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Abstract

The recent passing of Ann Sharp, Co-Founder and Associate Director of the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children, at the age of 68, has left many of us involved in the movement of philosophy for/with children bereft, no doubt in many different ways. The warmth and intensity of her personal and professional focus, the simple clarity of her thinking, and her boundless energy in the work of international dissemination of the concept and practice of philosophizing with children, resonate even more sonorously in her death. We thought it appropriate to try following at least one pathway backwards in her life story through the memory and testimony of her chief collaborator over a period of 35 years, Matthew Lipman. I interviewed Lipman, age 87, in the single room of the eldercare center in New Jersey that has become the site for his dogged and tenacious struggle with Parkinson's Disease, and asked him to reflect on their long partnership. The transcript ends suddenly, not because we stopped talking, but because I stopped taping, sensing his fatigue, and suggesting that we return for another round, at which point we turned to other, less somber matters.

Keywords: Ann Sharp; Matthew Lipman; philosophy for children

La contribución de Ann Sharp: una conversación con Matthew Lipman

Resumen

La reciente muerte de Ann Sharp, co-fundadora y directora asociada del Instituto para el Desarrollo de la Filosofía para Niños, a los 68 años, nos ha dejado a muchos de los comprometidos con el movimiento de filosofía para/con niños despojados, sin duda en muchas formas diferentes. La calidez e intensidad de su luminosidad personal y profesional, la diáfana claridad de su pensamiento, y su ilimitada energía para trabajar en la diseminación internacional del concepto y la práctica de filosofar con niños, resuena aún más sonoramente con su muerte. Pensamos que era apropiado tratar de rastrear hacia atrás al menos un camino en su historia de vida a través de la memoria y testimonio de su principal colaborador por más de 35 años, Matthew Lipman. Entrevisté a Lipman, de 87 años, en su cuarto del asilo de ancianos en Nueva Jersey que se ha vuelto el lugar para su tenaz y obstinada lucha contra el Mal de Parkinson, y le pedí que reflexionáramos sobre su largo trabajo compartido. La transcripción termina súbitamente, no porque hayamos parado de hablar sino porque paré de grabar, sintiendo su fatiga, y le sugerí que retomemos la conversación en otro momento al tiempo en que pasábamos para otras cuestiones, menos melancólicas.

Palabras clave: Ann Sharp; Matthew Lipman; filosofía para niños

A contribuição de Ann Sharp: uma conversa com Matthew Lipman

Resumo:

A recente morte de Ann Sharp, co-fundadora e diretora associada do Instituto para o Desenvolvimento da Filosofia para Crianças, aos 68 anos de idade, deixou muitos dos comprometidos com o movimento de filosofia para/com crianças despojados, sem dúvida de diferentes formas. A afetividade e a intensidade de sua dedicação pessoal e profissional, a clareza de seu pensamento e sua ilimitada energia no trabalho pela disseminação da concepção e prática do filosofar com crianças ressoa ainda mais intenso em sua morte. Pensamos ser apropriado seguir pelo menos um caminho de sua história através da memória e do testemunho de seu principal colaborador por um período de mais de 35 anos, Matthew Lipman. Eu entrevistei Lipman, de 87 anos, no quarto de um asilo de idosos em New Jersey, o qual se tornou um lugar para sua determinada e tenaz luta contra o Mal de Parkinson, e pedi para que ele refletisse sobre sua longa parceria. A transcrição termina repentinamente, não porque nós paramos de conversar, mas porque eu parei de gravar, percebendo seu cansaço, e sugerindo que nós voltássemos a esse tema uma outra vez, ao mesmo tempo em que conversávamos de outras questões menos melancólicas.

Palavras-chave: Ann Sharp; Matthew Lipman; filosofia para crianças

ANN SHARP'S CONTRIBUTION: A CONVERSATION WITH MATTHEW LIPMAN

David Kennedy

The recent passing of Ann Sharp, Co-Founder and Associate Director of the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children, at the age of 68, has left many of us involved in the movement of philosophy for/with children bereft, no doubt in many different ways. The warmth and intensity of her personal and professional focus, the simple clarity of her thinking, and her boundless energy in the work of international dissemination of the concept and practice of philosophizing with children, resonate even more sonorously in her death. We thought it appropriate to try following at least one pathway backwards in her life story through the memory and testimony of her chief collaborator over a period of 35 years, Matthew Lipman. I interviewed Lipman, age 87, in the single room of the eldercare center in New Jersey that has become the site for his dogged and tenacious struggle with Parkinson's Disease, and asked him to reflect on their long partnership. The transcript ends suddenly, not because we stopped talking, but because I stopped taping, sensing his fatigue, and suggesting that we return for another round, at which point we turned to other, less somber matters.

