

# Developing democratic dispositions and enabling crap detection: Claims for classroom philosophy with special reference to Western Australia and New Zealand

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## Abstract

*The prominence given in national or state-wide curriculum policy to thinking, the development of democratic dispositions and preparation for the 'good life', usually articulated in terms of lifelong learning and fulfilment of personal life goals, gives rise to the current spate of interest in the role that could be played by philosophy in schools.*

*Theorists and practitioners working in the area of philosophy for schools, advocate the inclusion of philosophy in school curricula to meet these policy objectives. This paper tests commonly-made claims that philosophy can aid in the acquisition of democratic dispositions and develop critical thinking. These considerations are located in the context of certain policy statements relating to the curricula of Western Australia and New Zealand.*

## Introduction

Whilst the official status of philosophy teaching in the primary and junior secondary phase of schools internationally is yet to be well established, there is international evidence of officially sanctioned philosophy in the senior secondary phase (Hand & Winstanley, 2008a, pp. xi-xii). It is in this regard that this paper considers curriculum documentation used in schools in New Zealand and Western Australia. Despite the lack of evidence of the 'official' inclusion of philosophy in the primary and junior secondary phases, an approach that has become well-established in many schools is 'philosophy for children (P4C)' and its associated teaching methodology, the community of enquiry<sup>1</sup> (Hand & Winstanley, 2008a). Developed in the 1970s by Matthew Lipman, then professor at Montclair State University, New Jersey, P4C initially had primary students in mind. The COPE is however a methodology that can be (and is) employed with secondary age students (McCall, 2009). This paper will however not concern itself with P4C *per se*.

Further enquiries in this area are timely due to the interest shown by state and national curricula in thinking and the development of democratic dispositions as evidenced in relevant policy documentation about to be considered. The starting-point of this paper is a set of claims made by proponents of classroom philosophy in *Philosophy in schools* (Hand & Winstanley, 2008b), a collection which reflects on many key debates about classroom philosophy. This paper uses the policy statements reviewed below as a context, it introduces the set of claims made on behalf of classroom philosophy, and it considers the COPE and specific exemplar classroom philosophy curriculum statements from New Zealand and Western Australia in regard to these promises made on behalf of philosophy in schools.

## Policy statements

Justifications for including philosophy in schools usually point to its ability to encourage enquiry and critical thinking and develop the dispositions of reasonableness, tolerance and patience, and skills of communication and cooperative participation (Splitter, 1995; Splitter & Sharp, 1995). The currently high levels of interest in academic literature in the role and place of philosophy in school are partly driven by state and national curricular emphases on the development of these attributes in students. A consideration of certain curriculum policy documents chosen from Western Australia and New Zealand will provide a sense of the 'official'

view on the importance or otherwise of democratic behaviours and dispositions on one hand, and critical thinking on the other, reflected by these two authorities.

### *Western Australia*

The Curriculum Framework of Western Australia sets out seven specific principles that include five clusters of 'core values', two of which are related to democratic behaviours and dispositions appropriate to the maintenance of democracy and democratic institutions. The value clusters are further detailed on the inside cover of the Framework document. The overarching statement is quoted here:

#### Principles of the Curriculum Framework

The Curriculum Framework for Western Australian schools is underpinned by seven key principles. These principles guide schools in whole-school planning and curriculum development...[These principles include] an explicit acknowledgment of core values [including]:

- *respect and concern for others and their rights*, resulting in sensitivity to and concern for the well-being of others, respect for others and a search for constructive ways of managing conflict;
- *social and civic responsibility*, resulting in a commitment to exploring and promoting the common good; meeting individual needs in ways which do not infringe the rights of others; participating in democratic processes; social justice and cultural diversity; (Curriculum Council of Western Australia, 1998, p. 16).

### *New Zealand*

In contrast, directives that could be related to the development of democratic behaviours and dispositions in the *New Zealand Curriculum* are much more abbreviated and somewhat scattered in its overarching statements. Nevertheless, here are some relevant points from overarching statements of 'principles' and 'values':

Principles: Foundations of curriculum decision making. The principles ... should underpin all school decision making... [These include]

- *Future focus*: The curriculum encourages students to ... explor[e] such significant future-focused issues as ... citizenship...

