconditionally abstracted from the contexts in which they are generated. The “context,” as stressed by Dewey, is a constitutive and generative element in any type of thought, to the degree that there is always a cultural and social background from which it emerges and develops, and which represents simultaneously its link and its necessary condition (Dewey, 1931). This background both causes and fuels it, providing stimuli, regulating its quality and intensity, pushing it to take on different and multiple shapes and functions and forcing it to transcend itself, going beyond its own limits and boundaries. From this point of view, the community represents a qualitatively dense context, within which actions, thoughts, feelings and meanings come to make up a complex and articulated unit together.

On the other hand in a community context the dynamic between individual-individual and individual-community is both the expression and the management of conflict and opposition, and the construction of new existential, expressive and cognitive forms representing an articulated and complex synthesis. It is precisely this embeddedness in such a composite background--characterized by its own specific pervasiveness and uniqueness-- that allows for the emergence of thoughts capable of composition, integration, qualitative leaps, and surpassing and transcending phases.

To the extent to which it is shaped by the context from which it emerges and takes shape (and which in turn contributes to modifying and reconfiguring it), a thought is something “qualitative” according to Dewey’s definition (Dewey, 1931). From this perspective, the whole world we live in is essentially qualitative in terms of dealing with events, objects, situations that cannot be regarded as mere contextualizing data, but as dynamically linked elements within a single composite framework, where each takes on a distinctive specific quality.

This quality can only be perceived through a cognitive process that somehow goes beyond empirical heuristics (where thought is defined as an investigation in technical scientific terms) allowing for the understanding of the unity and the meaning of things or events. It is a cognitive process that is able to select, put into

relation, and integrate elements and details so as to build new shapes and meanings. As such, Dewey's "qualitative" thought appears to constitute the matrix of what Lipman, in his model of complex thinking, identifies as "creative thought" in so far as this cognitive form is governed by the contexts it is situated in. It is also characterized by a tension that encourages it to resolve dichotomies, oppositions and separations, using new constructs and interpretations that take advantage of a plurality of processes and expressive vehicles, going beyond any pre-constituted plans and matrices (Lipman, 1991, 2003). Like Dewey's "qualitative" thought, Lipman's "creative" thinking allows us to draw upon the aesthetic dimension of human experience and to grasp it in the same contexts in which it is formed.

From Dewey's viewpoint, the experience of being and thinking within a research community (as Lipman intended it) can de facto be recognised as an "experience," or a way of experiencing by continuously elaborating and developing the stuff of the experience itself--where every part flows freely into what follows, bringing with it what came before without sacrificing its identity. Think, for example, of the problem that is solved or the game that is played to its conclusion (Dewey, 1934). In an "experience" as defined by Dewey, the parts are phases of a single constantly changing unit, or rather, they are pauses within an ongoing narration, which define its quality and synthesize what has come before, prefiguring what could occur next. In these terms, the experience of being and of thinking in a community provides the opportunity to participate in the construction of a narrative that is the result and the synthesis of individual stories, and it grows and develops in a qualitative unity, in which every individual story assumes a meaning and every form and type of thought is composed of a complex synthesis.

The communitarian dimension, therefore, constitutes on the one hand the contextual matrix of thought in terms of qualitative emergence that cannot be configured as individual, nor is it an indistinct shapeless expression of an absolutizing community. On the other hand, the space for expression, recognition, for realization of creations, ideas, hypotheses and plans confers a new quality and a new meaning on general and individual experience. As such, the shapes and modalities that characterize the community of philosophical inquiry as Lipman

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intends it, are profoundly different from those typifying the “group,” the “class,” the “team,” which represent other social matrices, and which in turn generate other cognitive matrixes.

Lipman chooses to employ the “community” construct because it goes back to a pattern of relationships and interactions built on the recognition and acceptance of a cultural, ideological, religious or social reference with which the members of the group identify, and which represents the reason for them to form as a group, to meet (according to regular timescales) and to spend time together (following a number of norms, rules, stories and traditions). One thinks for example of the very first Christian communities, of the Hebrew communities scattered around the world, but also of prayer or healing groups.

Being united through a shared existential sense of direction that moves both individual orientations and relationships between individuals that form within and outside a community in the same direction. Being a member of a community requires reference to a “sense matrix” that is shared by all those participating--a matrix that in turn generates multiple characterizing “senses” for the actions, interactions, events and phenomena that emerge there.

