Critical & Creative Thinking

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Research Articles

Reports

Review

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Welcome to
Critical & Creative Thinking

Welcome to Vol. 15 No. 2 of *Critical & Creative Thinking: The Australasian Journal of Philosophy in Education.*

Critical & Creative Thinking is published in May and November. Subscriptions are due in February (forms are available in this edition). We hope that you will continue your subscription, and if you have any suggestions, please send them to us.

About the Journal

Critical & Creative Thinking is an international journal published under the auspices of The Federation of Australasian Philosophy in Schools Associations (FAPSA). The focus of the journal is philosophical inquiry with school-age students. What was once called Philosophy for Children has now grown into a sub-discipline of philosophy with its own history, traditions and pedagogy, and incorporates what could be called philosophical inquiry in the classroom, reflective education and, generally speaking, philosophy in schools, as well as related methodologies such as Socratic Dialogue. The journal performs two roles. The first is to publish scholarly research concerning the theory and practice of philosophical inquiry at school level. These articles will appear in the 'Research Articles' section. The second is to publish reports of practice, comments on resources, suggestions and ideas about philosophising with school students and so forth, with a view to encouraging professional interchange among those interested in philosophical inquiry with school-age students.

Aim and Scope

To provide a vehicle for the communication of ideas and a forum for discussion and debate of issues concerning the practice of philosophical inquiry with school-age students.
To promote better teaching and curricular design for the development of critical and creative thinking amongst school-age students through increased understanding and use of philosophical inquiry in the classroom.

To enrich the understanding of philosophy and philosophical inquiry as well as its role in the development of good thinking and good judgement.

To increase interaction and collaboration between the academic community of scholars in universities and teachers in schools on matters of logic, epistemology, creativity, metaphysics, aesthetics, ethics, inquiry, philosophy of science, mind, personhood, community, understanding, learning, thinking, dialogue, discussion, and related matters concerning philosophy, inquiry and classroom pedagogy.

To promote discussion of the place of philosophy in the nation and school curriculum and its infusion into the present curriculum, as well as the place of philosophy in the intellectual, creative, moral and social development of individuals.

Notes for Contributors

All contributions will be considered for publication. Articles will be subject to the normal processes of peer-review for scholarly refereed journals, including blind reviewing by at least two referees drawn from the Editorial Committee (or from other international scholars with special expertise as necessary).

Manuscripts should be prepared with a title page. Include all relevant information about the author; institutional affiliation (if applicable), email address and contact details. The title page will be removed prior to review.

Articles should be 1.5 or double spaced in 12 point. Please keep formatting to a minimum. Use footnote citation with a list of references at the end. Tables and text in side-by-side columns should be placed in a table with 1 point border.

Please send articles attached as a Word document to:
sue.knight@unisa.edu.au

Letters to the Editor

It may happen that you read an article and would like to respond, but not in the form of a lengthy article. Such responses, which might simply add to a point made by the author either in agreement or disagreement, or offer an alternative view, could appear as a 'Letter to the Editor.' The idea is to encourage dialogue between readers and authors, in effect using the journal to create a community of inquiry.

Send all contributions to: sue.knight@unisa.edu.au

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Editorial

Welcome to the second and final issue of *Critical & Creative Thinking* for 2007. This was to have been a special issue focussing on empirical research projects designed to assess the effectiveness of community of inquiry style dialogue in fostering a broad range of cognitive skills and related dispositions. Regrettably, although a small number of research papers were submitted for consideration, there were too few to constitute an issue devoted to such studies. Perhaps we should not be too surprised by this, for while the field of philosophy in schools is underpinned by an extensive and growing theoretical framework, it is yet to be matched by an empirical research base powerful enough to affect genuine widespread change in our classrooms, schools and education systems. There does, however, appear to be a slow but steady increase in the number of empirical studies being undertaken in Australia and internationally, the reports of which will feature in future issues of the journal. Our hope remains that *Critical & Creative Thinking* will continue to develop as a scholarly journal with a strong interdisciplinary focus and, as such, be of interest and value to both philosophers and cognitive psychologists, as well as to teachers of philosophy working across educational levels and settings. Indeed, the papers included in this issue reflect the incredible diversity of contexts in which the practice of collaborative philosophical inquiry makes a very real difference to learning and teaching.

The first two papers, from Mark Freakley, and Susan Wilks and Greg Missingham, are concerned with the development of understanding and reflective thinking in tertiary students (prospective teachers and architects, respectively), through careful questioning and philosophical discussion. In the third paper, Laura D'Olimpio describes an approach which, when coupled with the thinking skills gained via the study of philosophy, will enable children and adults alike to better critique, manage and appreciate the ever burgeoning mass media. Also concerned with modern technology, Ron Laura and Amy Chapman urge us to reflect philosophically on the impact of what appears to be

uncritical acceptance of the ever increasing reliance on electronic technologies, and particularly computers, in educational settings. The fifth paper, from Sue Knight, serves to remind us that it is both possible and rewarding to engage even very young children in discussion of complex philosophical ideas and concepts, often as a result of sharing well loved stories. Also included in this issue are reports of successful philosophy sessions from two very different educational settings: firstly, a group of enthusiastic fourteen-year-olds and their teacher, Isobel Wightman, and secondly, a class of adults with English as their second language, taught by Greg Smith. Ho Wah Kam reports too on the experience of Philosophy for Children in Southeast Asia, while the final paper in this issue is a review by Tim Sprod of Anne-Maree Olley's recently published curriculum books entitled *Thinking about Picture Books: A guide to thoughtful discussion* (Part 1 and 2).

We are impressed by the depth and breadth of ideas gathered together in this issue of *Critical & Creative Thinking*, and extend our thanks to all authors for their contributions. We hope you find the issue thought provoking, and that it will serve in some way to support your work in this important field. Finally, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to Justine Gallasch for her dedication to the journal and for her careful work in the role of sub-editor.

Best wishes for the year ahead.

Carol Collins and Sue Knight

Ethics Education with Pre-Service Teachers

Mark Freakley (School of Education and Professional Studies, Griffith University, Queensland)

Introduction

Education systems and organisations are commonly asked to produce good students, good citizens and good employees. For instance, the Ministerial Council for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), in the *Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling*, stated that when students leave school they should 'have the capacity to exercise judgement and responsibility in matters of morality, ethics and social justice' (Goal 1.3). However, schools and all other organisations involved in further education are faced with certain obstacles in teaching ethics, morality and values.

First among these obstacles is that many reasonable folk understand that there is no absolute, universal or infallible method to disentangling the moral perplexities that can be found in the content of relationships and connections that make up our day-to-day realities. Nor is there any final or fixed solution to be found for every moral problem, because problems are transitory. Finding solutions to moral problems is not like unravelling a ball of wool that can, with patience, eventually be disentangled. Morality can rarely be reduced to a single issue of rights, or liberty, or justice. It is complex, because human relationships are complex and dynamic. This makes ethics education complex, because ethical competency requires more than an understanding of ethical theories or the acquisition of a set of moral algorithms complete with instructions for how to apply them. It requires a deepened understanding acquired through enacted dispositions towards critical reflection, care and reasonableness.

In trying to educate student teachers in these qualities, I have encountered a number of additional obstacles that might resonate with teachers in schools, particularly those teaching senior school students. In this paper, I describe the obstacles and then conclude by suggesting how the community of inquiry approach to ethics education[1] provides an effective response.

The Public Policy Construct of Student

The first obstacle is located in the broad context of education and involves the way in which public policy measures conceive the contemporary student as a radically individualised being, 'feasting on a smorgasbord of information and experience'.[2] The smorgasbord is to be provided by a diverse range of education and training organisations in order for the student, over a lifetime, to more quickly respond to their changing circumstances. The buzzwords 'flexible' and 'adaptable' in particular describe the learning environments most suitable for such beings. Under this construct, skills and knowledges are taken up and let go by students when circumstances dictate, and have no utility outside of that which can be measured by a person's success in negotiating a place in the 'Economy'. I will refer to this as the 'Public Policy Construct' of being a student, or PPC for short.

Embedded in the PPC is the idea that the self of personal identity that is being worked on through the contemporary forces of socialisation has become fragmentary, diffuse and malleable, so that 'keeping one's being light and flexible is the moral imperative of this new world'.[3] Such an environment can lend support to the idea that commitment to particular values, as is the case with the acquisition of knowledge, should be directed by the private rather than the public domain. Why? Because this enhances the adaptability of individuals to freely commit, or not, to the immediate and particular goals of whatever post-education or training context the PPC student finds himself in.

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[1] More fully described in Burgh, Field and Freakley, 2006.
[2] Heath, 2001, p. 97.
[3] Heath, 2001, p. 99.

The problem for ethics education is that PPC is inconsistent with the espousal of education for strong sets of public values, such as those provided by the recently published *National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools*. In advocating these values for the purpose of character formation, it is not imagined that they are the kinds of qualities that would be taken up or dispensed with as easily as putting on or taking off a coat, and yet such a stance is conveyed by PPC states of being that are light and flexible. Similarly, with regard to education in the professions, PPC undermines the very notion of professional ethics. In the profession of teaching, explicit ethical standards are demanded of teachers by all employing and registering authorities, but, viewed through the lens of PPC, these can be read simply as things to be acquired from the training 'smorgasbord' and with the same status as knowing how to write on a whiteboard and, with changing technology, just as dispensable over time. Encouraged by PPC, morally light and flexible beings are liable to be complacent and indifferent to issues of professional or public ethics or morality. In the next section, I expand on the obstacle of complacency.

Complacency

Complacency about ethics runs deeper than concerns about an individual student's indifference, as Hanna Arendt's studies remind us. Arendt devoted much of her life to making sense of Nazi totalitarianism and understanding what made it possible. She came to believe that the only way to avoid it was to have a healthy political community that encouraged public participation and institutionalised political freedom. She was deeply worried that modern life discouraged political activity and created morally superficial people – such as the light and flexible beings described above in the PPC of the work-ready student and employable citizen. In her account of the trial of Adolf Eichmann[4], she first presented the idea of the 'banality of evil': that the monstrous evil of the Holocaust was in large part achieved through a multitude of wrongdoings that were perceived as minor, commonplace or trivial. So, in accounting for Eichmann's role in the Nazi leadership, she shows how he simply drifted with the times, self-satisfied and refusing to

[4] Arendt, 1965.

think critically about his actions and those of others. Setting aside the difficult issue of the nature of the broad political and social context in which ethics education must operate, it does seem to me that we fail to make advances in the teaching of ethics if we are unable to deal with this kind of complacency.

For instance, the field of accountancy has, through the professional standards, demanded of its accrediting bodies a longstanding interest in professional ethics and the education of its members in this area. Yet, recent and notorious problems with accountancy in relation to company auditing and reporting arguably stem from the complacency of individuals and groups and their indifference towards the banal or seemingly trivial unethical behaviour, which has led to company collapses and to untold damage to individual livelihoods and retirement incomes.

In school teaching, the kind of complacency that I have in mind can be seen in such everyday actions as: the teacher on playground duty who, in order to avoid confrontation, turns a blind eye to student littering or name-calling; the teacher who, in the staffroom, lets go unchallenged a false or derogatory remark by one teacher about a student or another staff member; or, the teachers who are observed by colleagues standing at a school assembly chatting about their weekends and interrupting this only to castigate students who are seen talking.

In the next section, I suggest that lying behind these kinds of complacencies lurks the shadow of relativism.

Relativism

Relativism is currently intellectually very fashionable and has been for some time. But the kind of relativism that can be found in school classrooms and school staffrooms is usually far removed from sophisticated philosophical relativism. It is easy to identify some typical expressions of student relativism in discussions of ethical and moral issues. For example, take the following[5]:

- 'What's right for me may not be right for you.'
- 'What's right for me is whatever I believe is right for me.'

[5] Student comments in discussion groups.

- 'That's just your opinion, and your opinion is no better than anyone else's.'
- 'All societies or groups have different moral beliefs, and their beliefs are right for them, but not for others.'
- 'That's just a value judgement.'
- 'Who's to say what's right and what's wrong?'

From this, we can identify two predominant forms of student relativism. One is highly subjective and individualistic, e.g. 'What is right for me is what I believe to be right for me.' The other social or cultural, e.g. 'Different moralities are valid for different groups of people.'

One way in which student relativism can be conceived is as the first fumbling attempts at articulating a comprehensive moral relativism. From my observations of students, this seems to come bundled with one primitive version or another of a normative ethical theory. Take for instance these two expressions sometimes found on vehicle bumper-stickers or emblazoned on t-shirts:

- 'Life's a bitch and then you die.'
- 'If it feels good, do it.'

The belief that life can be reduced simply to seeking pleasure and/or avoiding pain expressed by these two aphorisms is commonly voiced by students in the ethics classroom. As nascent ethical theories, these views can and should be taken seriously. Students can be encouraged to critique their thinking in order to develop more sophisticated versions, thereby engaging them as participants in humanity's ongoing ethical conversation. However, what concerns me is that students move very quickly from these normative positions combined with moral relativism on to a kind of ethical solipsism or a variety of philosophical scepticism that can be quite entrenched and corrosive of efforts to teach ethics. I will try to untangle these threads with some further observations.

I have observed from listening to students that the life referred to in, for example, the statement, 'Life's a bitch and then you die', is very much an individual's life, and much emphasis is given to the fact that it will come to an end. It seems to many students that it is a given that such

questions as, 'What life should I lead?' and 'What should I do?' are circumscribed by the finality of one's death. That is, it is thought that these questions can only be answered from within the individual's contingent and somewhat ephemeral point of view. It is understood that judgements about how to live can only be evaluated by the individual in isolation, and the subject's point of view trumps any other point of view.

These beliefs seem to be associated with the idea that the individual person is essentially alone. While our pains, and few pleasures, are solitary experiences, this is not to deny that these experiences may be accompanied by the presence of others, even caused by others, but the belief is that our experiences, in-themselves, belong to us alone and cannot be shared. We are simply pleasure and pain machines constituted by environmental inputs that are matched by internal outputs of pleasure and pain. Life is nothing more than the organism striving to maximise pleasure and minimise pain. We are alone, in that our minds are trapped within our bodies, each of us bounded by a shell of flesh and blood. We are just the sum total of these individual experiences and, because of this, we are unable to transcend the individual point of view. This means that these experiences are the sole sources of value and that all values are essentially the values of individuals. There is no viewpoint, then, outside of the individual.

This means, according to the student relativist, that any agreements about value occur simply as a result of pushes and pulls caused by environmental factors, socialisation, enculturation etc, or internally sourced goings-on. Because agreements are achieved through the mediation of pleasure and pain machinery, so it goes, there is no way to transcend this machinery by, for example, arriving at agreements on value through the power of reason.

In taking hold, this kind of thinking presents a corrosive scepticism about reason's place in articulating the good life, and for students who subscribe to these views, it calls into question the value of reasoning about ethics. This aspect of student relativism can be charitably described as a variety of philosophical scepticism – a deep-seated doubt about the possibility of moral knowledge and the efficacy of reason and of rational inquiry itself. That is, what is the point of moral inquiry if nothing can be known about anything anyway?

However, not all expressions of student relativism are genuine attempts at philosophy. For some students it seems pretty clear that relativism is simply a convenient way to avoid doing any difficult thinking. They make such comments as the following, where the second part of the conjunction is the giveaway: 'There's no point in discussing this when it's just a matter of opinion – and who cares anyway?' However, beyond instances of intellectual laziness, when such claims are expressed with downright hostility, as they sometimes are, relativism is also a way for students to find shelter from the questioning of their views; it becomes protective of doubts, confusions and uncertainties. In order to protect their vulnerable self from discomforting inquiry, students will say such things as, 'That's just your opinion and I've got mine.' Defensiveness of this form can be entirely dismissive of moral argument in appealing to vague notions of subjective opinion, emotions or feelings in order to reject any questioning of their own dogmatic views; because if no one can know or reason, then their own unexamined views are beyond questioning.

In some situations, student relativism seems to be intended not to foreclose disagreement because it is personally threatening, but to avoid it out of a sense of what is socially appropriate. Argument and probing another's moral or ethical views is considered inappropriate, that is, rude, inconsiderate and invasive of another's privacy. However, more than etiquette is often involved here, for many students are genuinely committed to respecting diversity and the plurality of differing views, including moral convictions. For these students, relativism appears as the correct way to express their tolerance of difference and shows respect for the opinions of others: 'Your opinion is true to you while my opinion is true to me.'

Of course, not all students are relativists. To the contrary, quite a large proportion of my students have quite strong absolutist moral views that they would have foisted on their classmates. While it is not restricted to this group of students, they do raise another kind of obstacle to ethics education.

The Construct of Teaching

Many morally absolutist students keen on the value of an ethics education expect that they will be taught answers to

questions or solutions to problems and sometimes detailed procedures to follow in solving problems. From this standpoint, students can respond quite negatively to problem-focused approaches that deal with messy problems, such as those common to ethics and morality, and that are treated through genuine classroom or online discussion forums. For different reasons, this standpoint is also not uncommon amongst student relativists. Like other students, the student relativist just wants to pass the course. However, while from their particular point of view there is no point in reasoning about ethics, since the course is compulsory, what they want to be given are problem and answer sets that they can commit to memory and regurgitate in exams.

