

Critical and reflective thinking in schools education essay



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The literatures review the literature of current main approaches to teaching philosophy in schools, particularly in the United Kingdom.

Dictionaries correctly, inspiringly, but unhelpfully define ‘ philosophy’ as ‘ love of wisdom’, but a better definition would be reflective and critical inquiry.... A training in critical and reflective thought, a training in handling ideas, is of the essence in this new and demanding environment. Philosophy thus provides both the individual development and enrichment, and a bright set of apt intellectual tools for meeting the world’s challenges’

Grayling 2008: viii

Over the past ten years there has been a growing interest in developing approaches to help pupils develop their reflective and critical skills in order to help them cope with the challenges of modern life. In the UK primary schools keen on developing these skill have employed three distinct approaches i) Thinking Skills ii) Inquiry based Philosophy and less commonly iii) Academic Philosophy. This chapter begins with an outline of the context

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to the interest in creative and critical thinking and then continues with a review and evaluation of the literature of the three approaches.

2. 1. 2 Context

There has been an increasing interest in developing thinking skills which stem from the changing opinions of the skills needed in modern society (Rose 1997; Abbot and Ryan, 2000). One of the stated values and purposes of the National Curriculum in England and Wales is that

‘... education must enable us to respond positively to the opportunities and challenges of the rapidly changing world in which we live and work. In particular, we need to be prepared to engage as individuals, parents, workers and citizens with economic, social and cultural change, including the continued globalisation of the economy and society, with new work and leisure patterns and with the rapid expansion of communication technologies.

Increasingly, countries in Europe, have reduced the requirements to teach a body of knowledge and have promoted the use of transferrable skills such as critical and creative thinking and problem solving to develop deep learning and life skills relevant for the 21st Century (MacBeath 1999; Scottish Executive Department 2000). Abbot & Ryan (2000) and Powney & Lowden (date) contend the need for this change of emphasis in education is also recognised by employers who wish to have flexible and adaptable workers who have an open mind to change and a commitment to lifelong learning

However, the aim to improve critical and creative thinking without

specialised programmes may be limited according to recent study findings.

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The Study of Interactive Learning (SPRINT) project (Hargreaves & Moyles 2002) showed that teachers increased the ratio of their questions to statements. However, pupil responses were rarely 'extended' and dialogue remained dominated and controlled by the teacher. Hargreaves and Moyles expressed reservations about the limited demand for extended thinking in the National Literacy Strategy in England and other areas of the curriculum. Black and Wiliam (1998) concluded that challenging pupils to think independently and explore understanding through thoughtful reflective dialogue were central requirements for raising standards, but he adds a note of caution: 'there is no quick fix' with promises of rapid rewards'. Watkins (2001) analysed 66 studies and concluded that an emphasis on learning and thinking processes improved learning performances, while an emphasis on performance targets could depress learning performance.

2. 1. 3 Thinking Skills.

The QCA (2004) places great emphasis on thinking skills (e. g. synthesising, analysing, evaluating and justifying) and attitudes (e. g. open-mindedness and respect for all) and concepts (e. g. 'God' 'goodness') in Religious Education. Lake and Needham (1995) publish a popular 'text-book, 'Top Ten Thinking Tactics' and is designed to develop the capabilities of 8-10 year olds with ten cognitive strategies. Feuerstein et al's (1980) Instrumental Enrichment Programme (IEP) provides decontextualised paper and pencil exercises that develop in complexity through 14 'instruments.'

The Somerset Thinking Skills course (Blagg and others., 1988) consists of eight cognitive processes drawn from Feuerstein's IEP and has the ambition of developing positive beliefs about learning to learn, strengthening problem

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solving ideas, communication and self-esteem De Bono's (1987) Cognitive Research Trust (CoRT) Thinking programme aims to improve thinking skills in a series of carefully structured lessons.

Research into Thinking Skills show that nearly all the thinking skills programmes and practices studied were found to make a positive difference in the achievement levels of participating students. Such studies have included Adey & Shayer, 1994; Sternberg & Bhana, 1996; McGuinness, 1999; Trickey 2000; Wilson, 2000. Cotton (2002) reviewed fifty-six studies and found all to varying degrees reported benefits to the pupils. Studies which looked at achievement over time found that thinking skills instruction hastened the learning gains of participants, and those with true or quasi-experimental designs generally found that experimental students outperformed control groups significantly

While the research for Thinking Skills programmes produce improved results, Tickey and Topping (2004) note that few studies have entailed short or long-term follow-up. McGuinness (1999) warns that such benefits produced by these programmes may only be short-term, while Adey & Shayer, 1994 optimistically suggest that perhaps there may be ' sleeper' gains that could come into effect, long after the project has ended.

