Marcela Richardson

Michael Polanyi College

Synthesis essay

May 27, 2013

 What did MPC 1st year left me?

 Like a dialogue comes to light from a question, my essay will also develop parting from a question. What did Mpc 1st year left me in my learning? Most importantly is that I believe I can answer the questions thanks to the numerous dialogues and infinite experiences we had with facilitators and among my classmates this year. I have had so many connections, discovered new learning, which confirmed me that everything in life is connected, we are the only ones that can give meaning to things in our lives, and we should be the only ones giving meaning to our understandings. It is also our approach to each environment that makes us learn more, this concept of unification of knowledge was first discussed in the book Consilience, read in the first term.

I believe in this year I’ve discovered and learned many things about myself. Especially this was the whole idea of the MPC’s first year, to know oneself in order to understand others and communicate with them trying to achieve a share meaning. Thanks to Don Amable’s first dialogues of the book, Don Quijote, I learned that each of us have a purpose in each of our lives, and we must search it from within and everyday try to become the best version of ourselves, giving our extra mile, this have helped me have a more happy and honest life. By trying to learn what your purpose is and how you can improve others life you’ll have more dreams and aspirations to fulfill them throughout your journey here in Earth, and obtain no more than pure happiness.

In Godel, Escher and Bach, it was discussed that each message appears to be random until we establish a code to read it. I easily can see this related to our lives, because we are all in this world to accomplish something but we need to discover it by learning from ourselves and giving it a meaning to apply it. When we find our purpose in life and we are sure what we want to pursuit for the rest of our lives, you’ll notice things having more meaning than previous times and it is because we are giving that meaning to it.

The MPC can be seen as a system, as Hofstadter would describe it as a “related functions under a set of rules sharing a purpose”. I can connect this because the MPC standards have been created after a common process of learning where there were no rules at the beginning and after reflecting on the process we went through, we could articulate those experiences into rubrics, which are a set of rules constantly evolving by students. These rubrics created the base of our culture at the MPC, and we could easily understand them because they came to arise from a common experience and it created our ideals and standards we want to have in a learning environment.

The book that I believe was one of the most important in creating the main base of our program at the MPC, is Getting Real, that is why I chose it to facilitate next year, even though it was removed and changed to Radical Honesty. Getting Real, helped us become more honest with ourselves and others, in the way that instead of trying to “control” things we were relating more, and that created an environment of trust and openness amongst us where our ideas were discussed and feedback was the main measurement of our standards. It helped us articulate our standards in rubrics from the culture and academics. This book also connects with The Trivium, where it helps you keep in touch with yourself and gives you the tools onto how you express rhetorically.

When we live in a community, the purpose of it is to become a better person and make other people become better as well, and because they say we learn by imitation, we should try to get around with the people who want to become better each day and who makes us become better. This type of ideal can only be achieved in an environment where the group is being honest about their education and about their purpose in being part of such a different and unique program, where these ideals are respected and followed. When you become the best version of yourself you are more present in dialogues because you have real and honest intentions in your learning.

The most important thing about this awakening of life is the environment you create in order to make learning happen. The MPC offers you to put a pair of spectacles that will help you acquire the perfect tools to approach different situations and learn how to see life from a very honest and self-disciplinary view. Once I entered the MPC, things in real life had more sense, or less sense I might say. I have learned to analyze different environments and have different approaches depending on the situation I encounter myself. This culture of learning is created when an group of people has its own set of values and works independently of the creators, the students learn to be self governed and auto-didacts, they assume the responsibilities of their learning independently from other people, teachers, society and assume the responsibility of learning for their own personal success.

It is not fair to say that the other system has the fault of fomenting so many people that are dishonest with their learning and don’t value education, I’m thankful to have had this awakening in order to create many environments with this type of culture, so others can benefit from it and little by little influence the world in changing the way education has been working. By having this new culture of learning we can build meaning together and have a metacognition about our actions and of our thinking, behaving more in line with our own set of values created by us and not implemented by others who believe to hold the truth. By this we become successful in all aspects of our lives, wherever the future takes us, we will be able to take every opportunity as a learning experience.