Once again we see here the impact of PPC: education is not meant to provide a deep core of understanding, but instead a contingent set of ready-made responses for the context at hand. There is much that is lost in the shift away from genuine discussion fostered by the climate of PPC. There is evidence to suggest, for instance, that students suffer 'a fragmented sense of time and a loss of the so-called duration experience…[and] a reduced attention span and a general impatience with sustained inquiry'.[6] This contrasts with the unique educational benefits gained from genuine discussion. Dillon, for example, describes how quite apart from its instrumental value as a means of conducting inquiry, it also possesses an intrinsic educational value:

> We engage in discussion for the very practice of essential goods. We discuss for the experience of community and inquiry in the lived moment, for participation with our fellows in communal reflection, discovery and deliberation.[7]

There are, however, powerful forces at work shaping the nature of teaching in higher education that act to reinforce the negative construct of teaching just described. The changing environment of higher education is characterised by a strong and increasing emphasis on the mass delivery of instruction. Factors which continue to influence this direction in university teaching include

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[6] Birkerts, 1994, p. 27.
[7] Dillon, 1994, p. 112.

increasing staff-student ratios and the incorporation of rapidly developing communications and information technologies into instructional delivery. The emergence of these factors has seen a shift towards the more frequent use of the traditional lecture format as well as the proliferation of Web-based instructional delivery. The other side of this movement is the shift away from small group teaching exemplified by the traditional tutorial involving roundtable class discussions with twelve or fewer students. Where they maintain a presence, increases to tutorial class sizes are such that genuine, in-depth student discussion is now seen as impracticable. Instead, tutors resort to strategies that involve either very different forms of student talk or none at all (e.g. mini-lectures or summaries of important points; question and answer sessions; assigning tasks to sub-sets of the class followed by student reports to plenary sessions of the whole class).

Despite these obstacles, going against the grain of student expectations about appropriate modes of teaching and learning is difficult but necessary, given what I have said about student relativism, complacency and indifference.

Conclusion

Under the influence of PPC, we cannot assume that reasoning through genuine inquiry is valued any longer. Universities must in the practice of teaching actively educate students in the value of reason and its forms. This means getting back to basics by creating discussions that are genuine inquiries, involving valuing reasons, seeking alternatives, and the evaluation of ideas. Such characteristics are familiar to those involved in Philosophy for Children.

In my teaching, I try to respond to these obstacles by fostering engagement with ethics at the level of the banal. I avoid an emphasis on the delivery of knowledge about ethical theory, as such, but emphasise instead that the course will focus on problems that occur in professional practice and which will entail students engaging collaboratively in small, supportive learning groups. By focusing students' efforts on problem-focused activity, the overall impact of the obstacles I have presented, especially student relativism, can be mitigated. Once students are actively engaged together in some form of moral reasoning,

student relativism is diminished and dissipated. Through immersion in a community of inquiry, students come to see how using moral concepts, deciding on and acquiring relevant facts, reasoning carefully and clearly about the facts and the ideas that they engender, and being prepared to be persuaded by soundly arrived at conclusions, is interesting and rewarding. We avoid a head-on collision with student relativism and instead work together to avoid it. Most importantly, the idea that moral evaluation can only be conducted by the individual self in isolation is challenged and, more times than not, is overturned as evidenced by the following comments from students:

> One thing I noticed was how narrow-minded I was and by being able to post my views and have others discuss them with me really helped me to look at the bigger picture.
>
> The discussion group forces us to consider 'outside the box'. Gives us ways of providing reasons for decisions we may make. Encourages us to be aware of outcomes/consequences of our decisions, for students, ourselves and the wider community.
>
> I've realised the importance of being able to justify your actions. Presented with the same information, your friend can come up with a completely different viewpoint based on their beliefs, but when you work through it, you can find agreements and a common understanding about what to do.

As a teacher educator, I am particularly motivated by, and hopeful about, the possibility of moving students and teachers away from passive acceptance of unethical practices towards active ethical engagement. The best way of accomplishing that end is to provide teachers with the means of experiencing the *achievement* of ethical inquiry. As a result of such experiences, I expect that teachers are better placed to maximise their influence as both adult role models and active educators by helping students to appreciate that time spent on wondering and reflecting on ethics and morality is profitable and productive.

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'I think I will never have no questions': Thinking about thinking about design

Susan Wilks & Greg Missingham (Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning, The University of Melbourne)

Abstract

This paper describes the evolving teaching methods of a lecturer who, guided by a teacher educator, set out to ensure his students displayed, and were aware of, the process of metacognitive thinking. The writer believes it could occur anywhere a patient, persistent and reflective practitioner is involved.

The focus was a fourth and fifth year subject called 'Design Approaches and Methods' in the faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning at The University of Melbourne. For the purposes of this project, metacognition is defined as the self-monitoring of mental processes during learning and the conscious description of mental processes and any resultant altered strategies. The project began in 2005 and continued – guided by discoveries, research, expert advice, and tutors' and students' comments – until the lecturer was satisfied with the quality and quantity of the metacognitive thinking demonstrated in 2007.[1]

Background

Having moved from an Education faculty into a faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning at The University of Melbourne, I wanted to understand, and immerse myself in, what was for me a new educational environment. Much of my previous research, professional writing and work as a teacher educator had involved promoting the design process. This was because I believed the thinking skills it developed, particularly reflection and deep inquiry, offered a strong

[1] The quote in the title is taken from Student I's journal. The paper was written by the teacher educator.

model to the broader educational curriculum. I was therefore surprised at what I observed in many lectures, tutorials and design studios. Mostly, the skills promoted and used were at the lower levels of Bloom et al's (1956) taxonomic domain of knowledge and receiving. Lectures mainly consisted of delivery of copious amounts of information. In the tutorials and studios, time limits and the enormous quantities of material 'to get through' were frequently the reasons given by staff for not providing opportunities for student reflection or to demonstrate – verbally, or via written tasks – that they were understanding, extrapolating or interpreting 'knowledge'.

An exemplary model of teaching to encourage higher order thinking was, however, exhibited by the lecturer in 'Design Approaches and Methods' (DAM), a subject for fourth and fifth year Architecture students. Since my first observation of a 'lecture' in this subject, the lecturer and I have engaged in many pedagogical discussions, interviewed students, read journals and pored over student assessment of the course to ascertain why it stood out from the other subjects I had observed and how it could be further improved by adding metacognition.

Beginnings – 2005

In DAM lectures and seminars, the lecturer rarely provided answers to the frequent questions that were posed. The students were constantly challenged to come up with 'answers' and design solutions at Bloom et al's higher taxonomic levels of synthesis and evaluation (cognitive domain) and characterising (affective domain). The students were asked to make judgements in terms of internal evidence and external criteria, derive sets of abstract relations, and conceptualise organised value systems. At the same time, emphasis was placed on helping the students to see themselves as decision-makers and thinkers. This was aided by the lecturer's tendency to model self-correction, for example:

> I owe all of you an apology…It's clear that you were not properly introduced to the idea of thinking about whole bodies of design ideas in terms of organising principles.

Despite all the positives, we believed that it was in the area of *student reflection on their thinking* that further improvement could occur.

Following my early observations of lectures and studios, I spoke to some of the students about the subject. They said they liked it because it made them think. I asked them if other subjects were like DAM. They said they had never been explicitly asked to think in these challenging ways, or at these conceptual levels before. This surprised me, given they had previously completed three or four years of design studio.

In a subsequent meeting, the DAM lecturer explained that he [thought he had] asked the students to pay attention to the questions they did not usually focus on when designing or automatically doings things – in other words, to pay attention to themselves and their thinking. He wanted them to question what they took into account, date it, and look back at it later in the semester. At this stage he wanted them to ask themselves, 'Where are the ideas located? Are they in the design? …the audience? What is the relationship between the forms and the ideas?'

The lecturer emphasised 'problem-solving' in the design process. (This did not mean that he thought that there was a/one solution to the problems set.) He described the design act as a research process, and described the information flow that occurred in design. His aim was to have the students become aware of their thinking processes. The subject was about the quality and not the quantity of thinking. Drawings were to act as thinking tools. He advised students not to try to complete their drawings. He would rather they try ideas out far enough to allow them to reflect on whether they were getting somewhere. Students were asked to use 'creative notebooks', which contained more than words and drawings. He hoped to see phrases like, 'Today I decided…', and for them to ask themselves questions like, 'When were my creative periods and how was I thinking at that time?' with the reasons explicitly added. He wanted them to exhibit reflective or metacognitive (thinking about thinking) skills beyond mere descriptions of their thinking associated with the design process, such as, 'In my model I wanted to demonstrate a strong linear element.'

Student feedback

At the end of the semester I held a focus-group discussion with ten students who had successfully completed DAM. The lecturer took into account their suggestions about how lecture and tutorial content could be improved when planning the subject for the next year. He had been disappointed with the few examples of metacognition present in their journals. We felt that the reflective process could be stressed even more during lectures and tutorials with specific examples of metacognition being provided.

The Second Year – 2006

The scores gained from the Quality of Teaching (QoT) student questionnaire (using a scale from one to five) conducted at the end of the second year of our research project were higher than the faculty (and university) average (e.g. The subject was well taught 4.2; The subject was intellectually stimulating 4.4; I received helpful feedback 4.3; The staff displayed interest in academic needs 4.4). Many students provided extra comments about the high level of intellectual stimulation in the subject, while a few thought it was a difficult subject and wished more answers had been provided. Some suggested a subject with content like that of DAM was needed earlier in the course. In the additional comments section of the QoT questionnaire, some students commented that the intent and expectation of students in the tutorial tasks was not always clear. They said that sometimes even the tutor appeared confused about the tasks.

We decided that the next time the subject was run (i.e. 2007), studios would be a week after, rather than immediately following, the lecture. This would give both the tutors and students time to ingest and explore the concepts. The tutorials would comprise of discussion of the exercise/s the students completed during the intervening week plus further exploration of concepts through class discussions and exercises.

Did the changes achieve what the lecturer desired?

In 2006, the better students did undertake a careful, reflective engagement with a range of design approaches. Most students appeared to be well on the way to developing

a personal approach to architectural design. But this was less than we desired.

We realised that although a depth of understanding of concepts may have occurred, the assessment tasks did not require students to describe this, or whether it had occurred. The lecturer modelled a breadth and flexibility of ideas, but this was not present in many of the students' journals. Although there was a range of integrated assessment tasks and ongoing feedback for future work offered by the lecturer and tutors, clear criteria about some aspects of the subject were missing. For example, higher order thinking could be expected to be productive, reflective and evaluative – i.e. there should be evidence that students are consciously and deliberately seeking and using good reasons in deciding what to believe, reflect on, or do.

Most of the DAM lecture topics lent themselves to metacognitive approaches, for example: linked design issues; narrative devices; working with many ideas at once; and informing ideas. As the diversity of student backgrounds meant that the tutors were working with a range of intellectual aptitudes and experiences, it was also essential for tutors to take on the role of facilitator and evoker of student inquiry. The development of these skills would need to be incorporated in their training.

The students' journals

The lecturer was disappointed with the lack of metacognitive thinking present in the 'decision' journals. I read the journals of every fourth student on the class list, noting the occasional instance of metacognitive reflection (see examples below). The lecturer believed that he had adequately explained reflection in the written feedback he had given to all students at the end of the first two assessment tasks. He wrote:

> I'm puzzled about the 5/10 and 6/10 marks gained. Either you are not 'getting it' and/or you're not reading anything issued and/or you're not interested...The commonest overall omission is to leave out reflection on your present design practices. Every week try answering the following questions in your journals/workbook:

- What was interesting, useful, annoying or even dangerous in the lecture materials, workshop exercises and/or readings?
- Why?
- How does your way of working as a designer inform your opinion on this?
- What do you now think about your usual way of working as a designer?

However, on examination of statements about how marks would be awarded, particularly the *Reflection on Your Own Work* component, there was, in fact, no guidance about the metacognitive aspects (thinking about their own thinking) of their reflection. Only the postgraduate students completing the subject were asked to 'demonstrate a high level of engagement with, and/or critical analysis of, the subject content'. There was an expectation that they would offer clear evidence of thoughtful evaluation of the consideration of their methods and approaches together with those of others. The lecturer admitted that no examples were given in written form and it was 'all about' the product and thinking about the product, not thinking about thinking.

The lecturer expected the students to gain higher marks than they did because they had 'really applied' themselves during the semester. However, he realised that what he had been teaching them was to write about patterns in their decision-making, rather than on patterns of what was decided and why. So while the students were expected to be reflective in each task, no explicit examples of what was expected were provided. Although the students were being cognitively challenged by the lecture content and the subjects covered, it was not explicit in the written tasks. There were no examples of what metacognition might involve.

I am sure that many students were thinking at higher cognitive levels (because of the nature of the challenges set via the class exercises), but if they felt they were engaged in new ways of thinking that stretched their minds, they rarely wrote about it. **Student A** identified De Bono's Blue Hat thinking, heralding that 'the blue text comments on the thinking being used, makes decisions and comes to conclusions'. This was the only time Student A wrote this way. Perhaps had the lecturer responded in kind or referred to or praised these comments, other examples

would have been included in later submission tasks. It could also have been shown to the group as a model of metacognition.

One example in a 'top' student's journal offered an excellent example of metacognition:

> The threads of my thoughts are often back and forth like a dialectic. Information sparks ideas that in turn get challenged by constraints, then the idea gets changed or strengthened. So there is a debate between idea and reality. The thread goes back and forth between the two arguing sides until the thread becomes one big knot. The knot in turn becomes the proposal.

Student H divided his notes into 'Design Thought Process', 'Design on Paper', 'Design Advice' and 'Design Reflection', for example:

> *Design Thought Process*
> I wanted to create a black background for my boards. White lines on black background will look very sophisticated! I think so anyway. I've so many drawings but I don't know which to put where.
>
> *Design Reflection*
> Yes, I'm satisfied. I've looked at every corner of my design. My urban design works. I think it does…And I can see how the design looks in my head. In 3D I can see this building being built in Beijing. Now I'm more confident with my design.

It is interesting that Student H has differentiated 'Design Thought Process' and 'Design Reflection'. In fact, I think this offers a key to why there was not more metacognitive thinking present in journals. Most students discussed the 'Design Thought Process', but few wrote about 'Design Reflection'. The content under the first three sub-headings was consistent with all the other students' journals. Adding the last category meant the student was briefly metacognitive.

Student B was reflective about him/herself as a learner and a person:

> So many decisions were not made, and this is because I know I am a procrastinator. But that knowledge gets me nowhere…Anticipation of a heavy workload is not a big enough motivator…I CAN'T SEEM TO CHANGE. I find I can get work done relatively fast and early when in a group which is why I enjoy the group work. I can't allow others to be let down by me…

Student C included some 'classic' metacognitive prose with a light bulb metaphor:

> The constant 'light bulb' moments when I ponder over my previous designs, the 'By George, so that's what I was doing!' factor. It clearly highlights the reasonings behind our decisions while designing. I really think.

Student F was aware that he/she used 'suggestive ambiguity' in his/her designs because he/she enjoyed confusing people. He/she wrote that the weekly topics 'were great for progressing my own design. However, some of the ideas were slowly dissolved and eventually forgotten. Tragic really'. Unfortunately, nothing was explained. This could easily be overcome with the tutor's encouragement to explore those statements.

Student G wrote about the value of the journal:

> This document has been a very important thought process. It was created during one of the first weeks of the subject and has been added to up to this point. It is a collection of my ideas towards the final presentation. When the idea develops, changes, gets lost, it goes in here. Was also useful to read it over every so often to reinforce ideas, e.g., 'Having trouble dealing with complexity of screen and what I want to achieve with it.' So I set up a table to find out the requirements and standardise it into repeatable sections.

But the ideas this student referred to were not explored for their own sake but as part of the design process.

2007

In 2007 the lecturer provided examples of previous students' metacognitive thinking (like the examples above) and rewarded students with up to 20% of the total marks for evidence of such thinking. The tutors now understood the lecturer's aims in connection with encouraging and modelling metacognition in the sessions following the lectures.

The students' journals were expected to reflect engagement with the subject, examine patterns of commission and omission at the end of the semester, and demonstrate reflection on their thinking. What was made explicit alongside the exercises to be completed was what the staff wanted the students to think about and achieve in connection with their thinking skills.

The lecturer reported that, using the content of their journals as evidence, more students appeared to have understood the metacognitive requirement of the assessment task this time and provided me with examples that proved this was the case. Through anecdotal student comments, he discovered that the General Feedback issued for the third group of Topics (see below) had tipped the balance for some of the less observant students. The lecturer commented, 'It's a bit like computer programmers: consult the manual (i.e. reader and hand-outs) only as a last resort.' There, metacognitive thinking was described as a third level of thinking, above a second level – of thinking about how one designs, itself above the base level of thinking about a design task. The lecturer provided the following guidelines in his Feedback:

> There are at least three levels of thinking involved in what you are studying here:
>
> YOU as a designer. Most Journals provide quite a bit **on the material in the Topics** and even on the associated Exercises [Level 1 – demonstrating that you've understood or have engaged with the Topic or not].
>
> Then, a number of you remember to provide evidence of your **thinking about the Topic** or the associated Exercises [Level 2 – providing evidence of your response to the Topic, evaluating it against or comparing it critically with your own

> designing practice, or criticising the approach I've taken, for example]. Some of you write at this level quite comfortably.
>
> But, only a few of you (and rarely consistently) then **examine that thinking** [Level 3, the metacognitive – commenting, for example, on what kind of design thinker you are, whether you are surprised by what you've noticed, whether there are ways of improving certain features of your thinking, being less distracted, more effective and so on].

An 'aha' moment arose from further reflection by the lecturer. Face-to-face discussions with some of the graduate level students who were still puzzled about 'this thing called metacognition' led him to decide how he could improve matters next year.

During a discussion with these students, after only a few questions, he found it was relatively easy to point out to them when they had made remarks that provided evidence of 'second level' thinking. They usually expressed (often complete) surprise that they had not noticed. Once they had this understanding it was relatively easy to demonstrate to them metacognitive analysis and/or reflection on that thinking.

Next time, during the first seminar/workshop, the lecturer will concentrate on noting second level thinking and metacognitively examining it. A very good student commented that it is that very 'usual-ness' of one's thinking practices that makes it so difficult to notice and then to be able to explicitly reflect on it.

Another issue has arisen. Although the word limit for the reflective journal was 5000 words, some exceeded this quite substantially. No student complained, however, it did raise an equity issue: Is the student who writes to the number of words requested actually being penalised by the large number of 'fanatically enthusiastic/fulsome' submissions? We will now explore other assessment presentations that are realistic about workload/presentation expectations.

Student I's reflection concludes this paper:

> At the start I was like this (draws head with lots of questions). I had lots of questions and doubts about this subject. And now…(draws head with fewer questions) I think it got me thinking a lot more and raised big and simple questions that people don't normally ask. **I think I will never have no questions.** The more I learn, the more I need to learn.

