

Enactive and Collective Ethics through Cogenerative Dialogue

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Abstract: Reflecting on the notion of collective responsibility in/of cogenerative dialogue discussed by STITH and ROTH (2006), this paper ponders on the notion of enactive ethics and embodiment of knowledge and action. Based collective and participatory ethics and knowledge, this paper highlights the vision of cogenerative dialogue not only as a tool to discuss the notion of ethics in classrooms but also as a way of knowing and living in society *per se*.

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1. The Ethics of Know-ing in Our Lifeworld

Where learning is enactive and adaptive process of cognition, knowledge emerges from learners' interactions and recurrence of activities with/in the worlds (DAVIS, 2004; VARELA, 1999). That is, knowledge is not a conceptual domain of cognition but participatory and interactive process to know and live in the world. In the enactive mode of knowing and learning, ethics is also enacted and developed through social interactions, recurrent patterns, and embodied situational coping (VARELA, 1999). From this perspective, this article suggests several important aspects of how to perceive, learn, and act on ethics—respect and responsibility in particular, accommodating cogenerative dialogue in pedagogical settings as well as societal dimensions. [1]

Firstly, collective level of ethics is significantly recognized in this article. Emphasizing LEVINAS' notion of inescapable responsibility in our intersubjective being, STITH and ROTH (2006) attempt to develop students' collective responsibility through the dialoguing situations. Living in a society where individual freedom and diversity are highly recognized and valued as the characteristics of democratic and civilized world, we have emphasized how to maximize individual freedom and rights in our being and living. This tendency has forgotten to take into consideration the harmony of collectives and responsibility of being and living together in contemporary society. In this regard, collective responsibility that the authors put forward through cogenerative dialogue is vital for us to re-examine what ethics means in our interrelated relationships. Cogenerative dialogue as enactive social process develops the idea of ethics as co-emergent and co-dependent in a situation where agents are interactive and collectively generating ideas and action. This notion of collective responsibility opens potential of citizenry activities in terms of decision-making and taking action in unfolding future society. [2]

The interconnectedness between learners and lifeworlds is another important ethical aspect of knowledge and learning. STITH and ROTH state separation between the lifeworld and agents and among agents themselves are to be diminished in cogenerative dialogue in order to bring forth the participatory collective responsibility. As an effort to bring forth the connection between ethics and lifeworlds, cogenerative dialogue attempts to help students understand the concept of respect within their own wor(l)ds. Through inviting students' opinions and lived experiences into discussions, the study not only encouraged students to reflect on respect in their own experiences and behaviors but also learn how to speak and act respectfully in the very moment of dialoguing. The moment of learning was situated and embodied in the reflection on their previous experiences as well as the interactions at the situation at hand. In the situatedness of cogenerative dialogue, learning becomes embodied and learners situated in the lifeworld situations. This process itself is ethical by embracing the students' wor(l)ds. In this case, cogenerative dialogue is an effective tool to generate praxeological interdisciplinary learning of ethics and lifeworlds. [3]

Lastly, I like to highlight the process that each participant makes commitments to action taking for betterments, which is the most challenging and important aspect of enactive ethics. To make a successful cogenerative dialogue, students and teachers need to make specific plans that all participants feel responsible for and act on according to the authors. In this process, every one is an equal participant and there is no observer or controller. Teachers' effort to give up their desire to control over class situations and to help students feel comfortable to speak up is difficult but necessary to the collective development of cogenerative dialogue. Students are to respectfully and responsibly participate in discussions in order to make authentic and mutual decisions and plans for changes. And, their action needs to be followed to bring forth the changes they plan. Their knowing is enacted through their doing and vice versa. In this process of completing their commitments, teachers as well as students encounter conflicts and challenges of action taking with personal desire and emotive engagements. However, undergoing this complex process of action taking, teachers as well as students mutually understand and embody enactive ethics in their inter/actions and life-world situations. This is where the ethics of participatory knowledge emerges. [4]

It is important to notice there are pedagogical challenges in cogenerative dialogue as this article also suggests. It challenges traditional ways of teaching and learning process; top-down, knowledge transmission, and controlled system by teachers. Where learning outcomes are to be certain and final products of conceptual knowledge, the uncertainty of learning outcome and loss of control over students and curriculum is a pitfall of teaching for teachers. Under these aspects of teaching and learning, it is impossible for successful cogenerative dialogue to take part. Furthermore, in the busyness of schoolwork and clustered curriculum, teachers are challenged to make pedagogical decisions in the given situations and experience how easily they can slip into the traditional way of teaching. With these challenges, teachers' pedagogical decisions are fundamental to bring forth this long-term developmental process into

praxeological practice. There is need for consistency and reflection on the practice. [5]

2. The Vision of Cogenerative Dialogue

Ultimately, from a long term practice, students will understand and embody their collective responsibility of knowledge and action in their way of living in this world. This suggests cogenerative dialogue as not only a tool for classroom setting but as a way of developing democratic citizenship for students as well as teachers to get involved in dialogues with the society *per se*. [6]

I as an educator often question what ethics means or should mean in our living relationships to contemporary society. Especially, in a society where traditions and values rapidly change and confront our decision making and action, ethics has become very delicate and complicated topic to discuss. With these concerns in mind, I find cogenerative dialogue not only as an efficient tool for bringing up ethics as discussible topics in our dialogues but for practicing and embodying the ethics in ourselves through our lived and living wor(l)ds. [7]

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