

**Commentary on Ann Margaret Sharp's 'The other dimension of caring thinking'**

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In the first edition of *Thinking in education*, Matthew Lipman went to great lengths to analyse both critical and creative thinking and to show how they were fostered in the philosophical Community of Inquiry. Later, in the second edition, he also drew attention to thinking that is appreciative, affective, active (in the sense of taking care of or looking after something), normative, or empathic as varieties of caring thinking. In *The other dimension of caring thinking*, Ann Margaret Sharp extends the discussion of caring thinking to questions of personal development and the pedagogy of the Community of Inquiry.

Sharp claims that learning is more than an accumulation of knowledge. It involves education of the feelings and emotions so as to promote growth of the capacity to care. Without such growth we cannot develop as persons. The capacity to judge, value and be motivated to act are all of necessity tied to care. Good judgment depends on care. Without care we have no motive to act. Unless we care, all of our values evaporate and we lack the kind of relationship to one another and to the world at large that makes our experience meaningful. Since the meaning of our experience, our sense of values, what we choose to do and what kinds of people we become all depend on our capacity to care, development of that capacity is of fundamental importance in education.

These considerations come to the fore in the classroom Community of Inquiry. The kinds of interactions and forms of regard nurtured there help to educate the emotions. They develop trust and communicate care and concern for one another as well as for the procedures of inquiry. It is this, and not merely its commitment to logic and reason, that makes the Community of Inquiry such an effective vehicle for personal development. Its devotion to caring thinking therefore provides a powerful argument for its educational significance.

Given that we are talking about Community of Inquiry, it is worth remarking that what are now referred to as the three Cs has not been joined by a fourth C in *collaborative thinking*. After all, in the Community of Inquiry, the triumvirate of critical, creative and caring thinking govern proceedings in which individuals collaboratively construct and examine ideas. Critical and creative thinking can occur without collaboration, even if it provides a stimulus for them. Caring thinking, by contrast, seems to be intrinsically collaborative, in explicitly acknowledging human relations, whereas critical and creative thinking need not necessarily do so. If that is right, then caring thinking is a kind of collaborative thinking and only vehicles such as the Community of Inquiry, which foster collaborative thinking, can carry the educational burden for it.

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**The other dimension of caring thinking**

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**Introduction**

Life comes from physical or biological survival. But the *good* life comes from what we care about, what we value, what we think truly important, as distinguished from what we think merely trivial. What we care about is the source of the criteria we use to evaluate ideas, ideals, persons, events, things, and their importance in our lives. And it is these criteria that determine the judgments we make in our everyday lives.

In the second edition of *Thinking in Education*, Matthew Lipman (2002) has indicated the importance of fostering critical, creative and caring thinking in children, if one is to prepare them to make better judgments and live qualitatively better lives. He tells us that caring thinking is appreciative thinking, active thinking, normative thinking, affective thinking and empathetic thinking and then goes on to list a number of mental acts under each of these categories.

Maybe it is because ‘caring thinking’ is not as common a term as ‘critical thinking’ and ‘creative thinking’ in everyday educational language that we stop for pause when we hear it. However when we read what Lipman says about caring thinking, we find ourselves nodding and saying to ourselves, ‘Yes, that makes sense. To think caringly means to think ethically, affectively, normatively, appreciatively and to actively participate in society with a concern for the common good’ (Lipman 2002, p. 271). In a real sense what we care about is manifest in how we perform, participate, build, contribute and how we relate to others. It is thinking that reveals our ideals as well as what we think is valuable, what we are willing to fight and suffer for.

Nevertheless, one cannot help but think that there is much more to be said about caring thinking and caring practice than what Lipman suggests. Maybe the same can be said with regard to critical and creative thinking—but certainly with caring thinking we seem to be in a realm of metaphysics, as well as descriptive epistemology. Caring thinking suggests a certain view of personhood and a pedagogical process. It also suggests a particular environment for the cultivation of such thinking. I am referring to the process of communal inquiry and the democratic environment of the classroom community of inquiry. It is as if you can’t have one without the other, if you are interested in cultivating caring thinking among children on a large scale.

**What is a classroom Community of Inquiry?**

A classroom community of inquiry is a group of children who inquire together about common problematic issues in such a way that they build on each other’s ideas, offer each other counterexamples, question each other’s inferences and encourage each other to come up with alternative views and solutions to the problem at hand and follow the inquiry where it leads. In time they come to identify with the work of the group, as they cooperatively build meaning and commit themselves to an on-going, self-

conscious reconstruction of their worldviews as the inquiry proceeds. This constructing and reconstructing of worldviews is something we are all engaged in consciously or unconsciously.