Acknowledgements

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Critical Perspectivism and Engaging with Mass Art/Media

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Abstract

This essay serves as an introduction to my theory of Critical Perspectivism and how it links to the mass media, mass culture and mass art as a supplementary moral theory. I define Critical Perspectivism as a manner of being engaged and critical in the world, while adopting a caring and tolerant attitude alongside a rule-bound moral theory such as Kantianism or Utilitarianism. Therefore, Critical Perspectivism is a supplementary theory that outlines the adoption of a certain attitude as a mode of understanding and processing information received actively or passively by a participant in the world. I argue that Critical Perspectivism is a useful approach to take towards mass media and mass artworks as a way of obtaining and interpreting information that emerges from mass technological sources, particularly when the information comes 'at' us from the mass media, mass culture and mass art realms. I outline how Critical Perspectivism is encouraged and supported by the skills learnt in Philosophy for Children and promoted in the Community of Inquiry, and is useful for children and adults alike in order to apply filters and moral assessments to technologically advanced, mass produced and distributed sources of information.

Noel Carroll defines mass art as follows:

> X is a mass artwork if and only if X is a multiple instance or type artwork produced and distributed by a mass technology which artwork is intentionally designed to gravitate in its structural choices (for example its narrative forms, symbolism, intended affect and even its content) towards those choices that promise accessibility with minimum effort, virtually on first contact, for the largest number of untutored or relatively untutored audiences.[1]

Since the mid-1990s it has become clear, through a variety of articles and educational studies, that Philosophy for Children (P4C) is valuable in assisting the development and use of critical thinking skills for children from K-12.[2] These skills are highly adaptable and useful in the 'real' world, as well as serving as tools that assist in educational sectors. In this article, I introduce the notion of Critical Perspectivism: my theory that refers to the manner of being engaged and critical in the world, while adopting a caring and tolerant attitude alongside a rule-bound moral theory such as Kantianism or Utilitarianism (depending on your preference). Critical Perspectivism is a supplementary theory that outlines a mode of understanding and processing information received actively or passively by a participant in the world. I argue that this attitude of Critical Perspectivism is particularly useful with regard to processing messages delivered via the mediums of television, films and other mass produced and distributed technological and narrative sources.[3] I am not attempting to undertake the task of a detailed analysis of information processing here. Rather, I am offering one way to obtain and interpret information that emerges from mass technological sources, particularly when the information comes 'at' us from the mass media, mass culture and mass art realms. I argue that Critical Perspectivism, an attitude promoted by the skills learnt in

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[1] Carroll, N. (1998) *A Philosophy of Mass Art*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 196.

[2] Splitter, L. & Sharp, A. M. (1995) *Teaching for Better Thinking*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

[3] This could also include novels and websites; I am following the definition of mass art Noel Carroll offers in his book *A Philosophy of Mass Art*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998, p. 196.

Philosophy for Children and promoted in the Community of Inquiry (CoI), is useful for children and adults alike, assisting them in the application of filters and moral assessments to technologically advanced, mass produced and distributed sources of information.

Philosophy for Children, through its use of the Community of Inquiry, teaches children to question and analyse philosophical ideas, encourages tolerance, empathy and understanding, and assists children with moral and social analysis of their environments and the world.[4] In this way, the skills gained from studying philosophy in the classroom have a broad application beyond this educational context. Philosophy Cafés can be seen to have a similar outcome when a group of adults start to regularly attend Philosophy Cafés that are facilitated and run in a Community of Inquiry format. Responses and feedback from regular attendees as well as facilitators demonstrate that adult participants who regularly meet to discuss moral and other philosophical questions often become better listeners and demonstrably more open-minded as a result of the practice of such skills in a Community of Inquiry.[5] These analytical thinking skills are useful in all areas of life, not simply for the benefit of studying philosophical works. Such transferable skills include the moral skills of empathy and compassion that come from being able to imaginatively identify with someone different from one's self. This notion of the moral imagination and its role in moral education and life is detailed in the writings of Martha Nussbaum and Iris Murdoch.[6] The 'loving attitude' outlined by Nussbaum and Murdoch that can be adopted when considering the situations of others is informed by the ethics of care model first articulated by Simone Weil. Nel Noddings links ethics of care to education, and it is this model that Matthew

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[4] Lipman, M. (2002) Interview in *Critical & Creative Thinking: The Australasian Journal of Philosophy in Education,* vol. 10, no. 2.

[5] I have been a participating member and facilitator of Philosophy Cafés that are run monthly with a group of adults for the past three years. The core members of this group who attend each month's Café are demonstrably more tolerant, better listeners and philosophical arguers than when they commenced. Results of a survey conducted as a part of a post-graduate teaching internship project has collated results that also demonstrate this feedback from the participants themselves.

[6] See Martha Nussbaum (1995) *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life*, Boston: Beacon Press, and Iris Murdoch (1970) *The Sovereignty of Good*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Lipman draws upon in order to inform his CoI and P4C methodology.[7] Thus a parallel has immediately been drawn between P4C, CoI (including Philosophy Cafés in this case with regards to adults) and a moral theory that assists in our everyday life.

When faced with the modern world in all its diversity, a Community of Inquiry that promotes the development of broader, critical and inclusive perspectives and encourages open and inquiring attitudes is required now more than ever. Such skills gained from the CoI are particularly useful whilst engaging with modern technology. In this instance, I am not referring to the technological tools that assist the Community of Inquiry process in the classroom such as on-line learning resources (alongside the books and practical resources) that can assist teachers of Philosophy for Children. I am suggesting that once some of the skills associated with critical and creative thinking are being learnt and practised, they may be applied to daily viewing of the television, news and movies broadcasted in order to assist in appropriate engagement with such mediums.

The nature of modern technology is such that mass art (mass produced and distributed artworks) is impossible to avoid. Film, the common canon of our time[8], is everywhere. If you do not watch the latest (Hollywood) blockbuster, then you will see it previewed, reviewed or recorded on TV, DVD or VHS, download-able, advertised on posters, TV and radio or at least discussed around the water cooler. In this way, the ethics promoted in American blockbusters are unavoidable as they implicitly and explicitly exist in society. This is where the techniques and training of P4C as learnt through the CoI are extremely useful, as the thinking skills children who study philosophy in the classroom are taught include the ability to discern and judge between truth, untruth, embellishment and fiction. Ethical theories and concepts of right and wrong are also explicitly examined in such courses and classrooms. These skills are vital, particularly with reference to today's

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[7] See Nel Noddings (1984) *Caring, a feminine approach to ethics & moral education*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

[8] Christopher Falzon (2002) *Philosophy Goes to the Movies*, London: Routledge. Falzon outlines one way in which philosophy can be explicitly related to mass art by relating philosophy to film, arguing that films can be used in the exploration of philosophical issues.

technological world in which we cannot help but engage with the press, media and mass art. As our society is bombarded with many differing messages from a variety of different mass technological sources that pour forth a mass amount of information, often with contrary advice, results and analyses, participants in today's world are well advised to apply the skills of a discerning mind to the information they receive both implicitly and explicitly.[9]

Thus, the minds of audience members need to act as filters in order to prevent potentially harmful messages being passively absorbed and uncritically digested. This fear of mass audiences being 'dumbed-down' is articulated in the work of T. W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer. Adorno and Horkheimer were members of the Frankfurt School of Philosophy writing in the 1930s-1950s in the United States after fleeing Nazi Germany, and were concerned with the unethical nature of the post-war American mass media, which they felt was strikingly similar to the Nazi propaganda they had witnessed. For Adorno, the 'Culture Industry' rules supreme in the United States and across the allied Western world as this consumerist production and consumption group produce and distribute mass artworks for capital reward, making people objects to the 'machine'.[10] In a sociological sense, he argues that the culture industry is industrial, standardising everything and rationalising its distribution techniques. While Adorno outlines his ethical complaints against mass art, he does not offer any immediate solutions, arguing instead that it is only when our society changes that the form of mass culture will change. In the meantime, the culture industry damages society by creating formulaic films and other mass cultural objects that have no space for individual interpretation. With regard to the messages derived from mass produced and distributed works, Adorno states:

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[9] One only has to look at a pseudo-journalistic television programme or newspaper which argues, 'drivers over the age of 75 are a danger on our roads' one week, followed by, 'older drivers are the safest on our roads' the next.

[10] Theodor W. Adorno (1991) *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed and intro by J. M. Bernstein, London: Routledge, p. 85, 'although the culture industry undeniably speculates on the conscious and unconscious states of the millions towards which it is directed, the masses are not primary, but secondary, they are an object of calculation; an appendage to the machinery. The customer is not king, as the culture industry would have us believe, not its subject but its object.'

> The concepts of order which it hammers into human beings are always of the status quo. They remain unquestioned, unanalysed and undialectically presupposed, even if they no longer have any substance for those who accept them.[11]

While the ethical concerns raised by Adorno are important, I believe that some mass artworks can have ethical as well as aesthetic value and make important social and political points. This is evident in films such as *Philadelphia* (1993), *The Truman Show* (1998) and *American Beauty* (1999), just to name a few. Yet the concern that untutored audiences, such as children, are watching mass art that contain unethical messages or maintaining the status quo is worthy of examination.[12] Theoretically, taking a few (or more) steps back, had these people been philosophically trained, would it make any difference to the ethical impact the film may have? I do not believe that this is the correct question to ask. Adorno, due to his experiences, was quick to blacklist *all* mass produced and distributed works as Capitalist works that promote the status quo, leading to a passive and intellectually degenerate society. I believe we can accept arguments that counter the criticisms made by Adorno and it is obvious (to me at least) that there are some cases of *good* (aesthetically and ethically) mass produced artworks. Theorists such as Noel Carroll[13], Walter Benjamin[14] and Marshall McLuhan[15] agree that mass

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[11] Theodor W. Adorno (1991) *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed and intro by J. M. Bernstein, London: Routledge, p. 90.
[12] For example: Levine, M. P. & Schneider, S. 'Feeling for Buffy: The Girl Next Door' in South, James (ed) *Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Philosophy: Fear and Trembling in Sunnydale* (2003) Chicago: Open Court. Levine and Schneider argue that the reason *Buffy* is so popular is precisely because it maintains conventional stereotypes such as that of the 'girl next door'. Also Orenstein, C. 'What Carrie Could Learn From Mary' in *The New York Times*, September 5 2003. Orenstein comments, 'But under the guise of being salaciously liberating and radically feminist, the vision of modern femininity in "Sex and the City" is in fact surprisingly retrograde.'
[13] For example, see arguments made by Noel Carroll (1998) *A Philosophy of Mass Art*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
[14] Walter Benjamin (1969) 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', trans H Zorn, in H Arendt (ed) *Illuminations,* NY: Schocken Books.
[15] Marshall McLuhan (1994) *Understanding Media,* Cambridge: The MIT Press.

artworks do not inherently lack (aesthetic and ethical) value by their nature. Yet I maintain that the question of the general *lack* of (aesthetic and ethical) value in blockbuster Hollywood films and television shows requires examination. When faced with many mass artworks that encourage a normative attitude of maintaining the status quo and existing stereotypes and prejudices, we can look to the logical and analytic thinking skills learnt while studying philosophy in order to combat, or at least critically digest, such (ethical) messages.

As adults, it is one thing to 'switch off our brains' when we come home from a busy day at the office and knowingly watch a light-hearted piece of entertainment for the satisfaction of mild amusement, which we are keenly aware is the equivalent of reading a Mills & Boons novel as opposed to Oscar Wilde. Yet the people whose tastes are still developing are an important consumer market and are targeted as such by Capitalist industry systems. For example, 'priming' aimed at children in order to mould them as loyal consumers is common practice, as demonstrated by Fast Food chains that include toys from the latest movie with a meal deal. The result of such marketing is that everyone in the targeted age-range become big fans of that particular upcoming movie and know all of the characters even before the film has been released. But aside from the ethical issue of 'priming' and marketing, the children at some stage will become more conscious viewers…or not. In the hope of attributing the former option to them, conscious viewers must be able to discern between entertainment options of varying quality. This process requires the same skill set as that offered and promoted by Philosophy in School through the P4C teaching process and the Community of Inquiry. When the discussion around the water cooler turns to ethical questions, the critically engaged thinker will be able to have a meaningful discussion about such matters. The passive audience member will undoubtedly turn away, bored of a discussion that seeks to examine 'deeper' issues than the outfit or hairstyle of the lead actress.

Perhaps this initially seems to be a cynical position to take, however I will refer to a case in point. Sascha Baron Cohen's *BORAT: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan* is a comedy that can

be engaged with at a number of levels. It is funny due to its nature as a slapstick physical comedy, and it can also be critically engaged with and make a political point through its clever use of humour. The use of slapstick and trading on racial prejudices, cultural stereotypes and common ignorance may be a crude format for a film to take, yet Borat's small-mindedness reveals the fear of difference that permeates Western illusions of inclusiveness and political correctness. In this way, this film is thoroughly modern in its approach. For the audience witnessing the unsuspecting American public's response to staged scenes that feature throughout the film, the question may be asked, what use is modern political correctness if it simply covers up racism and discrimination? There is another sector of the public who will not find it amusing at all, yet due to the critical acclaim it has received, it has reached a wider audience than perhaps at first predicted.[16] The critical thinker who learns to examine alternative perspectives will question why Borat says what he says, they will investigate why Borat is politically incorrect and then examine whether or not the people who are polite and morally conservative are any better. These perceptive audience members will be the people who adopt an open, critical and caring understanding of ideas and others different from themselves. It is these people that will be able to adequately judge that Borat's misogynistic, anti-Semitic behaviour is unacceptable, but so too is that of the middle class conservative White American who operates under an alternative guise.

Through the example of *Borat,* it can be demonstrated that some opportunities to practise a Critical Perspectivism can occur whilst watching mass narrative artworks, and indeed this attitude is a good one to adopt in life in general. Relevant to the interpretations of mass media, mass culture and mass art is the notion of 'caring' that assists in the moral analysis of such artworks, and can also be applied to everyday life and moral scenarios. Martha Nussbaum and Iris Murdoch both speak of the value of an ethics of care approach that enables moral learning and

[16] 'Pirates, Penguins and Potboilers Rule the Box Office' by David M. Halbfinger, *The New York Times*, January 2nd 2007, accessed on-line at: www.nytimes.com/2001/01/02/movies/02boff.html. *Borat,* called 'the year's most original film', was made on a budget of less than $20 million USD and has grossed more than $125 million.

empathy through the use of narratives. According to Nussbaum and Murdoch, the moral value of (certain) artworks allows readers to learn and practise their moral discernment. This can also apply to films and narrative cinema stories, and Nussbaum would support this argument.[17] This notion of moral learning through literature is made use of in the P4C resources, materials and books.[18] With regard to adult audience members also benefiting from such skills, Nussbaum and Murdoch refer to the moral imagination and learning that accompanies reading great novels.[19] These works of narrative art that are high in aesthetic and ethical value assist us in practising our empathy and compassion, and these skills are transferable to everyday life and moral situations in the world. The objections that such moral truths are trivial and inconsequential are defeated by theorists such as Noel Carroll.[20] The Community of Inquiry method that assists children to learn and practise such skills through Philosophy for Children in the classroom is also merited by the Philosophy Cafés facilitated in the same format for adults. Thus, such thinking and social skills gained via CoIs are also applicable in the sense Nussbaum intends, whereby the moral agent learns via great narrative artworks, including novels and films.

These critical thinking and caring skills can assist the audience member in applying filters to mass artworks that have a lower ethical (and possibly aesthetic) value. Therefore, we can use the attitude of Critical Perspectivism in order to combat the concerns of Adorno. By employing a critically engaged and caring attitude, we may be perceptive viewers who actively engage with artworks and critically disseminate the information that is around us in our technological society. This attitude is useful not only when attending to explicit artworks that surround us, but also the

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[17] Martha Nussbaum (1995) *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life*, Boston: Beacon Press, p. 6.

[18] Laura D'Olimpio (2004) 'Drama and Philosophy: Language, Thinking and Laughing Out Loud!', *International Drama Educators Association (IDEA)/Applied Theatre Research Journal*, vol 5, accessed on-line at: http://www.gu.edu.au/centre/cpci/atr/journal/volume5_article9.htm

[19] Nussbaum refers to reading Henry James' *The Golden Bowl* to be an ethical act in itself.

[20] Noel Carroll (2000) 'Art and Ethical Criticism: An overview of recent directions of research', *Ethics*, Chicago: Jan 2000, vol. 110, no. 2.

implicit media and sources of information that are a constant presence in our environment. I believe it is actually these implicit messages with which Adorno was concerned. An example of how Critical Perspectivism is useful is demonstrable when children or adults are faced with the broadcasted news. The news has become filmic in its presentation, playing like a blockbuster film with streaming headlines, cut-shots and hype surrounding events from Ballarat to Bulgaria. How can one discern between differing levels of threat if everything is so very important? Challenging the sources and asking questions is vital for adults to ascertain the level to which they are affected by such mediums. Children, as vulnerable members of the audience, must also be taught to be savvy in similar ways, particularly when faced with 'information overload' that is common in our fast-paced technological (Western) world. Parents and teachers, who often take the role of assisting children to decipher such news programmes, will be better at teaching children the critical analytical skills required if they themselves are using such skills. Thus, the skills of the critical thinker, gained in part via the study of philosophy and critical thinking, are the only things that are going to enable a person to distinguish here between fact and fiction, whole-truths or embellishment. The thinking skills learnt via engagement in a Community of Inquiry are transferable to everyday life, as demonstrated in the schoolyards as well as extending to the children's own critical analysis and assessment of their experience in the world[21], and can thus be applied to the messages gained from, for instance, the news. Today's Capitalist consumer collects information from numerous different sources. Thus, they require the ability to be able to sift through these facts and also construct a 'bigger picture', as 'higher order thinkers' can see the frameworks as well as what is truthful as opposed to what is simply propaganda.

