UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM
University of Birmingham Research at Birmingham

The Limits to Dialogue

D'Olimpio, Laura

DOI:
10.1080/03054985.2023.2268513

License:
Creative Commons: Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs (CC BY-NC-ND)

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Citation for published version (Harvard):
D'Olimpio, L 2023, 'The Limits to Dialogue', *Oxford Review of Education*.
https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2023.2268513

Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal

General rights
Unless a licence is specified above, all rights (including copyright and moral rights) in this document are retained by the authors and/or the copyright holders. The express permission of the copyright holder must be obtained for any use of this material other than for purposes permitted by law.

•Users may freely distribute the URL that is used to identify this publication.
•Users may download and/or print one copy of the publication from the University of Birmingham research portal for the purpose of private study or non-commercial research.
•User may use extracts from the document in line with the concept of 'fair dealing' under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (?)
•Users may not further distribute the material nor use it for the purposes of commercial gain.

Where a licence is displayed above, please note the terms and conditions of the licence govern your use of this document.

When citing, please reference the published version.

Take down policy
While the University of Birmingham exercises care and attention in making items available there are rare occasions when an item has been uploaded in error or has been deemed to be commercially or otherwise sensitive.

If you believe that this is the case for this document, please contact UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk providing details and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate.

Download date: 06. May. 2024

Oxford Review of Education

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/core20

The limits to dialogue

Laura D’Olimpio

To cite this article: Laura D’Olimpio (08 Nov 2023): The limits to dialogue, Oxford Review of Education, DOI: 10.1080/03054985.2023.2268513

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2023.2268513

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

Published online: 08 Nov 2023.

Submit your article to this journal

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=core20

OXFORD REVIEW OF EDUCATION
https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2023.2268513

The limits to dialogue

Laura D'Olimpio

Philosophy of Education, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK

ABSTRACT

The great hope of dialogical pedagogy such as the Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CoPI) as advocated for by practitioners of philosophy for and with children (P4C) was to cultivate critical thinkers who would be guided by epistemic and moral virtues in their engagement with one another in an effort to uncover truth. And, further, that those democratic citizens could then take these newly honed skills out into the public square and enact good decision-making in their lives. The focus on equality and inclusion, with a respect for diversity of thought and opinion, guided a sense that every participant should feel as though they 'belong', and were free to engage in dialogue with others as equals. And yet, the question about how we might ensure the CoPI is a space in which everyone can meaningfully contribute is forefront in my mind. In this paper, I will focus on what might limit dialogue by explicating three main issues which I call 'paying lip service', 'existing power dynamics' and 'the transfer problem'. I will see if I can respond to these in order to ultimately affirm the role for dialogical pedagogy to support radical listening and genuinely inclusive dialogue.

KEYWORDS
Dialogue; pedagogy; community of inquiry; philosophy for children; epistemic virtues; moral education

Introduction

As someone who has contributed to the research, teacher training, practice and assessment of teaching school-aged students philosophy and ethics over the past 15 years, I believe there is much to celebrate. Philosophy for Children (P4C) has come a long way since the 1970s when it was invented by Matthew Lipman, Ann Sharp and others at the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC) in the USA. However, there remain some lofty goals in terms of the recognition of the benefits of and the implementation of dialogical teaching of pre-college philosophy across curricula. There are many reasons to continue to advocate for philosophy as a compulsory subject on all curricula and there is more work to do in promoting the benefits of the community of inquiry (CoI) pedagogy. As P4C expands across the world with increasingly diverse activities, games, resources and experiences available from which educators and philosophers can learn, I believe we must further consider some striking epistemic and ethical challenges that face not only advocates of the CoI, but dialogical pedagogies more generally as well as educators and society more broadly.

CONTACT Laura D'Olimpio l.dolimpio@bham.ac.uk School of Education, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2TT, UK

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

It is unsurprising to hear that I am worried about the lack of civilised dialogue, reasonable disagreement, and the increase in polarisation whereby individuals are less inclined to engage charitably with views that differ from their own in society. These trends are particularly evident online in social media spaces whereby the virtual public square sees ordinary individuals swayed by emotion, group think and fear that results in a demonising and dehumanising of others which closes down dialogue and any hope of compromise, tolerance, or understanding.

The great hope of P4C and the CoI as its central pedagogy was to cultivate critical thinkers who would be guided by epistemic and moral virtues in their engagement with one another in an effort to uncover truth.[1] And that those democratic citizens could then take these newly honed skills out into the public square and enact good decision-making in their lives. For proponents of dialogical pedagogies such as the CoI, the focus on equality and inclusion, with a respect for diversity of thought and opinion, guided a sense that every participant should feel as though they 'belong', and were free to engage in dialogue with others as equals. And yet, the question about how we might ensure the CoI is a space in which everyone can meaningfully contribute is forefront in my mind, along with whether these skills, once learned, may be put to use beyond the classroom environment. Now, it may be that the structure of a CoI simply does not and will not extend to a large online community such as Twitter (now 'X') or Facebook where individuals do not always know one another and are not face to face in a safe educational space whereby they may communicate in a nonadversarial manner. But what about the aim that the skills of respectful dialogue, such as those honed in classroom CoIs, could transfer to other face-to-face and virtual interactions?