Values: To be encouraged, modelled and explored. ... by holding these values and acting on them ... we are able to live together and thrive... [The values include]

- *Equity* through fairness and social justice;
- *Community and participation* for the common good;
- *Respect* themselves, others, and human rights (Ministry of Education, 2007, pp. 9-10).

In both policy settings, *respect* features, particularly in relation to the rights of others. Both also emphasise *participation*, in communities and democratic processes. Thirdly is a range of ideas which could be loosely grouped under the title of *social responsibility*, which includes concerns about social justice, equity and diversity.

The Western Australian document is far more promising as it analyses each of the 'core values'. This allows teachers in that jurisdiction to plan programmes and outcomes that could show progression within each of the supplied descriptors. In contrast, New Zealand teachers are left somewhat in the dark, the only descriptions literally being what is quoted above. It may be questioned, however, whether the more open language of the *New Zealand Curriculum* in fact ensures what Gregory (1997) alludes to, namely the space

for students to work out the content of these dispositions for themselves. Regardless of the answer, what is clear for teachers in both jurisdictions is that they must devise programmes that will develop these dispositions of *respect, participation and social responsibility*.

A further interest, as previously noted, leading to an intensification of interest in the topic of philosophy in schools in current international scholarship is driven by the call made in official national and state curricula for schools to develop ‘thinking’ skills. Further examples can be drawn from Western Australia and New Zealand:

#### *Western Australia*

This section of the Overarching Statement describes the outcomes which all students need to attain in order to become lifelong learners, achieve their potential in their personal and working lives and play an active part in civic and economic life...

[Outcome] 6: Students visualise consequences, think laterally, recognise opportunity and potential and are prepared to test options.

In approaching issues and problems, students think laterally, offer possibilities, explore and evaluate new ideas, and generate a range of positions and solutions (Curriculum Council of Western Australia, 1998, p. 20; 23).

#### *New Zealand*

The New Zealand Curriculum identifies five key competencies... People use these competencies to live, learn, work, and contribute as active members of their communities...[They include]

##### Thinking

Thinking is about using creative, critical, and metacognitive processes to make sense of information, experiences, and ideas (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 12).

The crucial phrase, ‘critical thinking’ is largely absent; indeed, searches of both documents reflect almost zero use of the terms ‘critical thinking’ or ‘thinking critically’. Both extracts above regard thinking as a ‘competency’ or ‘outcome’ that is instrumental to living ‘the good life’, which is defined in terms of economic and civic responsibilities, in addition to the attainment of personal life goals. Neither statement makes reference to reasoning; the New Zealand statement treats ‘critical thinking’ as one kind of thinking amongst others; the Western Australian statement defines thinking as ‘lateral thinking’ which could be related to the New Zealand use of ‘creative thinking’; both statements attempt to list processes that may engage a person when thinking, either at a general level (New Zealand) or more specifically (Western Australia). Both statements thus carry the hallmark of an infatuation with cognitive psychology that besets contemporary education. This conclusion is reached by taking the philosophical position that ‘thinking’, and in particular, ‘critical thinking’, is a normative and ethical matter, not as a matter of competent mastery of discrete processes. Being a ‘critical thinker’, it will be suggested in this paper, is a disposition, or ‘critical spirit’ (Bailin & Siegel, 2002; Daniel & Auriac, 2009). The question of interest to this paper is whether the use of philosophy in schools will develop this disposition in students.

The policy references above do not provide detailed rationales or guidance to teachers and schools; however they are representative of curriculum policy documents of the early twenty-first century. Detailed application of these broad policy directives in both jurisdictions will be considered later. The discussion will now consider the claims made on behalf of philosophy in schools in respect to the achievement of democratic dispositions and critical thinking.

## Claims made for philosophy in schools

### *Claim no. 1 and 2*

Citizens of a democratic state are required to think and deliberate impartially on a range of contentious moral issues; the traditional forms of moral and religious thinking are poor preparation for this task; philosophical education in schools that considers controversial issues will better equip tomorrow's voter to make responsible democratic decisions (Brighouse, 2008, pp. 61-62)

P4C's democratic and egalitarian community of enquiry pedagogy allows pupils to ask questions... (Murriss, 2008, p. 105; 106; 107)

### *Claim no. 3*

The argument is that philosophy is a powerful subject and that philosophising, or philosophic enquiry, is the optimum pedagogy for fostering the essential skills and dispositions of critical thinking (Winstanley, 2008, p. 85)

The claims therefore are first that philosophy in schools develops the capacity for morally responsible democratic decision-making; second that the COPE has the attributes of being democratic and egalitarian, and thus, by implication, participation in this community will develop these attributes in participants; and third, that teaching philosophy in schools will develop critical thinking. The first two are grouped together as they are claims regarding the ability of philosophy in schools and the COPE methodology to develop democratic dispositions; the third concerns critical thinking, which, it is argued, will emanate from general philosophical programmes.

