

Ignited Conference 2014 – Philosophy Presentation

1. Intro

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This morning I'm going to run you through some ways of introducing or reinforcing Philosophy in your schools.

There are some DVD's at the front for you to take away loaded with a sampling of resources we have available through our association. If you would like to know more, please add your email to the mailing list at the end of the session, and I can share further resources with you through our Google drive account – you only need a Gmail email address to access the drive. Failing that, you could simply send me a portable hard-drive and I will happily load everything we have, free of charge. I would, however, encourage you to also think about becoming a member of our association in order to benefit from on-going collaboration and resource sharing in the future.

2. What is Philosophy?

Let's begin with a definition of Philosophy. In a sense, it is not an easy question to answer when students ask what it is. I have certainly stumbled in the past, but have settled on some simplified definitions.

%%%SLIDE Aristotle claimed that philosophy begins in wonder. And this is very much what Philosophy education is about for me - awakening students to wonder.

In its simplest terms Philosophy is the act of thinking, not just about you own thoughts, but others as well.

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Sometimes Philosophy is defined in terms of metacognition, or thinking about thinking.

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In terms of a formal definition, Pythagoras is thought to have coined the term 'philosophy' in the sixth century BC. The term comes from two Greek words—*Philein* (Fi lee en), meaning 'to love' and *Sophia*, meaning 'wisdom' or 'good judgement'. Taken together, Philosophy is a discipline dedicated to the love, or pursuit, of wisdom.

But that pursuit is of course a long and on-going one. And in that sense, wisdom is something that is often beyond the fledgling experience of most young people. So what is the goal of teaching philosophy in schools? In a word, 'provocation'.

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Or to paraphrase Emerson, "it is not instruction that I can receive from another soul, but provocation"

This is also how David Birch describes philosophy education in his 2014 book by the same title (a sampling btw has been scanned onto your resource disc). He claims that in a philosophy classroom the pupils become a group, rather than a 'random assembly of separate individuals; and in this sense Philosophy is similar to PE and drama—they are subjects that cannot be done solo, the class itself is a crucial part of the lesson. Now beyond playing and performing together (as students do in PE and drama) Philosophy suggests we also talk together.

And this I think is becoming critical in the age of BYOD.

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In terms of the Philosophy of technology, teachers and students alike need to be careful about devices in the classroom. In thinking about the social impacts of technology, Paul Roberts has recently written an interesting book titled the 'Impulse Society' – last month he was interviewed by Kim Hill on Radio NZ, and there he describes how we are

"becoming an impulse society, corrupted by the ever present seductions of instant gratification... surrounded as we are by technologies that makes it ever easier for people to satisfy appetites, to gratify impulses without really thinking them through"

He terms this the "click and consume" culture. And here again I think Philosophy has something very real to offer our students...

Philosophy is slow:

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Philosophy requires us to slow down our thinking.

One of the main tasks of Philosophy is to deal with choice. That is, Philosophy sees thinking in terms of decision-making – it throws light on the fundamental choices of thought. And for young people to interrogate those *choices of thought* they require some basic logical and ethical tools firstly, and secondly a space within a school where they can broaden the horizons of reason, thought and understanding without the fast paced pressure of NCEA assessment, for example.

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That said, I will later discuss the options for NCEA assessment, but for now I want to emphasise value of the learning experience itself.

3. So what are the benefits to GATE students?

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They are four-fold:

