Fostering Empathic Reasoning and Ethical Understanding through the Community of Inquiry Approach

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Ethical Understanding is a critical capability for students to develop as 21\textsuperscript{st} century learners.
The 21st Century Learner

Successful learner, confident and creative individual, an active and informed citizen

- Ethically informed learner
- Caring individual
- Empathic citizen

(Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2013)
Scope of Ethical Understanding

* Students learn to behave ethically when they explore ethical issues and interactions with others

* Students need regular opportunities to make sense of the ethical dimensions of their learning

* Students need to learn the skills to justify their ethical position and understand the positions of others

(ACARA, 2013)
Ethical Understanding & Empathy in the Melbourne Declaration

* Ethical understanding:

  * assists students to become ‘confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens’.

  * fosters the development of ‘personal values and attributes such as honesty, resilience, empathy and respect for others’, and the capacity to act with ethical integrity (MCEETYA, pp. 8–9).
...students develop ethical understanding as they identify and investigate the nature of ethical concepts, values and character traits, and understand how reasoning can assist ethical judgment.

(ACARA, 2013)
Ethical Understanding draws on the work of Lipman, Oscanyan & Sharp and the P4C movement
Lipman and P4C

* Builds on children’s inherent curiosity
* To think critically, not passively about the world
* To reason well about philosophical and ethical issues
* Provides opportunities for genuine dialogue within a Community of Inquiry
The Community of Inquiry approach is the central pedagogical tool for exploring ethical concerns.
Processes of inquiring into ethical issues include:

- giving reasons,
- being consistent,
- finding meanings and causes,
- and providing proof and evidence

Interrogating such concepts through authentic cases ... can involve group and independent inquiry, critical and creative thinking, and cooperative teamwork, and can contribute to personal and social learning.

(ACARA, 2013)
The Community of Inquiry Approach

- Allows for exploration of ethical concerns through guided dialogue.

- ‘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’ (Cam, 2014).
Matthew Lipman stated that caring thinking was as necessary for higher order thinking as critical and creative thinking because ‘emotions are judgements’.
Emotions and Empathy

“well I think you don’t have to have that feeling to know what that feeling is like, but you have to know what that feeling means”

Flint (7 years & 2 months)
'Empathy is the spark of human concern for others, the glue that makes social life possible' (Hoffman 2000, p. 7)

What drives us to act ethically?

How can we foster children’s capacity for empathic reasoning?
A Community of Inquiry that employs experiential stimuli can create an Empathic Pedagogy which fosters Empathic Reasoning.
Should we help someone even if they don’t ask for help?

Karlinchen lief davon, denn Feuer fiel vom Himmel, und sie hatte Hunger, und niemand kümmerte sich um ein Kind, das allein war und voll Angst.

Karlinchen: a refugee story
DO WE HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO HELP OTHERS

- What is a responsibility?
- Did anyone take responsibility for helping Carly?
- Did Mr. Friendly know Carly?
- Would you help a stranger?
- Would you expect a stranger to help you?
- Is there a difference between helping a stranger and helping a friend?
- Is it OK to not help someone?
- Should we help someone even if they don’t ask for help?
How can we support refugees to feel hopeful about life in Australia?

Can we ever truly understand how it feels for those seeking asylum?

The UN Refugee Agency: LEGO Poster range
How do we know that we are reading people’s feelings correctly?

Should we be concerned for others when we may be misreading their feelings?

This is me being sad.
Maybe you think I’m happy in this picture.
Really I’m sad but pretending I’m happy.
I’m doing that because I think people won’t like me if I look sad.
Mismatched Messages

“well I think that sometimes when you have a face that looks happy you can be angry or have different feelings”

Tony (8 years & 4 months)
Emotional Charades

Yes it is difficult because sometimes they keep it in their

I think anger is so easy to read and sometimes sad is hard to read.

I think that sometimes people hid sad but I don't think I know.

Why it makes them embarrassed. When I was confused.

Because Charles was sad and I did not know why.

The next day I knew why.

Because Kate was making it hard for him then it happened with Andy too.

Fergus (7 years & 10 months)
Ethical Understanding

* students need regular opportunities to identify and make sense of the ethical dimensions in their learning.

* As ethics is largely concerned with what we ought to do and how we ought to live, students need to understand how people can inquire collaboratively and come to ethical decisions.

(ACARA, 2013)
The Community of Inquiry can create an Empathic Pedagogy which fosters Empathic Reasoning and develops children’s capacity for Ethical Understanding
‘Empathy is the spark of human concern for others, the glue that makes social life possible’

(Hoffman 2000, p. 7).

If you are interested in learning more about any aspect of this paper or my doctoral research, or would like electronic copies of any of the stimuli used in this workshop please feel free to contact me.

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