Because these claims are made on behalf of philosophy in schools generally, and the COPE methodology specifically, it is important to reiterate that this paper is less interested in an explicit consideration of Lipman's *Philosophy for Children*, and is rather more focussed on the general concept of including philosophy in school, and in particular the COPE as an approach, which can be used beyond P4C. A brief summation of the COPE methodology and an outline of the philosophy curriculum statements of Western Australia and New Zealand precede a consideration of these claims. The development of morally democratic citizenship, democratic dispositions and egalitarianism will be contextualised by reference to the curriculum policy statements reviewed earlier, to ascertain what, if any, guidance may exist for teachers in these policy statements. This will be followed by an assessment of the potential of the exemplar classroom curriculum programmes and the COPE method to meet these policy requirements. Critical thinking will be characterised, and the possibilities presented by the exemplar philosophy curriculum statements to develop such thinking will be considered.

## **The Community of Philosophical Enquiry**

The notion of the COPE has both the physical quality of a material reality, as well as a deeper more profound existence in the hearts and minds of its participants (Cassidy, 2007; Splitter & Sharp, 1995). What might this look, sound and feel like? Essentially, a circular formation of perhaps no more than twenty participants, with some suggesting fifteen to be optimal (McCall, 2009, p. 132). Larger classes could be subdivided into smaller units. Status is irrelevant, and each participant (including the teacher, if seated) is arranged so that each participant is able to have eye contact with everyone else in the group and no-one appears to be 'in authority'<sup>2</sup>.

The facilitator (usually the teacher) may guide the community through a text or a series of exercises. Participants are called upon to generate questions that arise from the text. These are likely to range from the procedural and factual to the psychological and the philosophical. It is of course the latter which are desired. Nevertheless, each question is valued; each questioner validated. The public sharing of questions is one

method whereby questioning skills are honed. The community has an agreed set of ground rules that govern the ebb and flow of discussion (such as speaking only when in possession of the ‘talking stick’ or other appropriate object). Respect for others is a consistent focus for the facilitator and participants. The facilitator may prompt further questions, or may merely silently record whatever is said.

The group is trained so that individuals ask their peers for clarification, request examples, and critique, in a mutually supportive way, their additional questions and truth claims. The COPE therefore has a unique self-correcting quality. The on-going discussion is not conversation, as it requires cognitive effort and a search for meaning (Daniel & Auriac, 2009). Moreover it makes demands on participants to present their views logically and to engage in logical analysis (McCall, 2009). Self-correction is deepened by the group summation at the end of an enquiry and the reflection of its members on the quality of discussion (Fisher, 2003). The sense of ‘community’ develops over time as participants feel supported, affirmed and able to ‘take risks’. Well-being grows from increasing self-esteem, thinking becomes sharper and critical faculties are honed in the mutual quest to satisfy the curiosity of participants (Cassidy, 2007; Splitter & Sharp, 1995).

This summary of the COPE method is necessarily scant; however subsequent arguments and elaborations will deepen this account. Before considering the three claims made on behalf of the COPE and classroom philosophy, the exemplar philosophy curriculum statements of Western Australia and New Zealand will be introduced.

## **Two exemplar philosophy curriculum statements: Western Australia and New Zealand**

### *Western Australia:*

A course in ‘Philosophy and Ethics’ was introduced in 2008 at the senior secondary level. Students are taught the specific skills of inquiry, reasoning and judgement, and the ‘Rationale’ statement that introduces the course notes that “Philosophy and Ethics aims to empower students to make independent judgements on the basis of reason” (Curriculum Council of Western Australia, 2010, p. 3).

