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Development of Careful, Creative and Critical Thought According to the Philosophy of Matthew Lipman: A Proposal for Inclusion in Basic Education

Abstract

To satisfy the imperative need for developing life skills in basic education students throughout the country, it is important to think about continue educational inclusion, which is to be understood as the idea of Education for All. Education for all should satisfy the basic needs of learning while developing the individual and social welfare of each student. From this perspective, it is necessary to reflect on how to make students citizens who make decisions and assume consequences, so that they can act with critical judgment. For this, it is necessary to inspect and reconstruct the essence of critical, creative and careful thinking, the essence of learning to think.

Keywords: creative thought, critical thought, education, inclusion

Introduction

The development of critical, careful and creative thinking, according to the philosophical thinking of Lipman (1988, p. 3), resonates as an alternative approach to educational inclusion in basic education.

The focus is on learning to think. The graduation profile of basic education in Mexico is very logical, based on the current curriculum. The graduate of basic education is expected to argue and reason when analyzing situations, identify problems, formulate questions, make judgments, propose solutions, apply strategies and makes decisions, evaluate the reasoning and the evidence provided by others and modify their own points of view as a consequence (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2011, p. 5).

Thought is the activity and creation of the mind

Based on the above, it is important to identify some concepts that develop the idea of learning to think.

In the first place, with respect to thought, Gonzalo (2007, p. 2) points out that:

Thought is the activity and creation of the mind; everything that is brought into existence through the activity of the intellect. The term is commonly used as a generic form that defines all the products that the mind can generate including the rational activities of the intellect and the abstractions of the imagination; everything that is mental in nature is considered thought.

Some types of thinking can be distinguished, such as critical, creative and careful thought. Gonzalo (2007, p. 4) argues that critical thinking examines the structure of reasoning on issues of daily life, and has dual analytical and evaluative aspects. On the other hand, creative thinking is used in the creation or modification of something, introducing novelties to modify something that already exists.

In an earlier analysis of these concepts, Dewey (2007, p. 8) proposes an education focused on the development of the child and not on the reproduction of society. According to the analysis of Velasco-Aceves (2012, p. 7):

John Dewey proposes an integrated approach, attempting to make education an exercise of community rationality, where thought and action are continuations of the same process, because there is dialogue and consideration aligned with the rigor of thought. There are two basic axes: thinking skills and social dispositions, aiming to sustain critical thought that is organized and ordered, but also careful thought that considers and is delicate and creative thought that is fertile in diversity.

These considerations led Lipman (1988, p. 6) to found a Philosophy Institute for Children in 1974 at Montclair State College, New Jersey, developing a curriculum to introduce Philosophy in the classroom. Lipman started from the assumption that if children are helped to reason and apply logic to think about their experience, they can be responsible for their own ideas, and will find meaning in what they hear, in what they express and in general, in their lives as individuals and members of a society (Velasco-Aceves, 2012, p. 3).

In order to promote and facilitate a significant learning process in students, and critical and responsible thinking, Lipman (2004, p. 4) developed the Philosophy Program for Children, proposing the inclusion of a space for philosophical reflection in the classroom, to promote a reflective and analytical attitude in children inside and outside the school (Lipman, 2004, p. 5).

Philosophy is an everyday exercise

Philosophy is seen as an everyday exercise (Herrera & Mogollón, 2012, p. 2) and Dewey undoubtedly inspired Lipman.

Lipman (1988, cited by Velasco-Aceves, 2012, p. 5), stated that:

Most of the time, when we hear the word Philosophy, we think about the works and teachings of the great thinkers and intellectuals of history, or, in those people who currently propose a way of interpreting and giving meaning to the events of our life as Humans. When we hear about Philosophy we rarely think about children, but Philosophy is a fundamental and naturally present aspect of their lives. The child needs to understand the world around him and the things that happen to him, and his first philosophical question is that well known and familiar, why? The question is that those of us who are with the children interpret the question literally and try to answer it with information, assuming that it is information that the child wants to obtain.

Often we do not perceive that the meaning or intention of the student's question goes beyond precise information. Having the habit of trying to respond, there is no space to consider the possibility of talking with students about issues that have no specific answers, much less allow them to ask, not to get answers, but simply to play with the great ability to think and wonder they have (Lipman, 1988, p. 6).

Meanwhile, Velasco-Aceves (2012, p. 4) considers that:

Often when the child asks why, what he expresses is amazement, perplexity before the things he perceives, amazement to see that things are one way and not another, amazement at the immensity and intensity of the things that the world and people offer him and that escape the precise and concrete answer.

By not discerning in students the fact that they are actually able to think philosophically, unconsciously, we work in a limited way to transmit information, values and concrete behaviors, which, even when they are performed interactively, do not open the possibility for students to explore and ask about other aspects of life and about the importance that these can have in their daily experience (Flores, 2017, p. 2).