However, Bonnet (date) is suspicious of the thinking skills approach which he characterises as an instrumentalist approach to empowering pupils, by the transmission of core skills. He questions whether the identified skills outlined in the programmes actually exist as discrete competencies and abilities. He is not convinced that they can be taught; separate from the world as specific

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skills which can then be applied to real problems. For him this creates a false separation between thinker and the world, and may even encourage us to see the environment as a resource at the service of humankind.

Haynes (2002) is also critical of the thinking skills movement, regarding it as too mechanistic and favours the communities of philosophy inquiry approach

‘ If we are concerned to develop our thinking, we need to move beyond an overly structured, narrow and rigid tradition of logical thinking and argument. This is particularly the case when that type of thinking takes us always in the direction of closure, polarisation and the irreconcilable, and away from solution, decision or ambiguity and suspended judgement. Our habitual ways of thinking must allow us to live, in the full sense of the word, with rapid change and uncertainty, with unprecedented adjustments in time and motion as well as with the ordinariness of everyday life, with highly intelligent technology and with the enormous power of information management. (Haynes 2002: 40)’

The community of philosophic inquiry may offer a way out of instrumentalism as it still offers critical thinking as it claims to offer the virtues of offer a more philosophic approach to problem solving (Delghausen: 2004).

2. 1. 4 Community of philosophical inquiry

The idea of community is a central theme in current educational practice and appears in a wide range of approaches. Community of learners (Rogoff, Matusov&n White, 1996), classroom community (Bridges 1995), Community of practice (Wenger 1998) are examples of this. The idea of a community of <https://assignbuster.com/critical-and-reflective-thinking-in-schools-education-essay/>

philosophical inquiry began with the work of Pierce (date). Pierce, a scientist and philosopher had the goal of bringing scientific rigour and logic to philosophy. Pierce (date), a pragmatist rejected the dominance of Cartesianism in modern philosophy, whereby the lone mind can reflect on the world and uncover truth by the process of reasoning.

The philosopher/scientist asserted'.... to make single individuals absolute judges of truth is most pernicious (Pierce: 229)

' In sciences in which men come to agreement when a theory has been broached, it is considered to be on probation until this agreement is reached. After it is reached, the question of certainty becomes an idles one, because there is no one left who doubts it. We individually cannot reasonably hope to attain the ultimate philosophy which we pursue; we can only seek it, therefore, for the community of philosophers. Hence, if disciplined and candid minds carefully examine a theory and refuse to accept it, and ought to create doubts in the mind of the author of the theory himself (Pierce: 229 date & page no)'

The community of philosophic inquiry involves a group of people joining to form a jury to judge ideas and hypothesis. Murphy (1990) explains that when the group involved in the inquiry reaches a consensus, ' one can speak of knowledge, truth and reality, but these concepts will be grounded in the community of inquirers, not in the individual consciousness'. Pierce believed the model of production of knowledge will be refined over time by the community of inquiry and would eventually lead us to the ' real', that is rock-bottom reality.

A popular form of community of philosophical inquiry in Germany and the Netherlands, and to a much lesser extent, England is the Socratic Method which is based on the work of Leonard Nelson (date) and Gustav Heckmann. (1981) Nelson believed the Socratic Method promoted the ' forcing of minds to freedom. Only persistent pressure to speak one's mind, to meet every counter-question, and to state the reasons for every assertion transforms the power of that allure into an irresistible compulsion' (date: page). The aim of the inquiry is to press the pupils to clearly express their thoughts, to use logic and to offer their views for critique by others. The teachers role is to use probing questions to draw out the ideas of the pupils and then to finish with a group vote to reach a majority view.

A community of inquiry approach, Philosophy for Children (P4C) was pioneered in America by Mathew Lipman in the 1960s at Montclair State University in New Jersey and was further refined by Gareth Matthews at the University of Massachusetts. Lipman (2003) used Pierces idea of a community of inquiry as the central methodology for philosophy lessons with children, and he also shared Pierce's pragmatism in his approach. In addition, he drew on theories of John Dewey (1916), a pragmatist philosopher, who believed in the need of educating pupils to play an active role in democracy. For Dewey (employing the theories of Vygotsky's socio-constructivist perspective), the importance of drawing on pupils' interests and using real-life contexts were key in devising a pedagogy for citizenship. Lipman was disappointed with his students during the political unrest of 1968 that spread to many universities in America. He believed his students were unable to engage critically to the events that had begun in Paris in that