Course content passes through Stages 1 – 3, of which Stages 2 and 3 are assessed by public examination. The preferred teaching methodology is the COPE, which is favoured for its potential to develop critical reasoning. Course content is arranged so as to cover issues of increasing complexity across epistemology (how do we know?), metaphysics (what is real?) and ethics (how should we live?). Access to Course Design, Syllabus, Assessment and Support Material, and Past Examinations is available at the Curriculum Council website<sup>3</sup>. The Course Design provides a clear, if systematic, Scope and Sequence for two units of each of the three stages across the content areas mentioned. Examples of course content include

- Distinguishing between strong and weak arguments (Stage 2)
- exploring a school of thought e.g. scholasticism, postmodernism,... (Stage 3)
- The conceptual difficulties of free-will, determinism and agency (Stage 2)
- Government interference and surveillance (Stage 2)
- moral virtues and friendship (Stage 1) (2010).

### *New Zealand:*

Buried deeply in the senior secondary curriculum guides for Social Sciences, within the official Ministry of Education website, *Te Kete Ipurangi*, is a newly added guide called ‘Philosophy’, which “is about acquiring wisdom through free inquiry. It explores fundamental questions about the world and our place in it, such as:

- What is real?
- How should I live, and who should decide?” (Ministry of Education, 2009).

The ‘Rationale’ statement lists ‘Think critically’ as a reason to study philosophy, noting that the “reasoned exchange of ideas in the classroom fosters tolerance of and respect for others” (2009).

Course content passes through three learning levels (6 – 8), aimed at Years 11 – 13. There are no uniquely designed assessments for philosophy. Instead, a range of internal Achievement and Unit Standards are cross referenced from various other learning areas on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework, including

Social Studies, Art History, Religion, English, History, Science and Classical Studies. There is no direct suggestion for a preferred teaching methodology, although ‘methods of inquiry’ are suggested to include clarification, exploration and evaluation. Content is framed in terms of learning outcomes that are divided in to four strands, inquiry, reasoning, philosophical perspectives and applied philosophy. Progression statements for each strand are provided at each level. Indicators include:

- Justify positions on philosophical ideas (Level 6)
- Illustrate ideas from various philosophical perspectives (Level 6)
- Develop and evaluate reasoned arguments (Level 7)
- Judge viability of basic assumptions in issues (Level 7)
- Connect philosophical ideas and critique them (Level 8)

### **Can classroom philosophy programmes and COPE develop democratic dispositions?**

Whilst claims 1 and 2 outlined earlier are distinct, they will be considered together under the general heading ‘development of democratic dispositions’, thus will be treated here as one claim. It will be recalled that the first of the claims to developing democratic dispositions was in reference to the development of the capacity for morally responsible democratic decision-making; and the second referred specifically to the COPE, which is said to have the attributes of being democratic and egalitarian, and thus, by implication, capable of developing these attributes in participants. The separation of programmes of classroom philosophy and the COPE methodology is not easily achieved. As noted, the Western Australia exemplar of classroom philosophy makes the COPE method central to its programme (Curriculum Council of Western Australia, 2010), whilst the New Zealand exemplar programme does not direct teachers to a specific pedagogical approach. The following discussion will proceed by contextualising a consideration of the claim that classroom philosophy and the COPE will encourage the development of democratic dispositions against the framework of the policy documentation quoted earlier.

The earlier analysis of the principles and values of both the Western Australia and New Zealand Curriculum highlighted the democratic dispositions of *respect, participation and social responsibility*. Therefore, teachers in both jurisdictions must devise programmes and pedagogical approaches to develop these dispositions.

#### *Respect*

The COPE depends largely for its success on the agreement of the whole group on the ground rules governing enquiry and debate. These procedures will come to be regarded as having both intrinsic and procedural value, and will ultimately be recognised as a source of dispositional training (Gregory, 1997). Respect is developed when members demonstrate rule following behaviours and when they point out instances of backsliding to fellow members.

Respect also demands a validation of the other, which occurs primarily when the facilitator acknowledges each person’s questions and contributions. This is a model for members of the COPE to follow, and ultimately shapes their own behaviour. This validation amounts to a legitimisation of each person’s contribution and aids in the social construction of knowledge provided that validation is *critical* and not mere patronisation. Respect encourages impartiality, as all views are taken into account and judged by their merits, and in light of the arguments put forward in their favour.