With this type of education, you work in collaboration and not isolated like in the other system, were competiveness is reached and there is a lack of sharing passions and ideas. In a collaborative environment, your peers will be constantly giving you feedback on things they noticed you are doing right or wrong, and they will often offer you their help. The reason it’s easy for us to accept and give feedback is because everyone is going through the same learning process, and are under the same set of values, it will be easy to identify the things the group is doing good or bad according to the standards. The only way to learn about yourself is when you live within a community, for the reasons mentions above, feedback from your peers is the most accurate measurement of your development in an environment because they see your improvements and your needs almost everyday.

Following the connection of systems, another concept talked about a lot in the MPC dialogues is the inductive and deductive systems. The induction system is what we are trying to accomplish in our educational system, by questioning the specific and continuing until we reach the generalization. Hence deductive systems are the contraire from general to specific. This concept connects to learning, in which the MPC’ers strive to learn to know, learn to do, and learn to be.

 Furthermore also we’ve talked about systems in Don Quijote, where there are two types of systems the idealism in which Don Quijote lives believing he is a knight and the realism demonstrated in Sancho Panza’s attitude. Hofstadter tells us that we as human beings are able to decide when to step out of certain system and that is what differentiates us with the mechanical system where it has no emotions and has no control over it. The human self-understanding is inseparable of the participation of a culture, as well as what makes us human beings is human language and culture.

Talking about the importance of language in human beings, I experienced a vote of silence through an entire day which thought me a lot of myself more than I can put into words (ironically), it helped me be more aware of my impulses and how I tend to control things even thought they are not my responsibility. Most importantly I learned that we have to be aware on who we are and thrive to learn more about ourselves as Don Quijote advises to Sancho Pansa when he is being ordered as a mayor. Wisdom it is in knowing how to live in peace without loosing control. I can relate this with the experience of my vote of silence, where I had to control my impulses of speaking out loud, keep my opinions to myself which made me realized that instead of “controlling situations”, I could relate to what others had to say, believing I am right will impede my brain to understand other’s ideas get across. Many times I had the urge to say something, but I rather suspended my assumptions and acknowledged others by listening to them trying to communicate with others and help them understand something for their own.

From Godel, Escher, Bach, I took this quote that completely summarized what I learned about myself by remaining quiet for an entire day: “A zen person is always trying to understand more deeply what he is, by stepping more and more out of what he sees himself to be”. I learned from myself that I tend to control things and people when they don’t do what I would’ve done. I also burst out comments that are not constructive for the person who said it but rather very humiliating or with a tone of sarcasm or fun. I must first listen closely to what is, rather than trying to control what I imagined to be.

Along with my learning from the vote of silence I could also connect it with Difficult Conversations in the chapter about feelings. Many times we don’t know how to listen to people because we don’t know how to express ourselves and there’s just too much things going in our heads when somebody else is talking to us. Applying the zen it would help to put your whole attention towards the person speaking and putting aside your assumptions or feelings. The main core in here is to learn to be more present with the people who you are with in a conversation, when they are trying to send their message across in order to obtain a shared meaning with you. I also learned that unexpressed feelings causes greater tension that makes you disengage, and I can say this happened to me many times during the dialogues I wasn’t able to speak. I had so many feelings bottled that when a moment of chaos occurred I lost concentration and said a few words. “You can change your feelings by altering your thinking”.

We started off this year by understanding the importance of documentation, since we watched the film Nostalgia for the Lights, women were looking for their families which were murdered during Pinochet’s presidency. Also, the other theme was the search for an understanding of our origins by studying the skies. This opened up my mind to think the importance to question everything that surrounds us even though “someone smarter than us” have told us is truth. It is here were true knowledge arises and awakens your thirst to discover and achieve the objective truth, if there is one. How many things we take as granted because we are too lazy to question them? It is a shame that we are not working the capability of our brains to think and find proves because of conformity. With Armando de la Torre, we’ve seen the scientific advances and how language and precision is very important in gaining truth.

