

# VERISIMILITUDE IN THE COMMUNITY OF INQUIRY<sup>1</sup>



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Matthew Lipman and his colleagues, in their book "Philosophy in the Classroom," (1980) describe that "It is meaning for which children chairs and have a right to expect from the educational process" and consider anything that helps them "to discover meaning in life is educational and the schools are educational only in so far as they do facilitate such discovery". In other words, education is about helping children discover meanings. Consequently, schools are only engaging in educational work insofar as they facilitate the process of meaning discovery (p: 6). Any other activities in schools are unrelated to education.

They argue that unlike information that may be transferred, doctrines that may be learned, or feelings that may be shared, "meanings must be discovered" (same pages). Meanings cannot be distributed among children in a class like candy. Students must discover their meanings through the process of "dialogue and inquiry"

Lipman and his colleagues assert in this book that "education both from the child's point of view and from the parents' should be imbued need with thoughtfulness and reasonableness". However, "the child's climb can be seen as a demand for meaning, the parents' as a demand for rationality".

The term "meaning" and "discovery of meaning" are used in various ways in this book. Sometimes it refers to the "meaningfulness or meaninglessness of life; "the children who cannot make sense of their own experience who find the word alien fragmentary and baffling likely to cast about for shortcuts to total experiences, and eventually may experiment with the drugs or succumb to psychoses."

At other times, it means the purposefulness/purposelessness of humans, sometimes it's the result of logical inference, sometimes it means having interest or being of utmost importance in life (p. 20 in Persian), and sometimes it's the result of explaining things that dispel wonder, similar to philosophical wonder

Failure to pay attention to the various meanings of "meaning" in the early texts of philosophy for children, including "Philosophy in the Classroom," might lead the reader to mistakenly think that the goal of philosophy for children is only to discover the meanings of words and concepts, rather than anything else. In other words, it might be assumed that philosophy for children only familiarizes children with concepts like justice, friendship, and beauty. However, if we pay attention to the different meanings of the

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term "meaning," we realize that what the philosophy for children program, even in its early versions, focuses on is a more general meaning.

They highlight **two types of meaningfulness**:

1. Means/end meaningfulness
2. Puzzle-like meaningfulness (appropriate part-whole relationship)

Splitter and Ann Margaret Sharp, in their book "Teaching for Better Thinking," call meaning-making the supreme goal of education (p. 127). They also consider meaning-making as one of the three signs of philosophical discussion (p. 235), and in their view, dialogue is the best tool for meaning-making, where "numerous examples of meaning transfer" can be seen

Meaningfulness can be found in two forms:

1. In the form of meaning criterion
2. Building a bridge between what is not understood and what is understood

They do not consider the three characteristics of philosophical discussion, namely "evaluation in the process of inquiry," "reference to general ideas," and meaning-making, as separate, but believe these three work together.

As mentioned earlier, Lipman and colleagues in the third chapter of "Philosophy in the Classroom" consider scientific explanation, symbolic interpretation, and finding philosophical answers to philosophical questions that can quell human wonder and amazement as the main instances of meaning-making .

In this book, they briefly categorize children's philosophical questions into three types: metaphysical questions, ethical questions, and logical questions, which were later expanded into more diverse types of philosophical questions in other works.

Maughn Gregory and colleagues, by extracting philosophical questions from children and adolescents, identified them as including:

1. Ethics and moral philosophy
2. Metaphysics (self-knowledge, ontology, etc.)
3. Epistemology
4. Philosophy of mind
5. Rights
6. Politics
7. Philosophy of science
8. Philosophy of art
9. Philosophy of nature

10. Philosophy of language
11. Philosophy of education
12. Philosophy of religion

However, to answer these questions, as observed in most philosophy for/with children texts, it is necessary for children to conduct inquiry and investigation.

This is the role of the community of inquiry - to provide this opportunity for children. In this community, instead of learning what scientists have discovered, children engage in inquiry and discovery of matters that answer their questions and quell their wonder.

Now the question is, what is the nature of these discovered matters? In other words, what is discovered and provides meaning for children? Is it familiarization with concepts? Or becoming familiar with ideas? Or knowing the relationships between concepts? Or discovering realities that were unknown to children and are of the nature of knowledge? Or is it problem-solving?