year. Lipman (2003) believed the younger generation needed to acquire deeper thinking skills for them to democratically resolve the many problems emerging in society. Lipman felt that schools should begin a structured approach to develop the necessary skills for democracy and proposed teaching philosophy to pupils as young as six or seven years old. He devised a teaching programme, Philosophy for Children which contained lessons and stories to start philosophical inquiry. The programme aims to develop pupils' creative, caring and collaborative skills (Lipman 2003). Typically philosophy sessions (usually called inquiries) begin with a stimulus which could be a short story, poem, object or music and pupils are encouraged to think of philosophical questions. An early pioneer in the UK, Karin Murriss developed picture books as she found Lipman's stories 'dated' (Murriss and Haynes 2000). A vote is taken on the most favoured question and the inquiry is chaired by a facilitator whose purpose is to encourage a skilful and democratic debate. Jones (2008), a P4C trainer notes the aim of the inquiry is not to reach a consensus but rather to allow pupils the experience of collaborative dialogue and to deepen their thinking skills. Disagreements are treated as valuable opportunities to learn to respect different points of view.

The P4C approach to philosophy does not require a formal qualification in the subject and can be taught to teachers in a few days. It has attracted a dedicated and enthusiastic following worldwide. It has spread across the world to such locations as Australia, China, South Korea, Mexico, Norway and South Africa.

P4C continues to grow in popularity over the past two decades and

particularly since the government's Excellence and Enjoyment (2006) paper <https://assignbuster.com/critical-and-reflective-thinking-in-schools-education-essay/>

whereby schools are encouraged to develop more creativity and innovation in teaching and learning approaches. Sutcliff (2006) states that in England and Wales that approximately 2000 primary schools offer P4C, together with 200 secondary schools (ICPIC: 2006). Catherine McCall maintains that 10,000 children are involved in P4C lessons in Scotland, (<http://sophia.eu.org>). Teaching philosophy to children is promoted in the UK by the Society for the Advancement of Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education (SAPHRE), which advocates intellectually rigorous communal dialogic inquiry into central, common and contestable concepts.

A flagship school for the UK is Galleons Primary School, London which promotes a video that enthusiastically contends the use of P4C has been the most significant factor in helping the school achieve an outstanding OFSTED report. The video repeatedly reminds us that the outstanding OFSTED grade has been achieved despite the fact the intake draws on those who live in 'social housing.' The inspectors note: quote

Sternberg and Bhana (1996) studied twenty evaluation studies of P4C and expressed reservations over the many positive benefits cited. They argued that most of the evaluations lacked a firm control group. They write:

' issues of subject drop-out, class selection durability, transfer, subject population, and experimenter bias were generally not addressed. Statistical analysis was often reported in only the most minimal detail: in some cases, significance levels were presented with no descriptive or inferential statistics (Sternberg and Bhana: 1996 64)'

However, despite their reservations they were 'favourably disposed toward the data reported'. They acknowledged the improved gains on verbal tests of critical thinking skills and believed that P4C and similar programmes were more stimulating and motivating than most thinking skills programmes.

Fisher (1999) argues that it is problematic to evaluate P4C because it has a wide variety of objectives and therefore is unsuitable to be fairly judged by most evaluative instruments. Barron and Sternberg, (1987) support this view, noting that Lipman constantly changed the criteria he used to evaluate P4C which included, the ability of students to provide examples to support their views, to be able articulate a challenge to a peer, to ask probing questions, to use their own experience to justify a view and the ability to look for connections.

Lacewing (2007) distinguishes P4C from academic philosophy by highlighting the role of product. He claims that 'each P4C inquiry begins 'anew' and the product is 'very provisional' and has the tendency to result in a 'reinvention of the wheel,' Whilst academic philosophy incorporates the philosophical skills of P4C, it has the advantage of drawing upon a wide range of philosophers to deepen or broaden the inquiry. I agree with Lacewing and with Rorty (date) who notes, access to knowledge of key philosophers and philosophical movement, allows the philosopher to be aware of all the moves and arguments. The influence of Dewey's self-discovery methods is strong in the inquiry approach, and whilst the practice of exploring thinking by first-hand experience is vital, the movement, I believe underplays the roll of enriching thinking by tapping into the ideas of present and past philosophers.

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Wilson (cited in Murriss 2007a) differentiates P4C by stressing the abstraction and the 'higher-order' thinking and reasoning of the latter. Academic philosophy is underpinned by abstract philosophising about general principles. P4C is marked, he upholds, by philosophizing about concrete examples. Wilson (date) argues that P4C suffers from 'educational ideology'. That is, it assumes that philosophy is merely questioning, reasoning and inquiry. Yet not all reasoning, questioning and inquiry are philosophic.