Language serves us as an important tool for communication; in the broadest sense is to make something common; according to David Bohm, On Dialogue. Thanks to language we can move from one system to the other one to convey our emotions and our interpretations. In order to find precision in language and to find objective truth we have to have a combination of all the previous topics I mentioned before. We have to constantly be open to new ideas and new interpretations and to doubt everything we have been told to be proven right. When one has the space to come to talk freely without any guidance, spontaneous conversations come to live and many meaning is taken out of it, as well as questions and new interpretations. The key to find the truth is to shut down what we think we already know and to start questioning everything. This will help us to be consistent with what we are looking for and keep away the blockings which are keeping us away from finding the truth and understand others opinions and their interpretations.

The importance of suspending our assumption goes beyond having a misunderstanding with someone. Such as in Copernican Revolution the root of the discovery of the heliocentric system came from a theory of the two-sphere universe, which explained it in a very “logical system”, so gave the bases for many other theories even though it was proven wrong many centuries later. Little by little thanks to the scientists that based their assumptions with observation and fulfilled their thirst of wanting to find answers about the universe in which we live in, many other theories arouse because the scientist had courage to take off those spectacles, and gave order so we could be closer to the theories we have about our universe now. And that is what’s incredible about theories, which if there are not the truth at least it encourages us to pursue the search for truth and construct over the discarded theories.

An objective truth is independent of the subject and their believes, it is just something that is, like the laws of gravity, the concept that the earth rotates around the sun etc. It’s amazing that because there are many humans that has trouble believing new theories others tell them is the established one, that wakes up the spirit of curiosity and gives them a sense of curiosity to want to discover by themselves their own understanding of something, here they ask questions about their ground believes and come up with new theories, new ideas that help revolutionize the world and what we believe in.

When someone has a theory or a thought, we immediately assume it to be truth, and that many times could lead us to misinterpretation and will affect our learning and will limit us to discover what the objective truth is. We have to see the world as if we were little children, ready to discover new adventures, learn something new, be amazed of the small things which actually are extraordinary, and above all doubt what the status quo says is the right thing to believe in and question the why’s of everything.

When we discussed Crito, many things came up to my mind. The importance of Socrates own values and being consistent towards them is something to be amazed by. What I like about the dialogue between Socrates and Crito, is the fact that Socrates tries his best to make his point clear and make Crito understand why he is choosing not to escape. In order for Crito to understand he has to have his own reasonable doubts about the context in which they are both. Socrates explains his point well systematically and there’s no leap of mal interpretation between him and Crito. Socrates is being consistent with his decision he once took of being under the Athenian laws, due to this, he has to follow the law and not become a problem to the town with his escape. He wants his values to persist and not corrupt the town. He will not do any harm to those who commit harm unto him.

One of the most amazing discoveries I made thanks to the dialogue between Socrates and Crito was the importance of not supposing things about other people and ideas, above all, to suspend my assumption at the time of encountering something I don’t know, or at least have the intellectual humility to say I don’t know and listen to the other person give their point of view which deserves to be heard and will surely help me understand it better. How will I encounter that which I don’t know what is that I’m looking for, well I will recognize as learning everything which presents to me as new and with that in mind become a better person and grow personally to finally put into action my purpose in this planet earth.

Bohm in On Dialogue tells us the importance of suspending our assumptions, to gain truth. Often we limit ourselves to understand the others, because there is a barrier in our minds that tells us how it is according to our believes, and that’s the reason we only get to see the negative aspects of what the other person is trying to convey to us and we don’t manage to understand them. Here it has not been reached a shared meaning, because we are using a pair of spectacles, this concept appears in Copernican Revolution which means that we base all of our assumptions with new theories based on the previous ones that has been provided to us.