The concept of respect is thus central to the procedures of a COPE. Do the course offerings of the two jurisdictions provide the content for developing respect? The New Zealand curriculum statement on philosophy makes a single reference to ‘respect’, when providing its rationale for teaching/studying philosophy at school: “The reasoned exchange of ideas in the classroom fosters tolerance of and respect for others” (Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 1). The reference to ‘reasoned exchange of ideas’ is noteworthy as it may echo a COPE context. The content of the curriculum statement is however not very helpful or directive in its suggestions for objectives or contexts that may explicitly focus on the development of respect. The

statement divides the study of philosophy in to four strands over the final three years of secondary school. Two of these are ‘philosophical perspectives’ and ‘applied philosophy’. Aspects of the intended outcomes and learning contexts of these strands may have the development of respect as an outcome, although on the evidence, this result is not explicitly intended.

The Western Australia Curriculum Council syllabus for Philosophy and Ethics details four outcomes for its three year senior secondary programme, the first of which is ‘Philosophical and ethical inquiry’, whose intention is that students ‘use investigative methods to think and argue philosophically’ (2010, p. 4) using a COPE methodology that the syllabus expects will develop a respectful exchange of ideas. Course content is divided between epistemology, metaphysics and ethics, the latter concerned with ‘communities and cultures’ as one of its contexts, from which perspective ‘respect’ is studied (2010, p. 5; 18). This statement is more rigorous than its New Zealand counterpart, by its directive outline of learning contexts that could develop an understanding of respect, and its insistence on the COPE as a mechanism for teaching respect.

### *Participation*

Not all students are equally disposed to participation, yet the COPE will not prosper without the participation of its members – much like a democracy, it might be suggested. Participation in a COPE depends on students internalising the merits of self-discipline and turn taking, so that every person who wishes to contribute, may do so. Individuals will feel secure enough to make contributions, even if they are off-beat or marginal to the topic, when the conditions that encourage respect exist, including a safe learning environment created by the teacher, (Splitter & Sharp, 1995, p. 20). The challenge for the teacher/facilitator is to draw out contributions from those less willing, which is considerably more challenging when using the COPE in a secondary setting (McCall, 2009, pp. 155-157).

It is a question for those critical of classroom philosophy and the COPE whether these are merely opportunities for talk, with no obligation to take action. The New Zealand philosophy curriculum statement makes no mention at all of ‘participation’, although one may expect that its ‘applied philosophy’ strand holds some promise. However, the indicators take students from recognising implications and assumptions, to judging their viability and ultimately evaluating their viability (Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 7; 11; 14), though it is unclear what may be the difference between ‘judging’ and ‘evaluating’. A scan of the other strand indicators provides no scope it seems, for even writing letters to the editor, so one may conclude in this case that the New Zealand programme for secondary students invests its hope for participation in keen teachers and students, but not in the text of its course description. Is the Western Australia example any better?

Whilst the term ‘participation’ appears frequently in the Philosophy and Ethics syllabus, it does so only in relation to participation in the COPE. The term ‘action’ is more helpful, although its appearance in learning contexts appears to be confined to a consideration of the implications of human and personal action, in relation to the outcome already referred to, namely ‘Philosophical and ethical inquiry’. However, there is a further, more hopeful outcome, which requires students to: “Apply and relat[e] philosophical and ethical understandings, [by] ... reflect[ing] on, evaluat[ing] and respond[ing] to a range of human issues by selecting from a repertoire of philosophical and ethical strategies” (Curriculum Council of Western Australia, 2010, p. 4). Here at least, if even only in theory, is the possibility of developing a participative approach to democracy.

### *Social responsibility*

It was noted in relation to the policy statements that social responsibility would include the promotion of social justice, equity and diversity. Social justice may conform with what Gregory refers to as a political virtue (1997, p. 46) which tells us *what* to think or do, and is therefore not the business of a school or COPE. Social justice is however promoted by a COPE whenever individuals on the fringes, whose voices are rarely heard, are encouraged by their peers to become involved.

The great democratic virtue of tolerance is to diversity what impartiality is to equity. By listening patiently and carefully to the wide range of differing views, and having one's own views subject to scrutiny by others who may decide to reject them, one develops the tolerance required of living in a pluralistic society. Likewise, weighing up options, giving each person a fair hearing and being prepared to self-correct and retreat from a position is a recognition that each member of the COPE is capable of reasoning, and that each person is fallible (Cassidy, 2007, p. 124).