Therefore, extrapolating from the point that Adorno made in the 1930s, the issue of the ethical impact of the culture industry on society and its members is still relevant today. I have demonstrated that there are some positive examples of such mass media that comment on the social

[21] See Peter Ellerton's interview with Alan Saunders on ABC Radio National's *The Philosopher's Zone,* 5/5/2007 accessed on-line at http://www.abc.net.au/rn/philosopherszone/stories/2007/1911312.htm.

and political issues in our society. This can be seen in the case of Sascha Baron Cohen's Borat character, as well as some television shows such as *The Chaser's War on Everything*, which comments on journalistic integrity whilst 'having a laugh'.[22] These two examples stand out due to their unique and effective use of humour that assists in making their important political points. Yet, while I argue that some instances of the mass media may assist us in this endeavour towards Critical Perspectivism, general thinking skills are necessary elements for the critical thinker to use whilst engaging with the media in order to be able to discern between these positive media influences and the (many) programmes and films (and podcasts etc) that lack (aesthetic and ethical) value.

Therefore, Critical Perspectivism, as a mode of being engaged and critical in the world, adopting a caring and tolerant attitude that operates alongside a rule-bound theory[23], will assist viewers in discerning the value of the multiple media sources and narratives that are unavoidable in our daily lives. The children who have been taught the skills as a result of practising P4C will hopefully be able to apply these skills to their future in a highly technological world. The Community of Inquiry format of P4C is also demonstrated in facilitated Philosophy Cafés, allowing adults who are also members of this rapidly developing technological society to be on hand to assist children and peers to develop and practise such techniques, whilst themselves making use of them. In fact, in true Community of Inquiry method and akin to the Socratic dialogue practised since the inception of the study of philosophy, an exchange will be enabled in which not only the children learn from the adults, but the adults will undoubtedly learn from the children as well. This is the case as, each time we practise such empathetic understanding and moral virtues such as kindness and compassion, we become a little wiser. Critical Perspectivism, therefore, like philosophy in general, has the ability to assist its practitioners in the growth of the love of wisdom, as well as moral practice. This can only be of value when applied to the mass cultural world we inhabit.

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[22] *The Chaser's War on Everything*, accessed on-line at http://www.abc.net.au/tv/chaser/war/

[23] Nussbaum also refers to her notion of a 'loving attitude' as a supplementary moral theory.

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Educational Compuphilia: The new assault on mental health in schools

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In recent years a considerable literature has accumulated to show that the traditional separation of pedagogic goals from learning programs designed to enhance the psycho-social and spiritual well-being of young people is not only philosophically misguided, but serves also as an impediment to maximal educational attainment (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2004). Although interest in the role played by psycho-social and spiritual well-being (what we shall hereafter refer to as 'integrated well-being') has for several decades found expression in philosophical, psychological and sociological research, a new awareness or 'consciousness' which explicitly acknowledges its profound educational importance is emerging (Griffiths & Cooper, 2005). Reinforcing one dimension of this new awareness of the educational importance of integrated well-being are several studies which establish that the quality relationships young students develop with their teachers may play a critical role in their personal constructions of self-esteem, motivation to learn, and confidence to take on new challenges, all of which have proven to be salient factors contributing to integrated well-being and overall academic achievement (Monfries & McAlpine, 2005; McDevitt & Ormrod, 2004; Zins et al, 2004; Johnson, Crosnoe & Elder, 2001).

As Johnson, Crosnoe and Elder (2001) propose, there is a determinate association between the secure attachments which students form with teachers and resultant levels of subjective happiness and integrated well-being. This correlation is in turn accompanied by better attendance, better classroom behaviours and improved academic performance. Monfries and McAlpine (2005) also argue

persuasively that the earlier students can establish secure attachments to teachers and significant others, the more likely it is that behavioural problems will be self-mediated and limited.

Given the importance of the subtle connections which exist in regard to the secure bonds formed between teachers and students, integrated well-being and enhanced academic performance, the central contention of this piece is to explore philosophically the extent to which the current trend towards computer-based learning, including on-line teaching, may serve inadvertently to discourage the development of such inter-personal attachments. This being so, the resultant sense of integrated well-being, of fundamental importance not only for students but teachers as well, may also be marginalised, thereby limiting the potential of students to learn and of teachers to teach.

The Technological Connection: Can Schools Be Too Plugged In?

Given the increasing awareness of the pedagogic importance of the depth of bonding between students and teachers, there is a mordant irony in the fact that so little critical reflection exists which questions whether computer-based learning is systematically depersonalising the school environment. To understand the source of this irony, we first need to comprehend why Western culture is far too quick to applaud the success of technology, yet strangely slow to recant its indiscretions. Because technology is now a defining characteristic of the modern age, so to say, we are as a culture more inclined to embrace new technologies unreflectively than to assess them critically. One plausible explanation for this discrepancy is that technology has itself come to function as the standard measure of progress and thus as the primary means of resolving our problems, whatever they are.

This being so, it is perhaps unsurprising that computechnology has been assimilated into the school curriculum more as a matter of course than as a consequence of rational assessment and philosophical discussion. Within the culture of what we shall dub 'compuphilia', the admonitions of philosophical thinkers such as Stoll, proffered just more than a decade ago, were barely audible. From this vantage, the trust we put in computer-based

education may not so much have been earned, as it has been inherited as part of our socio-cultural commitment to the technological world view. Is it not possible that we have become so bedazzled by the power of technology to let us walk upon the earth as giants that we have failed in the educational context to discern that we now walk the earth as blinded technological giants who have lost our way? Stoll states:

> A poor substitute it is this virtual reality where frustration is legion and where – in the holy name of Education and Progress – important aspects of human interaction are relentlessly devalued (Stoll, 1995, p. 4).

Technological power does not in itself bequeath philosophical vision, and without that vision we have only a shadow of a picture of what it is that gives education its value and in turn confirms that the educational goals we seek are worth pursuing. For example, in a study on computer use in American schools, Warshauer, Knobel and Stone (2004) concluded that placing computers and Internet connections in schools, especially in low-SES schools, in and of itself 'does little to address the serious educational challenges faced by these schools' (Warshauer et al, 2004, p. 585). Thus, even when it is so admirably discerned that the bonds between students and teachers represent an integral constituent of effective pedagogy, the suspicion that computer-based education could possibly serve as an impediment to such bonding rarely occurs.

Theologising Technology

The concept of technology is admittedly multi-faceted, and it is no part of our purpose here to get mired in the semantic morass of definitional demarcation which surrounds it. Suffice to say, there exists a subtle but monumental difference between the sense of technology as it refers to the specific machines, tools or devices we use to direct or facilitate our interactions with the world around us, on the one hand, and the sense of technology as a Weltbild or conceptual scheme within which we actually view the world, on the other. The point of important distinction we are endeavouring to bring to bold relief here is that we no longer simply use technology; we live it. This being so, technology is

ascribed an authority and priority in our lives that is tantamount to theologising it. We literally experience our existence in the midst of our technologies, and we use technology to become co-creators of a technological world. Our lives, our movements, and even our values become technologically textured. In a bizarre sense, it could be said that in so doing, we unwittingly 'sacralise' what is in essence 'secular' and we 'secularise' what is in essence 'sacred'.

Postman (1995) reminds us, however, that utopia is no more present to us in cyberspace than it is on earth. Because we are surrounded by and immersed in the technological texturing of our lives, we tend not to notice how profoundly technology has impacted on every aspect of our lives, including the sacredness, as it were, of our relationships with each other. Indeed, what might be called the 'theology of technology' has become so pervasive that educators are seduced into thinking that they cannot live without the materialist catechism it extols. This being so, we are blinded to the growing body of evidence and human experience which strongly suggests that the truth is that it will become increasingly difficult to live with it:

> In an age when the market has replaced the temple as the epicentre of our social landscape…it was, no doubt, naïve to imagine that cyberspace could provide a more 'pure' foundation for our dreams (Wertheim, 2002, p. 225).

It is certainly worth contemplating that the unbridled commitment of Western culture to technology, and thus to the uncritical acceptance of computechnology within education, is a consequence of theologising technology in such a way that it becomes a 'value presumption' of our educational paradigm. Compuphilia is thus born out of a cultural womb which nurtures technology as a form of social salvation. This being so, our belief in the value which technology serves as foundational to the way in which we see the world, becomes fossilised as a doctrinal belief within education against which all other educational beliefs are to be judged. Our belief in the value of technology is thus shifted from the status of a hypothesis for continued testing to a theologised dogma of science, which characterises the conceptual measures by way of which we test. Despite findings which suggest, for example, that technology does

little 'to overcome or minimise educational inequalities' (Warschauer et al, 2004, p. 584), we persist in believing that technology is the panacea to all our problems, even non-technological ones. The tenacity of compuphilia is so resilient that even when a particular problem has no immediate technological solution, we simply persist in believing that improved technology will solve the problem and make things better, without ever considering the extent to which the 'improved technology' can actually make things worse.

The rub is that many of these things are the really important things; the things that make human relationships worth having and life itself worth living. Because we have as a culture become distracted from the task of living simply, we think the only way we can live is complexly. So we technologise our lives as a self-fulfilling prophecy of our power to complicate our lives unnecessarily. The conceptual difference between a better standard of living and a better quality of life takes on a special force in this context. In the absence of sufficient philosophical consideration requisite for its balanced expression, our unrestrained educational commitment to computechnology remains problematic and requires re-evaluation. Whatever the result of this ongoing debate, it is incontestable that technological development with regard to improved standards of living should never be confused with the deeper question of whether what we dub as 'progress' stands unequivocally as a commensurate gain in quality of life. On this point, Arcilla elaborates:

> By struggling to preserve liberal learning in this way, we may come to a more acute sense of its gaping absence in the dominant entertainment culture of our information society. For some time, it has been in retreat; now one of its last refuges is being stormed. Perhaps this will embolden us to question, finally, the cost of this society to our humanity. And so to find that humanity once again (Arcilla, 2002, p. 465).

In the final analysis, our cultural belief in the technological approach to the world is so determinately entrenched as a defining characteristic of the educational paradigm, that it functions not as a belief to be tested but as, what Laura (1978) calls, an 'epistemic primitive' by way of

which we characterise the way we test. From a different vantage, Postman has remarked that:

> …at the moment it is considered necessary to introduce computers into classrooms…To the question 'Why should we do this?' the answer is: 'To make learning more efficient and more interesting'. Such an answer is considered entirely adequate, since…efficiency and interest need no justification. It is, therefore, not usually noticed that this answer does not address the question 'What is learning for?' 'Efficiency and interest' is a technical answer, an answer about means, not ends; and it offers no pathway to a consideration of educational philosophy (Postman, 1995, p. 171).

On the assumption that the philosophical caveats expressed here have at least some heuristic value, it is easier to appreciate why reflective debate on the tension between computer-based education on the one hand and the most effective educational contexts for forging strong student-teacher bonds on the other is long overdue.

Computechnology and Depersonalisation

We are now in a position to make explicit our main reservations about computer-based education. The persistent claims and promises for the most recent innovations in computer-mediated communication are inescapable. This technological 'advance', it is argued, will bring to our lives knowledge, power, pleasure, personal liberation, even personal salvation (Brook & Boal, 1995, p. viii). On this rationale, whatever is lacking in our lives can be provided by way of greater access to new forms of communication, entertainment and information. Let us thus make plain that we have no wish to deny the many benefits which computechnology makes available both inside and outside the classroom. Nor do we wish to contest that in certain contexts computechnology may both encourage and facilitate the cultivation of personal relationships across the continuum of human interchange. The problem to which we are alluding is a different one, and its resolution depends firmly on qualitative considerations, not on quantitative ones.

The first consideration to be addressed relates to the fact that while it is to be admitted that appropriate contexts may exist for the use of computechnology, we have as a culture, partly due to vested political and economic interests, generalised the specific cases of acceptable use in such a way that the application of technology in question becomes universal. For example, it has been only a few years since it was acknowledged that enrolment procedures for some students could be facilitated and thus made more administratively 'efficient' by enrolling 'on-line'. Shortly thereafter, however, it was legislated that enrolments for all students would have to be organised on-line. From a specifically justified principle for the use of computechnology in one context, an almost imperceptible extrapolation is made which universalises the principle in other contexts in which it has not been justified. We thereby diminish options for students by standardising procedures which by their very nature discourage face-to-face interchange. Because provision of on-line courses for distance students may be justified, by parity of reasoning, it clearly does not follow that any justification has been provided to show that all university courses should be offered on-line and only on-line.

By embracing the theologised form of secular life within which the technology of electronic communication is embedded, we at one and the same time marginalise and compromise the value of face-to-face interchange:

> The more that the use of computers is demanded of us, the more we shall be taken away from truly deep human experiences. That does not mean you should never spend time at a computer screen. Nor does it mean that if you spend time at a computer, you will never have any deep human experiences. It just means that current developments tend to put pressure on people to live less humane lives (Lakoff, 1995, p. 124).

This being so, our reliance upon computechnology and its various modes of communication (e.g. mobile phones, video games, internet transactions etc) become ever more embedded, taken for granted, and thus socially ubiquitous, without philosophical reflection for why this should be so. Should we not be asking whether our resolute commitment to computer-based learning serves unwittingly to devalue

the qualitative experience of our children's education by increasingly substituting face-to-face classroom interchanges with mechanically mediated informational transmissions characterised primarily by the processing of data? Is it not worth considering that the more time we encourage school children to spend in the isolated context of the computer screen, the less time they spend actually interacting with their teachers and the less time they spend learning how to interact with them and others to form bonds of trust and loyalty? Should we not be concerned philosophically that the pedagogy of computopia may in the end serve inadvertently to propagate contexts for depersonalisation not only in schools, but in both the workplace and the wider community? (Laura & Marchant, 2002, p. 95)

Computechnology and Dehumanisation

One significant facet of the depersonalisation associated with computechnology is well illustrated in the paradox that, as a culture, we have developed metaphorical idioms for personalising and anthropomorphising our computers, while we depersonalise humans by speaking about them as if they were machines. This way of speaking is by its very nature dehumanising. If a computer is not fully functional, it is not uncommon for the user to rationalise and 'forgive' its dysfunctionality by anthropomorphising its mechanical functions as if they were human forms of behaviour. It is not unusual, for example, to hear a user excusing his/her computer by saying that the computer has a virus, is not warmed up or is just understandably 'slow', 'lazy' or 'on strike' because it is still early on a Monday morning. We thus accept the shortcomings of the machines by speaking in a way which makes it seem as if their faults were human. The rub is that we all too often expect humans to behave as if they were machines and respond unforgivingly when they do not. In a tone of remonstrance for a job not so well done, for instance, we create idioms, such as 'get with the program', 'get your engine running' or 'it's time you plugged in'. On the other hand, we often compliment someone who works particularly hard by ascribing accolades associated with our conventional descriptions of machines. In this context, it is not uncommon for a person's hard work (manual, intellectual or otherwise) to be complimented by using mechanistic metaphors (e.g. 'he works like a machine',

'his engine never stops running' or 'she clearly got with the program'). In the foregoing cases, the issue of depersonalisation is conflated with dehumanisation, since the expectation is that the value of a human being can be judged without moral impropriety by assessing the work a human can do against a well-functioning machine.

The Loss of Face: The Human Face

That computechnology has facilitated and proliferated the forms of communication now available to us is incontestable. It is salutary to remind ourselves, however, that the more forms of communication we increasingly embed to expand the culture of computechnology, the increasingly less intimate and depersonalised the face-to-face human interactions become. Simply put, the argument advanced here affirms that the depersonalisation of human relationships and the dehumanisation which follows from it are an inevitable consequence of universalising the highly mechanised modes of communication which characterise computechnology. Compuphilia thus comes to represent a socially legitimated syndrome, which implicitly encourages the love of computers, without adequately understanding the extent to which their universality is by its very nature a threat to the love we have for humans. This is why, as a culture, we tend to anthromophormise our machines while dehumanising each other. Consequently, these contrary dispositions give rise to serious moral issues which have been badly neglected. For example, humans are expected by their employers – or we demand it of ourselves – to work at our computers, not only throughout the day, but sometimes tirelessly into the night. One promise of computopia was to give us all, even school children, more leisure time, but the truth is that if we have more leisure time, we all too often spend it working or 'playing' at the computer in virtual isolation. I-Pods are just another symptom of this growing trend towards 'technological isolationism'. It is well worth noting that to date, insufficient attention has been paid to the deleterious physical and mental effects of these new forms of social isolation.

Because we spend progressively more time communicating through or working in isolation at our computers, we tend not to notice that we are spending less time, and certainly less quality time, with each other. In

particular, within such technologically structured contexts of learning, the potential for creating deep and bonding relationships between teachers and students is decidedly diminished. Potentially intimate and vital personal relationships are in essence being channelled, without much, if any, notice on society's part, into impersonal, one-dimensional, mechanistically mediated ones. We have slipped, that is to say, almost imperceptibly into a new condition or culture of human relationships, which structurally encourages the substitution of face-to-face forms of human interchange with technologically mediated forms of communication, even when face-to-face communication is available.

When we treat each other more and more as machines and treat our machines more and more as humans, there is no doubt that the time has come to rethink the nature of our relationships with each other and to redefine the nature of our commitment to computechnology, especially as it impacts upon us educationally. When people, young and old, log-on to distant relationships mediated through computer cyber-space, the illusion is fostered that these relationships are comprehensive and deep, when in fact they are only a one-dimensional slice of a multi-dimensional form of human interaction. Loyal friendships and loving relationships depend upon bonds of understanding, trust and intimacy, few, if any of which can be satisfactorily provided by a single-facet experience of a multi-faceted person.

Given Western society's commitment to electronic technology, it all too frequently goes unnoticed that we have come to rely increasingly less upon face-to-face contact. Because we are able to converse over the telephone, we often choose not to meet people in person, even when we can. Indeed, we often use our answering machines to screen calls from both loved and unloved ones, just as many would rather text than make a call. Put simply, 'conversations' take place but they are increasingly no more than conversations with far removed or absent others. Because it is easier to communicate with people at a distance, we feel less compunction in distancing ourselves from them. The distance we create, encourage or tolerate represents a form of depersonalisation and dehumanisation which gives rise to personal alienation and social isolation:

> Whilst the internal workings of a child's mind remains shrouded in some mystery, it is palpably clear that protracted periods of social isolation do little to encourage a child's overall development (Laura & Marchant, 2002, p. 113).