I began with a question about that day in the early 1970's that Sharp—a brand new faculty member in the College of Education-- walked virtually unannounced into the small trailer that was the fledgling Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children on the Montclair State campus, sat down at a typewriter, and announced that she was available to work on Lipman's project.

Kennedy: So there was this sense of immediate recognition on her part.

Lipman: Yes, and I was happy to work with her.

Kennedy: You were completely alone at that point?

Lipman: Yes. Well, there may have been someone in the office at the time, but they didn't seem really interested. I explained what we were doing and she seemed to

recognize the project as one that she would like to work on. And from then on she was a permanent partner.

Kennedy: And she was new to Montclair State.

Lipman: She was new. It was her first year at Montclair State. Yes.

Kennedy: So then she adopted P4C as her research and scholarship, and put all her eggs in one basket, so to speak.

Lipman: Yes. And I liked that.

Kennedy: It was the same level of commitment that you had.

Lipman: Yes, that's true. It puts it very nicely.

Kennedy: And how do you think she contributed? What did she bring?

Lipman: To the project? She brought an unlimited range of things to contribute, and a capacity to work, and to bring her wealth of knowledge in the field of education.

Kennedy: So she brought an educational dimension.

Lipman: She brought a rich philosophical understanding as well—one which I was only just beginning to understand myself, and to understand the need for.

Kennedy: So she brought something new philosophically?

Lipman: Yes.

Kennedy: But she wasn't in the same philosophical tradition as you exactly, right? You were in the pragmatist tradition?

Lipman: Yes, but she brought something that she recognized I didn't have, and that the project didn't have, and that was needed.

Kennedy: Some communicative element?

Lipman: Communicative yes, and something fresh and vital and exciting, which she had for some time—for a long time—wanted to bring to the educational process in general and, when she got to Montclair State, to the School of Education in particular, she knew that something was missing there, that there was a need that the present faculty was not addressing. So she was already on the lookout for someone she could work with in education.

Kennedy: And someone who could help her to mediate between education and philosophy?

Lipman: Between a practical outlook such as pragmatism provided and what she herself could contribute in terms of phenomenology and traditional philosophy.

Kennedy: So she moved into a key spot at Montclair State in the configuration between philosophy and education and Philosophy for Children, because you were not centered in the philosophy department there at all—you were on your own—and you needed to make alliances with Education. So she got the Dean on board?

Lipman: Yes, she got Dr. W., who was the Dean of Education at that time, and who was an independent thinker. He showed respect for those exciting new philosophical approaches that she found important. She needed someone in Education who understood what she was doing—she couldn't do it herself. She would have welcomed more if they'd been interested. And I don't remember exactly what it was she began to work on first in terms of theory and practice.

Kennedy: It wasn't on the concept of community of inquiry?

Lipman: No.

Kennedy: Because I wanted to ask you how she contributed to the emergence of that. She wrote those two well-known papers about community of inquiry relatively early.

Lipman: As far as my own history with the term community of inquiry, I attribute its beginning completely to Justus Buchler.

Kennedy: Who presented it to you personally?

Lipman: Well no, not personally. He mentioned the term and of course attributed it to Peirce, in a book of his that I read in 1959 or thereabouts. I told him that I liked it, and he said that for Peirce it was just a working phrase, it was not developed. I said to Justus, this is a term that represents something we need very much.

Kennedy: In other words Buchler didn't really develop it either, but you got it from him and when the time came, placed it in a new spot. So you picked up on it, but it was Ann who translated it into educational terms in those two papers?

Lipman: Yes. I was delighted at the recognition that she was able to give to the term, although I wasn't as thrilled with it as she was. She was saying that this was just what we need—a working cooperative model of education that combines

pragmatism with the thinking of all the people who were working to open a new approach to philosophy.

Kennedy: So in a sense, you recognized and were interested by the term, and she jumped on it, as a piece of the puzzle.

Lipman: She had no hesitation about jumping on it. I wouldn't have done it on my own probably.

Kennedy: Because you were more cautious?

Lipman: I was more cautious, and I had more responsibility for what was put out there. But it all worked. I mean what each of us contributed was what the other failed to do.

Kennedy: And that made for a good working relationship.