It is clear that each of these can arise in response to various philosophical questions, and if we reduce the outcome of inquiry to just one of them, we would be doing a great injustice to philosophy for children.

To clarify the issue, we can examine the possible answers to different types of children's questions. The following are examples of questions collected by Maughn Gregory and colleagues:

1. How did things come into existence? (The answer is a type of knowledge)
2. Is this action fair? Why? (The answer is a type of judgment with the discovery of criteria, which is considered knowledge)
3. Are things inherently beautiful or ugly, regardless of personal taste? (... discovery of criteria, discovery about human aesthetic faculty, both of which are considered knowledge in some way)
4. Are humans part of nature? (Understanding humans and nature and their relationship)
5. How should power be organized in a society? (Understanding the nature of power and society and their relationship)
6. Am I my body? If not, what is the relationship between me and my body?
7. What is democracy? (Concept formation)
8. How should we decide what is right or wrong? (Problem-solving and discovering criteria and methods) (ibid)

If we recognize the community of inquiry as one of the main elements of philosophy for children (as Lipman talks about transforming classrooms into communities of inquiry in his book "Thinking in Education" p. 20 in English), the inquiry process itself will also indicate the possible outcomes of different questions.

The next question is: What is the purpose of inquiry? And what can be its outcome? Truth, reality, epistemic progress, problem-solving, discovering relationships, etc. - which of these can be the goal of inquiry?

All of these possibilities exist, but here we want to talk about truth, which has been set aside by some pragmatist philosophers of philosophy for children.

For example, Maughn Gregory says about the goal of inquiry, "The aim of pragmatist inquiry is not certainty but amelioration" (2000, p. 55). Gregory defines amelioration as "avoiding foreseeable problems and achieving foreseeable better states." In explanation, he writes, "While amelioration is certainly achieved through some form of objectivity, it clearly does not rely on immutable truths."

It is observed that this view reduces the goal of inquiry to just problem-solving and makes inquiry about many philosophical issues, which we quoted from his own article from the book "Philosophy in the Classroom," impossible. For example:

- What is time?
- What is justice?
- What is space?
- What is a number?
- What is matter?
- What is mind?

(p. 43 in Persian)

However, Susan Gardner, one of the prominent philosophers of philosophy for children, in her article "Inquiry is no Mere Conversation (or Discussion or Dialogue)" considers another goal for inquiry. She considers Karl Popper's view as the logic of discovery. In her view, the community of inquiry revolves around and is controlled by the search for truth

Truth is absolutely essential for this method. Only because of progress towards truth do participants ultimately become confident in the usefulness of this process

She explains that the issue of the community of inquiry is approaching truth, and this approach is what matters. If this doesn't happen, the name "community of inquiry" has been chosen incorrectly.

Of course, she distinguishes between Truth with a capital T and truth with a small t. If we don't deal with absolute truth or certainty or Truth with a capital T, lower-order truths can be revealed to us, and without them, we cannot survive.

She explains that as we eliminate errors, we get closer to the truth.

Gardner, in another article titled "Truth in Ethics and Elsewhere," addresses the necessity of accepting a concept of it and confirms this statement by Ross Phillips that if there is no truth in ethics, we cannot provide any value-based education. [Ross Phillips raises this point in the article "The Stimulus and the Goal of Inquiry, 1997."] Gardner says, "If it were true that there is no truth (which is an odd statement), that is, if it were correct that there is no kind of objectivity in ethics, then no real moral education could exist."

By examining children's questions in the community of inquiry mentioned in the articles, it can be concluded that, as Gardner says, perhaps in most cases, the discovery of truth is vitally important for its survival in the community of inquiry. Of course, perhaps not all the cases we mentioned earlier, including concept formation, discovering conceptual relationships, and problem-solving, are considered epistemic

progress at first glance. However, if we solve the problem of the concept of absolute truth and its inaccessibility through:

1. The definition of intermediate truths
2. Assurance of eliminating major knowledge errors  
(or the concept of truth that results from the best explanation)

Through Karl Popper's concept of verisimilitude, and if pragmatists set aside their sensitivity and fear of this concept, we can, as Gardner says, consider the goal of the community of inquiry in most cases to be approaching truth.

It should be noted that although the verisimilitude project was formally and mathematically criticized by David Miller, one of Popper's students, it is accepted by philosophers of science informally and intuitively.

## **References**

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