Conclusion

We have from the outset made it clear that our prime objective in this piece has been to reflect upon the impact which computechnology has had and is having in the arena of interpersonal relationships. Our central concern has been to tease out some of the neglected implications of the computer revolution as they pertain to the domain of education in particular, and society in general. It has been no part of our purpose to deny that computer technology can serve to facilitate communication with others who are remote from us, whether the medium of contact is undertaken by way of e-mail, videoconferencing, teleconferencing, on-line banking, home shopping, electronic voting or telecommuting.

Notwithstanding these benefits, we have been concerned to argue here that the potential for integrated well-being and the forming of deep and trusting relationships between teachers and students, so integral a factor in educational outcomes, is being jeopardised by the increasing reliance on computechnology as the predominant medium within which education is administered and mediated at virtually every level of teaching. A central concern of this piece has been to show that such electronic technologies become dehumanising and depersonalising when the relationships they simulate are substituted for the face-to-face personal modes of human contact and interchange, which by their very nature have the potential to be intrinsically richer than electronically mediated ones. This is as true in the educational context as it is in society generally.

Put another way, the argument advanced here has endeavoured to establish that notwithstanding its many benefits, the much applauded technologisation of the modern world is leading ineluctably to the depersonalisation of fundamentally intimate aspects of human relations. By legitimising the culture of computechnological communication, we implicitly encourage the progressive

substitution of technological innovation for forms of interchange characterised by the physical presence of another human. Not only have we come to mediate our natural experiences of human relationships via mechanistic interactions, but we have technologised our lives in such a way that it is becoming ever more difficult to conduct the vast array of our communications with each other in any other way. This is the lamentable legacy of compuphilia which now confronts us.

We have argued that while computechnology may have a salient role to play in education, compuphilia serves inadvertently to weaken the unions of loyalty, commitment and trust between teachers and students, which would otherwise enhance educational achievement and student satisfaction. The bonds of loyalty and trust, stemming from genuinely intimate relationships, feature as essential elements in the dynamics of all human relationships, but they are absolutely critical to loving and truly creative ones.

We have endeavoured to show that while technology has made electronic modes of communication increasingly accessible to us, the forms of communication upon which we have come progressively to depend are themselves, for the most part, decreasingly intimate. This being so, we have been concerned to argue that the ensuing loss of intimacy alters the nature of education irrevocably, and not necessarily for the best.

Having surrounded ourselves with machines, and having now brought the computer into our homes and schools, technology has itself become a value which we can use as a measure of the worth of the world around us. When all is said, the substitution of technological innovation for the phenomenon of human interchange represents a deep wound to the human spirit. We thus become caught in the web of a bizarre moral ambiguity. We still claim we value people, but we are not entirely certain what we value them for. Within the context of this moral ambiguity, it is difficult to see how the relationship of bonding between students and teachers, so critical to educational outcomes, can be maximally fostered.

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Maggie and the Pirate: What role do circumstances play in judging moral rightness and wrongness?

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In Ezra Jack Keats' picture book, *Maggie and the Pirate*[1], Maggie, aged (it seems) somewhere between six and nine, lives with her parents 'in an old bus which they made into a home'. We find Maggie alone on the riverbank, feeding her pet cricket, Nicki. When her mother calls from across the river, Maggie returns Nicki to his cage (a beautiful cage her father has just made), paddles her raft home and, hanging Nicki's cage on a nearby tree, sets off to the grocer's. When she returns, Nicki and the cage are gone and in their place, Maggie finds a scrawled note, 'THE PIRATE WAS HERE'. Neither Maggie nor her friends have any idea who the pirate is. Maggie frets – she misses Nicki, and she worries that the pirate will not know what to feed him. So she and her friends go searching. As it grows dark, Maggie comes to a tree house she has not seen before. Creeping in, she finds the pirate, holding Nicki's cage. She scuffles with the pirate and the tree house comes loose, crashing into the water. Maggie retrieves the cage to find Nicki drowned. She runs off with the dead cricket, leaving the cage behind. As Maggie and her friends are burying Nicki, the pirate appears:

> *'Why did you do that?' asked Maggie.*
> *'We never did anything to you!'*
> *'It was the cage – I wanted it real bad,' said the pirate.*
> *'I didn't mean for the cricket to die.*
> *My ol' man – he never makes anything for me.*
> *He doesn't even talk to me.'*
>
> *The pirate handed the cage to Maggie.*
> *She held it up.*

[1] Keats, E. J. (1979) *Maggie and the Pirate*. Scholastic Inc.

A beautiful sound came out!
She looked in.
There was a new cricket inside.

They all sat down together…[2]

This evocatively illustrated story raises a number of philosophical questions. More precisely, these are *ethical* questions – they are questions about moral rightness and wrongness. One might question whether it is right to keep a 'wild' creature in a cage, whether Maggie is right to fight the pirate, and what exactly the pirate is guilty of – stealing or killing or both. But it seems to me that the central ethical issue is this: **Does the fact that the pirate's father 'never makes anything for [him,]…doesn't even talk to [him]', make what he did any less wrong?** More generally, **should we take circumstances into account when we judge the moral rightness or wrongness of an action?**

It seems clear that this general question is one which must be raised in the classroom if, as teachers, we are to take on the task of fostering in our students the capacities and the disposition for the making of reasoned moral judgements. And it would be hard to argue that the development of such capabilities is not a central goal of education, at least in the West.

The pirate's circumstances did seem to make a difference to Maggie and her friends. Once the pirate had explained why he took the cage:

They all sat down together.
Nobody said anything.
They listened to the new cricket singing.
Crickets all around joined in.[3]

More generally, we might well think that it is right to kill in war; that Robin Hood was a hero for taking the ill-gotten gains of the Sherriff of Nottingham and distributing them to the poor; and that the captain of the American troop-carrier in Nicholas Monsarrat's novel, *The Cruel Sea*, made the morally right decision, however hard, when he gave the order to steer away from a dozen or so allied seamen, floating in lifejackets immediately above what the

[2] Keats, E. J. (1979) *Maggie and the Pirate*. Scholastic Inc.
[3] Keats, E. J. (1979) *Maggie and the Pirate*. Scholastic Inc.

radar screen showed to be an enemy submarine, so saving the lives of his ship's thousand or so men.[4] There are circumstances, we might think, in which we ought to kill, in which we ought to steal. Surely there are circumstances in which we ought to lie – when doing so would save a life, or prevent some other great harm. Take another example. Among warring tribes in the South American jungles, it was accepted that the best defensive tactic for women and children, in the face of a foray from a hostile group of warriors, was to hide in the jungle. The density of the undergrowth all but ensured the fugitives would not be found, so long as they remained perfectly silent. To have given their position away, however, would have meant certain death. Under these circumstances it was considered morally right to smother any child who began to cry.

The reasoning in all these cases – from Maggie to the South American Indians – would seem to be the same: there are circumstances in which good as well as harm can come even from killing, stealing and lying. What is more, in some circumstances the good that comes from such actions clearly outweighs the harm. The basis for this line of reasoning is the conviction that the rightness or wrongness of an action is grounded in the suffering and wellbeing which that action brings. More precisely, in the examples presented, it is the suffering and wellbeing likely to befall the group as a whole that is morally relevant: what is weighed is the good and harm likely to befall not the agent alone, but the group as a whole. This reflects a further underlying moral understanding, namely that human beings, and to varying degrees all sentient beings, share common capacities for suffering and for wellbeing, and that such common capacities render all humans, and to some degree or other all sentient beings, worthy of equal moral consideration. From these basic principles comes not only the notion of human rights, but indeed, the 'capabilities' version of utilitarianism developed over the last decade by Martha Nussbaum.[5]

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[4] Monsarrat, N. (1975) *The Cruel Sea*. London: Cassel and Company Ltd.

[5] See for example, Nussbaum, M. C. (1999) *Social Justice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. This version of utilitarianism has been elaborated on and defended in an earlier paper in this journal. See Knight, S. & Collins, C. (2006) 'The Australian Values Education Framework: no justification required? *Critical and Creative Thinking: The Australasian Journal of Philosophy in Education,* vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 32-49.

In contrast, it is of course possible to hold that the only consequences that matter are those which benefit the agent herself – what happens to anyone else matters not at all. This is the position known as *egoism*, and an egoist too may argue that whether killing or lying or stealing is right depends on whether, in the circumstances, the lying or killing or stealing is likely to benefit *me*, the agent. The circumstances the egoist takes to license stealing will in general be different from those in which the utilitarian believes stealing to be justified, though in the *Cruel Sea* case the captain's judgement will be the same whether he is judging on utilitarian or egoist grounds. This is because the captain's welfare coincides, in these circumstances, with the greater good. We can call capabilities utilitarianism and egoism ***fundamental moral principles***. They amount to methods for working out what is right and wrong; to rules of thumb, or ethical yardsticks[6] if you like, on the basis of which we make moral judgements. It is important for children (and adults) to become aware of their own fundamental moral principles, and the moral yardsticks on which others operate.

Not all moral rules of thumb relate to the consequences of actions. A rule might involve appeal to moral authority: an action is morally wrong if it is against society's laws, or runs counter to religious doctrine. Or certain actions, like lying and killing, might be seen to be wrong by their very nature, that is, be seen to be *intrinsically wrong*. (Kant thought lying was like this.) Rules of thumb such as these allow little (in the case of the first) or no (in the case of the second) room for circumstances. Someone operating on the basis of either of these fundamental principles will refuse to take particular circumstances into account when judging moral rightness and wrongness.

If we are to foster children's engagement in the processes of reasoned ethical justification, it is important that children, as well as teachers, become aware of the ethical yardsticks which they and others employ. But this is not enough: it is also crucial that both teachers and children come to understand the considerations which weigh in favour of adopting one fundamental moral principle rather

[6] Thomas White makes this point clearly. See White, T. (1998) *Right and Wrong: a brief guide to understanding ethics*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

than another. To fail to do so is to court moral relativism, the view that no one ethical yardstick is any better than any other. Yet moral relativism cannot be right. Why is it that on the whole, we, as teachers, endeavour to encourage children to take the interests of others into account when they act, rather than to think as egoists or to merely appeal to a moral authority? For surely we do strive for such an end, and for good reasons. For example, logically, mere appeal to authority does not constitute adequate justification. What is more, such an appeal to moral authority brings with it very real social dangers. History provides countless examples of ideas which were cruel and absurd, yet were followed to the point of death by the people. Think of Nazism, the Sarin Gas Attacks or the London Underground Bombings. Recently (and topically), we find Samir Kahlil Samir, from the Centre for Research on Arab Christianity at the University of St Joseph, Beirut, speaking on the ABC's *Religion Report* and underlining the dangers of basing one's moral judgements solely on the authority of a religious text, be it the Bible or the Qur'an or another. Samir agues that ethical judgements must be grounded in human rights, in the equality of persons, and that where religious texts conflict with such rights, the texts must be criticised.[7] To repeat, if we are to develop students' capabilities for reasoned ethical justification, such arguments must be raised in the classroom.

Similarly, the rejection of egoism rests on the denial of the principle of equality of moral worth; a principle which can and must be defended, and the arguments for which children must come to understand. The principle's defence is complex, resting partly at least on questions of free will and moral responsibility, and these too are questions we must encourage children, even young children, to consider if we are to succeed in cultivating the capacities of, and disposition to, engage in reasoned moral judgement. The distinction between a consequentialist and (say) a Kantian approach to moral justification also needs to be explored,

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[7] Samir, Khalil Samir (2007). Transcript entitled 'Christian Minorities in the Islamic Middle East', *The Religion Report*, 30th May 2007, accessed online, May 2007: http://www.abc.net.au/rn/religionreport/stories/2007/1938012.htm#transcript.

and the relative merits of each such stance considered. Remarkably, in Ezra Jack Keat's insightful picture book we find a vehicle for introducing even young children to concepts and arguments underlying the process of reasoned ethical justification.

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A Philosophical Community of Inquiry at Bega High School, NSW

Isobel Wightman

Bega High School, NSW, recently provided an opportunity for me to voluntarily facilitate a community of inquiry run in weekly sessions at lunchtime, from 1 pm to 1:45 pm. The composition of the group of up to fourteen mostly Year 11 students varied from week to week, with a core number of six students in regular attendance. We met in an annex to the school's library, seating ourselves in a circle of chairs. A stimulus was introduced and a thinking bowl passed around to encourage each member of the group to comment. The bowl is a powerful symbol of inclusivity, a vessel for ideas, a symbolic space for their creative blending, merging, catalysis or synthesis. Once we completed the first round, the thinking bowl was passed from student to student, depending on who wished to speak. This became increasingly challenging as the discussion progressed many keen to have a say. I encouraged the group to write down their ideas so that they would then be better able to listen to others with a measure of patience. The students were introduced to a philosopher's toolkit, depicting a basic way of thinking about thinking: exploring meaning, reasons, examples and counter-examples, assumptions, implications, inferences, consequences, and criteria or values. At the end of each session, I wrote up a lengthy summary for the students to read in their own time, sacrificing in-class reflective discussion due to time constraints.

The Eagle and the Arrow

We began with an examination of an Aesop fable, 'The Eagle and the Arrow', this stimulus providing enough material for three sessions:

> An Eagle was soaring through the air when suddenly it heard the whiz of an Arrow, and felt itself wounded to death. Slowly it fluttered down

> to the earth, with its life-blood pouring out of it. Looking down upon the Arrow with which it had been pierced, it found that the shaft of the Arrow had been feathered with one of its own plumes. 'Alas!' it cried, as it died. 'We often give our enemies the means for our own destruction.'

Session One

The first session was successful in learning to 'play the game' and to begin to think about issues that matter in our lives. The ensuing conversation was lively. We seemed able to immediately interpret the statement, identifying its metaphoric meaning, which we interpreted in broadly one direction.[1] We supplied reasons and examples to support our claims. We treated 'feather' metaphorically to refer to strength and knowledge. We felt that the fable implied that we should learn to hide our strengths, since knowledge can be used against us by our enemies. The notion of 'enemy' immediately stimulated a series of statements and assertions concerning the current War in Iraq. We seemed to assume that the Iraqi people constituted 'the enemy', the fable containing a warning for us regarding our enemies, since 'we reap what we sow'.

We ascribed the stimulus truth value almost automatically. We found it easy to supply reasons and examples. I invited the group to think more deeply about the fable by exploring assumptions and identifying further implications, consequences and counter-examples. In this way we avoided jumping to conclusions. I informed the group that we had not questioned whether the conclusion in the stimulus logically followed on from the preceding story, or whether an alternative conclusion could have been provided. For example, was the eagle correct in assuming that the arrow was that of an enemy?

Session Two

In this session, we explored the assumptions the eagle in the story made about the arrow. We speculated that the arrow may have been from a friend's bow, or that the arrow had not been intended to kill the eagle. We understood that there were issues concerning intention, such as: was the arrow

[1] I use the pronoun 'we' to indicate that I include myself in the discussions. The ideas presented here, however, come from the students, my own voice presented in the first person.

meant to kill the eagle; and was it, as the eagle claims, shot by an enemy? We also decided that the word 'give' in the sentence, 'We often *give* our enemies the means for our own destruction', contained a contestable assumption, since the eagle had not actually given away the feather; it was simply a natural process of moulting. We were therefore able to see that the eagle had jumped to the conclusion that the feather had come from an enemy's bow and arrow.

We recognised that the concluding statement, by focusing on enemies, did not include the possibility that our friends can hurt us too. We also began to see 'enemy' as highly subjective. We noticed that the word 'enemy' cultivated ill will and opposition in our thinking. We also noticed that in society and in politics the notion of enemy can be vicarious. Enemies are constructed on our behalf for us to believe in, in order that some other outcome is attained by, say, a political power.

We began to realise that our subjective sense of 'enemy' existed on a continuum, that there were shades of grey involved in our processes of evaluating various 'enemies'. We realised, too, that enemies were people we thought about as much as those closest to us. We know them or we imagine we know them. We also noted that 'you see what you want to see'.

Session Three

In this session I chose to build upon the insights from the previous session by inviting the group to explore the question, 'Is the notion *enemy* necessary?'

In the first round of comments, we noted that 'enemy' was part of a binary opposition, that of friend/enemy, comparable to other binary oppositions such as good/evil or yin/yang. 'Friend/enemy', therefore, helped us to discriminate between our friends and our enemies. We could compare ourselves to an enemy and look good to ourselves as a result. 'Enemy', we suggested, also challenges us, motivates us and fosters a competitive spirit.

We briefly pondered the political and ideological implications of politically constructed enemies such as 'the yellow peril' or 'reds under the bed', before focusing on an alternative view that suggested that, in an ideal world where everyone was happy and therefore able to accept everyone who is not just like themselves, we would not need

the notion 'enemy'. We could have degrees of good without bad. We could have 'semi-friends' and 'non-friends' (we might also have considered the word 'stranger').

So we had two quite distinctive views expressed within the group, the one supportive of the notion, at least so that we can discriminate between friend and enemy, and the other speculating upon the possibility that we could erase the notion 'enemy' and be the better for it. A lot of discussion ensued concerning how to replace the word 'enemy' in order to describe people, to discriminate and so on. It also occurred to us that we can be our own enemy! We noted that animals do not have enemies, that the word, therefore, is associated with humanity.

It was next suggested that the initial question was flawed, since the thing or quality that the notion 'enemy' conveys to us as a word will always exist regardless of whether we use the word 'enemy' or any other word with a similar meaning. Therefore, 'enemy' expressed something fundamental or essential in human nature. However, a counter-argument was also proposed that affirmed that the initial question referred to 'enemy' as a metaphor with consequences for how we think; that we could do away with the term, especially since the metaphor 'enemy' can be used to justify cruel actions.