Lipman: Yes, I had no uneasiness about the term. Peirce wasn't around, Dewey wasn't available, and she was a fresh voice. And she did this without relying on the Catholic upbringing and education that she brought to the group.

Kennedy: Could you say more about her Catholicism, or her post-Catholicism?

Lipman: Well, it probably sounds a little funny, but she relied heavily on the younger Catholic philosophers of the time. I hardly knew them, but they were the main voices in Catholic philosophy at that moment, and they were very familiar to her. She talked Maritain all the time.

Kennedy: Do you think they contributed to the philosophical material in the program?

Lipman: It was context more than anything else. She was also steeped in Simone Weil and that whole tradition that Weil represented. It wasn't pragmatism, but it did appeal to work and the importance of work, the justifiability of work. She didn't see how that could be made use of, and I didn't see it myself either, but we learned, and it was through her that Ann brought in a work tradition that we hadn't been able to do before those essays of Weil. We were delighted to be able to cite those types of voices.

Kennedy: Would you say that there were tensions in your relationship?

Lipman: There were gaps rather than tensions. I didn't know what those things were. And she, in her work at Fordham—she knew that there was something there that I didn't really know was there.

Kennedy: So that's the philosophical and bibliographical landscape that she contributed to. How about the sense of growing the movement? During the 70's and 80's there was a lot of expansion, or at least a steady expansion. More and more people were finding out about the program, there were grants, conferences, workshops. Was that also a shared task?

Lipman: The grants, no. There was pretty much a reliance on me to bring in the money and connections and so forth. If we needed large amounts of money, no question that I would have to go for it personally. On the other hand, she was very good in terms of the organization of energies and of recruiting people.

Kennedy: So she drew people.

Lipman: She drew people, and she knew just what she should and could do. I didn't have to tell her that she was leaving anything out—I didn't have to do that at all. She was always looking for work, constantly. But I don't want it to sound like our work was largely organizational. We both contributed what we could in every area.

Kennedy: In terms of the writing—the novels and manuals?

Lipman: Well, she would write a paragraph on an aspect of human experience, and point it out to me, and I would write a chapter and point it out to her, and we would bat the work back and forth.

Kennedy: You mean you would write a chapter of the novel you were working on?

Lipman: Right.

Kennedy: So she was kind of feeding you ideas.

Lipman: Yes, she was feeding me ideas—not that that's all I did, but on the other hand, she had very good common sense, and she recognized connections and resources.

Kennedy: So there was collaboration on the novels.

Lipman: There was, but there was also collaboration in other parts of the Institute's work.

Kennedy: And the manuals?

Lipman: We had a lot of people come in. Some worked for money and some worked for love and connections and so on. But we had to *fashion* the manuals. It didn't just fall into place overnight, and she contributed a great deal. We tried to do it in a successful way—tried to make it something that philosophers wouldn't be ashamed of.

Kennedy: So you were a real team.

Lipman: Yes. With the exception of occasions that were fairly rare, and I don't know that any need to be mentioned, we worked together well. I don't know that I've given sufficient recognition to her here, or that I ever have. But it's hard to do that.

Kennedy: Why?

Lipman: I don't know. I guess if I did know I wouldn't have not done it so often.

Kennedy: Was there competition?

Lipman: Very little. She wasn't interested in being a competitor.

Kennedy: But she was very strong-willed.

Lipman: Well, she was a strong person generally, including the will, but she was very seldom strong-willed for personal purposes. She didn't try to use the Institute for achievement of personal goals. Both of us recognized that the Institute represented a way of working in philosophy that we were very fortunate to have, and that we should not fool around with it, and "use" it. So we tried hard not to do that.

Kennedy: So you were very much on the same page.

Lipman: We were very much on the same page.

Kennedy: And of course she became very popular in the international world of P4C.

Lipman: Well, we wanted that. We knew she had capacities in those areas that needed to be explored, and that was one of the things she was there for.

Kennedy: So that was almost a conscious, strategic direction?

Lipman: Well, if we found a contact that we thought could be useful to us, I didn't have to go get her and introduce her. She was very good that way. She could be counted on to know what we were doing and cooperate with it just like that.

Kennedy: How do you feel about her passing? It was quite a shock for most people—so unexpected. She was still relatively young in terms of current life-span expectations. She was still traveling.

Lipman: And organizing, and communicating. She represented for many of the members of the association a kind of human touch that I never tried to develop—I don't know that I could have if I'd wanted to.