2 . 1. 5 Academic Philosophy

I shall use the term academic philosophy as the study of critical and reflective thinking taught with reference to philosophers, philosophical vocabulary and key ideas. According to mmmmm(date) pupils learn the skills of creative and critical thinking but are also able to link their ideas to the broader tradition the subject. The UK Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and Eurydice at the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) hold records of the curriculum syllabuses offered in 20 'economically developed' countries. The countries are: Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the USA and Wales (www.inca.org.uk). None of these countries offers philosophy as a national subject for the primary and lower-secondary age-range. In Brazil, however philosophy is a compulsory subject in most secondary and in some primary schools. In 2004 in Norway White Paper has suggested introducing philosophy as a statutory subject. The subject is being tested in primary and secondary schools. In countries where the subject is taught, it usually offered as an optional subject for the post-compulsory age

group. Enrolment rates for this course are usually a few the total student population (Hand & Winstanley 2008). For instance in the U. K. there is only one public examination board offering Advance Level General Certificate of Education in philosophy. In 2007, only 3, 001 students finished the course, with a further 2, 009 in the same year completing a critical thinking course (which has a large philosophy module).

. With so few pupils studying academic philosophy in secondary schools, it is unsurprising there is a limited amount of literature of teaching academic philosophy in primaries. However there are some materials for those wishing to develop academic philosophy for the 7-11 age group:

The few teachers who train in philosophy have specialised at the upper-end of secondary schools and therefore they have not had an opportunity to influence or share good practice in the primary sector. The popularity of P4C and Thinking Skills is due to the fact that teachers can receive some initial brief training (typically 1-3 days) and can begin lessons immediately. Few teachers in primary schools would have a degree in the subject and in England there is no national organisation dedicated to teaching academic philosophy to this age group. However, in England a small group of pioneers (based around the ' Philosophy Shop' company) who are enthusiastic about academic (or as they call it practical) philosophy and regard P4C as a dilution of the discipline.

Worley (2008) is an enthusiastic promoter of ' practical' philosophy, which he regards as ' real philosophy' and for him; the second-best choice is P4C. He is the director of a commercial website ' The Philosophy Shop' and offers

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training courses in teaching philosophy for those with a background in the subject. Unlike P4C training which is intended for trained teachers, Worley's courses are aimed at philosophers who wish to be employed as peripatetic teachers in schools. He makes the distinction between inquiry (which he regards as the concern of P4C) and practical philosophy which should only be taught by educators qualified in the discipline. He acknowledges the work of Lipman's and uses many of his ideas to promote inquiries but he feels it is important to introduce pupils to canonical philosophers and some of the key questions posed by the subject,

. His claims that his work with children (currently he teaches in 13 primary schools) shows that they can develop a range of philosophical skills and competencies. These include: conceptual analysis; abstract thinking, generality, complex reasoning, non-empirical reasoning, an understanding of the history of philosophy and the ability to reevaluate (2008).

I believe the work of Worley and his colleagues offer a fruitful avenue of inquiry to develop philosophy. I agree with Worley that it important to have good subject knowledge of philosophy to teach it effectively. Indeed, a teacher should be knowledgeable about any subject he or she teachers, and I do not feel an exception should be made with philosophy. I also agree with him that philosophy should developed in the spirit of Socrates be concerned with helping us to ' live the good life' by exploring one's values. Philosophy lessons should focus on issues to help pupils that children can apply to their daily lives and to get them thinking about their role as future citizens.

However, the drawback of teaching academic philosophy, the history of the 'famous dead' may end up being a dry subject. However, I believe Worley's (2008) instincts are correct in his acknowledgment of the strengths of Lipman's philosophical inquiry approach. Despite the limitations of inquiry methods, the strength is the varied and stimulating teaching methods that have been developed over the past forty years. Since they have been designed for the non-specialist, care has been placed into developing a pedagogical approach that works with pupils. Thus the use of their materials and courses with gives advice on useful information such as introductory games, suitable literature and other starting points, developing pupils' responses, assessment and leading an inquiry. SAPHIRE run a website that provides teachers with ideas and an opportunity for teachers to network, and to share good practice with one another. I agree with Worley that the next key ingredient is a teacher who loves the subject of philosophy and who can relate the responses of children to the wider thoughts of the tradition. This avoids the reinvention of the wheel and allows those pupils drawn to the subject to consult philosophical texts to deepen their understanding.

Worely's practical philosophy, the inquiry approach and aspects of thinking skills have much to offer. I support their goal of producing more responsible and caring citizens who are able to take an active part in (as AC Grayling puts it) 'meeting the world's challenges' (2008). However, I believe this cannot be achieved by better thinking alone, but instead we need to develop a critical awareness of the largely hidden role that power has to play in the generation of knowledge or truth claims. The philosophies of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault have done much to bring to our attention the way

power, disguised as 'truth' or 'common sense' restricts our capacity to think or express innovative thoughts. Chapter 3 contains an account of the theories of Foucault and Derrida This variant of philosophy would keep the core skills of the above programmes, namely reflective, reflexive critical thinking but would include a consideration of the politics of knowledge.

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