We arrived in this third session at a questioning of human nature and what is essential to it. I invited the group to ponder the following: Is it the case that words such as 'enemy' describe actual things or qualities that pre-exist in human nature, or does the word itself actually create the condition or quality in our minds? Even if we decide that both these views more or less accurately describe 'enemy', we have still not answered whether 'enemy' is somehow essential or necessary to our existence. We need to ask ourselves deeper questions, such as 'What is Human Nature?' Questions like this lie at the heart of philosophical inquiry. The discussion also led us rapidly into major currents of philosophical thought; the classical or modernist view and the postmodern view. The former is likely to support the essential nature of binary oppositions, the latter emphasising relative, subjective and metaphoric aspects of our discussion.

Plato's Cave

The second stimulus was Plato's 'Cave'. I decided to introduce the students to some key ideas that preceded and now contest the postmodern subjective relativist cultural atmosphere in which these students find themselves. Plato's 'Cave' is the better known of Plato's similes, which outline the relationship between his two orders of reality, that of Reality and that of Appearance, or Truth and Illusion. In 'The Cave', Plato depicts the journey the philosopher makes towards the light of objective truth. The students were provided with an account of 'The Cave' extracted from Plato's *Republic*, rather than my own or another's summary.

Session Four

The students thoroughly enjoyed this introduction to philosophical thought. Questions raised included the problem of discernment, or how to distinguish between what we know and what reality is. We realised that it is easy enough to become confused over what is reality and what is illusion. We might affirm that ignorance is bliss, or that we can remain content to look at the shadows only. Truth might be ugly, and therefore, which would we prefer? We realised that the Cave refers to a philosophical journey, and that mental barriers exist that need to be overcome if we are to achieve our goal.

We were reminded of the film *The Matrix*. We felt we could be blinded by reality, so that, were we to return to the shadows, we would be blinded by them, even while understanding them. This is a challenging position to be in.

We failed for the most part to recognise Plato's intention that 'sight' was a metaphor for 'know', slipping therefore into speculations based upon literal interpretations. For example, we thought that our perception of reality is always changing. Even being able to turn our heads slightly would mean we would see something different. This we linked directly to a postmodernist view that reality is not absolute, each person having their individual reality. We wondered, then, what of mathematical principles, such as $1 + 1 = 2$?

So we asked, 'What is the basis of reality?' and 'What is the truth and how do we know it exists?' We explored the idea of defining reality, and asked ourselves if we could trust our own senses. The world might not be how we see it. We

thought that our senses were not useful for understanding philosophy. We asked whether being shown reality would necessarily be a good thing. It could be horrifying! We then moved to consciousness, and pondered the possibility that if consciousness were created in a void, then there would be nothing that this consciousness could perceive. Without perception of any object, would this consciousness know the Truth, as in absolute reality?

Session Five

Reflecting upon the previous session led me to invite the group to participate in an imaginary exercise. I suggested that postmodernism has given us permission to reinvent ourselves, to construct any reality we choose. I proposed that we needed to look deeply into the roots of the context we found ourselves in (cultural and historical), and construct a reality that matches (coheres with) this understanding. I suggested that people associate philosophy with highly developed intellectual powers, whereas philosophy has as much to do with imagination.

Upon these bases, the group members were invited to imagine all their opinions and beliefs about themselves and their lives pasted onto a screen and then questioned. We tried to imagine how painful this would be; that when we question our beliefs and opinions they become uncertainties and this feels insecure. We may feel reluctant to engage in such a process. It would, as Plato depicted, feel much better to remain chained in a cave, able only to look one way, at shadows on a wall or screen. However, as philosophical thinkers, we find ourselves no longer able to sit so comfortably because we have already begun to question, already realised that at least some of what we believe is false or illusory, even if such beliefs constitute subjective truth. This exercise enabled us to re-explore Plato's 'Cave', treating 'what we see' as a metaphor for 'what we know'.

We asked ourselves, if we took the Platonic challenge, then what would we have left? We might go crazy trying to find out. What about concrete reality? We know that it is easier to believe in something that is false. Relying on our beliefs might be all we know. Questioning our beliefs may lead us towards also questioning what the point or purpose of anything is. But then, isn't this kind of exploration a never-ending journey – the quest for ultimate

truth? Like Buddhism – enlightenment. But then how do we know that there is an ultimate truth? How could we be sure that we have reached ultimate reality? Isn't it always subjective, even ideas of ultimate reality?

In a process of endless questioning, we asked ourselves what we would be left with that could not be taken away. We realised that we would have to question our own questioning! This smacks of infinite regress, but I suggested that it is, in essence, the philosophical path.

We then took a turn towards religion, and realised (with a measure of secular scorn) the comfort that religious explanations of our existence provide. As an aside, we realised that we needed to look at *why* people hold certain views.

We thought of the idea of degrees of truth – probability. We also confronted the problem of not being able to step outside our own heads, which meant that we were limited. We thought that perhaps the ultimate truth resides not 'up there', but rather 'right here', and that in our intelligence we are destroying the ultimate truth, of a higher order than ourselves – Nature. We also thought that the ultimate truth might be our ability to question and question our own questioning. This, I suggested, might mean that truth is embedded in process and change, and is not fixed.

Introducing Epicurus

The third stimulus was a potted account (around 800 words) of the core ideas of Epicurus (341 BC – 270 BC), who saw the philosophical path as one of emancipation. His ideas not only provided the students with a sense of the history and context of competing ideas emerging from different and broadly contemporaneous schools of thought, they also presented the students with a third way to view reality, beyond a simple duality of objective and subjective truth. We explored some key ideas of Epicureanism, including: the Epicurean understanding of the pursuit of true pleasure known through the light of reason (prudence); the notion of 'enough' and the matter of false (socially constructed) desires; and the high value placed upon friendship. The students were then asked to choose one of three quotes of Epicurus:

- 'If you live by nature, you will never be poor: if by opinion, you will never be rich.'
- 'You must be a bondman to philosophy, if you wish to gain true freedom.'
- 'We ought to look around for people to eat and drink with, before we look for something to eat and drink: to feed without a friend is the life of a lion and a wolf.' (Wallace, 1880, p. 167)

Session Six

In session six we selected the third statement, endeavouring to link our comments to the thinking of Epicurus.

Our initial interpretation of the statement was that if we choose wealth without sharing it, then we will have no friends. The lion and the wolf represented the uncooperative pursuit of selfish interests of the rich and the mighty.

We felt that in this statement, Epicurus was summing up his ideals, notably that friendship is more important and more enduring than food. We noted how highly Epicurus valued sharing. He thought that having enough would give the greatest pleasure. He did not like greed. Epicurus ranked ideas of friendship higher than food. He sought to include others. 'Looking around for people to eat with' focuses on the journey rather than the goal.

We felt that friendship is food for the mind, something that sustains us, just as food sustains our bodies. We reflected that, due to our own wealth, we tend not to think of sharing. We considered starving people and pondered upon the implications of the statement. In other words, we began to wonder about how people in different contexts to ours would interpret the statement. We even thought briefly of those suffering from anorexia, in contrast to those who overindulge.

Session Seven

We returned to the Epicurean values of friendship, sharing and having or wanting enough, this time focusing upon another of Epicurus' statements: 'If you live by nature you will never be poor, if by opinion, you will never be rich.'

Our first thought was that those who live in and of the natural world are never poor, or rich; that they would have enough, nature providing everything needed. Whereas we thought that opinion could not provide us with what we

need. We thought of 'nature' in terms of the natural world, and interpreted the statement as 'going with the flow'. We also noted another interpretation of 'nature', as referring to human nature. We immediately saw this juxtaposed with nurture, culture, inheritance and early childhood conditioning. Immediately we realised that opinion can interfere with an individual's basic nature.

So then we had to ask ourselves again, 'What is human nature?' Is it living by chance, is it going with the flow? What of our pleasures and desires? We thought that the modern world had somehow changed, or reshaped human nature, but then we thought that maybe human nature remains fundamentally the same, and that it is our attitudes that have changed. The way we do things may differ, but we are basically the same deep down.

The conversation took an interesting turn at this point. We recognised we had a problem with meaning and understanding and felt that, before we could continue to discuss the statement, we needed to define human nature. Yet we were concerned about how we could know we were right, or correct in our definition. Wouldn't our definition also depend upon human nature? I suggested that we did not necessarily require a definition, rather, we needed to understand the complexity of ideas and interpretations of human nature, and settle on some kind of agreed meaning. The point here is clarity.

At first we thought that human nature might be to do with survival and procreation, but then 'even carrots do this'! So what else is it about us that distinguishes us from plants and animals? We thought of success, the desire to do well, of power, of art and of creative expression. We then thought that it was our attitudes and opinions that make us human. These ideas were eclipsed by the Cartesian comment paraphrased by one student as 'We think – therefore we are'. So we began to see that human nature had something to do with our ability to think. Close on the heels of this comment was the word 'consciousness'. I suggested that consciousness be understood as self-awareness, or an ability to be aware that we are aware. The group concurred enthusiastically, and with some relief, adding that opinion, according to Epicurus, interferes with being aware.

We then considered that it is our opinions that reflect what we believe to be enough; that too many opinions cause confusion, and opinions change; that everyone has different ideas of happiness and different ideas of enough. So then the question becomes, 'What would be enough to make each of us happy?'

The discussion of human nature took us directly to seek an essential, or core, understanding. We could have considered virtues or qualities that we might consider human as distinct from animal. Whilst we made a serious effort to reach a consensus of meaning, we looked at the statement purely from the point of view of the individual; that if each of us somehow can find, know and live by our essential (essence) selves, rather than by our opinions, then we will have enough.

Utilitarianism

Epicureanism led us to consider uilitarianism, and the greatest happiness principle, juxtaposed with two competing views: Kantian moral duty and good intentions and existentialism's authenticity, taken as 'being true to oneself'. This meant that the students were given a stimulus of over one thousand words!

Session Eight

After reading the stimulus, we began our discussion by questioning how we can possibly know all the consequences of an action. This places a limitation upon the greatest happiness principle, since we cannot fully know in advance whether an action will inevitably lead to the greater happiness.

We asked ourselves what the greatest happiness is. We thought it impossible to please everyone, and therefore 'true' utilitarianism is impossible. We are all different and different things make us happy. This seemed a core belief of the group. We touched upon whether the Epicurean 'enough' would be a basis for deciding the greatest happiness. We did not pursue this line of inquiry. We felt that happiness is probably a good thing to pursue, tending towards ultimate good.

The conversation dwelt upon matters of punishment, which in society is intended to prevent bad actions. We asked ourselves whether it is intentions, or outcomes, that

motivate people to commit crimes. An interesting example was next proposed: If, while trying to kill a cat I ended up saving a child, this then might provide a basis for future cat killing, since I might believe that each time I tried to kill a cat, a child would or might be saved. Clearly the act of saving the child, at the cat's expense, would lead to the greatest happiness, but it cannot justify cat killing. Furthermore, the intention was not to save the child, but to kill the cat!

We then pondered another example: If lots of people are starving and one is less starving than the others, would you take their food to share amongst the more starving group on the basis that this would lead to the greatest happiness? These thoughts led us to a felt need for balance. How do we balance the immediate happiness and long-term happiness, for example, of future generations?

We asked ourselves whether we could have a global solution, one that could please everyone, if we are all different and have different ways of feeling happy. We decided that utilitarianism is a great theory that fails in practice. How do we judge and who gets to judge the greatest happiness, were issues raised.

We then turned to Kant and asked ourselves how we could measure whether an intention was good or bad. Can you have a bad intention? We felt that this depended upon individual perspective. We began to ponder upon intention and the greater good in the context of global warming. We asked ourselves, returning to Plato's 'Cave', whether we would be better off to live in a false reality and be happy, or to live with the truth and be unhappy. We might be happier burying our heads in the sand. This might be good for us, or lead to our happiness, but it would not be for the greater good.

Session Nine

Based on the previous session, the group was presented with four basic ethical criteria to apply to global warming. The group was asked to evaluate these four criteria, in terms of how well each one could contribute to finding solutions. The criteria were: Utilitarianism's 'greatest happiness principle'; Kant's 'good intentions'; Existentialism's 'authenticity' (interpreted as being true to oneself); and Epicureanism's 'enough'.

The ensuing discussion drew forth the group's prevailing belief that we are basically selfish and believe only in our personal happiness. History supports this belief in that we tend to ignore, as we have done in the past, the problem of global warming, decision-makers focusing on selfish interests in the short-term, and not the long-term consequences of their actions. We felt that global warming relates to the idea that 'enough is enough'. This has a double meaning. It suggests that now is the time to act differently. It also relates to Epicurus' idea of 'enough'. We felt that we needed to decide what we need more of, including people. The idea that we could decide, for example, that humanity had 'enough' children.

The conversation quickly moved on to the problem of oil. Based on utilitarianism, we thought that perhaps getting rid of oil (consumption) would be sad in the short-term, but would lead to the greatest happiness, as the future happiness for all. However, the concept of 'enough' could lead to us reducing our use of oil, since we are using much more than we need to. This would ameliorate current difficulties. We felt we needed to phase out oil, and not be drastic. We need balance.

We then asked ourselves whether 'good intentions' could help us. We might do the right thing for the wrong reasons or the wrong thing for the right reasons. This added a complexity that we shied away from exploring. We skipped back to the idea that we do not *need* oil, we were just as happy before we had it. Again, the notion of 'enough' was raised.

We joked that we need a planet to have an economy. We felt that we should include all of nature, the planet and, indeed, the universe in the greatest happiness principle. In other words, we should not base our decision-making upon human needs and wants alone. We understood that in economics you measure units of satisfaction, and that there is a point at which increased wealth or material acquisition no longer increases happiness. This thought again suggests that we were seriously considering the notion of 'enough'.

Again we felt that we cannot ignore the consequences of our actions. Yet we also felt that authenticity needs to come into the picture. We thought we might combine the notion of authenticity with ideas of human and planetary betterment, only if 'being true to

oneself' meant that human and planetary betterment was one's 'true calling'. We questioned whether anyone was really ever motivated in that way. Being broadly secular, it was felt that such motivations were false, constructed by religion.

We returned once more to the idea that we are essentially selfish. We thought that since we would all be dead before serious problems would arise, we need not bother doing anything about global warming. Is saving the planet for our children enough of a motivation to do something about global warming? (This is an interesting use of the term 'enough'!) We then thought that we would still suffer if we chose to do nothing since we would be left with a guilty conscience. Religion and God's salvation were mentioned, but the group, being secularly polarised, felt that religious beliefs were not helpful. This was in spite of the matter of a guilty conscience being raised. In summary, I added that a guilty conscience implies that there is more to us than our being fundamentally selfish.

The group also felt that utilitarianism was limited since everything we do is inherently selfish. We simply would not make the sacrifice to stop global warming. No-one, the group felt, was really altruistic, or motivated by goodwill alone, and would really sacrifice his or her own interests for the good of the whole. We felt that Epicureanism was too romantic, although this remained unexplored, except that it was tied to the idea that Epicureans were not necessarily being true to themselves, any more than other people with other beliefs were being true to themselves. It was felt quite strongly that many people follow things they do not believe in, they simply follow a tradition. In my summary, I asked the group whether they thought that secular postmodern culture is or is not another tradition.

We felt that human greed caused too many failures and that utilitarianism was limited by this. The group suggested that none of the four criteria discussed would alone solve the problem of global warming. We might need to put the four criteria together somehow, or we might need to find another principle altogether.

Evaluation

These sessions reveal the open and thirsty minds of participants highly desirous to engage in big questions, gain

an understanding of philosophy, philosophers and philosophical thinking. There was certainly no shortage of creative and speculative thinking amongst the group. There were, however, two areas that I found weak. Firstly, the group found reflexivity very difficult. Only fleeting glimpses of in the moment reflection were made apparent to me, although much could have taken place introspectively. I might conjecture that this is something that develops with maturity, experience and an inward reflective disposition. It is not easy to slow down enough in a highly stimulating atmosphere and consider the thoughts we have as they arise in the moment. This more meditative kind of exercise changes the group dynamic and may be initially confronting. The second area requiring cultivation is critical thinking. Whilst the group developed an ability to explore implications and consequences as well as clarifying meaning, seeking reasons, examples and counter-examples, recognising assumptions and teasing out inferences remained largely undeveloped. Reflexivity and critical thinking may be cultivated through the usual pedagogical devices of reading, essay, report and response writing, devices not at my disposal as a lunchtime volunteer. These sessions, and student feedback, do indicate a very strong desire for just such a curriculum.

Finally, at the end of session nine it became apparent that the group was committed to the belief that human beings are fundamentally selfish. In my final summation, I indicated to the group that they had settled upon two claims: that we are all inherently selfish; and that we are not all the same, and therefore we do not share the same reality, have the same motivations, or seek the same outcomes. These two claims are contradictory. If we are all inherently selfish, then this constitutes sameness. Our reality, motivations and desired outcomes are therefore in essence selfish. This makes any differences between us superficial. The group may have absorbed some key ideas in contemporary Western society: firstly, the idea that humans are fundamentally selfish, emanating from Neo-Darwinian theories of evolution; and secondly, that we are all unique individuals that have our own subjective reality that shapes how we perceive the world, a social constructionist belief that, in the context of these students, distorts the existentialist notion of authenticity. Selfishness, it seems, is

what makes us authentic, so that to be true to oneself is simply to be true to one's own reality. Altruistic motives were deemed inauthentic. Here we face the danger of a narcissistic 'ring-pass-not'.

Without religious studies and philosophy to provide counter-claims, such as the belief that we are innately good, these young people may be bereft of any deep justification for aspirations of human and planetary betterment beyond their own personal development, in spite of countless examples across the school curriculum that suggest otherwise. Students need to move beyond the notion that human intentions are always and inevitably selfish if they are to grow as moral beings. It is my contention that philosophical questioning in the classroom greatly enhances this process.

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Finding Fairness in Respect, Deservedness and Rule-Following: An experience of a community of inquiry in an adult ELICOS setting

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Overview

This article reports on a recent experience of a community of inquiry in an adult ELICOS (English Language Intensive Course for Overseas Students) setting at a Brisbane TAFE institute. This article highlights new definitions that have not appeared in school-based discussions with Australian children on the same text. Culturally-based criteria for evaluating fairness in human situations were explored and applied.