Too often education is seen as a 'silver bullet', a cure for all the problems and ills in society. It is easy to rest all the causes for concern at the door of educational institutions and demand or expect that educators will do away with these by means of good schooling, a solid curriculum, and exemplary teaching supported by a fair and inclusive educational policy. Proponents of P4C have been known to get overly excited and claim that the CoI can solve many issues in society, including extremism and racism. And while this simply is not the case, there is a reason to focus on how some of these wider issues in society do negatively impact upon the CoI and other dialogical pedagogies and may impinge upon participants' ability to practice critical thinking, the epistemic and moral virtues.

In a world in which some people and particular voices are prioritised over others and certain voices are routinely discounted, silenced, diminished, or not attended to: how do we work to make the CoI more inclusive and democratic … and, in doing so, possibly create a space for radical listening and learning? In this paper, I will focus on the dialogical element of the CoI pedagogy and ask what might be the limits to dialogue as properly understood in the CoI. I will focus on three main issues, which I call 'paying lip service', 'existing power dynamics' and 'the transfer problem', and I will see if I can respond to these concerns. I hope that some of the concerns I raise, plus some of the proposed solutions, may be enlightening in relation to other dialogical pedagogies as well as of general interest to educators and of specific interest to researchers and practitioners of philosophy for and with children and young people.

Part I: The vision of Community of Inquiry as dialogical

Matthew Lipman set out to defend the role for philosophy, 'when properly reconstructed and properly taught' (2003, p. 3) to improve the capacity of students to think critically. The appropriate pedagogy defended as a means to teach critical thinking is the 'community of inquiry' which allows thinking skills such as reasoning, evaluation and judgement to be practiced and acquired in a group. The CoI sees participants (students) seated in an inward-facing circle and the teacher becomes the facilitator of the dialogue. It is the students' own open (philosophical) questions that stimulate contributions, and there is no set destination but, rather, the inquiry follows the dialogue where it leads. The emphasis on the CoI as dialogical is vital with the vision of an inclusive, democratic exchange of ideas whereby everyone is equal and the best arguments are supported while the worst arguments will be dismantled. The shared endeavour is a search for meaning and truth.

If education is to revolve around inquiry, the classroom must be turned into a community in which friendship and cooperation support the nonadversarial deliberations and the dialogue is characterised by logical moves and logical progression. According to Lipman, the characteristics of a CoI are as follows: inclusiveness, participation, shared cognition, face-to-face relationships, the quest for meaning, feelings of social solidarity, deliberation, impartiality, modelling, thinking for oneself, challenging as a procedure, reasonableness, reading, questioning, and discussion (Lipman, 2003, pp. 94–99). As we can see, the practice of philosophy and philosophical thinking skills is a social enterprise on this account. Dialogue emphasises the fact that I am not an isolated solitary thinker; instead, I engage with those around me and with ideas that are different from my own. This encountering new and diverse ideas is what pushes and challenges me to refine and hone my thinking and argumentation. As Cam (2014, p. 1204) claims: 'I argue that we need to include philosophy in the curriculum throughout the school years, but it needs to be a philosophy taught in the spirit of Socrates which balances individual and social values'.

The connection between the CoI and other forms of dialogical pedagogy that stem from John Dewey is noticeable. As Cam notes, Dewey was an explicit influence on Lipman and the idea of dialogue in the CoI as education in how to be a democratic citizen is well evidenced. Cam notes:

> Dewey believed in the importance of preparing students for democratic citizenship. He stressed that consciously guided education aimed at developing the 'mental equipment' and moral character of students was essential to the development of civic character ... Lipman (1988) was to elaborate on this idea of schools as a model of a participatory democracy and his classroom community of inquiry provided close analogies with the democratic school, a microcosm of the wider society. (Cam, 2014, p. 1205)

Drawing upon the pragmatism of Dewey (1910/1997, 1916/2004), and the developmental psychology of Lev Vygotsky, Lipman (1988, 2003) believed that philosophy need not be confined to the domain of the academy, but rather children from the age of three years old and upwards (primary and senior school-aged students) were capable of critical thinking. Lipman believed that critical and creative thinking require one another; that to be critical one requires creativity to think through complex problems and in order to effectively use these transferable thinking skills, one must practice using them. Based on this combination, the pedagogical tool of the community of inquiry (CoI) became central

to his theory. While this approach has its roots in the analytic philosophical tradition of America, P4C has been successfully implemented in many countries including the United Kingdom, Australia, Austria, Brazil, Hong Kong, Ireland, Mexico, Portugal, Spain, Singapore, and Taiwan (Pritchard, 2014).

The pragmatist origins of P4C have not limited researchers or practitioners to only use this theory in their considerations of how philosophy can and should be taught to school-aged students. It is the case, however, that American pragmatism, espoused by thinkers such as Charles Sanders Peirce, John Dewey and Henry James, supports a holistic approach to education that envisions learning as praxis. In following Putnam (1995, preface), pragmatism can be taken as a way of thinking, not just a movement that peaked at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. What is useful about pragmatism taken in this sense, and indeed endorsed by Peirce, James and Dewey, is the commitment to tolerance and pluralism, values which Putnam rightly points out are shared moral beliefs. The radical empirical underpinnings of pragmatism have led its supporters to often speak about truth as the 'fate of thought' or the 'final opinion'; 'not that which is presently confirmed, but [that which] is "fated" to be confirmed, if inquiry is continued long enough, and in a responsible and fallibilistic spirit' (Putnam, 1995, p. 11). And it is this idea that Lipman (2004) picks up from the pragmatists, utilising Peirce's term that was originally applied to a scientific community of inquiry, to explain how philosophical thinking skills should be taught in a classroom environment to encourage critically and yet empathetically engaged dialogue that aims at truth.

