Title: 'You can get a lot out of the children by the way you do things'

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Introduction

This paper is not a report of research findings. It is an exploration of ideas evoked by one small piece of data - something a senior teacher said after experiencing a workshop about teaching thinking. Her actual words were that the workshop made her 'realize that as teachers you can get a lot out of the children by the way you do things'. We all know that the way we do things in the classroom is important and that what we do is influenced by what we believe about how learning happens. We argue here that the classroom climate we create is the essential element in any teaching-learning situation. We support this argument by drawing attention to common themes observable in the literature from a variety of academic areas, each of which tends to have its own body of knowledge. These include philosophy, developmental psychology, motivation theory, inclusive education, professional development, tertiary learning and information technology. If theorists and researchers in all these areas are moving towards agreement about the kind of context that facilitates learning, we should surely use these insights to enhance learning in schools.

The emerging picture of the ideal teaching-learning situation is of a safe psycho-social 'space', which may be physical or virtual, although in the latter case a certain amount of face to face time is usually recommended. Pinker (2015) puts forward strong arguments for the importance of real life interactions with other human beings in a variety of spheres, including education. Within this 'space' teachers and learners together engage with knowledge. They dialogue respectfully with each other and also with the ideas of the authors whose work they are studying. As the philosopher Oakeshott (1962, cited by Wegerif, 2013) suggests, learners of any age are being introduced not to an accumulating body of information, but to an ongoing human conversation about what we know and how it is possible to know it. This conversation happens among people and inside people. In a teaching-learning situation the knowledge that the teacher brings and the knowledge that learners bring are both valued and both questioned. Teacher and learners are motivated to engage and expect to learn from the encounter. The shared task is to access and deepen understanding by making connections, exploring implications and raising new questions.

 What are the arguments and necessary conditions for a teaching-learning situation different from the traditional model? Although there is inevitable overlap, we have attempted to organize our presentation in terms of the relevant social and personal, cognitive, and moral dimensions of the teaching-learning situation. We do not attempt to distinguish a separate emotional dimension since emotion is present within every dimension of teaching and learning.

The social and personal dimension of the teaching- learning space

The first essential social condition in any teaching-learning situation is that teacher and learners should in some sense be a community. A community is not just a group of disparate

individuals but a group that shares a common goal and certain common values. Teacher and learners think of themselves as constructing and reconstructing knowledge together because they believe that this is a worthwhile endeavour. Feuerstein's criteria for mediated learning (Feuerstein, Klein & Tannenbaum, 1991) draw attention to this when he emphasizes the importance of mediating reciprocity and meaning. Teachers and learners enter the learning space together. Learners join the community and engage because the teacher provides good reasons why the material to be learned is worth knowing and will be useful to them, as it is to her.

The Philosophy for/with Children movement, initiated by Lipman and his colleagues (Lipman, Sharp & Oscanyan, 1980) takes it as axiomatic that being part of a community is essential for learning and development. Splitter & Sharp (1995:18) describe a sense of community as evoking "a spirit of co-operation, care, trust, safety, and a sense of common purpose". A classroom community is an environment in which opportunities for learners to communicate with one another and behave democratically towards each other are maximised. It takes time to develop and is initially nurtured by the teacher. Gradually, guided by the teacher, the community begins to monitor and sustain itself. We find the same emphasis in the professional development and higher education literature although historically the literature about adult learning has been a field separate from the general education literature. The emphasis in lifelong learning and professional development is on the importance of collaborative learning communities. Lave & Wenger (1991) for example, describe learning communities as mutually supportive groups engaged in co-constructing knowledge. Referring to higher education, Bozalek, Mitchell, Dyson & Alperstein (2016:3) state persuasively that "It is through relationships that meaningful learning and practices are enacted."

It is increasingly recognised that children and young people also benefit from this kind of supportive learning environment. The teacher/leader becomes not an instructor, but a member of the learning group and at the same time is responsible for its progress as a learning community.

From the perspective of cognitive developmental psychologist Feuerstein (1991) has argued that mediated learning is only possible when learners feel that they belong as members of the classroom community and have a unique contribution to make. This theme is taken up by the proponents of inclusive education, who explore what it might mean for children at risk for exclusion to be made truly welcome in any classroom. Florian & Black-Hawkins (2011) for example, describe a pedagogy that avoids singling out individuals as different from the norm, and recognises both the uniqueness of individuals and the commonalities among learners.

The above understanding of community complements Vygotsky's (1962, 1978) notions about the centrality of learning together with others but goes beyond them in exploring the kind of social conditions most conducive to learning. It is not simply a matter of telling learners to talk to each other about a prescribed topic.

