'Gatherings' as stimuli to deliberate philosophizing

There is always a basic and spontaneous philosophizing that arises when people use words like *is, real, should, fair, know, beauty* and *purpose* – words that suggest the speakers are making judgements about *existence, morality, knowledge, aesthetics* and the *ends of life*. There are also traces of philosophical thought contained in the 'common sense' of communities: in established maxims, customary convictions, familiar metaphors and popular political opinions (Gramsci, 1982, p. 323; Jaspers, 1960, pp. 11–12). There is no escape from this kind of spontaneous philosophy. However, like the proverbs of old, it is often incoherent, contradictory and lacking in critical awareness. Deliberate philosophizing is therefore required in order to 'bring to light' contradictions, and also categories, models and standards in terms of which people interpret, judge and make meaning in the world. (Berlin, p.11)

Spontaneous philosophizing often leads to the creation of *aporia*: 'collections of individually plausible but collectively incompatible theses' (Rescher, 1994, p.36). The recognition of aporia often leads to doubt and puzzlement. Deliberate philosophizing is required to get answers that are as coherent as they can be in response to these aporia. It is an attempt to systematise our beliefs in general. It is my aim here to suggest that, in the time available, many so called 'enquiries' in P4C often stop at a stage of 'spontaneous philosophizing' – establishing areas of interest and gathering together responses. However, another stage would be to recognise 'aporia' and to have further dialogue about ways of resolving them.

Gatherings

Stimuli are usually artefacts chosen by teachers and presented to children. Written dialogues, stories, pictures, objects or music have all been used. I suggest that 'gatherings' in the form of the collection and re-presentation of pupils' utterances could provide promising starting points for enquiry. I suggest some ideas below.

Dialogues as gatherings

The initial discussion with children in response to a question about an artefact such as a story or picture sometimes has the feeling of a gathering of ideas rather than a rigorous enquiry. That is because, in the time available, the best that can be achieved is often a sharing of ideas along with an attempt to relate the ideas to each other – to draw a map of the territory so to speak. Some discussions focus on a definition of terms and others succeed only in stimulating a collection of related questions or claims.

If we regard some discussions as gatherings of ideas, then we might make a selection from the material of a discussion and re-present the selected items to the pupils in a subsequent session. For example, some definitions, criteria, consequences, claims and reasons that arose

in the initial discussion could be written up on cards and placed on an 'enquiry wall' or used in any kind of display. They could also be written up in script form and performed. The work of selection and summary could be done by the teacher, by teacher and pupils in negotiation, or by a group of pupils working on their own. All would be encouraged to recognise aporetic clusters as the basis for further questioning and discussion.

There is a value in passing more responsibility to pupils because the practice of making the selections will encourage them to recognise contributions of significance. When pupils are motivated by a particular question, then the practices described above could build on that motivation and enhance the quality, depth and appeal of philosophy in the classroom.

We might categorise these first sessions as spontaneous and the later ones as deliberate philosophizing.

Gatherings of ideas: 'QI' books

Pupils could be provided with QI books. QI stands for *Questions and Ideas*. Many teachers use *thinking journals* (a similar idea) as part of the routine of philosophical dialogue and follow up. At any time, in or out of philosophical dialogue, pupils could write questions an ideas about the discussions they have had and how those bear on the lives they lead. For example, they might write their own first thoughts, questions and afterthoughts in the books.

If the books are viewed from time to time by the teacher, then questions and ideas can be gathered and used as a stimulus for small or large-group discussion as above. When the work of pupils is valued in this way, they may feel more motivated to use their QI books. The practice would be a form of intellectual encouragement.

One possible way, amongst others, of encouraging children to write ideas (rather than just saying, 'write some ideas') is to give them a list of words that came up in dialogue or that relate to a theme under consideration. After a discussion about courage for example, such a list might include: *bravery, fear, risk, good, instinct, soldier, more, less, shyness, because, impressive*. Ask pupils to use a selection of these words to form a collection of single sentences either to express their own thoughts or the thoughts of others. Or ask them to write sentences that could possibly be uttered in the next enquiry about the topic. Then you will have something to gather, share and discuss.

Further implications for P4C

1. It is assumed that questioning comes first in P4C and that'democracy' for the pupils mainly involves choosing a question. But the teacher is always in control of the enquiry in that she chooses the initial stimulus. There are other possible approaches. For example:

- Just ask students what they think is interesting and important, have an initial discussion about one of their ideas, look for aporetic clusters together, negotiate a new focus and take it from there.

- Recognise that an initial discussion is only a starting point for more deliberate philosophizing. If the pupils seem engaged with a particular area of investigation it may be worth forming new questions in response to aporia and continuing the dialogue to address them.

3.The Lipman novels show the pupils doing what I have called spontaneous philosophizing *and* deliberate philosophizing. When we use other material, some spontaneous philosophizing – a gathering of thoughts and a comparative examination of them – seems important in order to follow the children's interests but also to do some deliberate philosophizing.

An example of 'gathering'

The film was made a few years ago after a visit to the 'The Yorkshire Sculpture Park' with a group of 10-year-old children from a school near to the park. We wandered around taking photos and talking. Then we returned to the school. We had an open discussion to gather ideas. The films has some still photos of the visit with parts of the children's discussion put over the top. I think one could pick out some things from it in negotiation with the children and develop those for future exploration. I've also attached an extract from the Lipman novel 'Harry' for comparison.

References

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