The contribution of philosophy to the development of tolerance is put forward by the New Zealand curriculum statement as a rationale for its inclusion in the curriculum. Each of its four strands (inquiry, reasoning, philosophical perspectives and applied philosophy) provide scope for this development. Its scant detail and failure to encourage any form of action, however, leads to the conclusion that 'social justice' may be at best, an academic concept in this course.

In its rationale for the study of philosophy and ethics, the Western Australia exemplar notes that the course contributes to students' understanding of being "a citizen who recognises the rights of others and makes choices in the social, civic and environmental spheres" (Curriculum Council of Western Australia, 2010, p. 3). In its explanation of the metaphysics and ethics course components, is evidence of wide-ranging questions that consider conceptions of ultimate reality; persons; governance; communities and cultures; self and others (2008, p. 5). Suggested topics that follow, whilst not detailed, are located in a thoroughly conceptualised programme of work, giving teachers much stimulus for presenting a relevant and vibrant course that may indeed deliver on the promise of developing a sense of social justice in students.

#### *Is the COPE democratic and egalitarian?*

The COPE, which has enquiry as its focus, may also coincidentally, have democracy as its focus, because the procedures underpinning both are similar (Gregory, 1997). The COPE as described earlier encourages certain behaviours: rule-making and following; careful listening; asking questions; choosing, selecting, deciding; turn taking; seeking, developing and adjusting answers and arguments in relation to questions; argumentation, which involves suggesting a response or position in relation to a question or statement, then giving and defending reasons for that response or position; seeking clarification or more information; challenging the responses of others and providing a counter response; no name-calling, put-downs or personal attacks; participating and contributing; and finally, reflection on process, content or method. These acts roughly follow the process of a COPE from start to end. Whilst these acts may resemble democratic acts (such as following certain rules, deliberating in a community and participating) this does not mean members of a COPE are necessarily likely to be democratic. Successful democracy, like successful enquiry, requires individuals who are democratically disposed.

Dispositions are personal tendencies or inclinations that guide or direct persons to act and think in certain ways. These are built up by practice, but this does not mean that they are followed in a robotically habitual way; rather, dispositions are knowing and intelligent acts of reason (Ryle, 1949). The development of reasonableness, central to attaining the democratic ideal, is considered a prime outcome of Philosophy for Children, conveyed by the COPE (Splitter & Sharp, 1995, p. 6). Rationality will be the result of practice in some of the behaviours outlined above. Hopefully these behaviours may also result in dispositions to virtuous conduct such as tolerance and patience, care and compassion, respect, self-discipline, impartiality and participation. As Ryle suggests, however, the acquisition of these dispositions over time is no guarantee that their holders will always act in predictable ways (1949, pp. 41-44). A good reason for this is that dispositions tell us *how* to think generally and not *what* to think in regard to certain situations.

Furthermore, one of the crucial weaknesses of the COPE methodology alluded to above, is that its deliberations are not *required* to lead to action (Cevallos-Estarellas & Sigurdardottir, 2000). Democratic notions emphasising majority participation conflict with liberal notions (with which democracy is frequently allied) that emphasise the rights of the individual (2000). The COPE puts no pressure at all on the individual

student or group of students to turn their ideas to action. In this sense, philosophy in school, using a COPE, is reduced to no more than an intellectual exercise aimed at heightened cognitive rationality for the individual.

Murris claimed that the COPE is an egalitarian community (Murris, 2008, p. 107). The generally optimistic tenor of COPE proponents (for example Cassidy, 2007; Cleghorn, 2002; Fisher, 2003; Hand & Winstanley, 2008b; McCall, 2009; Murris, 2008; Splitter & Sharp, 1995; Winstanley, 2008) does not readily admit the power exercised by students who display oppositional behaviour patterns (Burgh & Yorshansky, 2008). Such students may effectively derail the COPE either by defiance, rule breaking or sullenness. By her own admission, Murris notes that secondary students 'are often suspicious' and find 'sitting in a circle an alien experience' (Murris, 2008, p. 114). The 'egalitarian' nature of the COPE may be further called into question as power must still lie in the hands of teacher. Much depends on good will of the teacher to give the COPE the room to explore and enquire, thus potentially controlling the development of democratic dispositions. It is the teacher who has to release power (Murris, 2008).