At the personal level, each individual within a community learns about herself develops a self-concept, and assigns value to herself . Burden (2005:9), an educational psychologist, wrote that 'positive self-esteem is not merely a matter of feeling good about oneself. It consists of a much more deep rooted belief in one's capability to overcome the problems with which one is faced, the confidence to deal with negative issues as they arise and a realistic sense of agency, i.e. that one has the skills and strategies to act in an effective manner when called upon to do so.' Soudien (2017: no page no.) writes of 'being able to locate himself or herself as a conscious agent in a world of competing forces.' The ideal teaching-learning community balances a sense of individuality with an awareness that community is inescapable and forms who we are. Splitter & Sharp (1995:171), writing of Philosophy for Children practices, note that "Because the community of inquiry is essentially reflective, it provides each member with countless opportunities to observe how her own sense of self – as well as that of her peers – is emerging and changing."

Individual self-esteem is fostered when there are opportunities to experience success as a result of one's own initiative. The motivation theory of Deci & Ryan (1982) for example, maintains that intrinsic motivation arises out of feelings of competence and self-determination, which accords with the emphasis on self-efficacy in the literature. Deci & Ryan claim that the reason why rewards do not always motivate is because learners do not experience themselves as having chosen to perform a particular task. Mutual respect is essential if a learning community is to develop. As teachers we are well aware that diversity within classrooms can lead to disrespectful language and behaviour. Respect for others of any age involves taking their beliefs and opinions seriously, even when they differ from one's own. Gardner (xxxx), a philosopher, has suggested that true respect involves being open about disagreement rather than remaining silent in order to keep the peace.

Respect also involves not singling out individual learners as different from what is considered 'normal', and therefore at risk of being treated disrespectfully. Florian (2016) points out, for example, that curriculum differentiation decided in advance by the teacher can easily lead to certain learners being treated as less worthy than others. Her proposal is that, in truly inclusive classrooms respectful of everyone's right to be present, teachers should differentiate tasks, but not learners. All learners should be free to choose from the range of differentiated tasks. Choices convey the message that the teacher considers diversity the norm and has faith in learners' ability to make appropriate choices, which contributes to a sense of self-efficacy. Walton (2017) lists characteristics of 'inclusive classroom communities' that emphasise respect for difference and a sense of shared responsibility for each other's learning. Although she does not clarify the teacher's role as a member of the classroom community, she recommends what she names 'responsive teaching'.

A teacher can model respect and refuse to permit disrespect but if more than overt respectful behaviour is the goal, opportunities to explore what respect means and why it is important are required. The cognitive climate in the classroom can provide the thinking tools to make this possible.

The cognitive dimension of the teaching-learning space

We consider in this section ways of thinking about and interacting with knowledge, the importance and limitations of reasoning and the value of the explicit teaching of thinking skills and metacognitive awareness.

The cognitive dimension involves not only what the teacher knows, but also how she thinks about the status of her knowledge and about the nature of thinking, learning and intelligence. As teachers we must know and understand what we teach. At the same time we have to recognise that all knowledge is provisional and open to question. Entering into what Oakeshott (1962) calls 'the conversation of mankind' requires a different way of relating to the information available to us, whether in texts or on the Internet. The written word does not consist of facts given certainty by print. Written texts capture thoughts, reduce memory demands and persuade or otherwise by their organisation and logic.

The task of learners and teachers is to engage with and evaluate facts and ideas. To do so meaningfully and responsibly involves recognising the need to justify one's choice to believe one thing rather than another. As the philosopher Soudien (2017) writes, 'warrants and justification are essential tools of deliberation' although justification always occurs within a context and is never entirely objective. What teachers and learners believe about the world and its inhabitants does have to be grounded in reason and evidence, although such evidence can always be questioned. One important aspect of education, therefore, must be to persuade learners of the importance of dialogue and rational justification and to equip them with the mental tools to be able to engage fruitfully with ideas and beliefs other than their own. The Philosophy for Children movement argues, among other things, for the importance of acquiring 'the tropes of good thinking' (Gregory 2005). Psychologists too argue for the development of 'thinking skills' and metacognitive awareness. One of the best known, Feuerstein (1980) has been bold enough to identify what he considers the basic cognitive functions that all humans possess, but do not necessarily use well. Several of the more advanced 'cognitive functions' he describes are likely be found among the 'thinking moves' valued by philosophers. Examples are hypothesising and making inferences, both of which are mental behaviours often associated with what is called 'critical thinking'.

There are good reasons for the teaching learning space to include active attention to modelling, talking about and practising thinking. As Vygotsky and Feuerstein have argued, all children possess the ability to think and learn. Education involves learning how to use these abilities more successfully, including how to reason. We no longer think of learners as having a fixed level of intelligence, but if teachers do not provide explicit guidance to children about how to use their mental abilities they are unlikely to display their potential, especially in circumstances where thinking is not mediated in any context other than school. Feuerstein and his colleagues have proved that it is possible to enhance intelligence, through regular experiences of mediated learning over a substantial period of time.