The Setting

The focus of this paper is a single community of inquiry conducted as part of the regular program of an English language learning and development class, which occupied the optimal late morning time-slot. The aim of the session was to tap into the more philosophical temperament exhibited by Indian and Asian students, and to contextualise suitable English vocabulary within a relatively generalised topic area. A secondary aim was to develop classroom protocols for the conduct of future inquiries. My ASLPR 3+ (lower intermediate) group (Wylie & Ingram, 1995) included five males and eleven females from the People's Republic of China, India, Korea and Japan. Two trainee teachers and this scribe shared the facilitation.

Discussion Topic

The topic chosen was a story on 'Fairness' from *Ethical Inquiry*: *Instructional Manual to Accompany Lisa* (Lipman, 1985):

> While attempting to distribute candy to her class, a teacher is called away suddenly. In her absence, greedier students take more than their share and the result when she returns is clearly very unfair. To remedy this situation she proposes not a redistribution from the start but the application of a new rule – taking one piece of candy back from everyone so that everyone is treated equally. (My summary)

This has proved to be very useful in the past for generating good depth of discussion quickly, because everyone thinks they know what fairness is and preliminaries are not necessary (Smith, 1999, 2005, 2006). Since fairness is a concept recognised universally, and thought to be manageable by this level of language learners, it was chosen as suitable for concept exploration and development in this language centre setting. That hunch proved to be right.

A copy of the stimulus text was distributed to each individual, and was then read aloud in the way usual with practitioners of community of inquiry methodology. Some brief definitions, with spaces for notes from the discussion, appeared on the reverse side of the handout to provide some necessary vocabulary for a reasonable flow in discussion. These definitions of fairness appear in the following statements (Smith, 1999):

- Giving the same to everyone;
- Each gets what he or she wants;
- Each gets what he or she needs (even though it's not asked for);
- Sharing what you have in common;
- Relative to times and people so it is not the same every time;
- What an umpire or referee does, balancing needs against wants;
- A furphy; it can never be achieved so don't bother trying for it.

This bullet point explication in anticipation had the advantage of highlighting in print for all to see the subtle shift from wants to needs that could compose the crux of the forthcoming discussion. No modifications to the text or the notes supplied were made for this language ability group. As it turned out, none appeared to be necessary and, as is also usual, other topics took centre stage.

Beginning Discussion

As no questions were forthcoming after the reading, a leading question was posed: What does it mean to be fair? In this facilitator/scribe's mind, the best place to move after the anecdotal text story was to search for a working definition. This question elicited a number of suggestions that were recorded on the whiteboard. They included: everyone gets the same, everyone gets equal treatment, and so on. Discussion quickly focused on the justification given by the teacher in the story that everyone is treated the same (that is, every child had to return one piece of candy in the redistribution of pieces of candy to the class).

Other definitions of fairness, such as, that everyone felt happy, that everyone's needs were met, and that everyone received the same, were then raised, compared and explored through the intense ninety-minute long inquiry-discussion. A simple graphic was supplied on the whiteboard to represent fair outcomes, showing how people add to what occurs naturally in various talent areas to ensure that outcomes are equal, and so reach that stable situation we call fairness. This graphic represented various individual situations where extra support is given to individuals, empowering them to reach at least an equal level of access to fairness and so establish overall fairness, and one where no aid was supplied. Different numbers of shaded boxes in parallel columns represented the different kinds of counterweights supplied to less well-talented individuals or social situations, or indeed to represent various countries receiving what they need and lack to achieve fairness among nations.

Many of the ideas discussed were similar to those raised by children. There were, however, some new definitions that do not seem to have appeared in school-based discussions with children on the same text. They

include that everyone be treated with respect, that everyone gets what they deserve and that a fair rule followed yields a fair outcome; the Respect, Deservedness and Rule-Following terms in the title. These three concepts are dealt with in the rest of this article, as they are significantly different criteria for assessing fairness, coming as they do from other international cultures.

Innovative Criteria

This distinctive and interesting adult community of inquiry drew out different cultural experiences and expectations. One Indian student in particular, when giving his response to the leading question after quite some time in discussion, explained how being treated respectfully was superior to having an equal number or amount of goods. This view was put quietly but firmly, as being obvious and a given. It is a real challenge to our Western mentality of measuring equality in amounts or quantities and thus achieving fairness. What he and his culture appear to value more is that the person be treated with respect.

A second innovative criterion emerged, that fairness can be achieved when people 'get what they deserve', that effort brings its own reward. More effort expended by a hard-working 'tryer' deserves more reward than what a cleverer or more endowed or advantaged person achieves with little effort through natural talent. This second novel definition to emerge in this multicultural adult community of inquiry shows that fairness is an elastic term covering wants, needs and what is deserved (deservedness). This idea that fairness is achieved when individuals get what they deserve seems suspect and a rather debunked idea in our culture, since there is little fairness found or given, and what is achieved is often won. We find there is no grand master giving out what one deserves. Yet in an Indian and Asian context with the caste and the class social systems dominant, one is taught to be glad with what one has and, when one's due desserts are granted, it is considered fair as that is all that one can reasonably expect. So in this view, fairness is quite relative, independent of counts for comparison, and tied to one's social caste or class. Fairness here is achieved when one gains what is appropriate to one in his or her social situation.

The third innovative criterion emerging in this community of inquiry was that the Indian and Korean cultures appear to value adherence to a firm rule to achieve fairness. Following a just rule can achieve a just result, a fair result, or in short, fairness. Rather than rely on the integrity of an umpire, judge or referee, everyone's subjugation to a rule would ensure that no one person or agendum was dominant. If a rule is fair and closely followed, fairness is sure to follow. This approach takes the concept from the realm of honest and agreed subjectivity to the plane of objectivity. While it was agreed that fairness is usually an ideal, it can be recognised beyond the relative mire of subjectivities. This appeal is surely platonic or evocative of the Vedas.

Interestingly, the more cynical view sometimes proposed that 'fairness can never be achieved so it ought not to be sought' was quickly discarded. This rejection confirmed the morning's optimistic tone. The group felt that while an ideal cannot be achieved, communities ought 'to strive strenuously' to achieve fairness; that effort itself sets a moral dimension and direction upon their activities through an expectation that more quality can be achieved over what occurs 'naturally' in the market place, or in the genes and in inheritance. This definition of fairness as a symbol of moral progress is clearly more typical of Eastern cultures than of Western thinking.

Review

In summary, then, it was found that this community of inquiry on the topic of fairness seemed richer with adult learners than with previous similar discussions with children. Furthermore, the overseas students brought a richer diversity of experiences and cultural world views to bear upon conceptual analyses. Without any particular training in or experience with the conduct of the community of inquiry, this group showed just how robust this educational format is how it can be applied very beneficially to exploring concepts. The particular cultural backgrounds did not inhibit discussion; rather, they enriched the outcomes and spiced up the process. The participants showed how respect, deservedness and rule-following can be seen as valid and alternative pathways to evaluating fairness.

It is interesting that such different cultural values, often never raised or appearing in programs for the teaching of English, in fact do identify these international learners' thinking processes. Their dilemmas in coming to terms with the English language and its embedded values are not often appreciated by their native English language teachers. The cultural frameworks revealed in this particular community of inquiry session contained values and approaches that seem more inclusive, less competitive and more respectful of persons. They challenge our Western discourses.

Moreover, in the rich and respectful environment of the community of inquiry, such approaches value and definitely enrich discussion. The community of inquiry is richer with such surprising catalysts. They prove the versatility of the community of inquiry framework and justify its distinctive educational function in developing language in an ELICOS setting. This diverse richness continues in subsequent sessions.

Greg Smith is a Level II trainer and practitioner in classroom community of inquiry and has served on the Victorian and Queensland State association committees.

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The Experience of Philosophy for Children in Southeast Asia

This paper was presented at a plenary session at the recent FAPSA Conference (21-23 September 2007) on Fostering Philosophical Communities, Melbourne.

Ho Wah Kam (Singapore)

> I think Hegel was right when he analysed progress into three stages, which he called Thesis, Antithesis, and Synthesis, though…I do not think that the names he gave are very happily suggestive. In relation to intellectual progress, I would term them, the stage of romance, the stage of precision, and the stage of generalisation.
> A. N. Whitehead, *The Rhythm of Education* (1929)

Abstract

This presentation was set against the background of the internationalisation of Philosophy for Children (P4C). Since not much had been written about P4C in Southeast Asia as a whole, this paper examined briefly the *practical* experience of introducing P4C in this pluralistic and plurilingual region. My point was that P4C in this region today is going through what philosopher A. N. Whitehead would characterise as 'the stage of romance'. After giving a general picture of the state of P4C in Southeast Asia, I devoted some time to the more *intellectual* aspects of P4C adoption in different cultures. While the region is rich in philosophical thought and traditions, in the last 15 years or so only three countries in Southeast Asia (namely, Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines) have reportedly been using P4C. Each of these three countries has its own cultural and post-colonial heritage to consider and, in each case, such heritage may or may not affect the way P4C is regarded intellectually. I therefore urged that we show some degree of historical

sensitivity and social-cultural awareness when dealing with these cross-cultural issues. In line with my general concern as to whether there is any discontinuity between the values that P4C espouses and Southeast Asian philosophical thought, I considered briefly the following issues: how well P4C would be expected to settle in a situation of communitarianism; the relationship between ways of thinking (e.g. critical thinking) dominant in the community of inquiry approach as practised in the West and the traditional ways of thinking in each country in this region. Finally, the extent to which P4C should and/or could be indigenised was considered very briefly.

Introduction: The Context of Southeast Asia

Geographically speaking, I would describe East Asia as being made up of two large components – *Southeast Asia* and *Northeast Asia*. The countries in Northeast Asia that have been using Philosophy for Children (P4C) as a definable programme are South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, and the People's Republic of China. Southeast Asia covers the 10 countries of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), but only three of these countries have introduced P4C in selected schools – Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines. So, because of time constraints in this presentation, I examined briefly the P4C situation in Southeast Asia only. Malaysia was introduced to P4C in 2001, the Philippines in 2003, while a few Singapore schools were using P4C as early as 1992 when the P4C project was first started. Some of the general points and issues arising from P4C adoption in these three countries can be applied to East Asia as a whole.

It was the founder of P4C, Matthew Lipman himself, who has long acknowledged the internationalisation of P4C. He was reported to have said in an interview many years ago in Spain:

> I think Philosophy for Children, compared with other educative programs, has a particular vision in relation to its international character. Educational projects are more and more aware they must help young people acknowledge other cultures which exist in the world. This means they have to facilitate the understanding that their way of life is not the only one, that there are many

> people who have different values, different interests, religions, ways of behaving, artistic manifestations..., and that this situation is mutually enriching. But, at the same time, one can be surrounded by so many cultural riches that perhaps a young person can think there is no connection between them. In other words, there is multiplicity but no integrity. And, in this context, I think that what philosophy can offer is a system of inquiry which can help identify a unifying element which is common to all cultures, a thread running through all of them. But, unless an insistence upon commonality exists, this link with the cognitive traditions we all share will be lost, along with its associated richness and multiplicity (Interview, 1998, pp. 1-2).

Part of the purpose of this presentation was to show that despite the many differences in the larger context of Southeast Asia – economic, social-cultural and political – a commonality does exist among the three countries identified with the teaching of P4C. For instance, certain elements of hierarchy and paternalism are found in most Southeast Asia cultures; so are values that are communitarian and consensual (Barr, 2002. p. 9). Nonetheless, at the same time, in dealing with the situation in each country, I suggested that we show some degree of historical sensitivity and social-cultural awareness. As we all know, the P4C movement has been criticised (whatever the merits of this criticism) inside the US by native Americans and outside of the US in countries such as Latin America for the movement's lack of historical sensitivity (see Rainville, 2001, p. 67). P4C has also been criticised for 'its instrumentalised nature' (Vansieleghem, 2005, p. 21).

But there are, of course, differences among the three countries profiled in this paper: each has its own indigenous cultural and post-colonial heritage and, in each case, such heritage affects the way P4C is seen intellectually, given the fact that this programme of philosophical inquiry grew out of a Western philosophical (eurocentric) perspective, principally that of John Dewey, Lev Vygotsky and Matthew Lipman. In addition, each country inherited an education system from their erstwhile colonisers – Singapore inherited from the British a four-language education system (together with a high-stakes examination system), which later evolved

into a single national system in the early 1980s. Malaysia, in the post-colonial period of nationalism, ended with a dual education system (comprising a traditional religious education system and a secular one also with high-stakes examinations) with Malay, the national language, as the medium of instruction at all levels of education (Rosnani Hashim, 2004), until 2003, when some subjects have begun to be taught in English. The Philippines have had a strong Spanish and American influence in its culture and education system. As Hefner (2001) has argued, though all the decolonised countries of Southeast Asia had '…to scramble to devise a workable program for citizenship and nation building' in the aftermath of World War II, the formula for each country varied, reflecting the differing colonial histories, legacies and political conflicts (cited by Gopinathan, p. 5).

Outside of the three Southeast Asian countries identified, there is the more progressive Thailand (which was never colonised) and there is also Vietnam, which has emerged from a period of destructive warfare. I regard Thailand and Vietnam as potentially important sites for Philosophy in Schools. However, in Buddhist Thailand, Thai philosopher Soraj (2004) explains that philosophical study in Thailand is still limited to teaching the ideas and arguments of the past, both Western and Eastern (p. 2). In terms of philosophical inquiry, there is a tendency to see Buddhism as providing all solutions. In his paper, Soraj (2004) says that 'continuity with the past is also important and plays a strongly formative role', but adds that when:

> …Thai philosophy [involves] the activity of discussing, arguing, debating, refuting, affirming, etc, all through the use of logical reasoning, to arrive at some kind of value which the community finds appealing…[then when] such an activity happens in Thailand, *that* is Thai philosophy.

For Buddhist Thailand, as for other states considering using P4C, Matthew Lipman said, 'The situation is far from hopeless, even in countries where the influence of religion is very strong.' He suggested that scholars read *Philosophy in the Classroom* by himself, Sharp and Oscanyan (2nd edition, 1978).

In Vietnam, in the so-called 'pre-renovation period' (i.e. before 1986), philosophy was identified with politics (Pham, 2004, p. 2). According to Pham, in those days, philosophers tended to:

> …repeat and praise what has been written by well-known philosophers from the past…or to comment upon and justify the correctness and scientific character of all that has been said by leaders regardless of whether or not they are confirmed by reality (p. 2).

However, from the time of the renovation, 'doi moi' (i.e. since 1986), '…about 3,000 people are engaged in researching and teaching philosophy in a wide range of universities and colleges in Vietnam' (Pham, 2004. p. 226). Pham adds that philosophy is now a compulsory subject in tertiary and even in secondary education in Vietnam. The abovementioned factors may explain why notions of critical thinking and P4C have taken some time to settle in these two countries.

The Three Countries Identified with P4C: At the Stage of Romance

Singapore

In brief, P4C started as a project in Singapore in 1992 with one primary and a secondary school taking part, using Matthew Lipman's novels, *Pixie* and *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*. The project was then led by Dr Lim Tock Keng at the National Institute of Education (NIE). The first year proved to be difficult as teachers and students were not used to the community of inquiry approach. Things started to improve the following year, when two additional schools joined and there was funding to invite consultants such as Ann Margaret Sharp (from IAPC) and Thomas Jackson (from the University of Hawaii) to Singapore. In 1994, another two primary schools joined the programme. The repertoire of materials used expanded to include Phil Cam's *Thinking Stories*, and poems and stories by Asian writers.

In 1994, the programme received funding from the National Institute of Education to allow Dr Lim to develop a package of instruments and performance assessment tasks for evaluating the programme, to ascertain the effectiveness

of the community of inquiry approach, and to introduce Asian philosophy and core values into the programme. From 1994 to 1998, a few more schools were brought into the project. What was carried out in the project was closely monitored, with formative evaluation, to assess the effectiveness of the P4C approach. In brief, the feedback was generally positive.

Since the late 1990s, as part of their aim to reform the education system, there have been several new educational initiatives from the education authorities in Singapore, ranging from 'Thinking Schools, Learning Nation' (dated 1997) to the more recent one of 'Teach Less, Learn More' (dated 2004). The impact of the latest initiative prompted the professional wing of the Singapore Teachers' Union (STU) in 2003 to invigorate P4C by bringing consultants from the Federation of Australasian Philosophy in Schools Associations (FAPSA), based in Melbourne, to prepare a new cadre of primary, secondary and junior college teachers to use the community of inquiry approach, which should reinforce the 'Teach Less, Learn More' strategy.

The highlight of this STU initiative was the launch, in April 2006, of the first international P4C conference in Singapore, entitled 'Philosophy in Schools: Developing a Community of Inquiry', which was officially opened by the Singapore Minister of Education and attracted about 350 participants from Singapore, Australia and Malaysia. The Conference was designed to introduce to school principals and teachers the significance of *philosophical inquiry* in the classroom, and for schools, which had used P4C, to share their experiences with other schools. Keynote addresses on 'Philosophy in P4C', 'Philosophy and the School Curriculum', 'Philosophy in a Crowded Curriculum', and 'Teaching Philosophy in Australian Schools', were followed by nine seminars organised into three strands: 'Implementation and Training', 'Philosophical Attitudes' and 'Asian Traditions in Philosophical Thought'. There is now in Singapore a cadre of some 300 teacher-practitioners (from primary and secondary schools and junior colleges) exposed to P4C through workshops and seminars taught by trainers from FAPSA. The immediate success of this 2006 Conference gave rise to two major events:

1. The launching in January 2007 of a formal Level One Training Programme for P4C teachers, leading to the award (given to trained teachers meeting the certification requirements) of the Level One Certificate, validated by FAPSA. Some 17 teachers received their Level 1 certificates on 3 October 2007 at a certificate-awarding ceremony; and,

2. The forming of a P4C teachers' network known as *COIN* (Community of Inquiry Network), which has produced newsletters regularly to keep members and others informed of developments in P4C in Singapore and elsewhere. It is hoped that this network will in turn lead to the formation of a Philosophy in Schools Association in Singapore.