Because this kind of philosophical thinking is not the sitting-on-my-own-in-my-room kind, but, rather, the working-with-others-in-a-classroom kind, some rules are required by which to ensure its good functioning – much like society itself. Sharp (1984, p. 6) proposed the following rules to govern a CoI:

> Some suggested rules for class discussion could be:
>
> (1) Whoever is trying to express a thought should try to do so in words that are as clear and unambiguous as possible.
> (2) Bring up questions or express ideas that one considers meaningful (in other words, refrain from talking for talking's sake.)
> (3) Refrain from telling what someone else already said, unless one is doing it to make a point of one's own.
> (4) Try to offer good reasons for one's views.
> (5) Don't hesitate to ask one's peers for help.
> (6) Be willing to accept criticism from one's peers and revise one's views to take into account the criticism if valid.
> (7) Refrain from using technical philosophical vocabulary. It is not necessary. Often it is a cover for lack of clarity or an attempt to cut others out of the discussion.
> (8) Relate what one is going to say to the topic that is under discussion.
> (9) Respect every person in the class as a possible source of truth. Such respect is manifested in listening carefully to one another, looking for meaning rather than a springboard for one's next remark and trying to help one's classmates to make connections and develop their own positions. Eventually the students should develop the ability to build on each other's ideas and cooperatively work toward understanding of the issue under discussion.

What ought to be clear is that these rules are guiding philosophical inquiry and the dialogue in a CoI, which is different from conversation. Lipman notes the relevance of the dialogical pedagogy that contrasts in the following way to conversation: conversation is 'a process in which the personal note is strong but the logical thread is weak, whereas in dialogue just the reverse is the case' (Lipman, 2003, p. 87). Conversation is stable, whereas dialogue involves instability, because, Lipman (2003, p. 87) notes, 'In a dialogue … dis-equilibrium is enforced to compel forward movement', whereas a conversation is an exchange of feelings, thoughts, information, and understanding.

Those engaged in dialogue are seeking the truth and thus must pit ideas against one another in an effort to test the soundness and validity of premises that move through to conclusions. This pitting of one's ideas against others' can be scary or intimidating and thus a CoI requires a classroom atmosphere of trust and security in order to allow for participants to open themselves up to the possibility of being disagreed with and disagreeing with others, of being wrong, and of changing one's mind. Although conducted in a friendly fashion, the focus of inquiry and thus the focus of the inquirers is to figure out what is true and therefore they must offer reasons for their claims, and they also need to contradict or disagree with others in an effort to test out different ideas.

For such dialogue to work, there are a number of preconditions that must be satisfied, including that the members of the group feel safe with and trust one another (D'Olimpio, 2015, 2016); the teacher is well trained and an experienced facilitator of CoI (Gardner, 2015); resources such as initial provocations are judiciously selected; and the CoI rules are followed. The role of the facilitator is not to be underestimated and, as Susan Gardner explains, it is hard work! She notes:

> [The facilitator of a CoI] must be ruthless in ensuring quality of thought, relevance, consistency (or the awareness of the lack thereof) with the thoughts of others as well as the topic under discussion, [but] the facilitator must also create an environment which is 'relatively' risk-free. If students believe that they will be 'crucified' or ridiculed or embarrassed if they are not able to do what in fact they are not yet able to do, i.e., think well, they may be reluctant to speak up in class at all and then the whole process will come to a grinding halt. So the facilitator needs to be merciful with regard to the quality of what is actually said while being merciless with regards to the attempt for depth. (Gardner, 2015, p. 83)

Noting such challenges, I would now like to consider three main issues that may disrupt the process, interfere with the dialogue, and which may see epistemic and moral vices rather than virtues being practiced in the CoI. I will start with 'paying lip service', before considering 'existing power dynamics' and 'the transfer problem'. I hope to be able to offer responses to these challenges that face advocates of teaching philosophy in schools.

Part II: Paying lip service

One issue we can find in a CoI has nothing to do with disrespect or rudeness but almost the converse: an excessive politeness where participants shy away from disagreeing with one another. One way this manifests is when contributors to the dialogue 'pay lip service' to the ideas of others before stating their own points, but there is a lack of connection (either in terms of agreement or disagreement) between their point and the points of those they claim to be referring back to. For example, a participant in a CoI may say, 'I agree with Seamus, and … ' but the point they add does not agree with Seamus' at all. Or

they may say, 'building on Harriet's point, … ' and then the point they contribute has nothing to do with that made by Harriet. Paying lip service in this way makes it extremely difficult to get the dialogue flowing because sequential points are being made but not critically engaged with in any depth. This is particularly obvious when a controversial topic is the subject of discussion and the participants are too scared (or excessively polite) to contradict or disagree with one another.

The idea of relativism has permeated many classrooms such that participants wish to express a lack of criticism for the views of their fellow peers and, even further, affirmation that anything offered to the group is acceptable as a version of truth or that person's 'own truth'. This is seemingly lovely and kind and comes from a virtuous disposition of not wanting another's feelings to get hurt, but it makes for a terrible inquiry. Perhaps such excessive politeness is indicative of a developed moral sensitivity to others and a pleasant conversation, but, I would argue, it also fails to respect the other person sufficiently to take them seriously as an interlocutor. If the assumption is that the person being agreed with could not handle being disagreed with, or that offering a counter argument or objection may hurt their feelings, then some relevant epistemic virtues such as open-mindedness are missing. But, the problem may not lie with the person who is being agreed with; it is the assumption being made by those in the group who do not have the courage to disagree with that person because they assume they are likely to hurt their feelings that may be mistaken.