Learners need to be consciously aware of a repertoire of cognitive skills and metacognitively sensitive enough to exercise judgement and use their skills strategically. A number of authors (cited in Green, 2014 and elsewhere), many originally motivated by the work of Feuerstein, have created practical resources to support teachers who recognise the importance

of explicitly teaching ways of speaking to oneself that direct thinking and of encouraging metacognitive awareness so that learners are empowered to select appropriate skills for particular tasks. The danger is, however that, unless such resources are mediated in a way that encourages learners' autonomy, within a respectful community of learners, they are likely to be perceived as just something else to be learned to please the teacher.

At its best, instruction in critical thinking persuades learners of the value of seeking understanding and truth and provides some tools with which to do so. Van den Berg (2010) for example suggests three basic critical reasoning competences, namely, thinking for yourself, informed reasoning and critical reflection. Critical thinking and the teaching of 'thinking skills' generally have, however, been challenged on two further counts. Firstly, these skills tend to be presented as value free – tools for achieving a goal without any consideration of whether the goal is justified or moral. Secondly, as Lipman points out, most situations in which human being have to make decisions are not clear cut, but require judgements based on habits of careful and reasoned thinking together with the capacity to take into account special circumstances and contexts. A reasonable person, Lipman claims, "recognises the need for reasoned justifications of his or her conduct as well as for reasoned explanations of the things that happen to them over which they have no control." (Lipman 1993:21). He argues, therefore, that education should encourage 'reasonableness' rather than formal rational thinking. It should develop the ability to make reasoned judgements rather than the ability to think logically without considering individuals and contexts. If learners are to be able to engage in reasoned dialogue (Wegerif xxxx) they need to experience it as the norm in learning communities where differing perspectives are inevitable. The individual thinking tools or 'cognitive skills' of which psychologists speak are a necessary, but not a sufficient, preparation for developing judgement.

Moreover, we cannot separate the cognitive from the emotional dimension of learning. From the teacher's perspective, knowledge and insight about the topic is important ethically and emotionally. It would be irresponsible to convey inaccurate information. In addition a teacher's sense of competence enables shared enthusiasm. The more comfortable she is that she really understands what she is teaching the more relaxed, flexible and confident she will be and the more able to devote attention to the psycho-social aspects of learning, including the needs of individual learners. She can be authentically present within the community of learners. From the learners' perspectives, feelings of safety, competence and self-efficacy enhance the likelihood of engagement with intellectual challenges. Their responsibility is to be present in the teaching-learning space, to accept that they are part of the classroom community – needed by others and in turn supported by them. Attending to the emotional dimension of learning by recognising one's own and others' emotions and managing them appropriately is everyone's responsibility and may even be considered a moral dimension of the teaching-learning space.

The moral dimension of the teaching-learning space

The traditional understanding of the moral dimension of the teaching-learning space is that education should instil the values that a community considers desirable. Coles (1998:8)

writes, however that "Too often this matter of "character", of "values education", of moral development" gets presented as a one-way street: a boy or girl finally getting the point. Yet within a family or in a classroom, children and their parents and teachers are having conversations, responding to one another, learning from one another." Citizenship education as formally understood tends to identify the virtues of the responsible citizen of a democracy and embody them in curricula without opening up a conversation about how to 'teach' such matters. The philosopher Dewey was particularly interested in how schooling itself could model democratic process, instead of telling students how to be good citizens. Lipman drew on Dewey's ideas when he integrated the development of reasoning within a democratic community of inquiry. Lipman and his colleagues (Lipman, Sharp & Oscanyan, 1980, Sharp (1984, 1995) made explicit their recognition of the moral dimension of thinking by emphasizing they named 'caring thinking' as well as collaborative, critical and creative thinking. Other philosophers refer to the development of 'epistemologically virtuous agents, characterised by epistemic virtues (Gasparatou, 2017) and make the connection between reason and emotion by pointing out the role of emotional awareness and self-regulation in working towards becoming a reasonable community (Costa-Carvalho & Mendonca, 2017.

From a somewhat different perspective (teaching and learning in higher education) attention has been focused on the care ethics of the teaching-learning space itself. Tronto (1993:136) argued that "Care as a practice involves more than simply good intentions. It requires a deep and thoughtful knowledge of the situation, and of all of the actors' intentions, needs and competencies". The five moral elements of the political ethics of care that she identified were: attentiveness, responsibility, competence, responsiveness and trust, which she linked with the following aspects of care: caring for, caregiving, care receiving and caring with. Bozalek et al (2013:3) found this framework to be helpful in analysing their own learning experiences as educators in the field of higher education An ethics of care makes explicit the need to take into account the emotional dimension of teaching and learning, which is present in every encounter designed to promote learning, and suggests the caring role of both teacher and learners. Such roles are only possible within a learning community characterised by relationships of trust and respect.

Conclusion

It has become obvious that the social, cognitive, emotional and moral dimensions of the teaching learning space are inextricably intertwined. We are puzzled, however, by the fact that education in schools seems to ignore the messages from so many different voices about the crucial importance of 'how you do things' in this space. This paper is work in progress and we look forward to exploring these thoughts with participants at the conference.

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