When we focus on blaming someone, it inhibits our ability to learn what’s really causing the problem and to do anything meaningful to correct it. This also connects with a conversation we had with Roberto Blum about “epiphenomenon” (the brain and mind), which during a dialogue, we are creating something else rather than the dialogue itself, we can be observers from the outside, and then localize the problems in order to improve them, so the dialogue can grow and become richer in content. So what I learn the most in this chapter was that instead of finding whose blame is it, we should focus on the contributions everyone gave to the conversation and notice the things we could have done to improve the dialogue. It is also to look within us and become responsible for our actions.

This brings up to mind the importance of dialogues, where there is no central authority telling you the exact system in which you will follow the dialogue, but instead have a collaborative conversation with people involved trying to get a share meaning out of it. Consensus in dialogues are often not allowed, people state their assumptions systematically and with good arguments in order not to confuse other participants in the dialogue. There has to be trust and openness when one is participating in a dialogue.

 With Armando de la Torre we were discussing the 4 causes of the Greeks, and how with the advancement in science, little by little we entered the modern world and stopped thinking as the Greeks. In consequence their causes were eliminated except efficient cause, and the final cause only when trying to explain the behavior of the conscious mind of the human beings. We are here in this universe to discover the human intellect and try to understand each other. In our world and during the last centuries, many bad decisions have been taken and many bad actions made, that in some ways it has affected the world we now live in. Instead of trying to understand each other in dialogues, human being tend to follow their own personal interests and act as they wish to, rather than having a share meaning or come in to terms to have a better dialogue hence better decisions. According to the book On Dialogue by David Bohm, the world’s peace is in the art of knowing how to have a dialogue. It’s amazing how this very complex but simple tool can help us in our everyday life and have better conversation and acquire greater knowledge from the people we talk to with almost everyday. Dialogue helps us have a wider understanding of our surrounding, many new ideas emerge and it opens up the mind of others. It’s all up to us to apply this skills wherever we go and whoever we talk to, we should strive for the discovery of new and different ideas among different cultures.

While watching the movie “Agora”, which is an amazing example of how religion came to change most of what the people of that era thought to be truth, I thought religion is one of the main factors for the responsibilities of certain mentalities that are still present now a days. There were the Greeks who were pagans and rendered many gods, and others which were the Christians who believe in one God. The Ptolemy system was based on the Earth as the center of the universe, being us the most important creation of the universe, and that impacted a lot when it was proved wrong Ptolemy’s system and proved that the Sun was the center of our universe. I question myself, and ask how many other things have been established by the Church, to be God’s word, but really it is just the human way to keep society on a level of serenity, because no one else knows what to be truth.

What we often search in science and at the MPC is the approximation to truth. We wish to get closer to become the best version of ourselves. Most of the time as I said before, the culture in which we live in doesn’t support curiosity, even though many of us feel the need to question things but because of the religious dogma along with the culture we’ve been born in, we maintain quite and doubtful. How then can we change this result of many years of the same culture? Is the educational system we now have (authoritarian) is the one and only path to success? I believe not. To the contraire, the educational system has to be one that nourishes the self to become the best version of himself, and foments innocent curiosity, as well as truth it must be searched and obtained in every conversation we have, in every little thing we do, we get closer approximations to the objective truth every time we put ourselves to the task of finding it.

The MPC is a process of learning that you learn by experience; it becomes something tacit within yourself. When reading Meno, Socrates tells Meno that virtue is the willingness to learn, and I must say that the Mpc-ers have that same willingness about learning. He even mentions that it is not something you can teach; it is something that comes with every experience and your search for learning from it. Having this willingness to learn opens many doors for you, that probably have been in front of yourself your entire life but now that you’ve become a natural learner, you have the skills and courage to take them as they are and learn the fullest from every experience, even though sometimes it might put into doubt your believes and what you thought to be true.