Being part of a community means being in contact with others and with one’s self, not only when there is a shared horizon of common sense, but also when there is a shared existential matrix that identifies us as individuals capable of attributing meaning to objects, people, and relationships through our thoughts and our actions (Bruner, 1990). If the community is a “matrix of sense,” it is also a space for sharing, building/rebuilding, negotiating meanings in a cultural substrate that feeds on these, and provides tools to codify and interpret them. Sense and meaning are so closely linked that, in fact they become a primary framework of the community of philosophical inquiry (as Lipman intends it) in the form of a social matrix that generates an articulated and composite cognitive matrix. Sharing sense and meaning (but also building new senses and meanings) require the use and implementation of the thinking process that Lipman defined as “caring” (Lipman, 1991; 2003).

The meaning of the English words *to care*, *to take care of* in this context is linked to the pedagogical sense of “being in the world with openness” (Mortari, 2006)--in



other words, an “openness to the experiential and interpersonal dimension with responsibility and sense of judgment for the people and objects with which one comes in contact” (Striano, 1997). The value factor therefore has tremendous importance in this context. Through thought translated into action, we give sense and value to objects, to the world, and to people by grasping them in an implicate order, thereby “taking care” of what surrounds us and our selves.

Lipman identifies a type of careful, respectful, sensitive thinking that is also ethically and responsibly involved, as “caring”. It is in fact mainly this type of thought that supports the building up of a dialogic relationship, which implies a type of meeting with the other based on reciprocity and responsibility, in which it becomes possible to build an intermediary existential dimension and an intersubjective cognitive space, and thereby new interpretational perspectives and new attributions of sense and meaning (Buber, 1970; 2002). “Caring” thought not only supports the construction of judgments of value, but also ethical judgments, and contributes to directing choices that support human actions, highlighting their implications and consequences. In this sense, it is a type of cognitive and epistemic undertaking that seems very close to the “I care” of Don Lorenzo Milani (2001), to the extent to which it translates into a civil, political and social involvement in the various contexts of community life in which it is expressed.

The use of “caring” thought necessarily requires assuming epistemological positions that impose active listening, decentering, modularity, negotiation of beliefs, ideas opinions and points of view. In fact it is no accident that Milani’s “I care” translates readily into styles of collective thought and writing that place value on each contribution within a framework of arguments and thoughts, and are continually fuelled by dialogic processes. Entering into dialogue with another person’s thought, building upon it, developing new interpretational hypotheses for an event or situation on the basis of an observation and so on, presupposes the need for a distinctive and specific way of meeting others and building connections with them. This allows us to assume a specific epistemic position in which the other is seen as a co-generator of ideas and knowledge. The community dimension can be considered as a thought matrix that is fuelled by the recognition of otherness--of its

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existential and human contribution, but also of its epistemological role that develops necessarily within any framework of social connections.

In this sense it becomes evident that, in the Lipman model, the community of philosophical inquiry translates into a cognitive matrix that models thought in a “distributed” and “situated” sense (Perkins, 1993) and makes it a co-constructed process based on transaction. As such, it is a question of taking up an epistemic position that can and should also be fuelled by “socio cognitive conflict” (Doise, Mugny, 1981) but is substantially aimed at guaranteeing the “modularity” of knowledge and thought-elements at play within a dialogic framework, thus allowing for the expression and recognition of a multiplicity of positions and roles.

On the other hand, “caring” thinking also implies cognitive involvement in an analysis of the aims and consequences of individual and collective thought and action that has distinct ethical and pragmatic implications. As such, it calls for a careful intellectual posture that is responsibly involved, oriented by an element of tension and perspective that urges us to go beyond the data, to go elsewhere, towards what is possible within the horizon of common sense, but never in an over-defined or definitive way.

In the final analysis, the community of which Lipman is both a phenomenologist and an architect is a distinctive existential and experiential dimension: the other, the others, cultures, ideas, rules, practices, and histories represent the conditions for all actions, perceptions, thoughts and words that are generated within it, and that are therefore intended as a transactional (as Dewey understood the term) product of being in community (Dewey Bentley, 1949). Being in transaction, and believing ourselves and others to be so as well, allows us to recognise ourselves and others as individuals that are constantly immersed in an existential, adaptive and negotiating dimension, which requires a form of “multi-perspectival” thought (Lipman 1991; 2003), in which different epistemic positions and views on the world that are “prospective of meaning” necessarily arise.

From this point of view the community of philosophical inquiry represents a socio-relational matrix that is inseparably both epistemic and existential, and as such, reverberates along new links that build up between objects, between people,

and within the world in a continuous circuit, and in which new senses and meanings are always being generated. In light of these comments, it is clear how the model of the community of philosophical inquiry as elaborated by Lipman can and should be extended to contexts other than those involving the teaching of complex thinking to children and adolescents, which was its original application. As such, it becomes possible to interpret the acronym P4C as P4Community, articulating and revealing a possibility that is – when it is traced back to its pragmatic matrices--already present in Lipman’s formulation.

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