The community of inquiry, at its best, offers an immersion into a democratic and aesthetic experience that can serve as funded experience of the group in envisioning new possibilities and making judgments. The sensitivity, the appreciative discerning of parts and wholes, the imaginative manipulation of elements to construct something of harmony and vision, will be dependent on the consciousness and quality of this immersion. As we become more conscious of the social and aesthetic dimension of the inquiry process, we find that it takes on more and more meaning and we truly care about its process and its outcomes (Sharp 1997).

### **The ontic dimension of care**

Husserl, like Dewey, reminds us that learning is not the accumulation of scraps of knowledge. It is a growth, where every act of knowledge develops the learner, thus making him/her capable of constituting ever more and more complex objectivities—and the objective growth in complexity parallels the subjective growth in capacity (Lauer 1958, p. 29). But what kind of capacity is he talking about? I would suggest our capacity to care.

What we care about reveals to other s and to ourselves what really matters to us. To care is the opposite of being apathetic, indifferent. Care is the source of friendship, love, interpersonal understanding, commitment, human tenderness and compassion. If the child is not cared for by its mother, it would not live out its first week. If nurturing care does not continue, the child will die. In learning how to love each human being starts from the beginning, says Kierkegaard. This beginning is the relationship between people which we call care. Though it goes beyond feeling, it begins there. It is a feeling denoting a relationship of commitment and dedication, taking the ultimate form of being willing to delight in, to suffer with, or even to die for those values and persons we care about.

Such care commits one, ties one to the object. It follows that once this tie has been established some action will take place. Today in modern philosophy there is a growing awareness of the cognitive germ of all emotions and how important the emotions are for the making of good judgments. Some like Solomon (1983) and Nussbaum (1990) have argued that emotions are judgments, and if they are judgments, we should be able to give reasons to ourselves and others for why we feel the way we do. We are the judgment-making animals, but good judgment-making is as dependent on emotional maturity as it is on rational skilful thinking.

Alfred North Whitehead points out that Descartes was wrong in his thinking, 'Cogito, ergo sum', and goes on to say: It is never bare thought or bare existence that we are aware of. I find myself rather as essentially a unity of emotions, of enjoyment, of hopes, of fears, of regrets, valuations of alternatives, decisions—all of these are my subjective reactions to my environment as I am active in my nature. My unity which is Descartes' 'I am' is my process of shaping this welter of material into a consistent pattern of feelings (Whitehead 1961).

For Heidegger, care (*Sorge*) is the source of all human judgment-making, willing and action. Will is not an independent faculty but a function of the whole person. When we think of the self, we think of the structure of what we care about. If I care about nothing, I lose my sense of self. If I have lost my sense of self, I also lose my sense of relationship to the world and to others. Heidegger thought of care as the basic constitutive phenomenon of human existence. Care is thus, for him, an ontological category, in that it is care that constitutes a human person as a person. Willing and wishing are not the basis for care; *it* is rather that they are founded on care; they presuppose that we care about something. If we really care about something, we find ourselves wishing and willing to act in certain ways. 'Willing is caring made free', says Heidegger (1962, p. 371). Don't make the mistake of confusing willing with wishing. Willing is the developed mature form of wishing and is rooted with ontological necessity in care. In any individual act, willing and caring go together (May 1969).

One of the things that make care possible is time, the fact that we are the kind of creatures who exist in time, and are conscious of our own temporality. We are the creatures who know we are going to die. It is because we are finite that we care. For Heidegger, care is also the source of conscience. He tells us 'conscience is the call of care and manifests itself as care.' (1962, p. 371)

To care is always to care about something. We are caught up in our experience of the objective thing or idea or event or person that we care about. When I care, I feel I must do something about the situation. I must make some judgment. I must act. And it is at this point that our care brings our love and our willing into unity. As St. Augustine taught so long ago, 'love and do what you will'

Thus, when Paul Tillich, in *The courage to be*, described God as one's 'Ultimate Concern', he was referring to what the individual really cares about. And when the Buddhist talks of compassion, she is referring to the capacity of the person to care for another. Compassion, a feeling for someone, a capacity to feel what the other is suffering, is rooted in our capacity for care. And when Buber, in *I and thou*, talked of God, he referred us to the intersubjective and responsive experiencing of the other as a 'Thou', rather than as an 'it' (Buber 1958; Tillich 1952, pp. 81-82).