Perhaps this is simply a linguistic quirk; maybe the CoI participants understand that an affirmation of their point by another followed by a completely different point is a polite way of disagreeing and moving the dialogue forward. If this is the case, the participants are 'paying lip service' to agreement but they do not really agree with each of the points made at all. However, if someone – usually the facilitator – then points out that this means they do not agree at all because the point Janet made contradicts the earlier point made by Pete, the students do not always recognise this. Perhaps overcome by the need to agree rather than disagree, and perhaps not wanting to be seen to be fake or inauthentic, they may seem confused and withdraw, or reaffirm that both points are true or may be held at the same time. This relativistic attitude sees the dialogue stall with equal weight given to various ideas and no way of advancing one argument and dissecting or eliminating another. It may be that all the other participants speak up to note which statements or claims they agree with, but the end result is simply a popularity contest with some claims receiving the most endorsements but not really being robustly challenged.

Now it might be that students are simply displaying the skills they think their teachers are looking for and, in this instance, they are performing collaborative and caring thinking. Particularly in a competitive CoI environment such as in a Philosothon, although it is not confined to this, students know they are being awarded points for collaborative and caring thinking moves and thus they are using signifiers to demonstrate they are working as a team. However, as is often the problem with competitive rankings, the students want to know what gains them points and pursue the points for the sake of winning rather than necessarily simply enjoying the experience for its own sake and following the dialogue where it flows.

The real issue with paying lip service and starting a contribution with 'building on Bailey's point' is that if indeed the student is not engaging with Bailey's point, the dialogue has not progressed. The student may simply be waiting for their chance to

offer their own point or idea and they are not following the dialogue as it unfolds and contributing to furthering the ideas currently under discussion. Thus, we end up with many diverse ideas that have been voiced but then left hanging. Recalling Lipman's distinction between conversation and dialogue, we are left with a conversation because the personal note is strong but the logical thread is weak. Thus, paying lip service can impede dialogue and instead limits the CoI to a pleasant conversation.

Response to the problem of paying lip service

In response to the problem of paying lip service, it may be that in order to get students comfortable with challenging and critiquing the ideas of others in the CoI, we need to scaffold some educational activities that involve such techniques. Perhaps we commence with some stand-alone claims, statements or arguments that are not voiced by classroom peers, and ask that, together in groups, students dissect and analyse the strength and soundness of these, including examining any hidden assumptions or premises. This way, they are working collaboratively together to start with, and learning that to critique ideas and arguments is valuable and that collaborative thinking does not necessarily mean agreement with one another.

Perhaps a part of the problem we are witnessing here is that schooling is very much grounded in assessment and testing such that students have become adept at quickly identifying what skills are rewarded and they then seek to manifest or even ape those techniques to signify the skills in question. So, students mimic collaborative and caring 'moves' in the CoI in order to appear collaborative and caring because they know this is expected in a CoI. (Note that the marking rubrics in a Philosothon reward critical, caring and collaborative thinking and points are lost for dominating the dialogue).

If this is the case, there are two things to say to this: firstly, it may be that aping care may lead to genuine concern for the points of others. I do not want to rule out that practising this consideration inauthentically may eventually result in authentic acknowledgement of and building upon others' points. Dialogue is a skill that is learnt and students will take time and practice to get the hang of it, and to eventually do it well. Secondly, in the wider context of the assessment-laden schooling environment, there should also be opportunities for students to participate in CoIs held for their own sake, without any associated testing or assessment. While this does not rule out events like Philosothons, which are valuable and great fun (Diver, 2022; Tapper & Wills, 2022), the hope is that students learn that these dialogues are enjoyable for their own sake, separate to any prize that may accompany the event. To further support this approach, the themes and provocations would have to be carefully chosen as topics and issues the group genuinely cares about, is interested in, and wants to discuss.

Furthermore, as a way of exploring the idea that good dialogue is logical and engages genuinely with other perspectives – including those with which one disagrees – it could be taught that in dialogue, one ought to avoid logical fallacies (both formal and informal). Thus, there is also the opportunity for the teacher or facilitator of the CoI to gently point out and illustrate (as part of a scaffolded activity or perhaps when reflecting on the CoI) that respecting others does not necessarily entail agreeing with them. The philosophical ideas of respectful disagreement and charitable interpretation of positions with which one does not agree may be highlighted as a part of

the learning that takes place in a P4C classroom. And the informal fallacies could be brought in as examples of what not to do with fun activities designed around recognising these: i.e. strawman fallacy; ad hominem; tu quoque; the bandwagon fallacy, etc. Such educational activities can be used to further support the idea that fair and respectful engagement with the ideas of others involves disagreement *and* agreement, and the dialogical way to explore these ideas addresses the topic, not the person.