Malaysia

As in Singapore, Malaysia has a multi-ethnic population comprising a larger proportion of Malays (60%) and 26% of Chinese and 7% of Indians. The state religion is Islam. The driving force behind P4C in Malaysia is Associate Professor Rosnani Hashim together with her colleagues at the International Islamic University, Malaysia. Prof Rosnani's work in P4C stemmed from her interest in the teaching of thinking in Malaysian schools and the training of teachers to teach thinking. Of the teaching thinking approaches she had tried using, she said that she thought 'P4C was a unique and novel attempt to bring the feeling of thinking to a more practical level, when great ideas are thrown to the children'. With Islam as the dominant religion in Malaysia and Prof Rosnani's own work associated with Islamic education, I discussed briefly, as reported later in this paper, Islam and the kind of critical thinking that has stemmed from a Western culture.

Prof Rosnani came to know of P4C when she attended a summer seminar on P4C organised by IAPC in New Jersey, USA, in 2001. On her return from the USA, she experimented with the programme in a Year 5 (11-year-olds) class, using a Malay translation and adaptation of Lipman's *Pixie,* which was renamed *Siti.* In describing her early experience in introducing P4C to schools, she said that as the term 'Philosophy for Children' and even 'Philosophy' itself might be viewed as 'seditious' in the minds of most

Malaysians, she used the term 'The Hikam (Wisdom) Programme' instead (Rosnani, private communication, 2007). Prof Rosnani continues to spread the message of P4C and the related training to schools with the support of her colleagues at the International Islamic University, Malaysia.

The Philippines

P4C in the Philippines, according to Prof Zosimo Lee of the Philosophy Department of the University of the Philippines, is at its very early stage. It was Prof Lee who took it to schools in Manila. Prof Lee himself was introduced to P4C at two separate workshops, organised by IAPC, in New Jersey, in 1996 and 2000 respectively. Because of the strong Western orientation in the Philippine culture, dating from the Spanish and American colonial periods, and its receptivity and responsiveness to Oriental values as well, Professor Lee saw philosophers in the Philippines serving as a 'bridge or...to provide a meeting point for the two philosophical traditions [Western and Eastern] and at the same time contribute something from the Philippine philosophising experience itself' (Lee, no date). Nonetheless, despite the efforts of Prof Lee and his colleagues at the Philosophy Department, P4C has not spread as widely as they had hoped, even in the city of Manila itself.

General Comments

Different perspectives/approaches

It is interesting that the approach to P4C adopted by the three countries stemmed from different perspectives. Singapore, in the first phase of its P4C development, took the psychological perspective, and the interest then was principally in how Singapore students learnt to think. It was in the second phase that we saw a branching of this approach – firstly, in the premier secondary schools, in studying philosophy as part of Knowledge and Inquiry (KI) and moral education in the revised secondary school curriculum and, secondly, in the infusion model as part of the thinking pedagogy, in which P4C is infused into the teaching of school subjects, principally English and Social Studies. Ms Ellene Tan's use of P4C in a primary school is a good example of how the English lesson becomes the site for P4C (Tan, 2006). The making of meaning in literacy classes,

as Ellene Tan has shown, is done through dialogue by interweaving thoughts, words, actions and images.

Malaysia's approach may be described as pedagogical and psychological in that the main interest has been in using the community of inquiry as a method of teaching thinking. Prof Rosnani found the P4C method, as she puts it, 'realistic'.

The approach in the Philippines stems from an interest in teaching philosophy, since the advocates of P4C over there are philosophy professors in the Philosophy Department of the Philippines' top university. Nonetheless, Professor Lee said that 'the philosophical tradition in the Philippines itself has to be "crystallised" first such that it is clearer what its methods and orientations were…' (Lee, no date). Lee added:

> While the country has many philosophers, the Philippines has not really produced a philosopher of note. There is still so much that can be done for philosophy in the Philippines to mature and flourish. Philosophy for Children can provide the practice that will contribute to the maturation of philosophy within the country.

Pragmatism, empiricism and pedagogy

There is a certain pragmatism that pervades the work of P4C in Singapore and Malaysia. Influenced by the outcomes-based approach to education, the researchers are concerned to find out what is really learnt/gained in a community of inquiry as against the direct method of teaching thinking. So there has been both quantitative and qualitative research of the formative kind here. This is contrary to the trend of anecdotal accounts typically supported with 'exemplary excerpts from discussions and quotes from students and teachers' (see Reznitskaya, 2005). In quantitative research, the pre-test post-test semi-experimental design has commonly been used. Among the tests used were AH2/AH3 Group Test of Reasoning, the Middle Years Ability Test and the New Jersey Test of Reasoning Skills (NJTRS), but there has been little evidence of the connection between P4C processes and 'the desired educational outcomes'. Reznitskaya (2005) said that 'linking the processes of P4C intervention to specific educational outcomes may help to account for frequently documented mixed results in P4C

research' (p. 10). In saying that, Reznitskaya (2005) has also criticised the weaknesses in quantitative research on P4C reported in the literature.

In terms of pedagogy, there has been a problem in moving P4C into Southeast Asia. Despite the rhetoric, the transmission model of teaching remains in many classrooms in this region. Even in the Singapore classroom, when P4C was first introduced in the early 1990s, teachers found it difficult to use the community of inquiry approach. As one teacher reported, 'I think at the beginning we were a bit lost and, at times, we were a bit frustrated after the lesson. We wondered why we were telling them and asking them so many questions and they were not responding' (Lim, 1998, p. 3). In China, for example, as Li Junjie reported, '…over the past 80 years, education in China has been adversely affected by the model of education for taking exams'. In 'education for taking exams', elementary and middle schools emphasise filling students' brains with information (Li Junjie, p. 41).

Is critical thinking culture-bound?

Critical thinking, however it is defined, underpins P4C; as Matthew Lipman (2003) put it, 'P4C wholly embraces critical thinking, but it does so with greater breadth and depth', or in the words of Phil Cam (2004) 'engaging us in the search for alternatives and reflection upon reason' (p. 10). There are those who consider critical thinking culture-bound. Among them is Atkinson (1997, p. 79), who claims that there is a discontinuity between the cultural assumptions that underlie critical thinking in the Western context and the thought and expression present in non-Western culture groups, because critical thinking is a 'social practice' and is 'learnt intuitively'. For instance, 'The mainstream US view of individualism is inherent in the notion of critical thinking' (p. 81) and, as for self-expression, Atkinson adds that 'with other displays of individuality…the direct expression of ego via language seems to be substantially proscribed in many cultures'. Referring to Carson's (1992) review of educational practices in China and Japan, Atkinson quotes Carson as saying that language 'is viewed less as a tool for self-expression than as a medium for expressing group solidarity and shared social purpose' (p. 83). While John McGuire (1998) agrees only partly with what Atkinson had said, he

still thinks that there are concepts and practices in critical thinking that can or should be taught in the classroom setting irrespective of the cultural context. In the same way, Soraj (2004), a Thai philosopher, thinks that critical thinking (in the Western sense) and Asian traditions are 'neither necessarily divergent nor necessarily convergent'.

Soraj (2004) thinks that critical thinking is already well embedded in Indian and Chinese traditional cultures:

> …both India and China do have their own indigenous traditions of logical and argumentative thinking…they were eventually supplanted by the more dominant traditions which did not emphasise criticism and argumentation as much as social harmony or intuitive insights (p. 85).

This is the case of Thai culture. As a Thai himself, Soraj said:

> I am trying to convince members of my own country of the value of critical thinking and its important role in educating the Thai citizens for the increasingly globalised world today and tomorrow (p. 97).

These cultures (Indian and Chinese) probably contain (to borrow a term from King, 1996, p. 257) 'the seeds of transformation' that can turn their traditionalism into what King (1996) called 'rationalistic traditionalism'.

While Buddhism, a deeply spiritual and personal religion, and Confucianism, best regarded as a philosophy of life rather than a religion, straddle much of East Asia, Islam is a religion dominant in Southeast Asia; as the state religion of Malaysia and Indonesia, Islam is a strong and identifiable source of values in these two countries. It is therefore relevant to ask about the role of critical thinking in Islam. There is a very useful and sophisticated article written by Prof Yedullah Kazmi of the International Islamic University, Malaysia, who said, among other things:

> …in Islam, to engage in critical thought is a moral commitment and to be judged on its moral worth independent of its success or failure in this world. Allah requires us to act morally, the success or failure of such actions is entirely in His hands.

However, Yedullah Kazmi added that in Western critical thought, '…the source of a critique is judged purely on pragmatic and utilitarian grounds'. And, as Rosnani Hashim explains (in a private communication, 2007), 'while the community of inquiry runs well with the Islamic concept of *Shura* or consultation (being democratic)', it is nevertheless important in Islam to make a distinction between knowledge (of the socially constructed kind) and revealed truth as in the *Qur'an*. While critical thinking itself may be universal, we need to take note of what Vansieleghem (2005, p. 24) has said of P4C's 'rationalistic underpinnings and its presumptions of generalisability'. So when bringing P4C into the Southeast Asian classroom, it is therefore important not to underestimate the complexity of the issues concerning matters such as critical thinking, however it is defined, in cultures outside the West.

What is to be learnt from taking P4C into Southeast and East Asian classrooms?

In anticipating the internationalisation of P4C, Matthew Lipman (2003) has said:

> It is very difficult to teach Philosophy for Children in countries where the curriculum has not been translated in the languages of those countries. The translation need not be literal, but it should be the same language that the people in the country speak.

This was the reason for Rosnani Hashim of Malaysia to translate *Pixie* into Malay and call it *Siti*. It was a free translation. In doing so, she avoided in the translated version references to 'dating' and 'playing with dogs' (Rosnani, private communication, 2007). As Lipman had anticipated, in Hong Kong the first problem that students there faced was language. P4C advocate, Mr Lam Chi-Ming (2004), found in his P4C classes that his Hong Kong students did not read English well enough to understand the points of *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*.

Because the Community of Inquiry approach is very new in Southeast Asia, much of the concern of teachers is over the *how* or procedural matters. There is nothing wrong with this except that, at some point, there should also be concern over the *what* (declarative or propositional

knowledge). In an interview, Ann Margaret Sharp of IAPC (2006) said that P4C makes a commitment to procedural values: questioning, critical judgment-making, open-ended inquiry, self-correction and democratic procedures. These are the criteria that govern *how* the doing of philosophy proceeds in the classroom, the *how* of dialogical thinking, the *how* of communal inquiry. At the same time, P4C encourages children to be conscious of what others have said about an issue, including the philosophers of the past, and to make a personal judgment 'which is a manifestation of the child's thinking for himself or herself about the issue under question'. As P4C teachers in Southeast Asia become more confident, there will be as much of the *what* as of the *how*.

In looking back over what they had observed in Kunming and Shanghai, China, Kennedy and Kohan (2002, p. 49) felt that, in these new learning environments, they had the opportunity to re-examine the basis of P4C. As they put it:

> China offers an opportunity for P4C to question its basis, its method and its aims. It seems to be expressing a different cultural voice, and to be disposed to this kind of dialogue we are more used to claiming than practising. Both Kunming and Shanghai provide in their own ways formidable contexts: the deep, strong and disciplined education of the Railway Station School of Kunming and the scholarly, sophisticated and committed members of the Shanghai Institute for Research in the Human Sciences seem determined to take P4C not just beyond their own limits as Chinese, but beyond the limits P4C has already established for itself in the West (p. 49)

Concluding Remarks

In closing, I made one general point and two subsidiary points. The general point is that it is difficult to anticipate the kinds of issues that will arise when P4C is interpreted in a non-Western setting, based as it has been on Western symbolic and philosophical resources. The two subsidiary points are:

1. Despite what is said about Asian values, there is no real contradiction between what is espoused in P4C, seen as having a strong element of critical thinking, and the communitarianism of the East, which espouses social harmony and solidarity, the centrality of family values and group consensus. Bleazby (citing Garrison, 1996) states that:

> Dewey's communal inquiry is a *creative process* in which our ideas interact with the ideas of others so that they are all transformed into something new, but common and inclusive of each individual's perspective.

   As Kennedy (2000, p. 40) said, 'The most distinctive feature of the theory and practice of community of philosophical inquiry...is how it promotes both communal, intersubjective meaning and thinking for oneself.' The idea of community, Kennedy adds, 'is usually associated with the affirmation of collectively held beliefs and assumptions, and with the necessary sacrifice of individual opinions for the greater good'. So, in this sense, there is no contradiction between what is espoused in P4C and communitarianism.

2. Going back to philosopher A. N. Whitehead's characterisation of the rhythm of education – Romance, Precision and Generalisation – I said earlier that P4C in Southeast Asia is going through the first stage of Romance, which implies novelty, excitement and what Whitehead called 'a ferment in the mind' – the intellectual excitement of learning something new. However, Romance in itself lacks direction. We have to move on to the next stage of Precision. Precision, as defined by Whitehead, implies conceptual structure, exactness of formulation, attention to details, providing focus. Precision responds to the need for order and coherence. In P4C too, teaching for thinking has to be 'teaching for precise, open-minded, fair-minded thinking'. I do not think we in Southeast Asia are in the stage of Precision yet. But Romance without Precision may not give us the kind of direction we

need to develop P4C further, while Precision without Romance would make things quite dull. We would need to move into a synthesis of both Romance and Precision, which is what Whitehead called the stage of Generalisation. As cited earlier, Matthew Lipman (1998) said, referring to the spread of P4C worldwide:

> …there is multiplicity but no integrity. And, in this context, I think that what philosophy can offer is a system of inquiry which can help identify a unifying element which is common to all cultures, a thread running through all of them. But, unless an insistence upon commonality exists, this link with the cognitive traditions we all share will be lost, along with its associated richness and multiplicity (Interview, pp. 1-2).

This is *Generalisation* in the worldwide development of P4C, then.

Dr Ho Wah Kam is currently Academic Consultant to the Singapore Teachers' Union concerned with the professional development of teachers. Since 2003, he has advocated the invigoration of Philosophy for Children in Singapore schools by inviting trainers from FAPSA to conduct workshops on P4C for teachers and having teachers formally trained for P4C through the setting up of a Level 1 training programme in P4C.

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Book Review

Thinking about Picture Books: A guide to thoughtful discussion (Part 1 and 2), by Anne-Maree Olley

Reviewed by Tim Sprod

Can little kids do philosophy? This is a question on which philosophers and teachers are divided. The answer turns, of course, on what counts as philosophy.

Those who answer in the negative seem to have a pretty high threshold on philosophical inquiry. They look at academic philosophers and say, quite correctly, that little kids can't operate at that level of complexity, cohesion and persistence.

But is this an adequate answer? Does it mean we should not attempt to do philosophy with young children? I think not. Let's look at some parallels. Just because kids in early childhood can't do tensor calculus or Fourier analyses does not mean that we do not engage them mathematically. They certainly can't interpret Shakespeare, but we certainly think it worthwhile reading and exploring stories with them.

Anne-Maree Olley obviously agrees with me. These two books, mainly aimed at early childhood teachers, encourage us to use a selection of picture books to engage children in discussion of a range of ideas that have recognisable philosophical roots. I should point out, though, that Anne-Maree states that these books and ideas can be usefully explored by students across the school age-range if properly presented, an assertion that fits with my own experience.

In these two manuals, Anne-Maree provides discussion plans and exercises for 18 picture books – some more well known than others, at least to me (though this may reflect the age of my own children). Most teachers and parents would know such classics as Tomi Ungerer's *The*

Three Robbers, Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*, Mem Fox and Julie Vivas' *Possum Magic*, and Eric Carle's *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*.

Each book commences with an introduction that covers tips for using the resource, practical considerations, the role of the teacher and assessment and evaluation. These are followed by a description of the 'Think Tank' – Anne-Maree's phrase for a community of inquiry – and a very useful classification of questions a teacher could use. These introductory sections are identical in both books, leading one to wonder why the manuals have not been consolidated into one.

The bulk of each book is devoted to sections providing assistance to teachers (and also parents) in ways to explore some of the issues from the picture books. Readers familiar with standard practice in Philosophy for Children will note that Anne-Maree does not recommend that the agenda for the discussion be set by asking children what questions they have about the book. I am ambivalent about this.

On the one hand, very young children do not always understand how to ask, or the purpose of, questions. If invited to ask them, they will often merely make statements or observations. On the other hand, not giving them this opportunity to ask seems to me to deprive them of an opportunity to learn more about questions and how they can ask them. Further, it deprives the class as a whole of a mechanism for setting the agenda for discussion. Rather, this role is deferred to the teacher, or even to Anne-Maree.

The section for each picture book consists of three to five pages of photocopiable activity pages. Anne-Maree recommends that teachers use a blown up photocopy of these on the board, which has the advantage that it shows children what they have to do. However, I also suspect it may constrain discussion to only those issues on the sheet. The first page is always about the storyline, though it asks for interpretation rather than retelling, and highlights some of the themes that are dealt with in the following pages. The discussion guides are usually insightful and often well structured, leading children into deeper philosophical ideas, though I suspect they could be usefully retained by teachers to help them guide discussion, rather than shown to the children. Somewhat worryingly, they do rely on the teacher

having a prior understanding of the philosophical issues that the questions are designed to explore, as Anne-Maree provides no background explanations.

The final section contains some very helpful materials for evaluation, of both children and the teacher. These are thoughtfully constructed and look extremely useful, addressing an area that many find the most difficult part of doing philosophy with youngsters.

Overall, these books are a welcome addition to the resources for early childhood teachers (or parents) who want to engage in philosophical discussions with their charges. For inexperienced teachers, they provide a starting point and guide, though the lack of background notes on the philosophical issues explored is a drawback. Teachers with more philosophical background will find it very useful, and may even choose to rework the ideas and hints to suit their own approach.

Tim Sprod teaches at The Friends' School in Hobart, and is author of Books into Ideas*, which coincidentally includes materials for use with a number of the picture books covered in these resources.*

Thinking about Picture Books: A guide to thoughtful discussion (Part 1 and 2), by Anne-Maree Olley
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