1. Firstly, philosophy education integrates and transcends other disciplines. Philosophy has real potential to cross subject boundaries, and bind inquiry across disciplines, which ultimately enhances cognitive efficiency. Take for example the Philosophy of Science (and the nature of scientific method with Karl Popper and the notion of falsification), or the Philosophy of Art in Art History on the nature, purpose and power of art, Or consider further the economic philosophy underlying Capitalism, Or business ethics, or notions of truth in Media Studies.
2. Secondly Philosophy education structures inter-dependant discussion for young people whose existential relationships to the self and to others are in constant flux – this cultivates reasonableness.
3. Thirdly, and as mentioned previously, Philosophy education establishes a space within a school where ‘broadening the horizons of reason’ to the limits of thought and understanding can be a regular part of the curriculum – this facilitates rational autonomy. This relates particularly to GATE students, since they often ask weird and unusual questions that may be frustrating to parents, or alienating to peers. Philosophy provides a safe place not only to explore strange and eccentric ideas in a non-judgemental manner, but often validates their thinking when they discover someone else thought about the same things hundreds, or in some cases thousands of years ago.
4. And lastly, Philosophy education offers a non-sectarian inquiry and exploration of ethics. Which is not to say there is an opposition between religious ethics and secular ethics, nor is it to say Philosophy is an atheistic enterprise. It is simply to point out that Philosophy education enables students to examine a number of perspectives and develop skills to navigate moral life, which ultimately helps develop their sense of values

On a more general level, Philosophy education encourages students to seek wisdom and insight, think critically and logically, which also helps to build personal confidence in ones beliefs and ideas.

4. What options are there for introducing Philosophy into your school?

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The NZAPT has published a teaching and learning guideline on TKI¹ to help you implement a philosophy programme. There is a copy of this guideline on the resource disc under the 'Philosophy Curriculum' folder, and of course you can access it online – simply Google 'tki philosophy'. You will notice that Philosophy is housed under the Social Sciences banner. In the document you will find material relating to the Rationale for teaching Philosophy, Key Concepts, Pedagogy, Learning Objectives, Connections to other subjects, Ideas for Learning Programme design, as well as Resources to get you started. The document provides lots of good ideas that can be incorporated into a course proposal for management, should you want to introduce a Philosophy programme at your school.

Let us now look at ways *into* Philosophy

4a. Firstly, Philosophy Clubs

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You might like to first incubate a small programme within your GATE programme – such as a lunch time philosophy club. We have been running one at Rangi for several years. We meet every Thursday lunchtime and discuss a different issue each week.

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Topics have ranged from Philosophical zombies --

- If Zombies existed, would they still have Rights?
- Is a Zombie still a person?

To freewill and responsibility –

- Should a dog be punished for behaving like a dog?
- Should a vampire be held morally accountable for behaving like a Vampire?

Art--

- Can art be bad for you?

Education, God, and Genetic manipulation --

- Is education a form of brain-washing?
- Does it matter whether or not God exists?
- Should we support the research and development of synthetic, genetically-engineered meat?

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We also host an occasional Philosophy Film and Pizza evening, where we order pizza and watch a film (selected for its Philosophical content,

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such as the recent Lego movie, or Jack Black's film *Bernie* –

¹ <http://seniorsecondary.tki.org.nz/Social-sciences/Philosophy>

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We also have badges for long serving members – which the students seem to love collecting on their blazers.

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We meet with other Philosophy Clubs from neighbouring schools twice a year for Café Philosophy afternoons. These are basically mini student conferences where we have a topic such as animal ethics or censorship in art, where a teacher from one of our partner schools presents on that topic and then groups students to discuss various reflection questions over coffee and biscuits.

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Alternatively, you could go all out and attend one of the annual Julie Arlis conferences in either Auck, Wellington or CHCH. Arlis comes from Kings College, London and runs an intensive all-day student conference geared towards highly able, philosophically minded students. The day costs around \$40/student but is usually a very memorable day.

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On a slightly smaller scale, and possibly more practical for provincial schools there are the Bioethics seminars run by Otago University's Dr. Deborah Stevens at a cost of \$5/student. Her colleague, Dr. Lyn Bowyer, runs a larger scale Roadshow with graduate students and other professors from Otago University at a cost of \$15/student.

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There are also STAR programmes offering University level Philosophy papers by distance, with online lectures, texts and tasks. We have recently drafted some certificates to acknowledge student Achievement at the end of these courses.