Part III: Existing power dynamics

The second issue I want to raise is that of existing power dynamics. When we enter a CoI it is an idealistic assumption that we leave our identities and any existing power dynamics outside of the CoI and are able to engage as equals. Many facilitators have experienced magical moments where the student who does not usually contribute in class speaks up and is respected for their contribution to the inquiry. Yet there remains a tendency to think that if the CoI is well set up and facilitated according to the rules of inquiry we have already seen above, then the participants are truly equal and able to freely express their thoughts, opinions, and explore their ideas in the safe educational space created with their peers and the facilitator. As Sharp (1993, p. 343) puts it:

> the commitment to engage in a community of inquiry is a political commitment even in the elementary school level. In a real sense, it is a commitment to freedom, open debate, pluralism, self government and democracy ... It is only to the extent that individuals have had the experience of dialoguing with others as equals, participating in shared, public inquiry that they will be able to eventually take an active role in the shaping of a democratic society.

Now, this might be true, yet it is naively idealistic if it does not take into account that individuals come to a dialogical pedagogy such as the CoI with various identities and positionalities, some of which have not experientially felt and/or historically been constructed as equal in power to others. It is worth noting that philosophy, particularly analytic philosophy, is awakening to the fact that it has some ingrained issues related to power and discrimination that it needs to address. These issues are not solely confronting philosophy, but they are particularly noticeable in this discipline, largely due to historical reasons. The idea of philosophy as old, white, male and stale is now acknowledged, and philosophers in philosophy departments are working hard to be more inclusive and actively supportive of different voices, diverse styles of philosophy, and to decolonise the curriculum while learning where and how some spaces may feel hostile or unwelcoming to marginalised groups. The marginalised groups who remain very much the minority in academic philosophy include women, philosophers from indigenous and non-white or non-European backgrounds, disabled philosophers, LGBTQI+ philosophers and those who work on non-traditional topics.

Existing power dynamics may work in all sorts of various ways, especially when we take into account the intersectionality of identities and accompanying positionalities, plus the fact that not all identities are immediately visible or recognisable. There is an appropriate sensitivity that accompanies discussions to do with controversial issues or ethical questions, but this may not extend to recognise some in-built power dynamics that enter the group with the people. Furthermore, some of these power dynamics may be specific to

the group in question (for instance, the cool, popular kids versus the nerds etc as classroom social constructs).

Epistemic injustice may occur when certain voices are given priority over others – either consciously or subconsciously (Fricker, 2007). An additional burden may be placed on certain members of the group, especially when discussing certain topics, if they feel they are being asked to educate and explain certain ideas, experiences and concepts to others due to their status as a member of a minority or marginalised group (for example, see Chetty, 2018; Thompson, 2023 in relation to race and racism). In relation to the issue of existing power dynamics, there may be times where a CoI may seem to function well, yet has been a great burden to particular marginalised members of the group. And there are those examples whereby the CoI is not equal and democratic in the way it is theorised to be due to the existing power dynamics that enter the community with the participants precisely because individuals cannot leave behind their identities and positionalities. Such pre-existing power dynamics therefore may interfere with the dialogue that takes place within the CoI.

An example of an unequal CoI takes place in a multicultural classroom which contains new migrants or international students who may be less familiar with the dominant language spoken in the class and less comfortable with dialogical pedagogy. I have had difficulty running CoIs in classes with a large proportion of international Chinese students studying in a Western, English-speaking university. In the case of the Chinese students, there is a cultural background and schooling system at play that makes it difficult for them to disagree with the teacher who is a respected person in a position of authority, to speak up without being called upon and to offer their own opinions on something, given much of their experience of educational environments involves learning by rote, agreeing with what the teacher says and only answering a specific question when called upon to do so. They may actually enjoy the CoI, but many are unequal participants, listening to others while being too shy to share their own views or too timid to disagree with others. These existing power dynamics therefore impede the dialogue taking place in the CoI.

Response to the problem of existing power dynamics

Responding to the problem of existing power dynamics within the CoI is not an easy task, and I do not expect the CoI to do all the work here in solving pressing and enduring social justice issues. But it is worth attending to these dynamics and proactively seeking to improve the situation, at least in the classroom to the extent to which we are able. Something that facilitators of CoI can do is review their teaching materials to check that they are inclusive and reflect diverse voices. One strength of P4C is that the CoI traditionally commences with a narrative that is read aloud, together. There are many inclusive narratives that could be selected and discussed in a CoI across various age groups. In addition, I have elsewhere written about the added benefit of including drama and theatre in the P4C classroom to enhance the philosophical inquiry in a way that supports students' perspective taking (D'Olimpio, 2004; D'Olimpio & Peterson, 2018; D'Olimpio & Teschers, 2016, 2017).

The additional value in working with narratives and drama education is that it provides a wonderful opportunity for difficult themes to be discussed whereby the students can share their thoughts, feelings, ideas and ask their own questions in relation to fictionalised

scenarios, which can be less intimidating than real-life examples. By being able to refer to fictional characters and scenarios, representations and stereotypes are able to be safely explored that then relate back to real-life experiences and real-world problems. In this way, such discussions about serious topics may be handled with humour as well as sensitivity, and students can genuinely learn from these narrative artworks, particularly when accompanied by theatrical and dialogical pedagogical interventions.

It is also the case that teacher training is important, not only in relation to the CoI and any additional theatre or drama education that is required, but also EDI (equity, diversity and inclusion) training could be useful in terms of attending to difference and inclusivity. As well as this, knowing one's class, knowing who the participants are in the CoI you facilitate, is recommended and helpful. This may not always be possible, but if it is a regular class and recurring CoI group, then this will help you to select and explore topics and themes that are relevant and pertinent to the group in question while also being sensitive to their personal identities and positionalities. Plus, trust may be easier within an established group.