### Care as intentionality

Care is important because without it ethical thinking and valuation of all kinds would be impossible. With all our technology and all our wealth, there exists in our society a devastating feeling that in the end perhaps nothing really matters; that no one person can really do anything that will make any real difference in creating a better world. The threat of this kind of feeling is apathy, un-involvement, and the eventual grasping for external stimulants. If I really don't care about anything outside of my own survival, the possibility of a just society is non-existent. If no thing and no person really matters to me, the educational problem then becomes how children are to discover things that really do matter.

Caring is a particular type of intentionality that shows itself especially in our relationship with other persons. By intentionality, I mean the structure which gives meaning to experience. It is not our intentions themselves but it is the dimension which underlies them; it is our capacity to have intentions. It is our imaginative participation in the coming day's possibilities out of which comes the awareness of our capacity to

form, to mould, to change ourselves and the day in relation to each other. Intentionality is the bridge between us and the object itself. It is the structure of meaning which makes it possible for us to see and understand the outside world as it is. In intentionality, the dichotomy between subject and object is partially overcome (May 1969, pp. 224-225).

Let me give you an example. If I travel into a rural community to look for a house, the purpose I have in mind for the house will determine to a great extent that which I see. Suppose I want to find a weekend house for a close friend that I plan to visit often. I will be interested to know whether the house is well built, if it gets enough sun and has enough room for their whole family. I'll look at the arrangement of the rooms to see if they are conducive for visitors. I'll want to know if it is near recreational sites for the children and if it has local cultural institutions for the adults. However, suppose I am a person interested in investing in real estate in order to turn a quick profit. Then I might attend to what is needed to fix the place up and put it on the market, whether it is in a good neighborhood, what I will have to pay for it, what I could get for it in the near future. It is the same house. I'm the same person looking for it. But with different intentions, the house and the experience have entirely different meanings (May 1969, p. 224).

So to repeat, care is a kind of intentionality. If I care I have the capacity to wish the other well, to take care of, to attend to, to nurture, and to help something or someone grow. If teachers don't care about their students, not much educational growth can take place. Rather, a sense of emptiness and meaninglessness on the part of both children and teachers is almost a certainty. This lack of meaning will not be healed by introducing more thinking skills. It is doubtful whether rationality by itself ever can allay the fear or anxiety and eventual despair that come with the realization that there is little or nothing that I really care about. Something else must happen.

### **The Community of Inquiry—The hotbed of care**

It is in this sense that the classroom community of inquiry offers children the opportunity to discover values, things, ideas, ideals and people that they can care about. It also affords them an environment in which they can grow emotionally as well as rationally, socially as well as politically. It is in such a context that they experience authentic dialogue, respect for each other as persons, a growing mutual trust and ability to communicate on a variety of levels. This growing sense of trust in the seriousness of each other is invaluable in the education of the emotions.

With time and practice in communal inquiry they come to realize that their teachers and classmates really do care about them as persons. They believe in their potential ability to make a difference. In turn, this realization makes it possible for children to care about a variety of things and motivates their acting with courage and hope in the world.

In *Childhood and society*, Erik Erikson (1964) connected the capacity for trust with the capacity for care. The deeper meaning that accrues in a classroom community of inquiry practice is that the children can come to trust the meaning of their interpersonal, intersubjective universe, and their consciousness can, in principle, be in touch with that meaning. It is in this sense that the very practice of communal inquiry

carries intentionality and constitutes care. The practice is the language by which intentionality and care is made communicable to each child.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, if we are to foster caring thinking much more is needed than logic and reason. What happens in communal inquiry is that children become aware of a meaningful structure in the relationship of their lives to each other and to the world. They discover many things about themselves and the world but they also create other things as they proceed. As children commit themselves to the process of communal inquiry and all that it involves (including the principle of fallibilism) something much more important than what is said on any particular day is happening. Children are committing themselves to a practice that, although rooted in fallibilism, has intrinsic meaning and calls forth their care: their care for the tools of inquiry, their care for the problems they deem worthy to be inquired into, their care for the form of the dialogue, and their care for each other as they proceed in the inquiry itself. This deeper dimension of meaning is not something of which they are always totally aware. The dimension lies not only in what they say to each other, how many problems they solve, what questions they decide to take on, but in the aesthetic and intersubjective *form* of the dialogue as a whole - as they experience it. They discover themselves as cooperative inquirers, persons who are feeling, intuiting, wondering, speculating, loving and willing, as well as thinking and writing, encountering the whole vast range of human experience with their classmates and teacher.

This is an experience of caring. It is based on a trust that whatever happens in the external world, communication, love, solidarity, creativity, sharing of ideals such as beauty, justice and goodness, suffering and compassion are what really matters.

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