In terms of the cost of these projects there is a fund available known as the Frederic Woods Bequest fund. This fund was bequeathed in 2001 by Mr. Edwin Frederic Woods to promote Philosophy education in NZ secondary schools. It is a \$110,000 fund that is managed by the University of Auckland, and takes applications for all sorts of projects, as long as the outcome in some way promotes Philosophy in NZ schools. Professional development is also covered by this fund.

4b. NCEA and non-NCEA programmes

I'll talk very briefly about NCEA and non-NCEA options – again, most of what I outline is included on the resource disc.

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In terms of NON-NCEA programmes, here are three options

1. Firstly with Intermediate school level (Yr7&8)
2. Secondly, through junior social studies
3. And thirdly, some examples of non-assess Senior Philosophy modules

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1. Intermediate school (Yr7&8)

At the intermediate level, there's a great BBC series called *What makes me, me?* Which features a number of short animated clips with reflection questions peppered throughout. For instance, this episode we're about to watch asks the question, *Am I always responsible for my actions?* Other episodes feature questions surrounding the nature of personal identity, the nature of goodness, ownership of nature and so on.

We also consider some basic ethical principles using animal ethics as a vehicle – Is it okay to eat meat?

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For Year 8 we begin with an introduction to Epistemology (which is the study of Knowledge and how we come to know things). Here we examine the difference between appearance and Reality using Plato's Myth of Cave as a guiding metaphor. Later they make diorama's of the cave and sometimes create short film remakes of the cave in real life.

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Toward the end of the term we spend a lesson chatting while colouring in a Philosophy comic – the focus is as much about fun as it is thinking.

2. Junior social studies;

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The second route for introducing NON-NCEA Philosophy is through Junior Social Studies (which I also teach, and which ultimately serves doubles as a feeder for my senior philosophy classes)

Using the four conceptual strands, I draw out the philosophical themes in my classes as they relate to:

1. Identity, Culture, and Social Organisation
2. Place and Environment

3. Continuity and Change
4. The Economic World

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For example, at Yr9 using the *Identity and Culture* strand you could explore personal identity using the Ship of Theseus thought experiment.

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Or under the *Social Organisation* strand, you could cover parts of Plato's Republic focussing on his question concerning *what the best way to organise a society is?* Here I used the new film *Divergent* to very good effect (since it is basically a simplified retelling of parts of the Plato's Republic).

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Or using the *Continuity and Change* strand you could examine the Philosophy of technology and the impact this has had on the development of our species and civilisation. Here Philosopher Andy Clarke's work on cyborgs will deliver some interesting material; in addition to the many interesting articles relating to technology and multitasking with technology in the classroom.

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For Year 10 using the Place and Environment AND The Economic World strands, I've had some good results using Dr. Suess' story *The Lorax*, in relation to the work of the Philosopher Ronald Wright and his work *A Short History of progress*). Along with the German philosopher Martin Heidegger's philosophy of technology.

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3. Senior School

In terms of NON-assessed senior school modules, I have resources relating to:

- Safe relationships (here looking at Jean-Paul Sartre's work on sex and love)
- I also have modules on Existentialism and the Meaning of life
- Aesthetics
- Philosophy of Mind and Epistemology

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NCEA Philosophy:

To finish, I'll briefly outline a sampling of the NCEA units on the disc.

At Level 1: there is a unit on Protest Art and civil disobedience, using freedom of speech and artistic expression as the vehicle, with an examination of the case of the Russian punk band, Pussy Riot.

At Level 2: there is an Animal Rights unit examining notions of Personhood and the nature of rights. Here the documentary Blackfish provides the stimulus.

There are a number of Level 3 units, ranging from

- Internet Piracy and Copyright Law
- Income inequality in NZ
- Free will and responsibility
- The Philosophy of Capitalism and Neoliberalism
- And also units relating to the Philosophy of Religion

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To finish, I'll leave you with the German Philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's anticipation of JFK, when he said, "Ask not what you can do with philosophy, but what philosophy can do with you."