The theoretical solution to the problem of existing power dynamics is multilayered, complex, situational, and possibly ever-changing in the light of relevant social, political, ethical, and other considerations. Yet I do wish to stress the role for education, and for dialogical pedagogies in particular in the face of these inequalities. It is the power of sharing stories and discussing them that provides opportunities for perspectives other than one's own to be considered in a charitable way. Keeping conversations going rather than shutting them down is something that can be taught as an antidote to polarisation. If people think they cannot hope to understand another because they hold different political, religious or other views, then dialogical pedagogies may offer an alternative. It is respectful dialogue that genuinely engages with another as a person 'like me' that paves the way from intolerance to tolerance, and from tolerance to understanding.

Part IV: The transfer problem

Thus far, I have considered paying lip service and existing power dynamics and now the third concern I wish to raise is the transfer problem. This is the idea that even if the dialogue works very well in the CoI, it may not mean that participants in the CoI will continue to engage in epistemically and morally virtuous inquiry and dialogue outside of this specific classroom environment. In other words, there may exist a gap between the skills exhibited within a classroom CoI and the interactions in other classes, in the playground, at home, or online on social media. Educational research consistently finds that students have difficulty applying acquired knowledge and skills to new situations. Students vary in their ability and propensity to apply concepts learned in one class appropriately to another subject or beyond the classroom context, and they often fail to apply knowledge beyond the end of a particular course of study.

The reason this transfer problem is a problem is because the idea behind P4C is that children may learn, practice, cultivate and habituate the epistemic virtues, accompanied by moral virtues, that lead to them being critical thinkers and respectful members of a democratic society. In this way, the ultimate goal of the CoI pedagogy is to produce democratic citizens. Along with cultivating the skills of logical and critical thinking, the ideal or well-functioning CoI should also foster feelings of trust and respect as the

pedagogy is designed to care about the well-being of the members of its group. As Sprod (2001, p. 183) notes, these epistemic and moral virtues should be cultivated within a CoI and then may extend beyond it. He says:

> Although students may or may not join willingly, for it to work, the community must soon build communalities. Chief will be the interest in the inquiry itself, allied to a growing trust in the community's members as fellow inquirers. Part of that reliance on others will arise from the recognition and valuing of diversity within the community: diversity of views, of learning approaches, of styles of reasonableness. And finally, there may well come a recognition that the boundaries of the classroom community of inquiry are porous; that this community does not exclude outsiders, and that the capacities learned in the community apply outside it.

Furthermore, the transferability of these skills matters a great deal to the defence of including philosophy and ethics on the curriculum as a compulsory subject when a key element to that defence is that critical thinking skills are honed in the study and practice of philosophical inquiry. For instance, Winstanley (2009, p. 95) argues that it is the study of philosophy that will best equip students with the tools they require to be effective thinkers:

> Philosophy is the best possible subject for helping children to become effective critical thinkers. It is the subject that can teach them better than any other how to assess reasons, defend positions, define terms, evaluate sources of information, and judge the value of arguments and evidence.

While it has been claimed that philosophers are no more moral than anyone else (Schwitzgebel & Rust, 2014) there is some hope that starting the study of philosophy and ethics with younger students may lead to, for instance, better ethical decision-making (Schwitzgebel et al., 2020). However, the transfer problem is an enduring cause for concern for educators who worry that the skills learned in a classroom will not be applied in another subject or beyond the educational environment.

Response to the transfer problem

How might we respond to the transfer problem? A particular strength of the CoI pedagogy is that students are not simply learning propositional truths that must be understood, remembered and then applied elsewhere. The CoI model has an additional component in its favour in that it gives participants the opportunity to *practice* dialogue that features the epistemic and moral virtues, which is more likely to result in their cultivation and habituation than simply learning *about* them.

Sharp (1984) makes this argument, claiming that if the CoI improves the quality of children's thinking and reasoning *in general* (Education Endowment Foundation [EEF], 2015; Gorard et al., 2016; Topping & Trickey, 2007a, 2007b), it is plausible to suppose that it will improve the quality of their *moral* thinking and reasoning. She claims:

> I think that many teachers and parents would admit that the direct method of giving answers to moral questions has not worked . . . The solution offered by Socrates - involving young people in a process of inquiry, which entails dialogue and the inculcation of habits of inquiry - is an educational solution. It pre-supposes that the tools of inquiry can be taught and that children are rational persons capable of eventually forming communities of inquiry in which they explore alternative answers to moral issues. In the process, they begin to discover for

> themselves certain things that they have to take into account: impartiality, consistency, comprehensiveness, the relationship of parts to wholes, the relationship of ends to means and the role of ideals and context in discussing philosophical and ethical issues. (Sharp, 1984, p. 4)

There is some empirical evidence of P4C leading to improvements in children's moral behaviour as well as their moral reasoning:

> In general, then, there is now good evidence supporting the view that the practice of philosophical discussion improves children's social behaviour, as Lipman contended. Students develop care and respect for others, tolerance of differences and a greater capacity for self-direction … [Collaborative philosophical inquiry] does indeed build students' 'capacity to exercise judgement and responsibility in matters of morality, ethics and social justice'. (Millett & Tapper, 2012, p. 557)