The potential of the COPE to develop democratic dispositions is nevertheless significant, if one abandons 'thin' or 'minimal' notions of democracy that focus on elitist representation of a passive majority through the electoral system (Cevallos-Estarellas & Sigurdardottir, 2000; Enslin & White, 2002). These writers note the value of thinking about democracy as a deliberative act that requires greater communal participation by citizens. This notion of a 'strong' democracy is deepened by schools that engage their students in *democratic education* rather than *education for democracy*. Exercises in citizenship or civics (such as the call in the *New Zealand Curriculum* for a focus on citizenship), is preparation for a 'thin' democracy; the COPE has the potential, provided it develops a service, outreach or action component, to more fully encourage democratic dispositions amongst its members.

### **Critical thinking**

Some of the key issues in the literature regarding critical thinking will now be reviewed, followed by a consideration of some practical evidence extracted from the philosophy curriculum statements of the two jurisdictions under consideration here.

The discussion that follows is premised on the position that, regardless of statements made in curriculum policy documents, such as those outlined earlier in this paper, *critical thinking* is a desirable educational aim in contemporary schooling because a disposition to critical thinking is the mark of a rational and autonomous person. That such a person can think critically will, of course, serve that person well in all aspects of life, so on that basis, adhering to this premise allows one to occupy the same room as those who claim 'thinking' for instrumental 'lifelong' purposes.

Efforts at strictly defining critical thinking are soon followed by taxonomies, lists and outcome statements. A simple statement of critical thinking was made four decades ago when Postman and Weingartner, reflecting on an Ernest Hemingway comment, referred to an "... education that would set out to cultivate ... experts at 'crap detecting'" (1969, p. 16). They went on to suggest that this meant schools should 'cultivate the anthropological perspective' (p. 17). What they had in mind was a person adept at both living in the world and being able to step back from it and to signal warning bells at signs of decay. Such a person is an active *agent* in the process of meaning making. The point is illustrated by Freire when he speaks of the subject being not *in* the world as an animal may be, but *with* the world; not *adapting* to the world, but actively seeking to *transform* the world (Freire, 1985, p. 68) through the creative power of thought and work.

So it may be suggested that 'critical thinking' has the elements of creativity, impartiality, reflectivity, and fortitude. The disposition to critical thinking will mean that the individual takes nothing for granted and constantly questions and inquires. This 'crap detection' is discomfiting, hence the virtue of courage. For Bailin and Siegel, this disposition is defined by i) the value of good reasoning to critical thinkers, ii) their search for reasons and assessment of those reasons, and iii) the willingness to be guided by this process (Bailin & Siegel, 2002).

The preceding remarks have begged questions about taxonomies, which are associated with the vast range of commercially available ‘silver bullet solutions’ that “tend to focus on improving cognitive processes ... rather than forming the habit of acting and believing in accordance with reasons” (Winstanley, 2008, p. 90). This calls in to question strategies like SOLO taxonomy<sup>4</sup>, currently used in several New Zealand schools, because they focus on a description of particular stages at which a student’s thinking may be functioning without reference to the quality of thought. A student could be working at the ‘extended abstract’ level, yet not be thinking critically at all.

The definitive comments above about ‘critical thinking’ grouped together several items that get a separate billing in the curriculum policies quoted at the start of this paper. Those policies enumerate creativity, reflection and critical thinking as separate ‘kinds’ of thinking. It is this approach which underpins taxonomies and which fails to recognise first that the other ‘types’ of thinking are actually contexts for critical thinking (Bailin & Siegel, 2002), and second that one could be engaged in reflective or creative thought without being critical, just as suggested with abstract thinking. Lipman, who developed the P4C approach and the use of the COPE, has commented that self-reflective thinking (the metacognition to which *The New Zealand Curriculum* makes frequent reference) or ‘thinking about thinking’ is not critical unless it is used in community and in reference to the thinking of others. Until that happens, it is merely ‘thinking about thinking’ (Lipman, 1988).