However, Lipman's proposal is very interesting, since it opens a panorama that unquestionably points to the philosophical foundations of the reform of basic education (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2011, p. 3), based on the development of genuinely critical thinking. Intelligent, and based on criteria and on the fact of conceiving that rather than reaching the truth, it is about understanding better. In other words, it is about acquiring, not great definitions, but functional definitions.

It should be noted that, as Miranda-Alonso (2018, p. 5) says:

M. Lipman is a philosopher convinced of the potential of philosophy to transform education at all levels, both formally and informally. But every educational process has to start in childhood and, therefore, the inclusion of philosophy in the curriculum, from the stage of early childhood education, and the adoption of the methodology of research and philosophical inquiry in all subjects constitutes the specific and differentiated proposal of a program and of an educational project that has the objective of teaching to students to think, to feel and to live in a rigorous, critical, creative, and careful way.

Children think for themselves

As the main objective is to help children think for themselves about aspects that are significant in their lives, Lipman (1988, p. 6) argues that the fact that children think for themselves means that they are able to reflect on their own experience and formulate their own explanations and hypotheses about what this experience means to them. It is not about the teacher providing the specific answers to specific topics. The idea is that children can formulate questions about the issues that are relevant to their daily lives, and that by listening to different points of view they can assume their own position. It should be noted that reflecting on one's own experience implies taking one's beliefs critically and acting responsibly.

When we talk about children transforming their experience into questions and assuming their own position, we are talking about the development of critical thinking, which consists, according to Lipman (1988, p. 4), in being able to exercise judgment, based on criteria, with sensitivity to the context, and following a self-correcting thought process. That is, it is important to support students so that they

are careful in their affirmations, develop the ability to distinguish those situations in which making a judgment may or may not be relevant, and have the necessary skills to identify whether the criteria they use to affirm or deny something are relevant, supported by the evidence and whether they facilitate a better understanding of what is being judged, without forgetting the context.

The methodology of the Philosophy Program for Children allows students to develop a series of thinking skills and a social disposition that leads them to work in what is called a community of inquiry. This is done by converting the traditional classroom into a community of dialogue or joint, participatory and cooperative research, in which students and teachers seek answers to the questions raised through collaborative work (Herrera & Mogollón, 2012, p. 3), and where both students and teachers benefit.

Lipman (1988, p. 5) states that if we want to achieve a better understanding of human experience, in all its diversity, the presence of others who accompany us in thinking, and who help us put our own perspectives in perspective, is essential. The presence and judgments of others help us to think better.

Lipman (1988, p. 3) argues that:

In a community of inquiry it is intended that members get involved by sharing their points of view, which are put to the consideration of the group, which assumes the task of investigating its foundations and implications, making use of a series of thinking and in a climate of confidence and security, where what is submitted to inquiry is not the person, but their ideas and questions.

It is then a matter of developing a coherent and productive attitude of inquiry in an atmosphere of respect, where all opinions are taken into account and all members of the community of inquiry contribute, in such a way that experience, and its significance, are better understood.

These considerations are corroborated by the contributions made by Marzano and Pickering (2005, p. 6) in the dimensions of learning, especially those that indicate an awareness of the learning process, since the approach seeks to develop an understanding of how that which is known comes to be known, and if what is known is correct.

Conclusion

To conclude, it is important for students to have the experience of knowing and of being part of a Community of Inquiry, and of being able to ask and get an answer about what is achieved when starting and developing this process with students. It is very interesting to analyze and reflect on how Philosophy is not taught, but rather is done daily in classrooms and, as Gonzalo (2007, p. 2) affirms, begins with the student's own thinking on questions of daily life.

Perhaps more importantly, Philosophy does not only reside in the great thinkers of yesteryear, but can also be available to students and teachers, from the least to the greatest. Thus, Philosophy is available to everyone. It allows us to see the original meaning of the Study Plans with which we work in Mexico and the openness that it gives to the great models for educational transformation. The method of teaching will be affected by the conception that one possesses of philosophical activity (Lipman, 2002, p. 8).

It is essential to develop thought that is critical but is, at the same time, reflective and careful of others. For this it is necessary to learn to think in such a way that one has genuinely valid arguments, that is, where there is the possibility of putting the strength of one's ideas and beliefs to the test. Critical, careful and creative thought, as Marzano and Pickering (2005, p. 6) argue, seeks to understand how to know what is known and if what is known is correct.

In this sense, as pointed out by Lipman (1988, cited by Velasco-Aceves, 2009, p. 4):

Along with critical thinking, we can facilitate the development of careful and creative thinking.

Careful when considering others, to appreciate the value of their thinking, to respect and try to understand their framework of values and beliefs; creative because as situations are explored from different perspectives, it is possible to sketch new alternatives and possible courses of action that allow the transformation of personal and group experience.

Therefore, the development of critical, careful and creative thinking, according to Lipman's philosophical thinking, becomes a proposal that supports educational inclusion in basic education, since it aims to promote an education open to all students, with equity but also with quality (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2011, p. 3).

And if education starts where the child is rather than starting where the teacher is, what would be the best starting point? In the end, Philosophy is an everyday exercise (Herrera & Mogollón, 2012, p. 6).

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