In dialogical pedagogies such as the CoI, it is not solely critical thinking skills that are being honed. Genuine dialogue requires social and emotional skills in order to listen to others and respond in a reasonable manner. In a CoI where there are rules to follow, students have the chance to learn what a good dialogue involves, and how that differs from a pleasant conversation, a debate, or a blocked dialogue. By allowing time for a short reflection on what worked well and what could be improved in the CoI that was just held, these observations are able to be made explicit to all involved and may be worked on the next time. It is in these reflections that students can articulate what dialogue offers when it works well: the chance to really hear others and be heard; the chance to learn from others and share ideas together. In dialogue, we may gain moral understanding, as conceptualised in a broad way by Martha Nussbaum and Henry James:

> Moral knowledge, James suggests, is not simply intellectual grasp of propositions; it is not even simply intellectual grasp of particular facts; it is perception. It is seeing a complex, concrete reality in a highly lucid and richly responsive way; it is taking in what is there, with imagination and feeling (Nussbaum, 1992, p. 152).

As students learn to exercise such perception, and to recognise the difference between dialogue and other forms of communication, they cannot help but make similar observations beyond the classroom.

And, as for practising the skills of good dialogue themselves, a neo-Aristotelian would argue that if the gap still exists between epistemic and moral virtues being exercised in a CoI and outside of the philosophy classroom, then the habits have not been cultivated sufficiently as to ingrain them as character traits. Therefore, this seems to me to justify the demand for regular CoIs and even arguing for embedding philosophy as a whole school approach in order to ultimately gain the most benefits from it.

Conclusion

Perhaps when taken one by one my offered solutions seem unsatisfactory. What this highlights is that CoI as dialogue is more likely to work if it is practised regularly, including in non-competitive and non-assessed environments, in order to really learn what it means to be in dialogue with others, rather than simply talking or joining a conversation. The idea of scaffolding activities that support CoI participants to 'go deeper' resonates with offering some solutions to the problems of paying lip service, existing power dynamics and the transfer problem. But going deeper requires the

participants to feel safe enough to trust the group in order to be vulnerable to being challenged, having their ideas critiqued, being open to getting things wrong and changing their mind, and working together to move towards better answers and away from worse ones. This is unlikely to occur in a one-off or very occasional CoI, or one in which participants are performing in order to gain approval. Yet provided participants feel safe and included in the CoI, it is a powerful pedagogy that supports radical listening and genuine dialogue.

The individual who practices and hones the skills of critical thinking and is then able to adopt an appropriately critical attitude that is supported by the epistemic and moral virtues is a person who cares about the truth, other people and is deeply engaged with ideas and moral questions. It has been argued that there are some things we must learn by doing as we aim at practical wisdom, and we cannot escape the fact that we are embodied, rational, as well as affective beings. This means that we must look at ideas and decisions contextually, and try and adopt as many diverse perspectives as possible in an effort to get closer to the truth. One way by which we can achieve this is to recognise that we coexist with others who may have different points of view to our own. By entering into a dialogue, we can learn to see from another's perspective, even while always recognising that we are also necessarily limited by our own subjective point of view. Dialogue is a crucial skill that is learned and refined through practice, and the benefit of the CoI method as practised by P4C practitioners is that it explicitly attends to the skills of dialogue, including argumentation and the logical progression from premises through to justified conclusions. Additionally, this is done in a safe educational space that prioritises hearing various stories – including, and particularly attending to, children's voices. The CoI does not discount the wisdom any single individual has to offer, even while honouring the idea that our collective wisdom is greater than the sum of its parts.

There are some genuinely troubling trends being witnessed in public spaces that highlight threats to dialogue and democratic discourse. These threats include the routine silencing of certain voices, increased polarisation, and a lack of charitable and constructive disagreement – particularly evidenced online. In this paper, I have considered how some of these threats to democratic discourse may adversely affect the effectiveness of dialogical pedagogies such as the Community of Philosophical Inquiry. I considered three main issues, which I called 'paying lip service', 'existing power dynamics' and 'the transfer problem' and I sought to consider some initial responses to these concerns. Yet, ultimately, there needs to be much more consideration of these threats to dialogue and democratic discourse and educators need to attend to ways in which we can use pedagogy and classroom spaces to facilitate and cultivate epistemic and moral virtues rather than vices. In conclusion, I wish to affirm the role for dialogical pedagogy in the classroom as a space in which students may practice the skills of critical thinking, reasonable disagreement, and logical analysis that are practiced together with others in a shared effort to move towards truth, understanding, and wisdom.

Note

1. By 'virtues', I mean good habits (ethical and epistemic) that have been cultivated. Using this definition, the concept of virtue is compatible with the idea of 'learning by doing' central to pragmatism. Consider, for example, William James' 'virtuous believer' (1979).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Laura D'Olimpio is Associate Professor of Philosophy of Education at the University of Birmingham, UK and co-founding editor of the *Journal of Philosophy in Schools*. Her first book, *Media and Moral Education: a philosophy of critical engagement* (Routledge) won the 2018 Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia's annual book prize. Her co-edited book *Educating Character Through the Arts*, and a public philosophy book *Short Cuts: Philosophy* have just been published, and her second monograph, *The Necessity of Aesthetic Education* is forthcoming with Bloomsbury. Laura regularly contributes to *The Conversation*, and ABC Radio National's *The Philosopher's Zone*.