What then is the contribution the two exemplar philosophy curriculum statements can make to the development of critical thinking? The Western Australian course has signs of rigour and development that allows philosophy to exist as a stand-alone subject in its own right, which has some concern with the canon of philosophy. The New Zealand example has a much looser structure, resembling a development of P4C, by focussing on ideas and argumentation. The absence of a unique assessment programme weakens its credibility, although the integration of course content in to assessments drawn from other learning areas is an advantage. This summation draws together two of the key debates in the literature concerning philosophy as a stand-alone or integrated subject and teaching the canon or *doing philosophy* (see for example Hand & Winstanley, 2008b).

Both courses have a commitment to the development of critical thinking, and allow for course content that will provide the scope for such development. However, the rigidity of the scope and sequence of Western Australia and the specification of learning outcomes of New Zealand could limit the development of such thinking. The choice of COPE by the former (and potentially by the latter) keeps alive the possibility of the mutual meta-reflective thinking Lipman believed to be a function of critical thinking. Similarly, the meta-dialogical approach of a COPE allows active disagreement (Murriss, 2008) and the ‘reasoned exchange of ideas’ (Ministry of Education, 2009) that are essential to critical thinking. Both courses make it clear that knowledge is contestable, and that there are no fixed or immediate answers, which stimulate the development of virtuous courage. In both cases, the attendance of students in philosophy-based courses will help provide more training in the disposition of critical thinking than if those courses did not exist.

## Conclusion

This paper has acknowledged that the development of democratic dispositions and critical thinking is a typical policy requirement in many contemporary Western education settings. This policy position is encouraging a significant academic literature that considers the possible role for philosophy in schools in meeting these objectives. Accordingly, certain claims are made on behalf of classroom philosophy and a particular pedagogical approach, namely the community of philosophical enquiry (COPE). Using the policy settings of Western Australia and New Zealand, the dual policy aims of developing democratic dispositions and critical thinking in those education jurisdictions are confirmed. Both settings provide classroom philosophy programmes, and these have been used as exemplars in this paper, to test the claims that philosophy can meet the policy objectives as set out in curriculum framework documents. The COPE is a methodology of choice in one of these settings, and is likely to be used in the other; therefore, some of the

claims made on its behalf have also been considered in relation to the attainment of the requisite policy objectives.

Can courses of philosophy in schools and a pedagogical approach using the COPE develop democratic dispositions and critical thinking in students? A focus on philosophy, whether it is integrated or stand-alone, provides teachers and students the opportunity of investigating topics of critical socio-political, economic and personal interest that may only occur incidentally in other areas of the curriculum. Furthermore, as many of these topics require exploration and investigation rather than 'coverage' the leverage that can be exercised by critical reasoning is considerable. This point is significant as it is an acknowledgement that 'crap detection', or what Freire calls 'critical consciousness' (Freire, 1973, 1985) is the pinnacle of desirable educational aims (and considers 'creative' and 'lateral' thinking as contexts for critical thinking). Certainly, both exemplars considered here (more so the Western Australian than the New Zealand) offer the scope required to develop programmes that will challenge students.

To the extent that both programmes use the COPE or similar discursive methodologies, they also stand to develop democratic dispositions. Much will depend however on the teacher, and it may be suggested that the New Zealand programme would be enriched by encouraging COPE as a structure for teachers who may lack the confidence or experience required to manage open debate and discussion. The COPE does rely on, and gives participants opportunities for, engagement with many of the behaviours associated with democratic inclinations. However, both the COPE and the exemplar programmes considered stop short at encouraging a call to action, and it is in this area that more work is required, to develop a 'strong' sense of democracy that is participative.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The Standard English 'enquire' is favoured over the American 'inquire'. Henceforth in this paper, 'community of enquiry' will be referred to as 'COPE' for 'community of philosophic enquiry'.

<sup>2</sup> It is as well however to remember that the teacher continues to exercise legal authority and has *de facto* authority by virtue of age, experience and knowledge advantages over students.

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.curriculum.wa.edu.au/internet/Senior\\_Secondary/Courses/Philosophy\\_and\\_Ethics](http://www.curriculum.wa.edu.au/internet/Senior_Secondary/Courses/Philosophy_and_Ethics)

<sup>4</sup> Structure of **O**bserved **L**earning **O**utcomes, which is clearly outlined at <http://www.learningandteaching.info/learning/solo.htm>

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