Thanks to the awakening I had in El Zapote with nature itself; I can now appreciate more life’s small details. I’ve noticed lately the birds singing every morning, the different textures of the plants and trees, and most importantly I’ve learned to be present in every situation, appreciating life as it is, also keeping my assumptions besides so the message of the other person is received with complete honesty without any predispositions about the person or idea. This is what is called proprioception discussed in Bohm’s book On Dialogue.

One thing that impacted me this year was the calling of my passion in my life, since the day I decided to talk with Bert about my idea, which is writing a book of all MPC pioneers and the comparison with our past education experiences and how the MPC has changed our lives, my purpose here at the MPC has even more meaning, each dialogue or conversation I have with my classmates I try to learn as much I can and write down ideas about the upcoming book. It is much easier when you have a mission to take the most advantage of the tools MPC offers us. But, it is not until you are in an environment of honest learning that you discover these things in your own time and think for yourself when your true vocation comes from.

In the book from Mechanics to Aristotle, we’ve been discussing about change and time. Change can only happen with time, and if something changes we know time has passed by. For us to change our attitudes or actions that we are learning from others when they give feedback, it has to pass some time for us to notice and then do something about it. I also related this chapter with Copernican Revolution where there were two types of thinking the one of Aristotle about the search through cosmology that had a philosophical speculation and the one of Plato that was the search for astronomy, which had more observation to the skies and had exact mathematical calculus.

Reality just is. And we will strive to search it, by having approximations to what is. Truth is a relation to what is, and it can constantly be improving to be more precise. Reality is independent of humans, because our interpretation can always be refutable. The quest for truth starts with a leap of faith, a leap of faith that we can get to the ultimate reality. Where does the sense of truth come and is beauty related to it? Can beauty be objective? The sense of Beauty is the exclusive domain of Conscious Minds, minds which through the experience of living have gained a depth that transcends explanation by any mere set of rules. Do animals have a sense of beauty? Human beings have the 5 senses that are classified from concrete to abstract as, touch, taste, smell, hear, and the sight. And we by our sight we classified something as beautiful, but for example dogs have more developed their sense of smell and might classified something as beautiful depending on their smell. Truth is something that human beings will find too elusive to attain it fully, and even though machines could someday surpass our intelligence, they will always find themselves trying to understand themselves and search for knowledge by questioning beauty, art and simplicity.

We as human beings see the world as being something outside ourselves, even though it is only a mental representation of what we experience inside ourselves. I relate this quote from GEB, with the essays on Corn-pone opinions and Self-Reliance, in the way that we are often to worried on what society believes to be the rules and the way to behave. But we are not focus on what our inner self desires, wishes to do, because we believe others have the right to decide what to think and how to accomplish certain things. We don’t see the other paths; we only see the one most taken, because it is very easy to imitate what others do. But by creating your own path you learn about yourself and your behaviors.

One of my favorite quotes from Consilience, is almost at the end of the chapter where he says “It aims to save the spirit, not by surrender but by liberation of the human mind”. “When we have unified enough certain knowledge, we will understand who we are and why we are here”. This is what we must aim to search the unity of knowledge due to the connectivity in everything, we will understand many things and especially learn from within ourselves.

Anything that can be question should be question in order to have an awakening of curiosity that leads you to search for answers to satiate your personal hunger of knowledge and understanding. This process will only be helpful for yourself and getting a clear understanding of your own, because by the experience you live in that quest of finding objective truth, you’ll learn from the process and from the outcome. Also, when one discovers something from his or her own and from scratch, it has more impact onto you rather than having someone else “smarter” than you tell you what the answers of something is. Every human being has their own experiences that make them who they are and what makes me different from you, so each of us have different perspectives in how we see the world, so we should create our own perspective not society’s perspective on the world. Let’s take our life in our hands, and especially education, which is the tool to becoming the best version of us in order to live a happy and honest life. Some advises Susan Campbell, gives in Getting Real are: “All we need is genuine curiosity, an openness to experiment, and a willingness to experience with awareness whatever comes up. The prize you will attain for this effort is a deep and abiding trust in yourself and in life that no one can ever take away from you.” (Campbell 8%)