ORCID

Laura D'Olimpio http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0797-6623

References

Cam, P. (2014). Philosophy for children, values education and the inquiring society. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *46*(11), 1203–1211. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2013.771443

Chetty, D. (2018). Racism as 'reasonableness': Philosophy for children and the gated community of inquiry. *Ethics & Education*, *13*(1), 39–54. https://doi.org/10.1080/17449642.2018.1430933

Dewey, J. (1910/1997). *How we think*. Dover Publications. (Original work published 1910)

Dewey, J. (1916/2004). *Democracy and education*. Dover Publications. (Original work published 1916)

Diver, D. (2022). Philosothons: Rewarding collaborative thinking. *Journal of Philosophy in Schools*, *9*(1), 28–46. https://doi.org/10.46707/jps.9ii.145

D'Olimpio, L. (2004). Drama and philosophy: Language, thinking and laughing out loud! *International Drama Educators Association (IDEA) Applied Theatre Research Journal*, *5*, 1–8. http://www.griffith.edu.au/arts-languages-criminology/centre-public-culture-ideas/research/applied-theatre/publications/issues

D'Olimpio, L. (2015). Trust, well-being and the community of philosophical inquiry. *He Kupu*, *4*(2), 45–57.

D'Olimpio, L. (2016). Trust as a virtue in education. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *50*(2), 193–202. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2016.1194737

D'Olimpio, L., & Peterson, A. (2018). The ethics of narrative art: Philosophy in schools, compassion and learning from stories. *Journal of Philosophy in Schools*, *5*(1), 92–110. https://doi.org/10.21913/JPS.v5i1.1487

D'Olimpio, L., & Teschers, C. (2016). Drama, gestures and philosophy in the classroom: Playing with philosophy to support an education for life. In M. Gregory, J. Haynes, & K. Murris (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of philosophy for children* (pp. 145–152). Routledge.

D'Olimpio, L., & Teschers, C. (2017). Playing with philosophy: Gestures, performance, P4C and an art of living. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *49*(13), 1257–1266. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2017.1294974

Education Endowment Foundation. (2015, July). *Philosophy for children: Evaluation report and executive summary*. Independent Evaluators: Stephen Gorard, Nadia Siddiqui and Beng Huat See.

Fricker, M. (2007). *Epistemic injustice: Power and the ethics of knowing*. Oxford University Press.

Gardner, S. T. (2015). Commentary on 'Inquiry is no mere conversation.' *Journal of Philosophy in Schools*, *2*(1), 71–91. https://doi.org/10.21913/JPS.v2i1.1105

Gorard, S., Siddiqui, N., & See, B. H. (2016). Can 'philosophy for children' improve primary school attainment? *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, *51*(1), 5–22. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9752.12227

James, W. (1979). *The will to believe*. Harvard University Press.
Lipman, M. (1988). *Philosophy goes to school*. Temple University Press.
Lipman, M. (2003). *Thinking in education* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
Lipman, M. (2004). Philosophy for children's debt to Dewey. *Critical and Creative Thinking*, *12*(1), 1–8.
Millett, S., & Tapper, A. (2012). Benefits of collaborative philosophical inquiry in schools. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *44*(5), 546–567. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-5812.2010.00727.x
Nussbaum, M. C. (1992). *Love's knowledge: Essays on philosophy and literature*. Oxford University Press.
Pritchard, M. 2014. Philosophy for children. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*. Retrieved August 11, 2016, from http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/children/
Putnam, H. (1995). *Pragmatism*. Blackwell.
Schwitzgebel, E., Cokelet, B., & Singer, P. (2020). Do ethics classes influence student behavior? Case study: Teaching the ethics of eating meat. *Cognition*, *203*, 104397. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2020.104397
Schwitzgebel, E., & Rust, J. (2014). The moral behavior of ethics professors: Relationships among self-reported behavior, expressed normative attitude, and directly observed behavior. *Philosophical Psychology*, *27*(3), 293–327. https://doi.org/10.1080/09515089.2012.727135
Sharp, A. M. (1984). Philosophical teaching as moral education. *Journal of Moral Education*, *13*(1), 3–8. https://doi.org/10.1080/0305724840130101
Sharp, A. M. (1993). The community of inquiry: Education for democracy. In M. Lipman (Ed.), *Thinking children and education* (pp. 337–345). Kendall/Hunt.
Sprod, T. (2001). *Philosophical discussion in moral education: The community of ethical inquiry*. Routledge.
Tapper, A., & Wills, M. (2022). Cooperation and competition in the Philosothon. *Journal of Philosophy in Schools*, *9*(2), 78–89. https://doi.org/10.46707/jps.9ii.151
Thompson, W. C. (2023). "Racial Justice in/through Education: Teaching Race." In *Keynote presented to the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain (PESGB) 58th Annual Conference*. Oxford, UK, New College, Oxford University, April 1, 2023.
Topping, K. J., & Trickey, S. (2007a). Collaborative philosophical enquiry for school children: Cognitive gains at two-year follow-up. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, *77*(4), 787–796. https://doi.org/10.1348/000709907X193032
Topping, K. J., & Trickey, S. (2007b). Impact of philosophical enquiry on school students' interactive behaviour. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, *2*(2), 73–84. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2007.03.001
Winstanley, C. (2009). Philosophy and the development of critical thinking. In M. Hand & C. Winstanley (Eds.), *Philosophy in schools* (pp. 85–95). Continuum.